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Talk Time with Able Trust

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Hello, and welcome today's Talk Time with The Able Trust. Today we will be discussing the future of vocational rehabilitation with state directors from Florida, Washington, Oregon, California. As a reminder, this discussion is being recorded and will be posted to The Able Trust website next week. Closed captioning is available today (inaudible) by clicking CC on the Zoom tool bar. And then choosing to see subtitles displayed or a transcript on the side of your screen. Video will be displayed from the four state director and also the two interpreters in gallery view our screen. Drew Wann and Daniel LeMay are the interpreters and you can pin those speakers larger our screen by hovering in corner of their video box, click on the three dots and once you do that, more choices will pop up and you can click on the spotlight to make the interpreter box larger. When the interpreters switch off, you may need to change your spotlight setting to another interpreter. I

want to thank you the Florida division of vocational rehabilitation for providing sign language interpretation today. My name is Guenevere Crum, I am the senior vice president of Able Trust. Whether you are starting your lunch break on the east coast or starting your morning with a cup of coffee on the west coast, we are glad you are here. I appreciate everyone that has submitted questions in advance of today's conversation, and your questions have shaped today's session. Because of our large audience today, and the constraint of time, the panelists will be, would go from those questions, you may submit additional questions on the Q&A box and we will work to follow up with responses for you. Also at the end of today's session, contact information for each of the day's participants will be provided. And they invite you to submit questions directly. Additionally, in today's post webinar survey tool, there is another spot to share your ideas that may come to you later today as you reflect on today's conversation. The Able Trust has multiple spots to collect your questions because they are so important to us. There are more talk time opportunities scheduled, and our continuous process of collecting questions are shaping those topics, however the information can also be found on our website, WWW.AbleTrust.org. We have four distinguished lead yours joining us today, Allison Flanagan, director of the Florida Division of Florida Rehabilitation, and she is joined by Rob Hines, director of the Washington division of

vocational rehabilitation, Dacia Johnson, the executive director of the Oregon commission for the blind and Joe Xavier, director of rehabilitation, employment, independence, and equity. Thank you for joining us today and making yourselves available for the group discussion.

I'm going to take just a moment to pop up a slide. Thank you. All right.

One moment. There's our directors. The calling -- of 2020 is definitely defined by dynamic change, and that has uniquely both local and global and scale effects, the pandemic and the shifting landscape are reshaping opportunities for all job seekers, all of our different roles in the field are united in having to face new challenges to find success. Our discussion today will start to open up that conversation about the future of vocational rehabilitation. Today's event is brought to you by The Able Trust, dedicated to providing opportunities for Floridians with disabilities and advancing the mission of the Florida Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, created by the Florida legislature in 1990, we have partnered with thousands of organizations, businesses, and individuals to create a stronger, more diverse and inclusive workforce. Empowerment, education, and unemployment are the root outcomes of the partnerships and grants and program we support. The Able Trust has provided over \$42 million in direct grants over the years, and this has been made possible by

generosity of the, and community leaders and individuals that have decided to invest in community development and employment placement for individuals with disabilities.

To find out more about how you can make such an investment and connect with all of our programming and resources, we invite you to join us on-line and WWW.AbleTrust.org, and on Twitter, our handle is [@ableTrust](https://twitter.com/ableTrust), and on FaceBook [@TheAbleTrust](https://www.facebook.com/TheAbleTrust) and LinkedIn [@the-able-trust](https://www.linkedin.com/company/the-able-trust). Once again, if you have any questions or would like to share about what is working for you here in Florida or in your state around the country, contact us at info@ableTrust.org, we would like to hear from you. We invite you to tweet about this discussion, you can find us at Able Trust, we would like to hear from you in realtime with the [#FloridaVR](https://twitter.com/hashtag/FloridaVR), [#FutureofVR](https://twitter.com/hashtag/FutureofVR) and [#TalkTime](https://twitter.com/hashtag/TalkTime). It's another chance to post your questions. With that, before we kick off the conversation with today's panelists, I'm going to launch a poll. There we go.

I'm going to launch a poll, and we would like full participation to find out as a group, just how much anticipation of change is being felt by all of you, so make your poll choice here, we will collect this as a group. How much change do you expect in the field of vocational rehabilitation over the next 10 years? Do you expect very little, almost none? Do you expect there will be some changes but look largely like today? Will there be quite a

bit of change, but you feel like you will really recognize what is happening in the vocational rehabilitation field? Will it look and feel very different from today? So, we are getting quite a few votes. And that is great. So, we are looking for all those folks to vote. Now, if this poll is hanging out in the middle of your screen, and is blocking your view to the interpreter, you can move it to any part of the screen that works for you. So, getting just a few more votes, I am giving you the heads up that, take just a moment, and I will be ending the polling in just a few minutes. We will see -- (laughing) . All right. We will give it five, four, three, two, one. All right.

We are going to end the poll. We are going share the results. You should see on your screen those results. And so we have just a few people, three people that felt like there would be none, very little change that would be happening. So, you may find today's conversation a little challenging. And surprising in some ways, be prepared for that.

Quite a few of you, 48 out of the group here said there would be changes but you expect it to be a larger -- the majority thought that quite a bit of change is coming. But you thought you would be able to recognize it. And this is really a group that is a adventure some in spirit and have a view for the future. So, we really look forward to what it is that you expect is going to be changing. And some of you are really (inaudible)

envisioning -- very much expect that this will look and feel very different than it is today. So, the majority of you are looking for quite a change, and that's because that -- (inaudible) conversation right now. So -- a little bit of magic. And bring back (inaudible) bear with us for just a moment as I activate the screens.

>> Thank you, very much, Guenevere, we have got Joe from California, y video.

>> Sorry.

>> I will there we go. I have asked you to restart your video, you may have a button there -- to accept that. Restart.

>> Did that work?

>> It did.

