When an individual with a disability or a family member of a person with a disability has questions about employment opportunities or benefits in Indiana, Vocational Rehabilitation Services counselors are standing ready to answer questions. Because they serve in these key positions, counselors need the latest information on best practices regarding rehabilitation services as well as information about state agencies and regulations. Most importantly, they need to be able to efficiently and effectively connect people to resources.

The Indiana Vocational Rehabilitation Services Leadership Academy is a training program designed to develop the skills and professional development of vocational rehabilitation staff and employment providers around the state. The Academy is the product of a collaboration between Vocational Rehabilitation Services, a program within the Indiana Family and Social Services Administration, and the Center on Community Living and Careers (CCLC) at the Indiana Institute on Disability and Community at Indiana University. CCLC develops and coordinates the program for the state.

Providing Three Levels of Professional Development

Components of the Leadership Academy begin with a structured Orientation and are followed by CORE and Advanced skill development and leadership training and education. Vocational rehabilitation counselors, supervisors, and managers who take Web-based, rapid e-learning Leadership Academy courses can set their own schedule, participate in activities at their convenience, and work at their own pace.

Newly hired counselors around the state are expected to participate in Orientation, which covers basic skills, such as taking and processing applications for services, assessing eligibility, developing individualized plans for employment, and determining appropriate services. Counselors, who are mentored by their supervisors during Orientation, will also participate in other activities, including job shadowing.
CORE courses, the second level of training, cover issues ranging from ethical decision making to case documentation to the psychosocial and cultural impacts of having a disability. After completing Orientation, new counselors will also take CORE-level courses. Counselors currently on staff, however, may or may not need to take all of the CORE courses; supervisors will select courses, depending on need and career goals. Some CORE courses will also be available for staff of employment service providers.

Advanced-level courses, designed for VRS staff members who would like additional professional development, focus on disability-specific topics, such as employment for individuals with traumatic brain injury, Asperger’s syndrome, other autism spectrum disorders, serious mental illness, and more.

For more information about the Indiana Vocational Rehabilitation Services Leadership Academy, contact Jackie Tijerina, jtijerin@indiana.edu, or Jodi Isaacs, joisaacs@indiana.edu, or phone the Center on Community Living and Careers at (812) 855-6508.