a. Input of State Rehabilitation Council
(General)

All agencies, except for those that are independent consumer-controlled commissions, must describe the following:

1. Input provided by the State Rehabilitation Council, including input and recommendations on the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan, recommendations from the Council's report, the review and analysis of consumer satisfaction, and other Council reports that may have been developed as part of the Council’s functions; (General)

The State Rehabilitation Council provides ongoing input and recommendations to VRS. The council’s annual reports, meeting minutes, and summary reports of public forums can be found online at: http://mn.gov/deed/job-seekers/disabilities/councils/rehab-council.jsp.

The SRC spent a substantial amount of time reviewing WIOA and preparing public comment. The council’s comments were previously submitted to RSA. In summary, the following recommendations were made:

1. RSA should closely monitor the impact of steering 15% of the federal appropriation to pre-employment services for transition aged youth. The SRC felt that this new mandate should have included new funding. This new mandate could have negative impact on services for adults.
2. The regulations should clarify how the common performance measures will be used. The regulations do not indicate if VR agencies will be compared to other VR agencies, or if VR will be compared to all programs funded by WIOA. If VR will be compared to all WIOA funded programs, common definitions need to be provided. For example, VR considers placement to be 90 days of successful employment while other programs consider placement to be one day of employment.

3. The SRC provided comment on the draft WIOA regulations related to Employer Training & Services. The primary concern is the language used in this regulation indicating that WIOA “authorizes the DSU to expend VR funds for training and services for employers [. . .].” The SRC is concerned that the language in this draft regulation is not strong enough to make this a priority for the DSU. There are many operational requirements that the DSU must fulfill, and if the draft regulations do not use language that do not require or allocate funding to this activity, it will not be a priority. SRC would like the language revised to emphasize the importance of this activity.

Additionally, of particular interest to the council is the type of services that should be available to employers. The MN SRC General proposes that the following training & services be available to employers: a. Disability Awareness Training b. Myths & Facts of ADA Accommodations Training c. VR Services 101 training for Employers. This training should discuss services and supports available to employees/employers including when and for how long after employee is hired supports can be provided through VR and Extended Employment (state funded long term supports).

4. SRC provided comment and suggestions on metrics that can assist in measuring “effectiveness in serving employers”. These measures could include: a. Repeat hiring of VRS referrals by employer b. Employer referrals of other employment businesses c. Post-placement career progression d. Number of individuals employed by each employer business partner e. Ratio of employers hiring VRS consumers &/or using Work Opportunity Tax Credits (WOTC) compared to all employers SRC noted that a measure that would be ineffective at measuring effectiveness in serving employers would be employee retention rates. This would not have the strongest correlation to the DSU effectiveness, as much of it is related to the employer’s own initiative and commitment.

5. The goal of competitive integrated employment that provides an opportunity for advancement is a very appropriate goal for the public Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program. However, the Council is concerned that mandating the goal through regulation will infringe on the participant’s right to self-determination. People should be given choices and options for competitive integrated employment based on their abilities and capabilities. Establishing the appropriate level of integration for the person is best done on an individual basis through the counseling and guidance process, not federal regulations.

The employee with a disability may choose a competitive work site that is not fully integrated for a variety of reasons. The person may want or need a level of job coaching
or other supports not available at a single site placement. The person may be introverted and not want a high level of interaction with co–workers. People may select a small work crew because they feel that working with people who have similar disabilities provides a supportive environment. Public transportation may not be available to single site placements, especially in rural areas.

The Council also has concerns about the requirement that individuals with disabilities employed by a community rehabilitation program (CRP) and working on a community-based service contract (i.e., working on a janitorial work crew) be integrated with co–workers without disabilities employed by the CRP instead of with co–workers employed at the community work site. Many people with disabilities choose employment on a work crew as a stepping stone to a competitive single site placement. The level of integration should be measured at the actual work site, not the CRP site, since the opportunity for advancement would be employment at the work site.

6. SRC recommends that each state have the discretion to define the ages of those potentially eligible for services. Due to limited resources, SRC recommends limiting pre–employment services to students on IEPs or Section 504 Plans who are age 16–21. Interested students with disabilities age 14 and older should have annual exposure to VR, including information and referral.

7. The term ‘hearing impaired’ is offensive and should be replaced with ‘deaf, hard of hearing and DeafBlind’.

Public Forums

The State Rehabilitation Council convenes two public forums each year. The forums provide an opportunity to gather grassroots commentary and input regarding Minnesota’s Vocational Rehabilitation program, and they encourage participation in public conversation about matters of interest and importance in the arena of disability employment.

**May public forum: A Public forum on Employment and People with Disabilities in Southwest Minnesota.**

The May forum examined local employment data for southwestern Minnesota, a predominantly rural area with limited resources. Key stakeholders providing input included County Case Management, Southwest Independent Living staff, VRS staff, and the Commission on Economic Development. Overall, the SRC was impressed with the VR staff and their creative approach to the challenges posed when providing services in a vast low population area.

**Recommendations from the forum included:**

- Recognizing that VR staff in Greater Minnesota already collaborate with community resources, the SRC called upon VRS leadership to encourage VR staff to increase collaboration and provide creative leadership in such efforts. Specific examples included
supporting the development of more work readiness programs, skill training, and
development opportunities. One participant noted that the nearest job coach was one
and a half hours away.

- The SRC advised that VR staff actively encourage homebased employment options.
- SRC advised that VR continue to support early outreach and communication to potential
VR consumers in hopes that early engagement will allow VR staff to build connections
with employers and provide client choice.
- The SRC advised that VR continue to support outreach to employers, including small
businesses. VR has a unique and important role assuring small businesses are aware of
ADA, on–the–job training, work opportunity tax credits, etc.
- Lack of transportation impacted job choice, training opportunities and economic
development. SRC recognized that transportation options are very limited in rural areas,
but the problem cannot be ignored.

September public forum: Coordination between the Schools and Vocational Rehabilitation.

The September forum was sponsored by SRC–General, SRC–Blind and the Department of
Education. A panel discussed the federal and state initiatives designed to increase employability
for students with disabilities, and how to maximize the positive impact of pre–employment
transition services through effective collaboration.

Following a panel discussion of the current initiatives and a discussion of the current policies
and practices around VR and school collaboration, participants broke into local teams consisting
of the local school district staff, the VRS and SSB staff assigned to those school districts, and
students with disabilities from the various school districts. Each team developed strategies on
how to improve interagency coordination at the local level. Although not a part of the initial
design, participants used the forum as an opportunity to network and become familiar with
services available at other school districts and/or other agencies.

Review and analysis of consumer satisfaction

The SRC expanded on the May forum by holding consumer discussion groups in five additional
areas of the state. The Centers for Independent Living hosted these discussion groups, focusing
on a subgroup of VRS participants who received both VR and IL services. Public discussions were
held in Duluth (northeast), Fergus Falls (west central), Rochester (southeast) St. Cloud (central),
and St. Paul (Twin cities metro).

Discussion topics were primarily focused on people’s experiences looking for and obtaining
jobs, experiences working with placement services, experiences after getting the job and
working for a while, and thoughts on the VR/IL collaborative. Following is a brief summary of
the discussions:
Looking for and obtaining jobs:

- Scheduling interviews can be difficult if you use door to door para–transit services. You need to schedule a week in advance and provide a specific address. If you submit multiple resumes you don’t know who will invite you to interview or on what date.

- Several people mentioned VR was willing to fund school and coordinate academic accommodations.

- Several people mentioned they had returned to VR on multiple occasions for placement assistance. One person mentioned he worked for 30 years as a professional, and then returned to VR when the job ended. Other people mentioned they wished they had known it was O.K. to return if the job ended or you were ready for advancement.

- Most people were aware of assistive technology and many people accessed assistive technology services. One person mentioned that VR provided adaptations to her car to get to and from work, but no agency was available to modify the employer’s van that she uses while working.

Experiences working with placement services:

- Overall, people were very positive about the practical help provided including job search, coordinating interviews, mock interviews, resume development, etc. Two people described their experience as awesome. Several people commented that job seeking was much more difficult than they imagined. They initially didn’t see the need for support, but very much appreciated it once they started the job search.

- Several people felt they were being pushed to apply for available jobs in the local economy instead of VR developing jobs in their areas of interest. There was too much focus on the number of placements instead of the quality of the placement. One person mentioned that VR would not support his vocational goal because Labor Market Information indicated it was not in a growing industry. Another person mentioned that all he wanted was a d*** job; the process was too slow.

- Some people indicated VR provided too many choices. It was too difficult to decide. This was more common with transition students entering employment for the first time.

Experiences after getting the job and working for a while:

- There was recognition that the outreach, information and support VR provides to employers is unique and important.

- The overall theme was that the VR process is important but can be frustrating at times. Participants generally felt that they would not have succeeded without VR support.

- Several people felt 90 days of support after successful employment was not enough. Some people wanted more information on employee rights. Several people didn’t disclose their disability at hire and were uncertain if they should now disclose. Some
people weren’t comfortable calling their counselor after case closure, or weren’t aware they could request additional services after closure.

Thoughts on the VR/IL collaborative:

- The VR/IL collaborative was very important to the participants. One person stated that IL/VR was a “savior”. It helped her prioritize life’s major stressors.

- Overall, people felt the collaborative was very helpful for prioritizing what needs to be addressed first, Social Security benefits counseling, learning about community services, independent living skills, and learning advocacy skills.

The SRC and VRS have reviewed the notes of the discussion groups to help determine staff training needs. More emphasis needs to be placed on teaching self-advocacy skills. Several people mentioned they would have benefited from specific services but never asked for the services. People were appreciative of the team approach (VRS staff, IL staff and CRP staff co-located) but some people presumed everyone was employed by VRS. It is important that everyone is aware that VR provides choice of vendor and you don’t need to select the co-located staff. VRS needs to look at better ways to disengage when the person is successfully employed and does not need long-term supports. The information about post-employment services needs to be more inviting.

