

Disability Policy Issue Brief

Emily Harrison and Yonatan Ben-Shalom

Participants' Characteristics and Experiences from the First Two Years of the Vermont Career Advancement Project

The five-year Vermont Career Advancement Project (VCAP), administered by HireAbility Vermont, helps people with disabilities find career pathways so they can secure high-wage, high-quality jobs in fields that interest them. VCAP will increase access to high-quality career pathways by connecting participants with programs and educational opportunities that result in a credential, postsecondary degree, or higher-paid job. This brief describes the characteristics and experiences of Vermonters who have enrolled in VCAP as of August 2024, three years after the program started. An earlier brief in this series provided an overview of VCAP and how it connects people with opportunities for career training.ⁱ

Who has enrolled in VCAP?

As of August 2024, 527 Vermonters with disabilities had enrolled in VCAP. As shown in Exhibit 1, VCAP participants were most commonly ages 25 to 40, female, and White, non-Hispanic. Race and ethnicity among VCAP participants strongly reflected the state's overall demographics, with 87 percent of participants reporting White, non-Hispanic race and ethnicity compared to 89 percent in the state as a whole.ⁱⁱ In contrast, VCAP participants were on average younger than Vermont residents as a whole, with 70 percent of participants ages 18 to 40, compared with 33 percent of all Vermonters who are ages 18 to 39.ⁱⁱⁱ This difference is likely due to the nature of VCAP; one would expect people enrolling in a program focused on career training to be relatively young. The most common types of disabilities among VCAP participants were behavioral health disabilities, including mental health and substance use disorders, followed by developmental disabilities such as autism spectrum disorder and intellectual disability.

Thus far, the greatest number of VCAP participants have worked with Career Pathway Navigators (CPNs) in HireAbility's offices in Burlington (88 participants), Newport (71 participants), and Brattleboro (70 participants). For about half of participants (278), enrollment in VCAP was their first encounter with vocational rehabilitation (VR) services; other participants had an open VR case before they enrolled in VCAP. About one in five participants (102) were employed at the time they enrolled.

Exhibit 1. Select Characteristics of VCAP Enrollees

Category	Subcategory	Number of participants	Percentage of all participants
Age at VCAP enrollment	0 to 18	DS	DS
	18 to 24	137	26.0
	25 to 40	232	44.0
	41 to 55	109	21.7
	Older than 55	DS	DS
Gender	Female	300	56.9
	Male	199	37.8
	Nonbinary/other	18	3.4
	Unknown	10	1.9
Race and ethnicity	Black, non-Hispanic	24	4.6
	Hispanic	14	2.7
	White, non-Hispanic	458	86.9
	Other, non-Hispanic	19	3.6
	Unknown	12	2.3
Disability type	Behavioral disabilities	269	51.0
	Developmental disorders	123	23.3
	Physical disabilities	89	16.9
	Other/unknown	46	8.7

Source: HireAbility VCAP program data.

Note: DS stands for data suppressed. Counts less than 11 are suppressed as are the counts in the next-fewest group to protect participants’ confidentiality. Behavioral disabilities include alcohol abuse or dependence, anxiety disorder, depressive and other mood disorders, drug abuse or dependence other than alcohol, mental illness, and schizophrenia or psychotic disorder. Developmental disabilities include attention-deficit hyperactive disorder (ADHD), autism, intellectual disability, and specific learning disabilities. Physical disabilities include accident or injury (other than traumatic brain injury or spinal cord injury), arthritis and rheumatism, cancer, cardiac and circulatory system conditions, congenital condition or birth injury, diabetes mellitus, physical disorders and conditions, and traumatic brain injury.

What career pathways are VCAP participants pursuing?

Some participants pursue one or more career pathways—which means they pursue training and career development programs that lead to high-demand, high-wage employment—whereas others have not set a career pathway yet. Collectively, as of August 2024, VCAP participants were exploring 393 career pathways (Exhibit 2). Across all HireAbility offices, the most common educational institution providing career pathway training was the Community College of Vermont (CCV), followed by either Vermont State University (VTSU) or University of Vermont. Other educational providers included Career Technical Education centers throughout the state, other colleges and universities, two driver training schools, and ReSOURCE, a VCAP partner offering credentialed training programming in construction; weatherization; and heating, ventilation, and air conditioning systems.

The career pathways that VCAP participants were exploring most commonly lead to a career or technical credential (40 percent), such as licensed practical nurse or commercial driver’s license, or a two- or four-year college degree (39 percent). Other career pathways were less common—23 or fewer total participants have chosen each of the other pathway options. However, some types of career pathways,

such as registered apprenticeships or training leading to occupation- or industry-specific licenses, might naturally follow educational training and therefore become more common among VCAP participants later in the program.

Exhibit 2. Career Pathways of VCAP Enrollees

Pathway	Number of pathways	Percentage of all pathways
Any pathway	393	100.0
Career or technical training program—credential	157	39.9
Two- or four-year college	153	38.9
Career or technical training program—no credential	23	5.9
Basic skills or career prep	16	4.1
College course for credit—nonmatriculated	14	3.6
Other	30	7.6

Note: Some participants were pursuing multiple pathways and therefore may be counted in more than one row.

Source: HireAbility VCAP program data.