>> Thank you, Able Trust, and for all of your efforts to have find out full discussion about vocational rehabilitation, I'm very excited to have the three exceptional directors to join me on this panel to share their thoughts hand expertise as we look at the future of VR. We have 78 VR agencies across the country and we have amazing directors that I personally feel like these three are the best across the country. I know our conversation will be good this afternoon. It's a good time to have this discussion, this week, VR just celebrated our 100th anniversary. We are one of the longest living programs legislatively, and our individualized services are more critical than ever during this pandemic. Speak

of the pandemic, many quick adjustments have occurred across the states in response as to the pandemic, but we have all made changes within VR that have been a tremendous asset to the states. So, let's jump right into some COVID related questions, Dacia, I will start with you. If our panelists are wondering, I did it alphabetically. So, Dacia, VR has had challenges and you know what the challenges have been, the safety and -- as well as our staff, but there have been positive things that have come about. Can you tell me positives with VR?

>> Thank you for the opportunity to be with you today. And to really think about the future of VR, and it's interesting because as a leader in the vocational rehabilitation, thinking about the future in the middle of the pandemic is something our leaders have to do. We know that this pandemic will end at some point, and that our missions, during and after the pandemic need to continue. As you mentioned, Allison, the 100 year anniversary to me is a really nice, positive could thought that we are going strong after 100 years, and as leaders, our role is to really think about setting the stage for what the next 100 years will look like, and what the employment of individuals with disabilities is going to look like in the next 100 years. And try to be visionary in what we want the world of work to look like for all of our citizens, including people with disabilities. Some of the things just had reflecting on what are the positive aspects of this, certainly you hear about

government not being timely, right? Not being able to work in the sense of urgency, and we really saw within a matter of days as this pandemic unfolded across the country, shifting from in-person operations to all of the states working with our customers and our staff and offices, to within literally days to a remote service delivery model. So, to me, that really speaks to our ability, if necessary, to respond very quickly to continue to meet the needs of customers with disabilities in the country.

So, I think that was a really positive and powerful demonstration, not only of our efficiency and being able to shift to a different service delivery model, but also the level of commitment that our professional staff around the country have, to providing services, even under extreme challenging personal circumstances that we are all facing, to be able to continue to deliver the best services possible.

I think one of the other areas that we think about is how do we meet all of the needs of our customers, and even the most popular states have sections that are more rural and remote. So as we looked at the types of retooling of our services that we have seen, there are strategies that we deployed to provide remote services that we can continue to use to serve parts of our states that have been unserved or underserved historically, I'm really excited about that potential to be able to reach folks in ways that we traditionally would have thought not possible. I also think that

we are looking at ways to share success stories and really developed a nice infrastructure where we are not having to reinvent the wheel. There have been countless webinars and list serves where public agencies have created serve delivery strategies, and that's been really exciting to see that states, one, the public VR system is extremely generous in sharing best practices, and that states are able to build on each other's success to be able to provide the best services possible.

I was thinking about the hundred year anniversary, and we have a relatively new commissioner at the rehabilitation services administration, and when he shared his introductory remarks to state agency directors, he really had a simple message, which was lead. Right? Lead. And really during this time that we are, as a country, experiencing high end employment, it feel like a good opportunity for us to look at the time at leading the national efforts, as we experience the job reentry and economic recovery in our nation, that job seekers and workers who experience disability will be part of the future workforce, no matter what that looks like. I feel like all of us in the public VR community, whether that's a service provider, a counselor, a line level manager, supervisor, we all have a role in leading that conversation to ensure that job seekers with disabilities and folks who have jobs, as our workforce changes, that we are able to lead that conversation and make sure that folks with disabilities

aren't left out of the future of our workforce.

ALLISON FLANAGAN: Thank you, Dacia, I agree, the remote services, even though we had to adjust to those quickly during the pandemic, we are seeing such benefits of implementing those services, not just for staff but the customers. So I definitely agree we are going to see more of this continuing in the future even post pandemic, and lead on, definitely, VR needs to lead it on. Joe, about what California, what kind of things do you see?

>> Thank you, and again, thank you for inviting me to be part of this conversation, to the Able Trust for bringing this all together.

One of the other things that I would add as we think about the pandemic, COVID-19 that has really impactful is the forced evolution that it brings folks, some of the initiatives that we may be already helped started. For us, as an example, we have long wanted to move to the use of telework to reduce the reliance on brick and mortar and pre up dollars to provide services. The pandemic forced the evolution of telework in a matter of weeks that would have taken us years to get to into point. I think that it's that kind of quick shift action that Dacia described that is going to be key for how we continue to move forward. The world is shifting to remote work, remote services. One other element that I would add is that COVID-19 took an x-ray of us as a program, and so it does two things: It really highlights the gaps that we

have, which we now have the responsibility as leaders to close, but it also identifies the kind of opportunities that we are hearing, just heard more about today, and it gives us the opportunity to truly lean forward, lead, embrace, and think about a future that is very different than what it was just a few mere months ago.

ALLISON FLANAGAN: Thank you, Joe. Rob, I will ask you, any positive impacts you are seeing in Washington?

>> Absolutely. Thanks, folks, for having me on this call. I'm very excited to be here and part of this discussion.

I once heard a wise VR director from California refer to this time as a forced evolution. And so I would say we have to kind of claw our way out of the swamp, and I mean that in a kind way, very quickly. And take on a more nimble mindset in terms of service delivery and tempo, restating some of the things you heard from Dacia and Joe. I just want to underscore that. Things that we once considered impossible or just very, very difficult to achieve, we now know are possible. We went from a two year telework plan into the state of Washington to a two week telework plan. And so I think it's just helpful to think in term of never wasting a crisis, right? Just like that, you may have heard of the sub four minute mile, it was a struggle in the distance running world in until this guy name Roger accomplished it in 1954, and right after that, this long awaited record bested by another runner, you have to ask the question why, it suddenly

became attainable. I think in light fashion, with this new mindset of, VR can accomplish great things in the future, and people, I think sometime have a very low expectation of government, and that kind of, can work its way into our system in staff, in management, I think we have seen, you know, this very positive shift in a new direction, in rapid fashion. I think that we are going to be reaping the rewards of our efforts for quite a while for the next hundred years, so I think that's great.