2. the Designated State unit’s response to the Council’s input and recommendations; and (General)

The Director of Vocational Rehabilitation Services and the Field Operations Director attended most meetings of the SRC and responded to questions from the Council. Much of the discussion in the past year focused on the changes related to WIOA. There were no formal recommendations made to VRS that required a formal response. Instead, the focus was on VRS management team and SRC learning together about WIOA.

3. the designated State unit’s explanations for rejecting any of the Council’s input or recommendations. (General)

There were no formal recommendations made to VRS requiring a response.
b. Request for Waiver of Statewideness (General)

When requesting a waiver of the statewideness requirement, the designated State unit must identify the types of services to be provided by the program on a non-statewide basis. The waiver request must also include written assurances that:

1. a local public agency will provide the non-Federal share of costs associated with the services to be provided in accordance with the waiver request; (General)

This agency has requested a waiver of statewideness. VRS requests continuation of the waiver with respect to delivery of vocational rehabilitation services in Minnesota Independent School District No. 2170, which includes the cities of Staples and Motley in north central Minnesota. VRS serves students with disabilities in all public school districts and most private schools and charter schools. Uniform statewide provision of services is required by the Rehabilitation Act, except when waived. Independent School District 2170 and VRS use a service model, pursuant to waiver, under which a full–time counselor provides services exclusively to the district’s eligible students. The school district employs the counselor, sharing costs with VRS. Hiring authority and case supervision is a responsibility of the VRS area manager. The contract under which this collaboration is carried out is negotiated and administered by the local rehabilitation area manager to meet specific local needs.

2. the designated State unit will approve each proposed service before it is put into effect; and (General)

This written contract provides that all non–federal funds allocated by the agreement are made available to VRS, that all services provided under the agreement are subject to VRS approval.

3. All State plan requirements will apply (General)

requirements of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan will apply to the services approved under the waiver.

All state plan requirements apply to all services approved under the contract.
c. Cooperative Agreements with Agencies Not Carrying Out Activities Under the Statewide Workforce Development System. (General)

Describe interagency cooperation with and utilization of the services and facilities of agencies and programs that are not carrying out activities through the statewide workforce development system with respect to:

1. Federal, State, and local agencies and programs; (General)

Following is a discussion of Vocational Rehabilitation Services’ collaborative arrangements with federal, state and local agencies and with private entities that are not formal components of the statewide workforce investment system.

Olmstead Subcabinet: The Department of Employment and Economic Development is active on the Governor’s subcabinet to implement the Olmstead Plan that was approved by the U.S. District Court on September 29, 2015. The subcabinet "embraces the Olmstead decision as a key component of achieving a better Minnesota for all Minnesotans, and strives to ensure Minnesotans with disabilities will have the opportunity, both now and in the future, to live close to their families and friends, to live more independently, to engage in productive employment and to participate in community life" (2013 vision statement). The employment section of the plan listed two population–level indicators: 1) Increase the employment rate of persons with disabilities so that it is comparable to the employment rate of persons without disabilities and 2) Increase the employment earnings of persons with disabilities so that they are comparable to the earnings of persons without disabilities.

Minnesota Autism Interagency Committee: Representatives from Minnesota’s Departments of Education, Human Services, Health, and Employment and Economic Development meet monthly to discuss the needs of citizens with autism. VRS is active on this committee, and on a sub–committee that wrote Minnesota’s Autism State Plan. The rehabilitation specialist for autism is also active on the Department of Human Services’ Advisory Council on residential services for people with autism. The task force supports expanding transition program options and employment opportunities for teens and adults with autism, particularly innovative community–based programs (e.g., Project Search—www.projectsearch.us/) that better meet the unique needs of this population.

Collaboration Grants to Provide Independent Living Services: Since 2008, the VRS/IL collaboration has served Minnesotans with the most significant disabilities who require both vocational rehabilitation and independent living services to meet their goals for working and living in the community. In FFY 2014 VRS dedicated $1,027,466 in SSA program income to fund
locally designed collaboration grants with each of Minnesota’s eight Centers for Independent Living. There is an IL counselor housed in most VRS offices.

**Minnesota Employment Center for Individuals Who Are Deaf or Hard–of–Hearing**: Provides VRS funded short–term services and state–funded long–term support services for individuals who are deaf and hard–of–hearing.

**VECTOR Youth Project for Deaf/Deaf Blind**: $1.9m in school district funding supplemented with $475,000 in VRS managed state funding support enhanced transition services for youth who are deaf, hard of hearing, or deaf blind in Minnesota. Enhanced services include work readiness classes, college preparation classes, driver’s education, community based work experiences, and paid internships in competitive employment. For students who transition to college, high school instructors work with the college for the first semester to make sure all needed accommodations are in place and the person is making adequate progress. Ninety percent of VECTOR students are either working or enrolled in college at time of high school graduation.

**Cooperative Agreements with the White Earth Nation – Tribal VR program and the Red Lake Nation – Tribal VR program**: VRS and State Services for the Blind provide information, technical assistance, training opportunities, and support to the state’s two tribal VR programs. A formal process is in place for referral and transfer of cases in accordance with best practices ensuring choice. Although not a part of the formal written agreement, the Social Security Administration’s Area Work Incentive Coordinator plays a crucial role in providing technical assistance on benefits planning.

**U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Services**: Memorandum of Understanding to enhance work opportunities for veterans with disabilities by sharing information, coordinating activities and offering complementary services.

**Ticket to Work Employment Networks**: VRS, State Services for the Blind and SSA co–host periodic meetings of the Employment Networks to provide staff training, updates on Ticket to Work procedural changes, and to promote Partnership Plus job retention services after VRS/SSB case closure.

**The SGA Project**: The Institute for Community Inclusion at the University of Massachusetts– Boston is conducting RSA funded research on best practices for assisting SSDI beneficiaries achieve employment above Substantial Gainful Activity (SGA). The VR agencies in Minnesota and Kentucky are currently demonstrating this rapid engagement model where eligibility is determined within three days; within seven days transferable work skills are identified, labor market information is presented to the consumer, and benefits and financial planning services are started; and within 30 days the IPE and a Placement Plan are developed. A benefits analysis is completed within 8 weeks of application if needed. RSA demonstration grant funding is being used to provide SSDI beneficiaries’ access to a financial specialist to help the person know how income will impact federal and state benefits, and how work incentives and VR services can help improve credit scores and provide savings that can be used as a down–payment on a home.
or to purchase reliable transportation, etc. Minnesota hopes to demonstrate that rapid engagement and holistic services will lead to more placements at higher wages.

**Professional vocational rehabilitation counseling organizations:** Active participation relating to ongoing professional development for staff and to counselor recruitment takes place through well–established working relationships with and memberships on the boards of the Minnesota Rehabilitation Association, including the Minnesota Rehabilitation Counseling Association chapter. Performance–based funding for placement services provided by community rehabilitation programs and limited–use vendors: Placement providers receive milestone and outcome payments for facilitating successful outcomes for VR customers. The first milestone is payable when the Placement Plan is developed, the second milestone is paid at time of successful placement, and a final outcome payment is paid when the person has been successfully employed for 90 days.

**Work Incentives Connection (Minnesota's Work Incentives and Planning Assistance program):** VRS maintains an agreement with Goodwill Easter Seals to provide benefit analysis counseling and related services for consumers on a fee for service basis with the goal of increasing the employment of persons who receive Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI). The agreement also provides funding for staff training on work incentives.

2. **State programs carried out under section 4 of the Assistive Technology Act of 1998; (General)**

The Minnesota STAR (System of Technology to Achieve Results) Program: The STAR Program, a program within the Minnesota Department of Administration, is funded by the Department of Health and Human Services in accordance with the Assistive Technology Act of 1998, as amended. Vocational Rehabilitation often refers people to STAR for a device demonstration. This allows consumers to compare benefits and features of a particular device or category of devices. Once a decision on a device is made, the person can borrow the device for 30 days to make sure it meets the person’s needs before VR purchases the item. VR also maintains an agreement with STAR to provide VR assistive technology specialists with commonly used devices for use in doing assessments with consumers.

3. **Programs carried out by the Under Secretary for Rural Development of the United States Department of Agriculture; (General)**

U.S. Department of Agriculture: Memorandum of Understanding establishing formal working relationships between the USDA’s AgrAbility Project and Vocational Rehabilitation Services field offices under which consumers may access programs funded by USDA Rural Development in support of their employment plans. The Minnesota USDA Rural Development Office also uses
technical economic and forecasting information provided by DEED to develop and market its services.

4. Noneducational agencies serving out-of-school youth; and (General)

The designated state unit maintains a close working relationship with the local Workforce Development Board’s Youth Programs, including the Youth Disability Employment Initiative. Two of the service providers have become Employment Networks so they can continue job retention services after WIOA services have ended. One of the providers is seeking CARF accreditation to become a community rehabilitation provider to better meet the needs of youth with disabilities.

5. State use contracting programs. (General)

State Use Program: Since the mid–1990s, Minnesota state agencies have been legislatively encouraged to purchase goods and services from small businesses operated by individuals with disabilities. In 2007, the Legislature enacted a set–aside program, providing that 19 percent of the total value of all state janitorial contracts be awarded to community rehabilitation organizations approved by VRS as service providers under the VRS Extended Employment Program. During the 2010 legislative session, the set–aside program was expanded to include document imaging, document shredding, mailing, collating, and sorting services. Further, the amount of each contract awarded under this section may exceed the estimated fair market price for the same goods and services by up to 6 percent.
d. Coordination with Education Officials (General)

Describe:

1. DSU's plans (General)

The designated State unit's plans, policies, and procedures for coordination with education officials to facilitate the transition of students with disabilities from school to the receipt of VR services, including pre-employment transition services, as well as procedures for the timely development and approval of individualized plans for employment for the students.

Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VRS), State Services for the Blind (SSB), and the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) have an agreement to achieve better coordination between schools and VR services and creating a bridge from the school to VRS or SSB prior to school exit. Following is a discussion of the current agreement. It is anticipated that the agreement will be updated when the final WIOA regulations are published:

- Provide guidance to students with disabilities transitioning from school to employment.
- Offer consultation and technical assistance to educators in planning for the transition of students with disabilities from school to VR services.
- Define roles and responsibilities, including the financial responsibilities of each agency, and determine state lead agencies and qualified staff responsible for transition services.
- Design methods of identification and outreach to students with disabilities who are in need of transition services.
- Guide the development of policies and procedures that help students with disabilities make the transition from school to employment.
- Promote flexible, coordinated, and collaborative planning and service delivery among MDE, VRS, and SSB for eligible youth transitioning from school to employment.

