

## **Best Practices for Addressing the Shortage of Certified Vision Professionals August 2019**

The overall shortage of vision professionals across the United States has led to many agencies, organizations, and policy makers using untrained staff to provide services to individuals across the life span with visual impairments. The large variance and accuracy with which these services are provided by untrained individuals has led to improper training, dangerous techniques, and the need for retraining at a later point in the individual's life. Albeit, well-meaning supervisors and administrators have made decisions to use untrained and uncertified staff to provide said services in an attempt to address staffing shortages; however, these practices leave something to be desired. As AERBVI members, we strive to provide the most recent up-to-date research to ensure that consumers are receiving the best services and training available. In an attempt to address the lack of best practices research, the RSA (Rehabilitation Services Administration) tasked the OIB-TAC to provide current research to the field.

The OIB-TAC (Older Individuals who are Blind Technical Assistance Center) and Mississippi State University's National Research and Training Center on Blindness and Low Vision have worked to research and address service delivery strategies and techniques for older adults with visual impairments to ensure, that despite the overall shortages of instructors in the field and limited financial resources, individuals receiving rehabilitation services are provided the best service delivery available to them by trained and certified individuals from the field of vision rehabilitation. OIB-TAC gathered a task force of certified professionals and leaders, in the area of blindness and low vision research, to address the topic of best practices for older blind adults receiving rehabilitation services.

*Best practices are service delivery strategies or techniques that appear effective based on available evidence; are client-centered; are sensitive to the context of the service delivery setting; and are responsive to evolving technology, resources, and/or research (OIB-TAC, 2017).*

This task force convened in January 2017, with a culminating report covering best practices recommended for agencies providing services to older adults. The service delivery methods and best practices discovered and discussed in the final draft of the OIB-TAC report (2018) addresses the need for certified staff, consistency in training methods, and direct supervision by certified staff while an individual is working towards certification. The final report provides agencies a way to move forward towards best practices in their hiring process, by ensuring that all non-certified staff are provided direct supervision by certified staff, while working to receive certification themselves. OIB-TAC determined:

*Acceptable practice includes a plan to move toward the best practice, and the unacceptable practice is typically regarded as unsafe, detrimental, or nonproductive in assisting OIB consumers become as independent as possible (OIB-TAC, 2018).*

As AERBVI members, we should always strive to ensure that all consumers of blind rehabilitation services across the life span are provided with the best services available to them through the use of properly trained certified staff, in the area of training taking place. The AERO Board encourages all Ohio providers, administrators, and policy makers to consider OIB-TAC's findings and work towards implementing best practices into their hiring decisions and service delivery models for individuals across the life span. We also encourage all individuals completing training in the vision rehabilitation field to sit for standardized exams to obtain certification or licensure in their given area of study. OIB-TAC's full best practices report can be found at the link below:

[https://www.oib-tac.org/sites/www.oib-tac.org/files/OIB%20Best%20Practices\\_1.pdf](https://www.oib-tac.org/sites/www.oib-tac.org/files/OIB%20Best%20Practices_1.pdf)

AERO's Board Members would like to thank RSA and OIB-TAC for their work in addressing and researching the topic of best-practices in the field of vision rehabilitation.

Sincerely,

AERO Ohio Board

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