ALLISON FLANAGAN: Absolutely. And Joe, you talked about remote teleworking, as far as our staff goes, I do see this as a great recruitment tool for our workforce which is a big challenge for VR is to get qualified VR counselors to work with our customers, but the telework approach, and I know in Florida, we are going to continue a (inaudible) approach for staff, post pandemic, but this is a great recruitment tool, and they are very much, most people are very much enjoying the telework. And we have seen production go up. Definitely benefits out there. As a state government entity, too much bureaucracy and red tape, but like you said, even though we had the vision to go there some time in the future, this pandemic made us get there very quickly. But I think that is definitely a benefit (inaudible). Lots of good examples coming out of this, it's not all bad, in this pandemic, as you all know. This next question, though, I'm going to focus on our providers, who assist the VR agencies (inaudible) and we

couldn't achieve what we did without our provider partners, I'm going to let Joe start because California has a huge rehabilitation provider population that works with them. So, when you are thinking about that partnership with the community rehab providers who assist us, so, VR had worked very closely with that provider community to make sure they understood the changes we were making but also to support them and approach them to let that permanent approach service delivery, can you share with us some example and just how critical that partnership is, and what do you see it like post pandemic.

>> You are right, there's no way that VR here in California, and I'm assuming in all 78 VR agencies, can do the work that we are doing without the benefit of our community providers, our partners. One of the things that we did here in California, in addition to needing to move quickly as a government, was to really create an environment that allowed the providers to be nimble. So we applaud a rather simple but straight forward principle, that would be we support maximum flexibility where feasible and reasonable to deliver services in a very different way. And so our provider community really embraced that, and really took on not only for their staff, the skill and the abilities to work remotely, but as Dacia has already said, just provide remote services. Again, the services that we never thought could be provided in a remote fashion, they are moving forward, providing

those in a remote fashion. They are also quickly adapting to the shift in what the workforce need needs. We know that really has shifted, as a provider community has been nimble and thinking about how do we help people develop a skill for this new workplace? Even the consumer's ability to work remotely, not something we may have thought in the past as a skill that needs to be developed, clearly it is. And so providers are doing, that as well as how do you interview remotely, it's becoming much more commonplace. Do I see this continuing? Absolutely. I think maximizing the utilization of virtual services is going to be key. But I think it does a couple of different things. One is -- it reaches the remote and unserved sessions of our states of our communities, but the other that it does, it eliminates the boundaries, you know, where there's geographical or whatever the structures exist, and -- people to reach -- and deliver an expertise of a service, so maybe you have somebody that is particularly skilled at working the with a certain element of the youth -- providing services remotely enable that to be done without the constraints of traditional boundaries. So, those are just a couple of the things that I see our provider community doing and embracing and frankly, I think it's simply the tip of the iceberg, I think the more that we settle into quote this new normal, the more creative and innovative we are going to see and it's incumbent upon us as leaders to set the environment for that

creativity for that innovation, and to embrace doing different, to embrace thinking different. Again, what was not possible yesterday, all of a sudden looks like -- we need to go with that and embrace it.

ALLISON FLANAGAN: Thank you, Joe. And I agree, that approach -- with our providers are is going to be critical and I think we are going to see more of that as we continue to really look at our services and what can be done virtually and what can't. And I think even the ones that we have initially said, no, that can't. I think we will figure out a way as well. I don't think the word can't will be in the VR vocabulary for a while. Rob, how about Washington and your thoughts on this?

>> Yeah, just like Joe's comments and yours, we realize the pivotal time that we are living in. And so we have been holding virtual meetings with our providers and kind of doing a listening tour with them, listening to their concerns as well as their innovative approaches that they are considering and continue serving our customers during this pandemic. And then on our end, we, at Washington DVR, seeing some of the critical nature of the income downturn and just kind of the impacts that that has, we are seeking to alleviate those adverse financial impacts. And our CRPs are experiencing a lot of attention around the fiscal piece, because we have also been in order of selection for a while, and now we have COVID-19. How do we respond to that

to continue to provide services for our folks? We know we will need our CRPs more than ever. One of the ways we are hoping to relieve the pressure is by suspending -- giving you some ideas that we have been doing, suspending the requirement for accreditation in the upcoming cycle. We have heard from them for some time that it does place sometimes a heavy burden financially on small companies to be accredited. We will monitor some of the other accreditations during this -- the upcoming contract period, we hope to have some various options for them to be accredited. And also on June 1st, we implemented an emergency 50 percent rate increase through August of 2020, and at the end of that time, we will be reevaluating it.

So, these are things that all of a sudden, like we have considered in the past, we are not going to do that, now we are, like, it's time to move and we need to move quickly because it's critical that we respond now in this time to show our commitment to our partners in those community rehabilitation providers and make sure that we have got viable services on the other end of this pandemic. So --

ALLISON FLANAGAN: Very true. A lot of good comments there. And I find it exciting about what the future of our providers are going to look like with VR. And unfortunately the order of selection where states have waitlists because of limited resources, we have seen that grow. This was growing before the

pandemic, and now we are seeing more. They have to close categories and put people on a waitlist. Our providers will be critical to work with those individuals especially if they do end up on the waitlist, it has certainly opened up an opportunity for providers to open up a new niche. And Oregon, the blind population, what are they thinking about?

>> I was muted. So, I think some of the things I agree with what Joe and Rob indicated, I have been experiencing something different. For specialized agencies that serve the blind, we have specialized providers where we are investing a considerable amount of training to make sure they understand the unique challenges that they may impose on the preparedness and the placement process in job seeking.

So it is as imperative as any other agency and sometimes more so for us to keep that capacity going. Because we know at the end of this, our community rehabilitation providers are going to help us lead those efforts to ensure that our customers with disabilities are part of the new workforce, our new normal, our ways in which some community are able to provide the best wrap around services where we may not have staff but we have providers that can be able to do that. As a small agency, we have, I have 10 caseload carrying counselors to give you a scale that serves the entire state. Oftentimes those relationships and the providers are part of that essential team that helps those

customers deliver services. The other piece that I think that we are all kind of reeling from as we are going through lots of changes and conditions of our communities, the lessons that we can all learn as leaders in the system is to make sure, as Rob describes and Joe describes, taking the time to listen to people that are important to us, and hear their concerns. And as government taking action, that is meaningful action in order to be able to meet their needs, those are values that we have in the public VR system for our customers each day. But we need to also embrace our broader community and make sure that we are taking the time during this pandemic to listen to folks, and then as Rob described, make changes if we need to, in order to make sure that we are doing our part to meet the long and short term needs of our customers with disabilities.