Coordinated Services for Youth in Special Education

Minnesota law mandates a coordinated system of services for youth, birth to 21, who are involved in special education. The Minnesota System for Interagency Collaboration (MnSIC) was formed to develop and implement this system. VRS is represented on MnSIC and VRS staff participate on subcommittees that develop service strategies for students and recommendations for governance and coordination of state and local collaborative efforts.
Community Transition Interagency Committee (CTIC)

Approximately 70 local CTICs promote statewide interagency coordination to remove system barriers and expand community services. CTICs include parents, students, advocacy groups, local businesses, county government, post–secondary education, vocational education, community education, corrections, SSA health care, and other local service providers. VRS staff serve on all CTICs, thereby helping to improve and expand vocational services that result in employment outcomes.

Rehabilitation Counselors Assigned to High Schools

VR counselors are assigned to all public, private, and charter high schools in Minnesota. They are active participants on transition planning teams so that each VR eligible student with a disability can access VR services and establish a written VR plan before leaving school. Outreach efforts include working with school nurses, guidance counselors, case managers, principals, social workers, 504 personnel, community agencies and work experience coordinators to identify students with disabilities who are not in special education programs. About 11 percent of students referred to VRS are not enrolled in special education programs. A referral of all potentially eligible students is sought as soon as possible so that employment services can begin well before the student leaves school.

Interagency Agreement to Purchase used Assistive Technology Devices

When a child with a disability transitions into a work environment or postsecondary program, VRS or SSB may purchase any assistive technology device that the child’s former school district purchased on the child’s behalf.

2. Information on the formal interagency agreement with the State educational agency with respect to: (General)

A. consultation and technical assistance to assist educational agencies in planning for the transition of students with disabilities from school to post-school activities, including VR services; (General)

- The Minnesota Department of Education (MDE), Division of Special Education, Vocational Rehabilitation Services and State Services for the Blind agree to share responsibility for ensuring that students with disabilities receive current information about their strengths, interests and preferences in order to make informed choices about integrated competitive employment prior to leaving school.

- MDE, Division of Special Education and VRS/SSB agree to share responsibility for ensuring that students with disabilities receive exposure to career information through Minnesota’s Internet System for Education and Employment Knowledge (ISEEK),
Minnesota Career Information System (MCIS) or other state supported sites. Information could include connections to postsecondary education training requirements, current labor market forecasts, and job outlook to assist the student in making informed choices about their futures.

• MDE, Division of Special Education and VRS/SSB will work together to implement career exploration and vocational skills development for transition–age students with disabilities.

• MDE, Division of Special Education and VRS/SSB agree to collaborate and promote transition to adult services through participation in existing councils, committees, and other workgroups within respective agencies.

B. transition planning by personnel of the designated State agency and educational agency that facilitates the development and implementation of their individualized education programs; (General)

• MDE, Division of Special Education and VRS/SSB agree to accept shared responsibility for the transition planning for students with disabilities receiving both special education and VR services. DEED’s VRS/SSB staff agrees to be active participants in the transition planning process once VR eligibility is determined.

C. roles and responsibilities, including financial responsibilities, of each agency, including provisions for determining State lead agencies and qualified personnel responsible for transition services; (General)

• MDE, Division of Special Education is responsible for ensuring that local education agencies provide special education and related services as documented in students’ Individualized Education Program.

• DEED’s VRS/SSB assists students with disabilities in making informed choices to prepare for, obtain and maintain employment. Services relate to assessing an individual’s VR needs, developing and implementing an individualized plan for employment (IPE), and assisting in the achievement of the employment goals for the individuals served.

• MDE, Division of Special Education and VRS/SSB are financially responsible for the services they provide under its own laws and rules.

D. procedures for outreach to and identification of students with disabilities who need transition services. (General)

• MDE, Division of Special Education and VRS/SSB staff will work together to develop outreach tools related to integrated competitive employment for students with disabilities, school personnel, and other community agencies. Materials may include a
description of the purpose of the VR program, referral process, eligibility requirements, priority for services, application procedures, and scope of services that may be provided to eligible individuals.

- MDE, Division of Special Education and VRS/SSB staff will support the Community Transition Interagency Committees (CTICs) to improve interagency collaboration among those that support youth with disabilities.
e. Cooperative Agreements with Private Nonprofit Organizations (General)

(Formerly known as Attachment 4.8(b)(3)). Describe the manner in which the designated State agency establishes cooperative agreements with private non-profit VR service providers.

VRS purchases services such as vocational evaluation, skill training, internships, job development and job placement, on-the-job training, and time–limited job coaching. Services must be consistent with an employment plan developed between counselor and customer, based on the consumer’s informed choices and offered in integrated settings.

Written Assurances

Providers must provide written assurances about their organizational missions, operations (including audits and lines of authority), staff development and qualifications, services, fees, populations served, standards of professional practice, and adherence to customers’ employment plans. They must also provide written assurance regarding vendor compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, Minnesota Human Rights Act and other employment law on individual rights, accessibility, occupational health and safety, and data privacy.

Two Categories of Providers

Minnesota distinguishes between two categories of vendor: the limited–use provider and the unlimited use community rehabilitation program (CRP). This arrangement permits wide selection of services and system flexibility and emphasizes the use of providers accredited by the national Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF).

Limited Use Providers

Limited–use providers (those without CARF accreditation) introduce competition to the rehabilitation marketplace and provide an entry point for new providers in response to an unmet or emerging service need. They are typically small organizations with small caseloads, limited to a narrow range of specialized services such as intensive job placement or job coaching for individuals with a particular disability. Some are private–for–profit entities. VRS uses the services of 53 limited–use providers. Contracts are limited to $20,000 annually.

CARF–accredited CRPs

An unlimited–use CRP must be accredited by CARF for the services they provide. Professional/Technical Contracts, detailing services and specific fee schedules, are negotiated, with the engagement of VRS area managers and counseling staff. VRS management reviews the agreement for approval or modification. VRS currently has 62 Professional/Technical Contracts.
with CRPs statewide. VRS employs a program specialist to help maintain a mutually supportive professional relationship and to negotiate modifications to agreements with CRPs. VRS and CRPs work together to promote mutually held goals, including:

- Develop and maintain choices for consumers.
- Meet workforce needs identified by the state’s employers.
- Ensure that services are provided in integrated settings.
- Facilitate state–level planning and coordination of training needs of CRP staff.
- Facilitate communication between VRS and CRP staff at the administrative level.
- Increase CRP awareness of vocational rehabilitation issues at state and national levels.
- Identify and provide training for CRP and VRS staff.

VRS has an active CRP Advisory Committee to assist in achievement of these common goals. Priority topics discussed included "telling our story" (development of a strategic marketing and communications plan), enhanced placement services through collaboration, CRP input into the VRS administrative structure, collaborating with CRPs to provide paid internships for consumers including pre–employment transition internships, enhancements to supported employment services, and shared coordination and delivery of staff training.

The Advisory Committee is also engaged in defining CRP quality measures and defining opportunities for joint training of VRS and CRP staff. The committee is currently actively involved in developing and providing training for VRS and CRP job developers on rapid engagement and fully engaging the consumer in the placement process.
f. Arrangements and Cooperative Agreements for the Provision of Supported Employment Services (General)

(Formerly known as Attachment 4.8(b)(4)). Describe the designated State agency’s efforts to identify and make arrangements, including entering into cooperative agreements, with other State agencies and other appropriate entities in order to provide supported employment services and extended employment services, as applicable, to individuals with the most significant disabilities, including youth with the most significant disabilities.

Statewide Collaboration

VRS collaborates with the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE), Department of Human Services (DHS), and county and local service providers to offer statewide supported employment services. VRS is a partner in several state–level agreements that provide long–term supports. During development of an employment plan, VRS counselors and other service team members help consumers to select supported employment services that meet their needs. They identify which services will be provided by VRS, as well as the source of long–term supports in the community. VRS provides time–limited supports for up to 18 months (up to 24 months for youth), but an employment plan may be amended if additional time is needed to achieve job stability. The primary funding resources for long–term supports in the community following VRS case closure are county case managers, the VRS Extended Employment Program, DHS programs such as traumatic brain injury waiver funding, and the Social Security Administration’s Impairment–Related Work Expense exclusions and Ticket to Work funding for persons on SSI and/or SSDI.

State–funded VRS Extended Employment Program

Minnesota’s Extended Employment Program, administered by VRS, develops performance based contracts with CARF–accredited CRPs. The contracts set expectations for extended support, establish funding levels and specify how many employment hours will be funded. These collaborations contribute significantly to the quality, scope, and effectiveness of the state’s supported employment efforts.

The VRS Extended Employment Program augments Minnesota’s supported employment resources, including those for persons who are deaf or hard–of–hearing and for persons with serious mental illness. It provides over $12 million a year to CRPs to provide ongoing supports. VRS coordinates both vocational rehabilitation and extended employment services to maximize the impact of both time–limited and extended services.
The Extended Employment Program is in the rule making process. Currently, more than 80 percent of the dollars support people working in integrated community settings. The proposed rule would eliminate center–based employment over five years, shifting 100% of the money to community based employment.

**Individuals with Serious Mental Illness and Individuals Who Are Deaf or Hard–of–Hearing**

Extended Employment dedicates $1.6 million to supports for persons with serious and persistent mental illness. Another appropriation provides $475,000 annually to provide ongoing supports for persons who are deaf or hard–of–hearing. In state fiscal year 2014, the VRS Extended Employment program provided ongoing work supports to about 4,700 individuals working in the community, most of whom had previously received time–limited VR services.
g. Coordination with Employers (General)

(Formerly known as Attachment 4.8(b)(5)). Describe how the designated State unit will work with employers to identify competitive integrated employment and career exploration opportunities in order to facilitate the provision of:

1. VR services; and (General)

Excellence in placement services is fundamental to more fully living into DEED’s vision statement of “a healthy economy, where all Minnesotans have or are on a path to meaningful employment and a family sustaining wage, and all employers are able to fill jobs in demand”. Coordination with employers is also key to VRS’ priority to embrace employers as key customers resulting in increased employment outcomes.

