

# CAREER PATHWAYS ADVANCEMENT PROJECT: EVALUATION BRIEF SERIES - PROGRAM OUTCOMES

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## INTRODUCTION

From 2015 – 2020, the Institute for Community Inclusion at the University of Massachusetts Boston served as the independent evaluator of the Nebraska Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Career Pathways for Individuals with Disabilities model demonstration project. Funded by the Rehabilitation Services Administration Nebraska VR conducted the Career Pathways Advancement Project (CPAP), as one of four state VR agency grantees. Nebraska’s CPAP program uses an “upskill/backfill” approach to support past VR clients and incumbent workers to advance in their careers and fill the open position with another qualified VR client. With businesses as partners, Nebraska VR targeted the five industry sectors of Information Technology; Manufacturing; Transportation, Distribution, and Logistics; Healthcare; and Architecture/Construction for the model demonstration.

## PROGRAM GOALS

The overall purpose of the project was to use career pathways to help individuals with disabilities to acquire skills and credentials necessary to advance into jobs with higher wages and employer-provided benefits. The targeted program outcomes included:

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| a) Increase the number of distinct career pathways accessed or created by the participating State VR agency  |
| b) Increase the number and percentage of individuals who achieve competitive integrated employment within each of the project’s career pathways  |
| c) Increase the average weekly wage and employer benefits of VR-eligible individuals participating in each of the project’s career pathways, as compared to those of non-participating eligible individuals. |

## OUTREACH AND SERVICES

The CPAP effort conducted recruitment and program outreach through several pipelines, including contacting individuals who had received VR services and been successfully employed in recent years. These individuals were invited to return to VR to focus on career advancement. Incumbent workers at partnering businesses who might be eligible for VR services were also invited to apply for CPAP services.

**2,021** Past VR clients contacted to participate

**302** Individuals served by CPAP

**95** Successfully employed to date

About **40%** of the 302 CPAP participants are still working toward completing education and training programs and advancing in their careers, and are expected to have successful employment outcomes. Of the 180 individuals that have finished the program so far, 95 (53%) have earned a credential and achieved competitive integrated employment.

## PROGRAM OUTCOMES AT A GLANCE

<b>302 incumbent workers</b>	Past VR clients and current employees with disabilities at partnering businesses have been served in the program
<b>170 businesses contacted</b>	Employers in five targeted industry sectors engaged by CPAP career pathways recruiters
<b>140 credentials earned</b>	Earned by CPAP participants engaged in upskilling through training and education to advance in their careers
<b>\$300 increased wages</b>	CPAP participants increased weekly wages from a median of \$500 to \$800/week upon program completion
<b>+2 additional benefits</b>	The number of employer-provided benefits (counted from zero to five including health insurance, paid leave, etc.) received by CPAP participants increased by an average of two additional benefits
<b>36 career pathways</b>	CPAP accessed/created career pathways in a range of high-demand industries and career clusters
<b>95% satisfaction rate</b>	CPAP participants surveyed were satisfied with the services provided and felt the program helped them to advance

## DEEP DIVE: WEEKLY WAGES AND EMPLOYER-PROVIDED BENEFITS

CPAP staff tracked outcome data for the 95 individuals that successfully earned a credential and achieved competitive integrated employment. Specifically, we measured the change in a) weekly wages and b) number of employer-provided benefits (count ranging from one to five) from the time the individual applied for CPAP services, to the time the case was closed upon program completion.

Table 1. Weekly wage and number of employer-provided benefits summary

<b>Overall (N=95)</b>	Wages at Application	Wages at Closure	<b>Wage Change</b>	Benefits at Application	Benefits at Closure	<b>Benefits Change</b>
<b>Median</b>	\$520.00	\$780.00	<b>\$300.00</b>	1.00	4.00	<b>2.00</b>
<b>Mean (Average)</b>	\$511.91	\$899.14	<b>\$387.23</b>	1.69	3.86	<b>2.17</b>

### Highlights:

- Weekly wages increased for **97.9%** (or 93 of 95) of CPAP participants that achieved competitive integrated employment
- **76.8%** (or 73 out of 95) of CPAP clients have increased the total number of employer-provided benefits received
- Of the 95 successful CPAP cases, only four individuals are employed in non-benefitted positions.

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## Non-CPAP Comparison Group

As a model demonstration, this pilot of the upskill/backfill model was the first that we know of in a VR agency setting. Although the weekly wage and employer-provided benefits earned by the group of CPAP participants who successfully completed the program are impressive, it is challenging to put these outcomes into context. One way to help us understand the potential impact of the program is to look at a comparable group of individuals served by Nebraska VR during a similar time period. It is important to note that this model demonstration was not an experimental design, and there are significant limitations to this approach; however, we offer an estimation of the program impact in the section below.

The evaluation team at the Institute for Community Inclusion used the [VR Program Evaluation Toolkit](#), developed in partnership with Mathematica Policy Research, to draw a comparison matched group of non-CPAP participants and estimate the impact of the CPAP intervention.

### **First, we filtered the non-CPAP comparison group pool to only include:**

- Cases closed into the five targeted career clusters
- Cases served during the same time period, and
- Cases for which the individual had weekly earnings greater than \$0 at the time of application

### **Then, we controlled for the following individual characteristics through the matching procedure:**

- Gender
- Ethnicity
- Age
- Level of education at the time of application

The first filter yielded a pool of N=530 non-CPAP cases. The matching procedure selected a comparison group of N=95 non-CPAP cases that had similar characteristics to the CPAP cases.

### **When comparing outcomes, the results indicate that the CPAP intervention had the intended effect on both wages and employer-provided benefits.**

- Non-CPAP cases earned median weekly wages of \$560 (mean = \$583), compared to the CPAP median wages of \$780 (mean = \$899).
- The point estimate (that is, our best guess) of the effect of CPAP intervention on weekly earnings is \$311.31.
- The point estimate of the effect of the CPAP intervention on employer-provided benefits is 1.94.

## CONCLUSION

The outcome data and comparison group analysis presented here demonstrate some of the advantages of focusing on career pathways beyond the simple metric of assisting someone in obtaining an entry level position. The differences in the CPAP and non-CPAP outcomes show that the CPAP approach can take individuals much farther toward financial and health-care independence. Because the incumbent workers targeted for the CPAP pilot were a unique and targeted sample, and the criteria for “success” differ for CPAP vs. non-CPAP program participants, we offer this evaluation data as our best estimate of the program impact. The outcomes of the CPAP model demonstration provide important insights about the ways a focus on upskilling and advancement can have a significant impact on the career pathways of individuals with disabilities.