ALLISON FLANAGAN: A lot of good points, Dacia, and a lot of folks who may not be familiar with VR, we have agencies that serve very specific populations, (inaudible), blind and visually impaired, we have that separate agency as well, and then you have states that have (inaudible) of those services, like California who is serving all the populations and (inaudible) Washington, they do have a separate blind -- serving a general agency, which is what I served in Florida -- wait, I think I got that backwards. Rob has the blind agency -- okay. Never mind.

So, I want to move on to the unemployment. This is a huge

issue right now. Originally I read an article where Department of Labor, well -- have jobless claims since March, since the pandemic starts, 40.8 million jobless claims since March. This is an unprecedented time for everyone. Even before the pandemic, we have -- unemployment rates, so we are all interested in watching data to see how much is this going to increase, because we know people with disabilities are definitely impacted. A lot of these individuals have underlying health conditions, so, they have to stay home and shelter in place because they are at risk with this pandemic right now, obviously it impacted their ability to complete training programs or on the job trainings. So, there's been a huge impact to that population. Let's think about this employment rate, and how that's going to affect VR and Joe. I'm going to start on this one, with the unprecedented unemployment rates that we are continuing to (inaudible) knowing that there's a substantial increase in employment for individuals with disabilities, where do you see VR as helping those that with unemployment in the coming months to help them find suitable employment?

>> Thank you, Allison, I mentioned the -- the pandemic has taken an x-ray on VR, we need to pay attention to the fact that we already had a 70 percent unemployment rate. If anything, it gets worse. I would just encourage us all not to hear that as a criticism or an indictment of how we got here, but more as a calling to what we need to do to embrace a different way, a

different pathway forward. So, the gig economy, the fourth industrial revolution was already changing what the job was going to look like, forced evolution. Force we have a model of people coming into and working through our services. You go through an orientation, and application, eligibility, a plan, services, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. And we really need to think about changing to a model that is a lot more -- up with, we need to get the individual in the door now, not tomorrow, not in 90 days, because the individual that lost the job has a lot of skill, we have to expedite that entry point into, two, we have to shift our thinking to say, where is Joe when he walks in the door, does he need a just in time service to either redirect, retrain, and move back into that workforce, rather than putting Joe through the barrage of the traditional VR process? And then the other thing that we should think about as well, we have a lot of large employers, each of us respectively across the country. So we are really moving to embed our counseling staff with certain expertise into that large employer to, one, help the employer develop and foster that environment that embraces the employment of people with disabilities, but two, for lack of a better term, to be on the inside, to foster that recruitment and that placement of individuals within these large employers so that we are much more expeditious in connecting the individual with the workplace. And the other thing that we need to think about is that we really have to shift with

those job market that the shifting, career technical education is so front and center these days, the old idea that you learn once you get your credentials and you are done, that is changing. It's now, you know, earn and learn and relearn. And so we have to shift how we think about getting people ready for tomorrow's jobs and really recognizing it's been said that 25 percent of the jobs that are lost right now are not coming back. That means there will be new opportunities that we have to be leaning into, how do we get those opportunities made available for people with disabilities.

ALLISON FLANAGAN: On mute. Sorry. One of the a lot good points, there, are you all hearing me?

>> Yes.

ALLISON FLANAGAN: Okay. Excuse me. So, a lot of good points there. And obviously this unemployment rate is definitely going to impact us. I did like what you said about meaning to start -- people now instead of waiting to come off unemployment, because VR is a little bit of a process for the eligibility and plan development, but I agree, we need to figure out how to speed that process up, in order to respond more rapidly to the unemployment, and I tried to use that example that you did, tell my staff, if you walked in tomorrow and I gave you a pink slip and said you no longer have a job, you prepared for that? And try to make them understand how our customers feel, and a way to pay your bills, are you at risk of losing your home or car. And

not understanding the situation that they are in, sometimes eats easy for staff to think that three days is okay, as long as they are within the 60 days requirement period. But that three days feel like three years to that customer. We have to be mindful of the impact of the length of our discussions on our customers. Do you want to add anything to this discussion, Rob?

>> Yeah, I mean, certainly looking at the VR process and turning it on its head, is what I've been thinking about for a long time, and to go from a process oriented system to an action oriented system, the expectation of our customers is to move quickly, and expectation of society, and rethinking what the voc rehab process is and why we settle into the assessment mode, that's something that we are going to have to examine if we are to stay viable. People will just stop coming through our doors if we don't. It's kind of obvious, first we need to enable our customers to engage technologically, so our program are going to have to get technology in the hands of our customers and training, unlike in the BC area, before COVID, like a relative or guardian may not have been present during the job interview process, the thinking has to change, as some of our vulnerable populations during this pandemic period need to distance or quarantine longer, they might need help to engage virtually, they might need to have some assistance from somebody, thinking of things that are going to have to be practical measures that we will have to address. I

think this is truly a tremendous opportunity for people with disabilities to get in on the ground floor to the booming virtual job market.

ALLISON FLANAGAN: Dacia, anything you want to add to that?

>> In a way, the things that I was listening to Joe, I actually hired someone for the first time in my 25 year career virtually without ever meeting them. And so I think that as we have these experiences, we need to be able to be prepared for our customers who we are going to be engaging in a new normal around that piece. The other thing that I think is impactful for us to think about is, as Rob and Joe described, turning our whole process thinking upside down and really challenging us to rethink that, quickly when we started the 90-day plan process, at our agency, we had 180 day standard, we obviously had to cut that in half, where we had 90 days to develop a plan for employment. We have been, would go internally on improving our performance across the board, we last, last quarter, we did in less than half of the 90 daytime period, we are averaging well under 45 days, sometime down to 30 days. So, that may not be fast enough, and we are kicking it. Even 45 days is probably too long to wait.