VRS has developed three updated strategic priorities and measures related to coordination with employers. These priorities replace the priorities listed under Goal 4: Employer Engagement in Section (P) Evaluation and Reports of Progress.

A. Develop and implement a VR consumer talent pool structural framework within the electronic case management system. The talent pool will be developed to gather and tap information to facilitate matching consumers to employment opportunities.

Metric: Secure approval and resources to develop the consumer talent pool structural framework as part of a larger rewrite of the case management system.

B. Develop and implement Low Risk Hiring and Retention Options designed to increase employment outcomes and workforce diversity.

Metric: Track the VR consumer participation and employment outcomes in low risk hiring and retention options on a quarterly basis. Options include on–the–job training, job try outs, internships, 700 hour program and Schedule A hiring.

Metric: Create and delivery training to help employers identify, develop and sustain natural supports for employees with disabilities in the workplace.

C. VRS will lead and convene Placement Partnerships focused on developing, maintaining, and strengthening relationships among VRS, VR Community Partners and employers.

Metric: The placement specialist team will develop a quarterly report on the major activities and outcomes for active placement partnerships.
Metric: VRS will share the quarterly report with partnership participants and use as a tool to increase understanding and collaboration for increased employment outcomes.

Metric: WIOA Common Performance Measure 6 (effectiveness in serving employers) will be developed and addressed in an annual report.

Following is a report of progress on the revised priorities:

The Disability Employment Resource (DER) was developed to support business engagement. The initiative helps businesses meet their workforce goals by employing people with disabilities in competitive integrated positions, while employment professionals learn more about how to align their placement goals with business needs.

The DER curriculum improves business engagement by delivering information to bridge the gap between business and human services, dispelling myths that can prevent employers from considering people with disabilities, helping human service professionals understand the business perspective, providing tools for starting and building relationships, and connecting businesses with information and resources to help them succeed.

The DER model has four stages of engagement:

The first stage is Visibility. Strategies are provided to identify businesses and develop contacts.

The second stage is Credibility. The focus is on educating and informing the employer by asking for opportunities to present employment information to the business, hosting informational events, and sharing stories about business successes in employing people with disabilities. To encourage engagement, the employer may be asked to conduct mock interviews with job seekers or mentoring a job seeker.

The third stage is Fulfillment. The focus is on finding qualified candidates for the employer’s job openings.

The fourth stage is Reciprocity. The focus is on supporting the new employee by mentoring the person’s supervisor, if needed, and providing job coaching and other support services to fully integrate the new employee in the work site.

Minnesota has developed 15 Placement Partnerships throughout the state to provide a single point of contact for employers and to enhance the skills of placement professionals.

Placement 101 is a three day training to provide professionals with an introductory level of knowledge and skills in providing placement services for VRS consumers. It is available free of charge to VRS and community partners. To date, 17 classes have been completed, providing training to over 300 placement professionals. In addition, 30 trainers have been trained (15 VRS staff and 15 community rehabilitation program staff) to ensure an adequate number of trainers to continue the project. In addition to supporting joint training to maintain qualified staff, the placement partnerships share job leads and host job fairs and other community events.
In 2012 a Next Generation Placement Design Team was developed, consisting of 18 key VRS and CRP leaders who engaged in a facilitated process to develop the ‘Next Generation’ of placement services for the benefit of job seekers and employers. The model was piloted in each region of the state (northern, metro, and southern) and at the Deaf/Hard of Hearing Units in St. Paul and St. Cloud. The model is currently being expanded statewide to all geographic areas of the state and all VR communities (VRS, community rehabilitation programs and limited use vendors).

The vision of Next Generation Placement is that job seekers will be better prepared to actively engage with the placement team to secure integrated competitive employment. The placement team will provide coordinated, effective and individualized support to the job seeker and employers, including access to ongoing supports to help the person maintain and advance in their employment. Employment will increase self-sufficiency, thus further increasing the person’s integration in the community. The employer will also be more engaged and willing to provide job skill evaluations, job tryouts and on the job training. The initial evaluation of the project is very promising. For example, one employer has completed 79 job skill evaluations or job tryouts, and hired 31 of the people. The employer has directly hired another 25 people.

The SGA Project, implemented in August, 2015, is piloting another strategy for engaging consumers and employers. The consumer works with a core team consisting of a counselor, benefits planner and placement specialist. The consumer can add additional people if desired, such as an independent living counselor or mental health worker. The counselor and placement specialist focus on helping the person decide on a vocational goal that exists in the local economy, while the benefits planner helps the person set an income goal. The placement plan is developed at the same time as the Employment Plan, even if the person will be entering a training program. If the person is entering a highly competitive field, the placement specialist may recommend internships or other services that will give the consumer a competitive edge over other job applicants. Frequently, the internship leads to a job offer.

2. transition services, including pre-employment transition services, for students and youth with disabilities. (General)

With the greater emphasis on providing pre-employment transition services, VRS staff have reached out to local school districts across the state to identify how transition students are currently able to access community-based work-based learning opportunities and what gaps need to be filled. In many instances, there are work-based learning coordinators, hired by the school district, that have at least some employer relationships within the community. However, many of these coordinators report that they don’t always have the time or expertise to form the breadth of relationships that meets the needs of all students. VRS is working collaboratively with these coordinators to create a structure for connecting them to employer relationships and job leads created/identified by the regional placement partnerships and to revise and deliver the Placement 101 training in order to meet the unique needs of these school staff members. On the flip side, where there aren’t work-based learning coordinators available to students, VRS is identifying alternative options to work with employers to offer students work
experiences. First, VRS and three Workforce Investment Board Title I Youth programs are currently piloting a way to collaboratively identify students in need of paid work–based learning experiences and connect them to employers to provide these experiences at integrated work settings in the community. In these 12–week experiences, students will gain confidence and skills to help propel them along career pathways. As many as 50 students will be served with this model. Furthermore, VRS is working with Community Rehabilitation Providers on various opportunities as well. These include job shadows, job try–outs, internships, and full and part–time jobs. Lastly, VRS has both internal and contracted job placement positions that are re–directing their time within VRS offices to focus more intentionally on partnering with employers to offer these opportunities as well.
h. Interagency Cooperation (General)

Describe how the designated State unit will collaborate with the State agency responsible for administering each of the following programs to develop opportunities for competitive integrated employment, to the greatest extent practicable:

1. the State Medicaid plan under title XIX of the Social Security Act; (General)

Medical Assistance, the state’s Medicaid program, is administered by the Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS). Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VRS) and State Services for the Blind (SSB) collaborate closely with DHS in the provision of a variety of Medicaid services:

Waiver Programs: Medicaid participants with disabilities who need a defined level of care and choose to live in the community may be eligible for one of the following waivers to help fund the cost of community living and supportive employment:

- Brain Injury Waiver: the person must have a traumatic, acquired or degenerative brain injury and require the level of care typically provided in a nursing facility or neurobehavioral hospital.

- Community Alternatives for Disabled Individuals (CADI) Waiver: the person must have a disability and require the level of care typically provided in a nursing facility.

- Developmental Disability Waiver: the person must have a developmental disability or related condition and require the level of care typically provided in an Intermediate Care Facility for Persons with Developmental Disabilities (ICF/DD).

There is joint planning occurring between the Waiver Programs and the state funded Extended Employment program to maximize the number of people who can access competitive integrated employment through the provision of supported employment services. Many counties have waiting lists for waiver services.

VRS and SSB access Medicaid dollars to pay for durable medical supplies such as wheelchairs, hearing aids and communication boards. Medicaid has limits on what they will pay for specific items. If the rehabilitation counselor feels the consumer would benefit from an “upgrade” to the item, Vocational Rehabilitation can pay the difference between the Medicaid payment and the cost of the upgraded product. Medicaid will apply the VR payment to the consumer’s spenddown.

Minnesota’s’s Medicaid Infrastructure Grant was a joint project of the Department of Human Services, the Department of Employment and Economic Development (VRS and SSB) and the
State Council on Disability. Collaborative efforts started utilizing grant funding has been continued using state appropriations, including:

- Disability Linkage Line (DLL): The DLL is a partnership between DHS and the Centers for Independent Living to provide disability related information and referral resources for Minnesotans with disabilities. Assistance is available in the areas of accessible housing, personal care services, transportation, employment, disability benefits, assistive technology, and other community resources. Services are available through a toll free number or online at www.MinnesotaHelp.info. The most recent expansion of the DLL has been in the area of benefits planning and benefits analysis for beneficiaries of Social Security benefits.

- Disability Benefits 101: DB101 (www.db101.org) is a free online service operated by the Disability Linkage Line that was initially developed using Medicaid Infrastructure grant funding. The program allows people to plan for their future by providing estimator sessions showing how income will impact benefits, explores effective use of work incentives, helps people establish work goals, and provides answers to questions through live chat, phone or email. The program includes short videos of success stories. Many of the DLL staff are certified Community Work Incentive Coordinators and can provide benefits analysis services if there are complex issues. Utilizing Department of Labor – Disability Employment Initiative funding, a new section on Work Benefits for Youth has been added. In addition to VRS and SSB staff being actively involved in the development of the online program, consumers were actively involved in the BETA testing to make sure the program was accessible to people with disabilities.