What HireAbility services have VCAP participants used?

All VCAP participants have used at least one program-related service (Exhibit 3). Most participants have used VR counseling and guidance (71 percent) and job readiness training (53 percent). Other commonly used services include academic and training services and job search assistance. Use of all services will increase as participants continue to engage with VCAP and explore career pathways.

Exhibit 3. Service Used by 100 or More VCAP Enrollees

Service	Service description	Number of participants	Percentage of all participants
Any service	Any service related to VCAP, including those included in the service categories below.	527	100.0
VR counseling and guidance	Information and support services to help a consumer exercise informed choice when deciding on goals and services.	374	71.0
Job readiness training	Training to equip a consumer with skills needed in the workplace and identify training for specific careers.	281	53.3
Academic and training services	Activities to support academic services including costs of books and supplies, in-classroom support, and other services.	226	42.9
Job search assistance	Activities directed to job development, finding job leads, and supporting the consumer with job search and applications.	218	41.4
Information and referral	Information about and referral for services relevant to the consumer’s case but not offered by HireAbility or its contractors.	215	40.8
Maintenance	Costs related to expenses that might otherwise impede training, including childcare, computer hardware and repair, housing, utilities, and other costs.	194	36.8
Career assessment	Activities to assess a consumer’s career interests and aptitudes, including formal and worksite assessments, and task analyses.	187	35.5
Transportation	Costs related to transportation such as public transportation and driver’s license fees, vehicle registration and repair, and other costs.	131	24.9

Service	Service description	Number of participants	Percentage of all participants
Vocational or technical-related experience	Activities related to a vocational or technical program, including costs of supplies, tuition and fees, and unmet needs allowance.	117	22.4

Note: Participants often use multiple service types and therefore may be counted in more than one row.

Source: HireAbility VCAP program data.

What do VCAP participants say about their experiences?

Based on interviews with program participants, most participants reported positive experiences with VCAP. Among 18 participants who completed an interview in spring 2023 and 21 participants interviewed in spring 2024, 18 said they felt supported in accessing the VCAP services they were interested in. Many interviewees reported they had accessed career-related services such as job exploration, training, technology supports, referrals to other agencies, and resume services. Many of them had also taken courses from CCV or VTSU, and program participants shared positive feedback about working with VCAP Career Pathway Student Navigators at their schools.

Most participants who interviewed also reported positive experiences working with their VCAP CPN. Nearly all of them said they had a good working relationship with their CPN, and interviewees described their CPNs as responsive to their needs, communicative, enthusiastic, and supportive. One VCAP participant said of their CPN, "I just feel they're behind me and for me 100 percent. And that's very helpful in your psyche."

VCAP participants had some recommendations for improving the program. For instance, one interviewee reported problems participating in trainings scheduled on weekdays when they work, and they suggested adding services during nonwork hours. Other interviewees reported specific problems they encountered while participating in VCAP, such as needing to pay for education courses up front before the program reimbursed them or issues communicating with their CPN. Overall, though, interviewees had positive experiences participating in VCAP and many had no suggestions for change because they felt the program completely met their needs.

One program participant who worked with the VCAP Career Pathway Student Navigator at their school said, "They actually care, instead of just setting me up with a couple of classes and saying, 'Here take these classes.' They wanted me to succeed, and I could tell that they wanted to really help."

Looking Ahead

Some VCAP participants have already achieved major program milestones: 40 have earned a vocational or technical credential or license; 15 have earned an associate or bachelor's degree; and 16 have successfully completed the program with competitive integrated employment, which means their jobs are compensated above minimum wage, and they receive the same benefits and opportunities as their coworkers without disabilities. Those employed at exit earned an average hourly wage of \$22.60, 65 percent higher than the current minimum wage in Vermont (\$13.67). They also worked more than

37 hours per week, on average. As more participants complete VCAP and advance their careers, HireAbility expects participants' outcomes to improve in the coming years.

HireAbility will continue to enroll VCAP participants over the next two years of its grant from the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) and plans to implement the model more widely after that. In its role as HireAbility's evaluation partner, Mathematica will continue to collect and analyze program participants' data. We will conduct another round of interviews with VCAP participants in 2025 and we will develop an impact evaluation report based on analysis of HireAbility and RSA data in 2026.

More Information

For more information about VCAP and Mathematica's evaluation, visit <https://www.mathematica.org/projects/evaluation-of-the-vermont-career-advancement>.

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References

ⁱ Harrison, Emily, and Yonatan Ben-Shalom. (June 2024). "The Vermont Career Advancement Project: A Way for Vermonters with Disabilities to Find Meaningful High-Wage Work." Available at <https://www.mathematica.org/publications/a-way-for-vermonters-with-disabilities-to-find-meaningful-high-wage-work>.

ⁱⁱ US Census Bureau. Retrieved August 21, 2024. <https://data.census.gov/table/DECENNIALCD1182020.P9?q=040XX00US50>.

ⁱⁱⁱ Vermont Department of Health. (November 7, 2023). "Population of Vermont Counties by Age and Sex, 2020–2023." Available at <https://www.healthvermont.gov/sites/default/files/document/HSI-STAT-POP-Vermont-population-by-county-age-and-sex-2020-2023.xlsx>.