So I think we continually have to, what felt maybe three to five years ago or three to five months ago as us really doing a good job, I think we have to kind of think about it again and say

how can we get those plans done faster so we can get folks the tool they need to enter back into employment.

ALLISON FLANAGAN: Definitely agree with that. We are a process oriented agency, but I think we need to move more towards outcome related and not just process, I think we are going see some additional changes in this area as we move forward. Directors like us, are going to be advocating for this, at that level with our oversight agency. So, I was watching the news recently, and the interesting resource -- (inaudible) I wish I knew who did it, I think it was some (inaudible) out of Chicago, but they surveyed -- businesses just recently -- pandemic, and alarming 40 percent of the educated said they will be producing the workforce post pandemic. It's a little shocking, but anybody that survived the 2008 recession remembers that we had a lot of layoffs and furloughs, and when they decided to not to return to the workforce -- I think we are going to see the same thing, employers are recognizing, I could get my job (inaudible). So, just understanding that we are going to have a challenge with that reduction of workforce completely and then for individuals with disabilities competing for the same jobs as those without disabilities, (inaudible) understanding what the employers are going to do, not returning where they were, how do you feel like this is going to impact our customers and how VR responds?

>> That's a great question. I mean, we wish we had a

crystal ball, right? We could have seen this coming and been prepared for it and then also looking ahead to what is, you know, a tight market we know for our customers for employment. So, I think we are undoubtedly going to need to be very creative and continue to rapidly evolve as I mentioned earlier, we are going to need to acquaint customers with the requisite technology to engage in the virtual job market, and stay end engaged with employers. To keep people with disabilities in the mix. One of the things we have to do as we rethink our approach, I think more than ever, this might sound kind of philosophical, I think more than ever we are going to have to really believe in the ability of our customers to engage. I think we see sometimes barriers, when there aren't any. I think being visionary for our customers, thinking about ways to be creative and positive to support them in whatever that market looks like, and so we are going to have to rethink, like I said earlier, the assessment process, the time that it takes to get things done, and make sure that we are as you said earlier, Allison, outcome oriented, as opposed to the process oriented.

ALLISON FLANAGAN: Dacia, what about you?

>> I agree. I think that the piece that what we don't know is what that, what the conditions are exactly going to look like. But what I believe in the last decade, what we have seen around disability is, I think employers and businesses more and more

understand that they should be hiring individuals who represent the community in which they serve. And this gives us, again, as the VR programs and providers the opportunity to lead that conversation to say now more than ever, as we are leaving this COVID pandemic, it is important that all of our communities are represented to inform the best business and customer service practices, the best government policies. All of our sectors, I think, should be representative of all the communities of color as well as people with disabilities, and make sure that our communities are representative in providing the best services possible, to society as a whole. It feels like there is that ground swell of those conversations happening that VR, again, has an opportunity to lead the disability portion.

ALLISON FLANAGAN: Sorry to hear -- again, one of VR leading. Joe, do you have any additional comments on this?

>> I just want to kind of highlight something. Another aspect I think is really important. My three-year-old grandson is going to pre-school virtually, a few hours a week. And it occurs to me as I'm watching him, that he is developing the skill set for tomorrow. So many of the people who work in today's workforce or that need to get back in today's workforce have not necessarily developed that skill. So, we have to do two things, when engaging with business, we better understand what the job of tomorrow looks like. Is it going to be more virtual? Is there that

skill set that needs to be developed in order for the person to be competitive? We need to identify what that skill set is, and we need to get after helping not only the consumer who is coming down the pike line, not only that three-year-old, 10-year-old, 20-year-old, that is okay with technology, but the one who is here today. How do we get them okay with what that skill set is going to be tomorrow, and so that they are competitive for the jobs so that we can engage with business and getting them into the workplace.

ALLISON FLANAGAN: Thank you, Joe, you kind of tipped on my next topic that I want to hit was focusing in on the industry sectors, because we know the pandemic is changing those sectors that are going to be the most, that have the most workforce needs and that's (inaudible) change the different approach. We want to talk about technology and how technology is going to play into those position in the future. Especially telemarketing. When we think about those industry sectors, how do you think that VR needs to adjust our approach for the customers so they have the best training in the fields that are in demand? Dacia, do you want to (inaudible).

>> You know, one of the things is thinking about the impacts, and of the current COVID emergency, and the pandemic on that industries at large. We are, industries, when we went through this a decade ago, in the 2008, 2010 time period, it was a

structurally different thing. I think in our current crisis, we can expect an impact on all sectors of our economy; government is affected, retail is affected, in ways that we haven't seen previously. And this is an unprecedented time. So as we are kind of looking at what this could look like as we are reopening, some are predicting a broader impact to sectors that might not even return in the previous format. There are things for, you know, businesses that have been around a hundred years who may never come back, that will not only affect our customers that are working in those environments, but also may be a ripple effect. I think our travel sector and all of the supported services around travel is going to look differently. Several manufacturing is going to look different, as we are looking at aspects of the manufacturing that have ramped up to meet consumer demand for certain types of things that we use in our daily life, to others that are certainly going to have to shift and challenge to operate differently with social distancing and maybe other health guidelines. And speaking of social distancing, to think about and an agency that predominantly serves individuals who don't drive, they access largely public transportation, that is going to look different. We are going to have to rethink how we are going to get our public around. In densely populated areas of our country, that is going to have an impact not only on our customers but the urban sectors that rely on getting their folks to and from work

using that public transportation system. Some of the things around public services, we are used to Monday through Friday, 8 to 5 work, where through social distancing and demand, I can envision that maybe we have some additional shift alternatives where perhaps even government agencies have different work hours to meet the customers' demands. I do, and certainly we can already see that the telework across the board is going to fundamentally change the way we do business. And as business, as a core partner of VR, I do think it's another opportunity for us to lead, to say -- (inaudible) help us know as you are thinking that out, have a framed up conversation, so we understand in realtime as they are shifting their business models, how we need to shift our customer delivery to both business and customers with disabilities to make sure that our services can respond to those needs in realtime.