- SGA Project: the Institute on Community Inclusion at the University of Massachusetts – Boston has received RSA funding to demonstrate effective strategies to assist SSDI beneficiaries achieve income above the substantial gainful activity (SGA) level. Minnesota VRS is one of the demonstration sites. At time of enrollment, the SSDI beneficiary is assigned a counselor, placement specialist and financial specialist. Eligibility for services is presumed within three days and the Employment Plan is developed within 30 days of application. VRS has partnered with the DLL to provide financial counseling in VR offices. RSA funding was used to provide the benefits planners with financial literacy training so that in addition to benefits planning the financial specialists can provide assistance with improving credits scores, paying off credit card debt, and developing savings plans. It is hoped that the combination of rapid engagement and financial planning services will lead to better outcomes. Although the SGA Project does not receive any Medicaid funding, the financial specialist positions would not have been possible without the initial collaboration with the Medicaid Infrastructure Grant.
The primary agency responsible for services for adults with disabilities is the Minnesota Department of Human Services. The Minnesota State Interagency Committee (MnSIC) has the responsibility to develop and implement a coordinated, multidisciplinary service system for children and youth with disabilities ages three to 21. The Committee brings together the Minnesota Departments of Education, Employment and Economic Development, Commerce, Corrections, Health, Human Rights, and Human Services to develop needed policy change to reduce duplication of local effort and to improve local response to the needs of children and families by developing a coordinated, multidisciplinary service system. Minnesota does not have a specific agency focused on developmental disabilities.

Minnesota’s Olmstead Plan supports freedom of choice and provides a framework and a series of key activities that must be achieved to ensure Minnesotans with disabilities have the opportunity to live, learn, work and enjoy life in the most integrated setting desired by the person.

Governor Mark Dayton appointed an Olmstead Subcabinet to develop and implement this plan. The Subcabinet consists of representatives of the MnSIC agencies listed above, the Housing Finance Agency, the Department of Transportation, the ombudsman for mental health and developmental disabilities, and the Executive Director of the Governor’s Council on Developmental Disabilities.

VRS and SSB are involved in several joint projects with the above agencies:

- **Individual Placement and Support (IPS):** IPS services bring together mental health treatment services and vocational rehabilitation to help move people with serious mental illness into competitive employment. Participants are more likely to achieve employment success, leading to increased income, improved self-esteem, improved quality of life and reduced symptoms.

- **Way to Work Project:** Also referred to as the Ohio model, VRS has placed vocational rehabilitation counselors in a sheltered workshop to assess consumer needs and develop strategies to move the employees from segregated employment to competitive integrated employment. Dakota County, the Department of Human Services and VRS are studying effective ways to provide training, supports and benefits planning to assist people transition into the community.

- **SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) Employment and Training:** The Departments of Human Services and Employment and Economic Development are currently studying opportunities to blend SNAP funds with other anti-poverty funding to help move more people out of poverty.
3. the State agency responsible for providing mental health services. (General)

The Minnesota Department of Human Services has primary responsibility for coordinating mental health services for youth and adults. Youth services is a coordinated effort bringing together mental health services, substance abuse treatment, primary medical care, juvenile corrections, education, child welfare and vocational rehabilitation, as appropriate.

Adult services are coordinated through Adult Rehabilitative Mental Health Services (ARMHS). The services are funded primarily through Medicaid waivers and state dollars. The four core components of ARMHS are basic living and social skills, community intervention, medication education, and transitioning to community living. Vocational Rehabilitation Services is a critical component of community living. ARMHS cannot fund vocational services, but VRS closely coordinates services to provide the person with a comprehensive package of services.
i. Comprehensive System of Personnel Development; Data System on Personnel and Personnel Development (General)

(Formerly known as Attachment 4.10). Describe the designated State agency's procedures and activities to establish and maintain a comprehensive system of personnel development designed to ensure an adequate supply of qualified State rehabilitation professional and paraprofessional personnel for the designated State unit, including the following:

1. Data System on Personnel and Personnel Development (General)

A. Qualified Personnel Needs. (General)

Describe the development and maintenance of a system for collecting and analyzing on an annual basis data on qualified personnel needs with respect to:

i. the number of personnel who are employed by the State agency in the provision of VR services in relation to the number of individuals served, broken down by personnel category; (General)

In FFY 2015, VRS served 17,922 consumers and ended the year with an active caseload of 10,921 individuals, including 423 applicants. In FFY 2016, we anticipate serving approximately 17,240 consumers, and ending the year with an active caseload of 10,740, an average case load for counselors of 68. U.S. Census Bureau data on the geographic distribution of Minnesotans with disabilities is used to determine the distribution of staff. The metro region has 132 positions, the northern region has 82 positions, and the southern region has 76 positions.

ii. the number of personnel currently needed by the State agency to provide VR services, broken down by personnel category; and (General)

The Vocational Rehabilitation Services leadership team consists of a director, nine managers and two Office Services Supervisors. (Two positions currently overlap for succession planning to prepare for two Admin staff retirements.)

Direct supervision of field staff is provided by seventeen rehabilitation area managers and four rehabilitation supervisors. Twenty three rehabilitation specialists and three other administrative specialists support the work of both administrative and field staff by providing technical assistance, training, and consultation.
Direct service to VR consumers is provided by 160 rehabilitation counselors, augmented by nine rehabilitation representatives, twenty three job placement coordinators, a business services specialist, two community liaison representatives, and one Occupational Communication Specialists (sign language interpreters); sixty nine vocational rehabilitation technicians and sixteen clerical staff provide support to both field and administrative offices.

**iii. projections of the number of personnel, broken down by personnel category, who will be needed by the State agency to provide VR services in 5 years based on projections of the number of individuals to be served, including individuals with significant disabilities, the number of personnel expected to retire or leave the field, and other relevant factors.**

(General)

VRS had fifteen retirements in calendar year 2015. There were six voluntary resignations. The number of voluntary resignations has remained constant (around 2%) over the past five years. Between 2015 and 2020, 30% of VRS staff, including 23% of counselors and 33% of managers and supervisors will be eligible to retire.

**VRS program director/managers/supervisors (Admin)**

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**Rehabilitation Area Managers/supervisors (field)**

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**Rehabilitation Specialists**

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<tr>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rehabilitation Counselors</td>
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<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rehabilitation Representatives</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Placement/Business Services</td>
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<td>Vocational Rehabilitation Technicians</td>
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<td>Clerical Support</td>
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<td>Other Admin/Field</td>
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TOTAL

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<td>4.5</td>
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B. Personnel Development (General)

Describe the development and maintenance of a system for collecting and analyzing on an annual basis data on personnel development with respect to:

*i. a list of the institutions of higher education in the State that are preparing VR professionals, by type of program; (General)*

Three area graduate programs award master’s degrees that prepare individuals to work as vocational rehabilitation counselors:

- Minnesota State University at Mankato
- St. Cloud State University
- University of Wisconsin – Stout

VRS maintains a collegial relationship with these programs, recruiting for internships and filling counselor positions from among graduates. The section below displays current enrollment and the number of rehabilitation counseling graduates available through these programs.

*ii. the number of students enrolled at each of those institutions, broken down by type of program; and (General)*

Minnesota State University – Mankato

Students enrolled: 10

Employees sponsored by agency and/or RSA: 0

Graduates sponsored by agency and/or RSA: 1

Graduates from the previous year: 4

St. Cloud State University

Students enrolled: 26

Employees sponsored by agency and/or RSA: 2
iii. the number of students who graduated during the prior year from each of those institutions with certification or licensure, or with the credentials for certification or licensure, broken down by the personnel category for which they have received, or have the credentials to receive, certification or licensure. (General)

All graduates from the three institutions received master’s degrees in rehabilitation counseling:

- Minnesota State University – Mankato: 4
- St. Cloud State University: 12
- University of Wisconsin – Stout: 20

2. Plan for Recruitment, Preparation and Retention of Qualified Personnel (General)

Describe the development and implementation of a plan to address the current and projected needs for qualified personnel including, the coordination and facilitation of efforts between the designated State unit and institutions of higher education and professional associations to recruit, prepare, and retain personnel who are qualified, including personnel from minority backgrounds and personnel who are individuals with disabilities.

Internships commonly lead to permanent counseling positions. Eight students completed internships in 2015. Eight internships are currently in progress. We anticipate hosting additional interns beginning Fall 2016 semester. The staff development manager devotes approximately 10% time as the point of contact for managers, professors, interns, supervising counselors, and Human Resources to coordinate intern placement and supervision, and for counselor recruitment. Other activities include presentations to students, coordinating VRS participation in career fairs, and informing university personnel of counselor vacancies.
The VRS staff development manager is an active member of graduate counseling advisory committees at the University of Wisconsin – Stout and Minnesota State University, and communicates regularly with counseling program directors.

VRS provides tuition support for staff pursuing graduate degrees in rehabilitation counseling. Employees in the St. Cloud program and UW – Stout online program also had access to RSA stipends to assist with some tuition costs. One VRS employee graduated with a Rehabilitation Counseling graduate degree in 2015, and one was promoted to a counselor position; seven employees are in the process of completing degrees.

Media advertisement: VRS posts its vacancies at the State of Minnesota personnel openings website and the MinnesotaWorks job bank, as well as in newspapers.

Minnesota post retirement option: The post retirement option, which permits a state retiree to work up to half time without losing insurance or retirement benefits, is a component of VRS retention and succession planning strategies.

As a key strategy for staff retention, VRS pays close attention to organizational vitality and staff morale. VRS works to maintain a high level of employee engagement through statewide staff communication about the vision, mission, values, strategic goals and agency achievements, and a robust training and development program. VRS completed an Organizational Vitality survey in Spring 2015. Survey response rate was 87% this year. Findings indicate strong employee engagement on the key indicators measured. For example, 92% agreed that the VRS mission makes them feel their job is important, 92% agreed that they have the necessary training to do their job well, and 79% agreed that they were informed of decisions and issues that affect them and their work. Staff also provided suggestions for specific changes that would increase job satisfaction; response themes included continuing the commitment to training, increasing recognition and feedback, enhancing organization communications, reviewing system or policy issues, and addressing work environment issues. VRS plans to repeat the survey annually as a measure of employee engagement and as a tool to identify needed improvements in organizational effectiveness.

Counselors and other staff are recruited and hired under Minnesota’s competitive civil service system, including affirmative action to recruit and hire individuals with disabilities and members of the state’s diverse cultural and ethnic populations. Voluntary disclosure of ethnic and cultural status provides the following FFY 2015 data: 7% of VRS employees identify themselves as American Indian, Asian, Black or Hispanic/Latino, 92% identify themselves as White, and 2% are non–specified or undisclosed. At present, 10% of VRS employees voluntarily disclose a disability.

