

Disability Policy Issue Brief

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The Vermont Career Advancement Project: A Way for Vermonters with Disabilities to Find Meaningful High-Wage Work

The five-year Vermont Career Advancement Project (VCAP) helps people with disabilities find career pathways so that they can secure high-wage, high-quality jobs in fields that interest them. VCAP will train more people for 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 why Vermont needs VCAP and how it connects people with disabilities with opportunities for career training.

Why is VCAP Needed?

Throughout the United States, people with disabilities are less likely to be employed than people without disabilities.ⁱ In Vermont, 55 percent of working-age adults with disabilities are employed compared with 82 percent of non-disabled adults.ⁱⁱ Among those working full time, adults with disabilities earn on average \$50,476 per year compared with \$67,741 among those without disabilities.

Because they have higher unemployment and lower earnings, Vermonters with disabilities are almost three times as likely to live in poverty than non-disabled Vermonters.

HireAbility Vermont, Vermont’s state agency meant to help Vermonters with disabilities prepare for, obtain, and maintain meaningful careers, designed VCAP to address barriers to employment and encourage Vermonters with disabilities to enroll in training programs for high-wage occupations. These programs could help people with disabilities gain marketable skills and secure high-quality, well-paying jobs. In addition to helping Vermonters with disabilities, HireAbility helps employers recruit, train, retain, and promote employees with disabilities. According to HireAbility data, until recently less than 11 percent of HireAbility consumers participated in training programs that lead to a credential, postsecondary degree, or higher-paying job. Several barriers have prevented HireAbility’s consumers from enrolling in training programs, including lack of resources, need for additional support, and concerns about losing federal benefits such as Supplemental Security Income or Social Security Disability Insurance.

Exhibit 1. Employment and poverty among Vermonters with and without disabilities

Percentage of Vermonters who...	
Have a disability and are employed	55.1
Do not have a disability and are employed	81.8
Have a disability and experience poverty	22.6
Do not have a disability and experience poverty	8.3

Source: Adults ages 18 to 64; Disability Statistics from the American Community Survey, 2022.

What is VCAP?

The Rehabilitation Services Administration, part of the U.S. Department of Education, funded the projects of eight state vocational rehabilitation agencies, including HireAbility's VCAP, that strengthen career pathways for people with disabilities. These career pathways should promote high-demand, high-quality training and career programs with an overall goal of improving outcomes for people with disabilities. If the projects succeed, the eight states will increase high-wage employment in positions with the same compensation and benefits as non-disabled employees, self-sufficiency, independence, and inclusion for people with disabilities.

VCAP connects people with disabilities to educational opportunities and credentialed training programs. It will enroll 500 people over five years and provide them with better access to opportunities such as occupational training, postsecondary education, pre-apprenticeships, and apprenticeships. In the long term, HireAbility and its partners will expand VCAP into a statewide system that adequately prepares Vermonters with disabilities for meaningful, high-wage employment opportunities. Ultimately, such a system could lead to a more robust workforce in Vermont and better employment outcomes for people with disabilities.

How Does VCAP Work?

All Vermonters with disabilities who are interested in VCAP and eligible for HireAbility's services can enroll in the project. After signing up, participants work with their Career Pathway Navigator to set a goal they can achieve or work toward by enrolling in occupational training, postsecondary education, pre-apprenticeships, or apprenticeships that lead to a credential. Participants' goals can align with one of five career pathways that offer high-demand, high-wage employment (that is, advanced manufacturing, financial services, health care, information technology, or skilled construction trades) or another sector that aligns with their objective. To support VCAP participants' goals, Career Pathway Navigators work with participants to provide career assessments, connect them to educational supports, enroll them in trainings, and coordinate the use of services so that they can achieve their goal. When needed, Career Pathway Navigators connect participants to other HireAbility staff who can also support their goals, such as a Certified Work Incentive Counselor who can help participants estimate earnings and possible impacts on benefits.