>> Thank you, Dacia. I will let you respond to this specifically talking about the industry sectors, and the one thing I will think out there, the gig economy, which is already getting a lot of traction before this pandemic started, it's kind of like working for Lyft and Uber, but it's working for a company but also self-employed, and then also self-employment. Let's include that in our -- on these industries and how that's going to change because those are definitely two options for our customers that allows for greater flexibility with before the pandemic, after the

pandemic, I don't know what it's going look like, Joe, do you have comments on this?

>> I think you are right, I think if that gig employment offers the flexibility for someone to work four hours here, four hours there, no longer one employer as you described. But there's another aspect of this that I think becomes key, that I would expect a business -- I think we ourselves as leaders in our respective organizations are also going to have to deal with, and that is a gig economy mindset with a fixed employer. Let me give you an example. Our traditional workplace is eight to five I think as Dacia described earlier. What if we have staff that say you know what I want to do? I want to work from 6 to 10 and then I need a couple hours with my kids and then I will work from 4 to 6. And in the past, we say no, no, no, eight to five, butt in chair, if we don't see you, we don't know. And now we say, wait a minute, why not? Maybe it's not during the business hours and have that kind of work where they can do it six to ten at night, so, I guess the key message here is that the linear way that we have thought of how work is performed. It's not will change, it is changing. It has changed. And so I love Rob's term; BC we didn't embrace it, AC we better embrace it. And we better learn what that skill set is. I'm going to keep harping back to that. We all know that the number one interest in business is does Joe have the right skill set for the work that I have. And we have to contemplate skill

sets we haven't thought about in the past, gig economy is one, self-employment is the other, and great variability under the schedule is yet another.

ALLISON FLANAGAN: Thank you, Joe. Rob, how about some additional comments on this topic?

>> I mean, I'm not going to repeat the great comments from day Dacia and Joe, but I will say that, just to go back to the change of the sectors, the impact to the different industries, we know things like retail are going to be so different and transformed at the end of this pandemic. It's already transformed. You have curb side and direct shipping for most products these days. What I want to focus on is getting our customers into different sectors. Because, you know, I just want to be honest, I sometimes go and listen to reports and these grates opportunities, but they are in the same sectors, services and retail, it's like I would love to see our focus be able to shift into these emerging markets where there's a better financial viability and better connection to their community and better satisfaction over time. So that's the piece that I want to kind of concentrate on.

ALLISON FLANAGAN: I think we all should be focusing on this rather settling. They really have opportunities out there to -- it's up to us to encourage them and help them see those goals met. I'm going to shift a little bit and late talk about our

stakeholders across the country, and I'm not talking about our providers, who are providing services, but stakeholders like our business partners, non-profit institutes, national organizations and corporations, that support employment for individuals with disabilities.

And Joe, I'm going to kick it off with you first. When you think about our stakeholders, they don't provide that direct support, but they do support our efforts in the challenges that we have with our customers. So, when you think about stakeholders, how can they support VR's mission and especially our customers in obtaining (inaudible) employment?

>> Great question. And I think today more than ever we need a coordinated collaborative approach to serving our consumers. Partnering across systems and across initiatives enables us to deliver a resource that we don't have. And there is not a single VR agency that has enough resources. The idea that we treat an individual as a whole and that we lack all of the necessary services for that individual, frame it as one person, one goal, one plan, regardless of who touches that individual. And that partnership, by the way, is that at every level and every system. It's our government partners, it's our not-for-profit partners, our foundations, and other sectors that have an interest in supporting individuals with disabilities going to work. There's models out there philanthropy high school partnered with

government an initiative to develop certain strategies that really have, that wrap around impact on the person, I think sometime at VR, we think of the individual only needing employment, and while true, employment is the way forward, it's really hard to think about employment if you are hungry or cold or you can't get to the job. So more and more and more we have to think about partners across all sectors.

ALLISON FLANAGAN: Very true. Our customers often come to us with so much need, and while VR is somewhat limited to just that employment focus, talking about supports -- that we can do, understanding all those other partners, resources out there to make sure that they have assistance in all their needs. I think it's critical. Definitely a shortage out there for housing assistance. That's a struggle we have here in Florida; food, you name it. There's a lot of resources out there, but I don't think there's ever enough. So, Rob, how about you?

>> Absolutely. Let's face it, government resources and VR resources are finite. So, there's a real need for us to create equity in communities where there are scarce resources, some of the things we hear a lot about here in Washington that are real issues especially in rural areas is broad band access, transportation, access to programs and, like very necessary services are scarce, I think by partnering with non-governmental organizations, not for profits, like private entities and community

groups, we could begin to move the needle in the right direction and we would be augmenting programs and leveraging third party to create sustainable models where everybody benefits, especially people with disabilities, right? And business, we could begin, if we can benefit the people with disabilities and business, I think we could begin to chip away that at unemployment rate for people with disabilities. Also I think improved partnerships with other disability advocacy groups would be great because we could leverage our missions, it could be exciting. I think some examples would be like the traumatic brain injury Council, working to bring awareness to the community about TBI and training others on how to work and accommodate individuals with TBI. Think about that, if you had other agencies pulling on the rope with you, it would really alleviate some of the weight that you have to carry.

ALLISON FLANAGAN: I remember you have a big interest in veterans with disabilities and helping them achieve their goals and what kind of partnerships do you see in the veteran world?

>> I mean, we have been having some pretty great conversations across the country with veterans serving individuals like veterans organization, the Department of veteran affairs, the employment program, looking for different ways to -- they have been going through change just like the public VR program has been going through change, and trying to take advantage of being

in this mode of change, to promote better service and better coordination for people that we serve jointly, especially.

ALLISON FLANAGAN: And thank you for your service, Rob.

>> Oh, thank you.

ALLISON FLANAGAN: Dacia, what do you think about our stakeholders and how can they help VR?

>> I think that you can never -- sometimes you will hear that VR is the best kept secret. And sometimes that can feel stale because you are like, how that can be that we are the best kept secret? But we are relatively small in the field of human services, right? There are larger overarching systems of labor and education that are larger partners and more visible in the system. So we really need to continue to rely on our broader partners and stakeholders to help ensure that the vocational rehabilitation has the largest visibility possible in the system. I also think that to leverage and encourage those stakeholders to be a champion in term of their own workforce, one of the things that I know to be true because I live it every day is having individuals on our workforce who experience disability and have other diversity initiatives that, so our labor force represents the communities that we serve. It makes our work products better.