The New Americans team, based in the Twin Cities, offer vocational rehabilitation services to refugees who recently immigrated to Minnesota from countries such as Somalia, Ethiopia, Jamaica, Turkey, Congo, Guyana, Iraq, Nigeria, Egypt, Pakistan, Sudan and Eritrea. The New Americans team consists of a lead rehabilitation counselor and two community liaison representatives. They are themselves refugees from East African countries. Each member of the
New Americans team is multi-lingual and provides intensive supports from application through employment closure to the VRS consumers they serve.

Coordination with professional associations: VRS staff serve on the board of the Minnesota Rehabilitation Association (MRA) and serve on MRA conference planning committees. A significant number of staff attend MRA conferences each year. VRS encourages staff membership in professional associations, and many serve as officers and work on association committees.

3. Personnel Standards (General)

Describe the State agency’s policies and procedures for the establishment and maintenance of personnel standards consistent with section 101(a)(7)(B) and 34 CFR 361.18(c) to ensure that designated State unit professional and paraprofessional personnel are adequately trained and prepared, including:

A. standards that are consistent with any national or State-approved or -recognized certification, licensing, registration, or other comparable requirements that apply to the profession or discipline in which such personnel are providing VR services; and (General)

Vocational rehabilitation counselors and other professional staff are hired through competitive examination under the Minnesota civil service system. The current rehabilitation counselor candidate examination was developed by a workgroup that comprises staff from VRS, State Services for the Blind, and the department’s Office of Human Resources.

Qualifications for counselors are based on both educational preparation and professional work experience. The academic degree standard for Rehabilitation Counselors is the Master’s Degree in Rehabilitation Counseling or a Master’s Degree in a closely related field and evidence of completion of a graduate level course in counseling theories/techniques.

B. the establishment and maintenance of education and experience requirements, in accordance with section 101(a)(7)(B)(ii) of the Rehabilitation Act, to ensure that the personnel have a 21st century understanding of the evolving labor force and the needs of individuals with disabilities. (General)

Rehabilitation Counselors

- Master’s degree in Rehabilitation Counseling; or
- A degree in a closely related field with evidence of completion of graduate level coursework in counseling theory/techniques.

All of the agency’s vocational rehabilitation counselors meet the state’s standard.
**Rehabilitation Representative**

- Bachelor’s degree in rehabilitation counseling or in a related social services field; or
- Bachelor’s degree in any field, plus two years of experience providing employment related services for persons with disabilities.

**Placement Coordinator**

- One year professional experience in which the primary focus was the provision of vocational services to persons with disabilities; or
- Master’s degree in behavioral science, counseling, vocational evaluation, job placement, vocational rehabilitation, or a closely related degree; or
- Three years of paraprofessional experience in which the primary focus was the provision of vocational services to persons with disabilities.

**Vocational Rehabilitation Technician**

- A minimum of one year of experience in an organization whose mission includes the provision of services to persons who are injured or disabled so that an understanding and sensitivity toward people with disabilities has been obtained
- Customer service skills sufficient to perform intake, assist with forms, and to develop positive relationships with the consumers
- Keyboarding skills sufficient to create documents and complete data entry, and
- English sufficient to interview consumers and employers, present job–seeking skills training, and to draft correspondence or complete forms.

4. **Staff Development. (General)**

Describe the State agency's policies, procedures, and activities to ensure that, consistent with section101(a)(7)(C) of the Rehabilitation Act, all personnel employed by the designated State unit receive appropriate and adequate training in terms of:

A. **System of staff development (General)**

a system of staff development for professionals and paraprofessionals within the designated State unit, particularly with respect to assessment, vocational counseling, job placement, and rehabilitation technology, including training implemented in coordination with entities carrying out State programs under section 4 of the Assistive Technology Act of 1998; and
The staff development director is a member of the VRS management team and is responsible for the Comprehensive System of Personnel Development. Staff development coordinates training, develops training programs to meet identified needs, and coordinates internships and other recruitment activities.

Staff development and training needs are assessed through interviews with field staff, reports from area managers and recommendations from staff groups and committees. Case review yields training needs information. A Staff Development Committee meets regularly to develop and guide staff development activity.

The comprehensive staff training and development plan describes core training curriculum for staff, identifies competencies required of each VRS position along with training strategies and resource information for each competency, and identifies specialized competencies for serving transition age youth. Annual performance reviews between supervisor and employee include a review of training and development needs of the employee.


Guidelines for funding continuing education contribute to agency succession planning, professional expertise and leadership capacity. Completion of an ethics course once every five years is a minimum expectation for all staff. Besides agency–required training, staff must complete at least one self–initiated elective training activity annually. The agency makes a concerted effort to publicize conferences and external training opportunities available to staff; these are a vital component of the overall staff development strategy as they enable counselors to obtain advanced training to meet individual learning and development goals for serving VR consumers.

Equipping staff with skills in Motivational Interviewing (MI) has been a most significant ongoing training initiative. Staff have taken advantage of a variety of learning opportunities – from Introduction to MI, to MI Refreshers, to Coaching Circles, to Audiotape proficiency training, to MI Train the Trainer to MI Coach Skill Building to MI Coding, and to individualized MI audiotape coding and feedback. VR managers and supervisors have participated in MI training designed around MI and supervision; as they’ve participated in clinical supervision training, they’ve noted the strong correlation between motivational interviewing and skills needed for effective clinical supervision.

All staff have had the opportunity to participate in MI training, with most opting in to at least the initial Introduction to MI (now mandatory for new employees), and many opting to attend advanced MI training. Staff have reported improved relationships with consumers, greater ease in developing employment plans with consumers, and much greater job satisfaction. Building
the capacity of internal staff to provide MI training and coaching has been the recent emphasis, accomplished through monthly Coach Skill Building sessions. These internal MI champions have experienced the benefits to clients and to themselves, and are now delivering the Introduction to MI training and offering team–based MI practice sessions.

We continue to offer a variety of in–service training programs to enhance counselor skills. As VRS expanded the Individual Placement and Support model for Persons with Serious Mental Illness (IPS), staff involved in the expansion projects received training on the IPS model of service delivery. Training has also been offered on Rehabilitation Approaches to Serving People with Mental Health Disorders, Mental Health First Aid, and ADHD, LD and EBD: Effective Rehabilitation Approaches. “Understanding Special Education Evaluation Summary Reports” was extremely impactful on their practice. Training on Social Security Work Incentives is offered annually. AT Liaisons receive advanced training in Assistive Technology through UW Stout Vocational Rehabilitation Institute. All field staff received training on a new Mandated Reporting policy.

VRS continues to support staff in attending external training that addresses individual development needs related to serving unique populations, including participation in the Minnesota Rehabilitation Association Conference, which this year offered two full day programs on serving individuals with mental health disorders and on working with families of transition–age youth.

VRS has offered several in–service programs to enhance counselor skills in assessment and employment planning including Assessing the Ability to Benefit, Assistive Technology basics, Small Business Plans, Social Security Work Incentives and Supported Employment. Transition Counselors noted that a program “Understanding Special Education Evaluation Summary Reports” was extremely impactful on their ability to do meaningful assessments and plans.

An 18–month statewide case review cycle is in progress and will be completed by March 30, 2016. The process places greater emphasis on reviewing for quality in assessments and employment plans. It engages counselors by including them in reviewing their own cases and provides same day feedback. Staff have reported greater satisfaction with the redesigned review process, viewing it as more conducive to learning and process improvement than the previous process. Managers received training on a model for training staff how to complete a quality assessment of VR needs; in addition, a tool to assist counselors in thinking through the critical components of a strong VR Assessment has been designed and will be incorporated into the case management system.

VRS and CRPs in Minnesota continue to make a concerted effort to work in partnership to serve VR consumers. Placement 101, a foundational training program in job placement for new VRS and CRP placement staff is offered on a quarterly basis with an average of 18 participants in attendance. The training design team also developed a training program on Business Engagement; implementation is pending infrastructure enhancements that will enable the rehabilitation community to successfully meet the needs of businesses. Training on a VRS initiated pilot project “Next Generation Placement” concluded in 2015; the pilot is designed to
implement and assess the effectiveness of an enhanced team approach to providing job placement services.

Substantial Gainful Activity (SGA) is a research project funded by the University of Mass Boston ICI designed to improve earnings for VR customers who receive benefits through Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI). After extensive planning and training half of VRS staff, SGA was launched on August 3. The SGA Project is a major initiative to increase wage outcomes for SSDI customers. Paid internships for some graduate students were made available by the project.

VRS field managers and supervisors participated in Clinical Supervision Training offered by Christine Haddad Gonzalez, University of MN School of Social Work in Fall 2015. VRS RAMs and Supervisors completed a full day of training which focused on supervisory relationships, building trust and issues of race. RAMs and Supervisors will have access to up to 45 hours of consulting with the trainer, coordinated through the Regional RAMs.

The VRS leadership team has defined a set of leadership competencies for the agency. A leadership development program for VRS staff has been designed and will be launched in October 2014. The VRS Leadership Exploration and Development (LEAD) Program was launched in November 2014. Thirteen VRS staff participated in the 12 month program, which included opportunities for self-assessment, increasing awareness of VRS strategic priorities, developing skills in leadership related competencies, experiential learning through leading a project, and reflective learning via participation in a peer-coaching process.

The State of Minnesota’s Emerging Leader’s Institute (ELI), a seven month program designed to help participants explore leadership within State government, is available to a total of 60 State of Minnesota employees each year. Three VRS employees completed ELI in 2015, and one employee is participating in the 2015–16 ELI cohort.

The Department of Employment and Economic Development librarians routinely track and disseminate relevant research and journals. They also provide in-service training to VRS teams on how to use the department’s advanced online library search capabilities and on effective use of social media.

B. Acquisition and dissemination of significant knowledge (General)

procedures for the acquisition and dissemination of significant knowledge from research and other sources to designated State unit professionals and paraprofessionals.