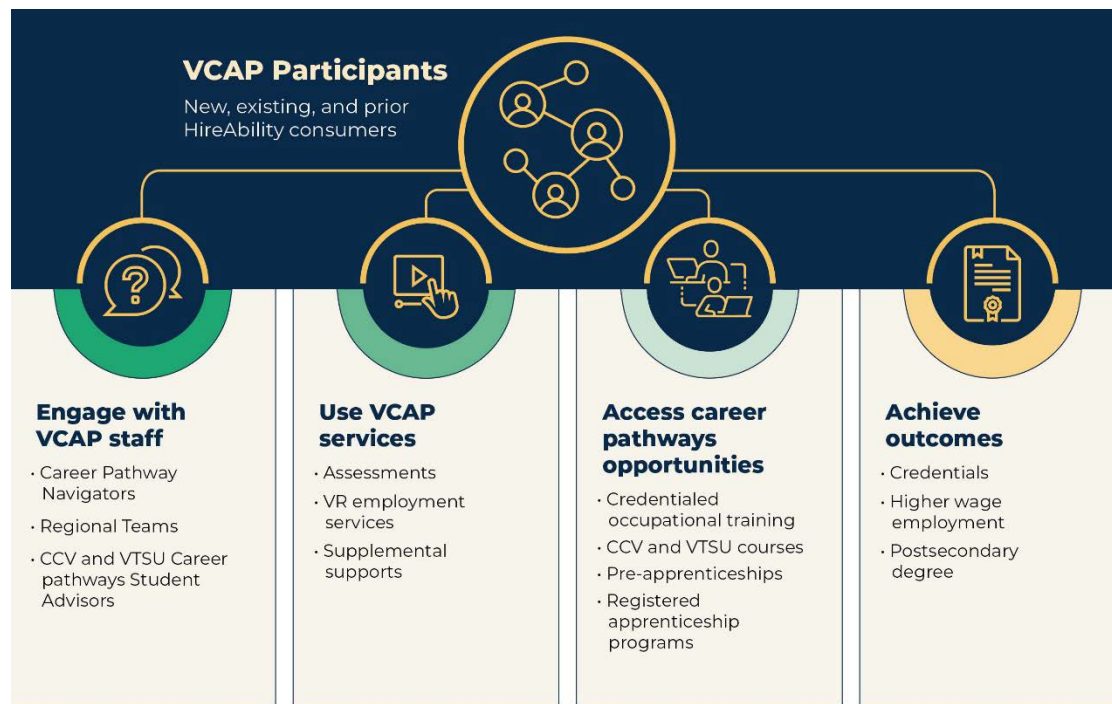
VCAP's seven partner organizations are essential to its success. Each partner plays a unique role in Vermont's workforce system and offers specific services to the project. Because HireAbility does not provide any credentialed training opportunities directly, VCAP participants access training opportunities through these partner organizations. In addition, members of each partner organization serve on the VCAP leadership team to guide the project's development.

VCAP partners

- **Advance Vermont** provides access to [MyFutureVT](#), an online resource for Vermonters to find education, training, and career opportunities.
- **The Community College of Vermont** and **Vermont State University** deliver instruction for new apprenticeship, pre-apprenticeship, and industry-recognized credential opportunities and have Pathway Student Advisors who help project participants navigate educational opportunities and systems.
- **ReSOURCE** offers credentialed training programming in construction; weatherization; and heating, ventilation, and air conditioning systems, and it will develop additional training opportunities over the course of the project.
- **The Vermont Association of Business, Industry and Rehabilitation** has employment consultants who assist VCAP participants with job placement and work directly with employers on worksite financial supports.
- **The Vermont Association of Career and Technical Directors** identifies existing and new career and technical education programs that provide related instruction and pre-apprenticeship opportunities.
- **The Vermont Department of Labor** provides people access to registered pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship programs.

By the time participants are finished, VCAP participants will have a credential, a postsecondary degree, a higher paid job, or all three. To achieve this goal, participants work with staff from HireAbility and partner organizations to access services and supports upon enrolling in VCAP. Each participant chooses a career pathway based on their professional interests and then enrolls in relevant credentialed occupational training, postsecondary education, pre-apprenticeships, or apprenticeships. Depending on their goal, participants will move through each stage of the program and access resources to support their training, as the figure below shows.

Exhibit 2. VCAP stages from participants' perspectives



CCV = Community College of Vermont; VCAP = Vermont Career Advancement Project; VTSU = Vermont State University; VR = vocational rehabilitation.

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 U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2024). Persons with a Disability: Labor Force Characteristics – 2023. <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/disabl.pdf>.

ⁱⁱ Thomas, N., Paul, S., Bach, S., & Houtenville, A. (2024). Annual Disability Statistics Compendium: 2024. <https://www.researchondisability.org/annual-disability-statistics-collection>.