And so the broader message to me that we can help with our stakeholders is be part of the message and hire people with

disabilities on your staff, because I will guaranty you that the work that you do will be better, that your interface with your customers, even if it haven't individuals with disability, will be stronger, because their disability is represented in our community. And I think that that, to me, is such a powerful -- everyone wants their work products, no matter what industry they work in, to be the best possible. And I strongly believe in my core that people with disabilities, being on your workforce, makes that true. And then it challenge is us to think about universal design in a different way. I believe that there are lots of examples that are currently being act out in realtime of processes that may have been challenging for people with vision loss, that is now, when you are teleworking, challenging if you are sighted, right? When we are relying on this paper -- processes that were otherwise inaccessible to people who were blind, or if you can't come into the office -- for us to rethink our processes and have our stakeholders help with that universal thinking to say, if we are all going to be teleworking to a greater degree, let's rethink some of this paper stuff that for people with low vision or blindness is a problem and always has been. We worked around that, let's make it better for everyone and more efficient across the board.

>> Great points there, Dacia, I can't agree more, about making sure, not just our stakeholders, but everybody that we partner and work with should practice hiring people with

disabilities. I recently heard lots of successes. And here at headquarters in Florida, we actually had a -- through the on-the-job training, OJT, do work here at headquarters for us. And this individual has a background in finance, and he was here at headquarters at the reception desk. Of course we got him switched to the payment section, and he did an OJT. I was so proud when I got the personnel package to hire him into a government position, because he had done so well with OJT. This is exactly what it's supposed to look like. He came to VR, we gave I am had an opportunity in his area, the financial background, he came in and showed exactly what his skill were, and they were willing to hire him. So, (inaudible) because VR is hiring our own customer, but he has the skills, the abilities, he has proven himself through OJT. So seeing individuals at work, it's not just helping us achieve our mission, but really helping the community, and all the people that are -- interact, oh, wow -- there's still that stigma out there, folks, many employers, even though -- after 30 years are passing the ADA, next month, still think a person with a disability is going to impact insurance or a person with disabilities are going to cost more with accommodations, so many false myths out there. But our customers have proven it wrong. We have about 15 more minutes, I'm going to throw out one last question. And I will know there's a lot of questions in the Q&A section, and I will (inaudible)

Able Trust to figure out how to address those, I want to make sure that everybody gets their answers to their questions, and some of them are very specific to a state or a process (inaudible) so we will make sure we get those asked, but Rob, I want to start with you on this one. I just want to us visualize five years down the road, it's 2025, well passed this pandemic, we are AC now, after COVID, what is happening down the road in five years, do you have any crystal ball views on this?

>> Yes, the crystal ball, right? I think a lot of it is stuff I have been thinking about for a while, and aspirational as well. I mean, I see our staff, our customers as more nimble than ever, I mean, obviously, we are now more nimble than ever. I think at that time I believe our focus and our thinking and our philosophy toward the VR process will have evolved and changed. We will have hardened those mobile work skills and found ways to maximize the effectiveness of the telework, telehealth platform that are out there that we have been begun to use, like telehealth. They are in different sectors that are emerging or have emerged. I believe, and this is one that I have been excited about for some time, even before the pandemic, just because space is so expensive. I believe that we will have virtual teams bringing services into the community. The whole brick and mortar idea will have shifted in many cases, especially in urban centers. Washington DVR, please God, will be completely paperless and

our need for less work space will probably shrink by 33 percent or more. We won't be behind the private sectors, and will be more in line with the speed of business and people will recognize us as a true partner to business and we will see the value of partnering with VR to employ people with disabilities.

ALLISON FLANAGAN: Excellent. I'm holding my hat on the paperless process as well. Dacia, what about you?

>> I agree with what Rob was saying, I think one of the interesting things to think about, how government has shifted, I think we have an opportunity to keep up with the private sector in this new normal and even I have to admit myself, I was apprehensive about telework for direct service staff. I deemed them not suitable oftentimes. I have had to think about my own perceptions because our production has been comparable. Our referrals are down, but for the folks in the system, our plans have not been impacted. Our applications are slightly down below referrals, but I believe that the work can be done. And if the customers are getting their needs met, and if we have staff feeling like they can continue to deliver services, I do think that we need to lead that effort to say hey, let's not think traditional. I think we have to continue to challenge ourselves that what we thought to be true, we have learned is not exactly the case across the board. I think to speak to those traditional stereo types of hiring people with disabilities, I think we can lead, what you thought about

people with disabilities on the workforce is also one of the thoughts we thought to be true and that is not evident and more and more data becomes available, we can use that to lead our efforts to say people with disabilities on your workforce will make your workforce stronger. And I do think that this will be, in 2025, we will have more tool in our tool belt to continue to be the champion of that effort.

ALLISON FLANAGAN: Very good. Thank you, Dacia. What about Joe, do you want to wrap this up, this question?

>> Yeah, this one really speaks to me both professionally and personally. And I really see the collision of the opportunity created by COVID-19 and what's occurring with artificial intelligence, as just a really explosion of what is going to be possible. Let me give you some concrete example. Somebody who is blind, my reliance on technology is just, it's there for me to do my every day work, and I see the evolution of technology that is going to allow me to do things I just never dreamed I could do before, travel more independently, access electronically -- look what we are doing here, whoever thought this was possible BC? We never did this before, we didn't do it. But think about individuals interpreting where holograms support the use of our live interpreters. Think about things like job coaching where today it requires a body to be present. Artificial technology and intelligence is going to create those supports that we need in the

workplace for people with disabilities, that I think is just going to exploited the opportunity for individuals with disabilities to go to work in the sectors that Rob described, and it's incumbent upon all of us to not be afraid of it and to embrace it. I don't know about the rest of you, but I have never been okay with 70 percent unemployment rate. That's only going to get worse. In my mind, we need to cut that in half, we need to be down to somewhere less than 30 percent unemployment rate for people with disabilities.