In the next year, priorities are to develop and implement structure within VRS to address WIOA regulatory changes through a Core Policy Team and Core learning team. The Core Policy Team will analyze the new law, drill into the legislation and develop the implementation priorities. The Core Learning Team will take the implementation priorities, develop training and ensure effective training of staff through the Rehabilitation Area Managers. Continue to build counseling and counseling supervision skills along with developing internal capacity to provide ongoing training in Motivational Interviewing. Continue to build skills of VRS and CRP Placement
Staff. Provide Person–Centered Thinking and Person–Centered Planning training to ensure VR Staff promote client–centered practices in accordance with the Olmstead Plan.

5. Personnel to Address Individual Communication Needs (General)

Describe how the designated State unit has personnel or obtains the services of other individuals who are able to communicate in appropriate modes of communication with or in the native language of applicants or eligible individuals who have limited English speaking ability.

VRS ensures that personnel and methods are available so that staff may communicate with consumers in a preferred language or other means of communication. Substantial numbers of VRS consumers use languages other than English, including: Cambodian, Lao, Vietnamese, Somali, Spanish, and American Sign Language. Translation of forms, information brochures and the ready availability of purchased interpreter services or a multilingual staff member ensures effective communication statewide.

The addition of a highly qualified State Coordinator on Deaf Services in 2012 has greatly enhanced agency capacity to serve consumers who are deaf or hard of hearing. In addition to the State Coordinator on Deaf Services, twenty eight staff are conversationally competent in American Sign Language, including five VRS managers/supervisors, thirteen counselors, four placement specialists, two VR technicians, two Rehabilitation Representatives, two Occupational Communication Specialists (who are also certified sign language interpreters) and one Office Administrative Specialist. Deaf and hard of hearing specialists in six locations are using a video remote interpreting platform called Stratus VRI via a state contractor to supplement the use of onsite interpreting services and provide more options for accessibility. Counselors are also using videophones, FaceTime, Skype and Microsoft Lync to communicate virtually and visually, and new video communication platforms are being offered which allow hearing staff to communicate directly with deaf and hard of hearing consumers via desktop or laptop computers.

6. Coordination of Personnel Development Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (General)

As appropriate, describe the procedures and activities to coordinate the designated State unit's comprehensive system of personnel development with personnel development under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act VRS has a collaborative agreement with the Minnesota Department of Education, Minnesota’s secondary education system. This is augmented by Department of Education representation on the State Rehabilitation Council and VRS participation on the Minnesota State Interagency Coordinating
Team, with staff support by VRS program specialists for transition services and services for people with autism.
j. Statewide Assessment (General)

(Formerly known as Attachment 4.11(a)).

1. Provide an assessment of the rehabilitation needs of individuals with disabilities residing within the State, particularly the VR services needs of those: (General)

A. with the most significant disabilities, including their need for supported employment services; (General)

The American Community Survey estimates that 253,800 Minnesotans of working age, or 7.7% of the state’s population, has a disability. Males are slightly more likely to have a disability than females (7.9% versus 7.5%). Fifty–nine percent of the responders indicated they have one disability, 22.2% indicated they have two disabilities, and 18.7% had three or more disabilities. Cognitive and ambulatory disabilities are the two most common types of disability.

The availability of long term supports continues to be an issue, especially supported employment services for individuals with serious mental illness, traumatic brain injury, autism spectrum disorder and deaf/hard of hearing. In addition to traditional long term supports, consumers and supported employment providers identified a need for additional support services including personal support for life issues, how to disclose a disability if not done at time of hire, how to quit a job, how to make yourself visible and promotion–worthy within a company, and understanding the job appraisal purpose and process.

B. who are minorities; (General)

The ratio of minority and non–minority service rates have been at .85 consistently since 2012. The RSA national standard is .80.

Vocational Rehabilitation is showing continuous improvement in the number of participants from minority backgrounds. Individuals who are Black/African American represent 5.4% of the state population, 12.8% of the VR caseload, and 11.6% of VR’s successful closures. Individuals who are Hispanic/Latino represent 4.8% of the state population, 4.0% of the VR caseload, and 3.4% of VR’s successful closures. American Indians represent 1.0% of the state population, 2.5% of the VR caseload, and 1.2% of the successful closures. Asians represent 4.8% of the state population, 2.4% of the VR caseload, and 2.4% of the successful closures. Research suggests blacks and American Indians experience disability at a higher rate than other cultural/ethnic groups. VRS needs to continue active outreach to minorities to assure equal access to the benefits of VR services.
C. who have been unserved or underserved by the VR program; (General)

Several underserved populations have been identified. Recent surveys by the Department of Human Services indicate 46% of the people who have reached full retirement age plan to continue working. Many of these people have disabilities.

Ex-offenders is a growing population. More than half of the ex-offenders have a serious mental illness and over half have chemical dependency issues. 24% have cognitive disabilities and 12% have a physical disability. A Wilder Foundation study found that 83% of homeless ex-offenders had a serious or chronic disability. VRS is engaged in several initiatives including an Ex-Offender Employment program, the Minnesota comprehensive Offender Reentry Plan, customized Fast TRAC training services and staff training. Progress has been made in developing appropriate training programs, but additional work is needed on how to develop soft skills needed for employment.

D. who have been served through other components of the statewide workforce development system; and (General)

People with disabilities are served in all components of the workforce development system, both as universal customers and in eligibility based programs. Ten percent of the universal customers self-report having a disability. However, when the system became an Employment Network under the SSA Ticket to work Program many people who had indicated they did not have a disability assigned their ticket, suggesting people prefer not to disclose a disability until there is a reason to.

A customer Job Seeker Satisfaction Survey indicated an overall satisfaction with services. The five resources customers found most helpful were developing job related skills (44%), learning job search skills (34%), resources to help in job search (28%), financial help and gas vouchers for job search (26%), and staff helpfulness (17%). Recommendations for improvement included providing more services directly in the Centers (32%), improving the quality of services (16%), increasing financial support (10%), and improving the staffing ratio (8%). It was noted services aren’t always consistent statewide. For example, not all Centers have special “zones” for youth and young adults with disabilities.

E. who are youth with disabilities and students with disabilities, including, as appropriate, their need for pre-employment transition services or other transition services. (General)

VRS staff have reached out to local school districts across the state to identify how transition students are currently able to access community work-based learning opportunities and what gaps need to be filled. In many instances, there are work-based learning coordinators hired by the school district that have at least some employer relationships within the community. However, many of these coordinators report that they don’t always have the time or expertise to form the breadth of relationships that meets the needs of all students. VRS is currently
developing a structure to share job leads developed by the VRS/CRP Placement Partnerships, and plan are being made to offer the Placement 101 training curriculum to school personnel. VRS and three Title 1 Youth programs are piloting a model where students will participate in a 12 week paid work experience to gain confidence and encourage development of career pathways. VRS is also working with CRPs to develop more opportunities for job shadows, job try–outs, internships and integrated competitive placements. It is anticipated that these pilot projects will lead to a model to better serve youth with disabilities in both the WIOA Title 1 youth programs and VRS.

2. Identify the need to establish, develop, or improve community rehabilitation programs within the State; and (General)

An online survey of the executive directors and program managers of the state’s community rehabilitation programs (CRPs) did not indicate a need to establish or develop additional CRPs. The largest unmet need was finding transportation options for people working in individual sites in the community. Many of the existing options provide transportation between group homes and center based programs or enclaves, but there are very limited options for transportation to and from individual integrated worksites. They also identified the need for more funding for ongoing employment supports. As a part of providing technical assistance to the state’s two tribal VR programs (White Earth Nation VR and Red Lake Nation VR) the tribal Councils identified a need for a CRP serving the reservation itself. Currently services are available at neighboring cities, but transportation to services is an issue, and services are not culturally specific. They also identified the need for an American Indian Center for Independent Living to provide culturally specific services on the two reservations.

3. Include an assessment of the needs of individuals with disabilities for transition career services and pre-employment transition services, and the extent to which such services are coordinated with transition services provided under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. (General)

The Minnesota Department of Education, several local school districts, the Title 1 Youth programs and VRS is currently conducting this assessment to determine how to provide cost effective coordinated transition career services and pre–employment transition services. The pilot activities are described in the section on youth with disabilities.
k. Annual Estimates (General)

(Formerly known as Attachment 4.11(b)). Describe:

1. The number of individuals in the State who are eligible for services; (General)

Of the approximately 225,000 Minnesotans between the ages of 16 and 64 with two or more long–lasting disabilities, it is estimated that approximately 150,000 are eligible for vocational rehabilitation services.

2. The number of eligible individuals who will receive services under: (General)

A. The VR Program; (General)

In FFY 2016, Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VRS) anticipates serving about 17,240 persons under Title I of the Rehabilitation Act, all of whom will be individuals with either a significant disability or a most significant disability under Minnesota’s administrative rule for vocational rehabilitation.

It is estimated that about 15,480 (89 percent) will be persons who have a most significant disability, and about 1,760 (11 percent) will be persons with a significant disability.

B. The Supported Employment Program; and (General)

It is estimated that 3,000 individuals will have individualized employment plans with a supported employment goal in FFY 2016 under Title VI Part B, Supported Employment Services Program. The approximate cost of purchased services for these individuals will be $4,500,000. Under the administrative rule enacted to establish Minnesota’s order of selection, all persons receiving supported employment services must be found to have three or more serious functional limitations (priority category one).

C. each priority category, if under an order of selection; (General)

In FFY 2016, it is estimated that about 15,480 persons with serious limitations in three or more functional areas (priority category one) will be served at an approximate case service cost of $16.9 million; about 1,270 persons will be served who have serious limitations in two functional areas (priority category two) at an approximate case service cost of $1.2 million; and about 490 persons will be served who have a serious limitation in one functional area (priority category three) at an approximate case service cost of $460,000.
3. The number of individuals who are eligible for VR services, but are not receiving such services due to an order of selection; and (General)

The total waiting list under the current order of selection is 830 people. Vocational Rehabilitation Services has four categories under the order of selection. Category One (three or more substantial functional limitations) is currently open. Category Two (two substantial functional limitations) is closed with a waiting list of 553 people. Category Three (one functional limitation) is closed with a waiting list of 270 people, and Category Four (no identified substantial functional limitations) has a waiting list of 7 people.