ALLISON FLANAGAN: Definitely agree with that, Joe. And I know I have read something recently about the -- Americans with Disabilities Act, passed in 1990, was supposed to have an impact on employment for individuals with disabilities, but 40 ever 30 years later, that unemployment rate has not really shifted with individuals with disabilities. And even though so many employers out there are open to hire people with disabilities and they have opened their doors and provided accommodations, there is obviously something else happening, that's not impacting that unemployment number. I feel like we need to dig into that. And figure out what is it that we could do to make sure that people with disabilities are valued and want to work and there's no distance (inaudible) out there, disinterest out there, we know insurance is a big piece of this. But it's definitely, I agree, wholeheartedly some of the statements you said. But

we only have a few minutes left. So, I want to give Able Trust -- time to wrap it up. But I want to give my eternal thanks to Dacia, Rob, and Joe, you all have done an exceptional job, which I know you would. That's why I reached out to you all to help me on this. Definitely gives us some food for thought several things mentioned here that I need to figure out, these are the things I want to happen, now I want to get them to happen and start that process and not wait too long, let's get on it now, not wait for five years. So there's a lot of work that I feel like we have ahead of us but it's exciting work and we are going to see the benefits in our customer's outcomes. So, I thank you all, I appreciate you, I know I owe each of you now for this, but I'm going to turn it over to Guenevere for final words.

>> Thank you, director Flanagan, I'm going to spotlight on Daniel, I hope that's okay. I'm going to share my screen as well. And I will bring you to close-out. There we go. So, I'm going to launch a poll, and -- not that poll. Hold on one moment.

Well, here it is.

Thank you. So, I would like to ask everybody here do you have the tools that are needed to meet the challenges ahead? We have a tremendous amount of folks that have stayed on the call with us, I know a lot of you are vocational rehabilitation employees, and a lot of you are providers. And each of you have a different perspective on this. But do you have the tools that are

needed to meet the challenges and the changes ahead? Can you help the customers and the folks that you are trying to work with gain employment? That's the question that I would like to ask. And the answers are simply, yes, no, unsure. We are interested in all these responses, and so everybody that is answering yes right now, take the time to share with us our -- your favorite tool that is working for you, so you can do this in a Q&A, we have gotten a lot of fabulous questions and we are working on responding to those folks that have laid in some really thoughtful questions and I appreciated everybody that has done that. You will also be receiving a survey that will be coming to you. That's another great spot to -- some of your favorite tools working for you, everybody that is answering yes, please take a moment to do or contact us at [Able Trust.org](http://AbleTrust.org), we want to know what is working for you and your state and we try to raise that awareness with everybody that's on the call today. Your strategy might become part key take away notes that will be developed from this session. If you answered no, please share with us the idea of, that you have of what is missing, what tool do you not have that would make a difference for you and the work that you are trying to accomplish? Share this information that same way into the Q&A or send us an e-mail at info@AbleTrust.org. Your perspective of what is missing is critical as well. If you are unsure, take a moment to share with us what is making you feel

doubt, whether or not you have what you need or if you feel like there's a strategy that's working a little bit, but maybe it needs some help. So those questions that are lingering for you, we would really like to be able to dive into that deeper and develop more sessions, that we can get into that subject that is really not bringing some peace for you, and we can bring some light into that question and share it with a really broader audience. If you are feeling unsure, probably someone else is feeling that same way.

Last call for the folks. I'm going to share whether or not they have the tools that are needed to make those changes.

Last call for votes.

So, most of you all felt like you had the tools that you need. And that's really interesting, so what I would really like to know is what is working for you, and we can make that part of the summary that we will be develop from today's session. Those of you that are unsure, there's a real mind there to tap into and really find out what it is that we can help you bring some clarity. So, share your doubts, share your challenges, we would like to get into that. And for those of you that do not feel like you have what you need, what is it that you need? Let's get that out and front in front of the director's here and in front of our community so we can all be better informed about how to tackle this. I appreciate everyone participating in that. And with that, I am going to

launch the final two slides, so bear with me for just a moment. Technology. Here we go. And I will click. So, upcoming programming and resources from The Able Trust. I would like to invite everyone to join us for our upcoming webinars, on June 18, we have jobs in Florida, today and tomorrow, and the discussion on the panel got into a lot of this today, what are the jobs of the future, what are the industries that may not be around post pandemic what are the con transitions and where are the expansive technology. Join us, June 18, registration is open on our Web page, you can get to us at [WWW.Able Trust.org](http://WWW.AbleTrust.org). And June 30, we have an organizational capacity building mission, that's with myself, register for that, that box will be open later today, we invite you all to be a part of that. You do not have to be from Florida to sign up for any of these, these are free and open to anybody on the call today, sharing with your friends, we would like as many people on them as possible.

A copy of today's discussion will be posted on to the website of the Able Trust next week. And we will also be developing a key take away summary of all the thoughts that were shared today by our panelists but also in the question and answers box, take the time to share with us and we will catch up with everyone. You can follow us at Twitter, you can post some of your questions there as well. But you can stay up to date with all the work that The Able Trust is doing.

The panelists have invited you to contact them directly with questions that you may have that may be specific to their state or, so, please contact them, Allison Flanagan@VRFLDOE.org, Rob Hines, in Washington, HinesR@DSHWA.GOV, and Dacia.Johnson@state.OR.US, and Joe at Joe.Xavier@DOR.CA.GOR. Please fill out the survey that you will be directed to after this slide ends. Thank you to each panelist. We have brought four states into our conversation, but our conversation had so much in common. Thank you, Doctor Flanagan for taking the lead. It's been a privilege to learn more from each other. If you want to connect with us, we would love more details, those of you that submitted those recommendations anonymously, reconnect with us, we would love to follow up. We need a better -- to make it accessible for everybody.

But aside from that, I would like to thank everybody for participating today, look for the key summaries takeaways to be available on The Able Trust website. It will also hit your e-mail. And on behalf of everyone here at the Able Trust, we wish you good health and to stay focused on the future. Thank you so much for joining us today.