4. The cost of services for the number of individuals estimated to be eligible for services. If under an order of selection, identify the cost of services for each priority category. (General)

In FFY 2016, approximately 2,875 individuals will obtain an integrated competitive outcome that is approved by the U.S. Secretary of Education. All of these will be individuals with significant or most significant disabilities.

**Priority Category One: Open**

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**Priority Category Two: Closed**

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Priority Category Three: Closed
Title I

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Totals

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I. State Goals and Priorities (General)

The designated State unit must:

1. **Identify if the goals and priorities were jointly developed (General)**

Identify if the goals and priorities were jointly developed and agreed to by the State VR agency and the State Rehabilitation Council, if the State has a Council, and jointly agreed to any revisions.

VRS and the State Rehabilitation Council, with input from the Community Rehabilitation Providers Advisory Group, has jointly agreed to revise the Goals and Priorities to promote the continuous improvement of the VR program.

2. **Identify the goals and priorities in carrying out the VR and Supported Employment programs. (General)**

State Goals for Program Years 2017–2020

**Goal 1: Increasing the number of Minnesotans with the most significant disabilities working in competitive, integrated employment**

VRS and the VR Community are committed to expanding job opportunities and improving employment outcomes for Minnesotans with the most significant disabilities.

**Strategic Priorities**

A. *Increase consumer engagement and satisfaction*

**Action:** Survey customer engagement and satisfaction after plan development and at case closure

**Action:** Conduct customer focus groups on an annual basis

B. *Increase the number of employment outcomes*

**Metric:** The number of successful employment outcomes per federal fiscal year

C. *Increase education, credentials, and skill gains*

**Action:** Establish baselines for secondary and post–secondary credentials and for measurable skill gains
**Metric:** WIOA Common Performance Measure 4:

The percentage of participants who obtained a recognized post–secondary credential or a secondary school diploma, or its recognized equivalent during participation in or within 1 year after exit from the program

**Metric:** WIOA Common Performance Measure 5:

The percentage of participants who are in an education or training program that leads to a recognized post–secondary credential or employment and who are achieving measurable skill gains

**D. Increase job retention**

**Action:** Establish a job retention baseline

**Metric:** WIOA Common Performance Measure 1:

The percentage of participants, who are in unsubsidized employment during the second quarter after exit from the program

**Metric:** WIOA Common Performance Measure 2:

The percentage of participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the fourth quarter after exit from the program

**Metric:** WIOA Common Performance Measure 3:

Median earnings of participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the second quarter after exit from the program

**Goal 2: Increasing Pre–Employment Transition Services**

VRS, schools, and the VR Community will focus on increasing vocational exploration and work based learning experiences for high school students with disabilities.

**Strategic Priorities**

A. **Develop strategies to implement the PETS requirements stipulated in WIOA**

**Action:** Track required and authorized services and monitor expenditures and fiscal impact

B. **Increase VRS outreach on the responsibilities under WIOA to provide pre–employment transition services for students with disabilities**

**Action:** Develop and implement a WIOA pre–employment transition services communication and outreach plan designed for school staff
**Action**: Track the number of schools with VRS time and expenditures devoted to WIOA required and authorized pre–employment transition services

*C. Increase the number of work based learning experiences prior to graduation for VR eligible students in high school*

**Action**: Establish a baseline and track the number of VR students with paid and unpaid work based learning experience prior to graduation

**Goal 3: Enhancing Organizational Vitality**

VRS will hire, develop and retain staff who will provide the best possible services to Minnesotans with the most significant disabilities.

**Strategic Priorities**

A. **Develop staff skills and competencies in serving Minnesotans with the most significant disabilities.**

**Action**: Provide relevant training for VRS staff, including training on person–centered thinking and planning

B. **Maintain a leadership development program for current and emerging leaders.**

**Action**: VRS will conduct a leadership development program for approximately 10–15 current and emerging leaders on a biannual basis

**Action**: VRS will evaluate the participant experience in the leadership development program to inform program design

*C. Develop strategies for increasing the diversity and cultural competence of VRS staff*

**Action**: Provide cultural competence training for VRS staff

**Action**: Develop strategies to increase diversity in staff hiring and retention

D. **Strengthen organizational communication internally and with system partners**

**Action**: Provide monthly VRS organizational updates to staff

**Action**: Communicate rationale for major policy and practice decisions internally and/or with system partners
Goal 4. Leveraging Partnerships

VRS will provide leadership in convening and strengthening system–wide collaborative partnerships that expand and fully use resources to serve Minnesotans with the most significant disabilities.

**Strategic Priorities**

A. Engage the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) for input and feedback on the vocational rehabilitation service delivery model for Minnesota

**Action:** The SRC works in partnership with the DSU to develop and review state goals and priorities and assists with the development of the State Plan and Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment

**Action:** The SRC produces an annual report, conducts public forums, and coordinates its activities with other councils.

**Action:** The SRC provides input on substantive VR policy changes

**Action:** The SRC works collaboratively with the designated state agency to measure customer satisfaction.

B. Maintain and build our partnerships with community–based rehabilitation providers and advocacy organizations

**Action:** Continue to convene and leverage the VRS CRP Advisory Committee

**Action:** Convene statewide meetings of community partners on an annual basis

**Action:** Maintain collaborative agreements with the Centers for Independent Living (CILs)

**Action:** Collaborate with advocacy organizations to advance mutual agendas.

C. Expand our collaboration with other system partners to better align and fulfill the requirements of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and Minnesota’s Olmstead Plan.

**Action:** Expansion of key partnership work with Department of Human Services (DHS), Minnesota Department of Education (MDE), the Olmstead Plan interagency efforts, counties, local school districts, and WorkForce Center System partners

D. Expand access to ongoing employment supports through county, state and federal programs

**Action:** Partner with Department of Human Services (DHS), counties, and Medicaid providers to increase resources for support of integrated, competitive employment
**Action:** Partner with VRS Extended Employment (EE) providers to transition and increase state resources for support of integrated, competitive employment

**Goal 5. Engaging Employers**

VRS and the VR Community will continue to embrace employers as key customers resulting in increased employment outcomes for Minnesotans with disabilities

**Strategic Priorities**

**A. Develop a robust system to assist VRS staff in matching qualified VR jobseekers with competitive, integrated employment opportunities. Leverage the Workforce One case management and/or Minnesota’s internet based labor exchange system rewrite initiatives to fund, develop, and implement the system.**

**Action:** Secure approval and resources for a VR client talent pool structural framework as part of future application development priorities for the Workforce One system and/or other Minnesota systems.

**B. Develop and implement Low Risk Hiring and Retention options designed to increase employment outcomes and workforce diversity.**

**Action:** Track participation and employment outcomes in low risk hiring and retention options on a quarterly basis. Options are anticipated to include On the Job Training, Job Try Outs, Internships, 700 Hour Program, and Schedule A Hiring.

**Action:** Create and deliver training designed to help employers identify, develop and sustain natural workplace supports for employees with disabilities.

**C. VRS will lead and convene Placement Partnerships focused on developing, maintaining, and strengthening relationships among VRS, VR Community Partners and Employers**

**Action:** The VRS Placement Specialist team will develop and disseminate a quarterly report on the major activities and outcomes for active placement partnerships.

**Action:** Work with partners to implement WIOA Common Performance Measure 6 focused on effectiveness in serving employers.
3. Ensure that the goals and priorities are based on an analysis of the following areas: (General)

A. The most recent comprehensive statewide assessment, including any updates; (General)

The revised goals and priorities are based on an analysis of the comprehensive statewide assessment, feedback from community partners and public forums.

B. the State's performance under the performance accountability measures of section 116 of WIOA; and (General)

The revised goals, especially Goal 1, will lead to improved performance under the performance accountability measures of Section 116 of WIOA.

C. other available information on the operation and effectiveness of the VR program, including any reports received from the State Rehabilitation Council and finding and recommendations from monitoring activities conducted under section 107. (General)

VRS and the State Rehabilitation Council considered Goals and Priorities established by other public VR agencies, and input from the State Council on Disability and people with disabilities.
m. Order of Selection (General)

Describe:

1. Whether the designated State unit will implement and order of selection. If so, describe: (General)

A. The order to be followed in selecting eligible individuals to be provided VR services. (General)

*Eligibility for VR Services*

A person is eligible for vocational rehabilitation services from the general VR agency when they have a physical or mental impairment that constitutes or results in a substantial impediment to employment, and they require vocational rehabilitation services to prepare for, secure, retain, or regain employment.

*Qualifications for VR Services*

A person is qualified for vocational rehabilitation services from the General VR agency when they are eligible and found to have serious functional limitations due to a severe impairment and wish to obtain, retain, or regain employment.

*Service Priority*

The order of selection establishes service priority based on the number of functional areas in which a person has significant limitations to employment. Persons with limitations in more functional areas are deemed to have more significant disability. It is intended by the order of selection that persons with the most significant disabilities will be served first when all persons who are eligible cannot be served.

*Waiting List*

When annual program resources are insufficient to serve qualified new applicants and to serve all current customers through the end of the fiscal year, a priority category may be closed. New applicants who qualify in a closed category are then placed on a statewide waiting list for that category. Closing a category slows the rate of increase in the number of persons being served. It conserves resources so that obligations to persons who are already being served may continue to be met.

*Functional Areas*

Serious limitations in life skills in one or more of the following areas, as defined:
A. Communication: the ability to effectively give and receive information through words or concepts, such as reading, writing, speaking, listening, sign language, or other adaptive methods.

B. Interpersonal skills: the ability to establish and maintain personal, family, and community relationships as it affects, or is likely to affect, job performance and security.

C. Mobility: the physical and psychological ability to move about from place to place inside and outside the home, including travel to and from usual destinations in the community for activities of daily living, training, or work.

D. Self-care: the skills needed to manage self or living environment, such as eating, toileting, grooming, dressing, money management, and management of special health or safety needs, including medication management, as they affect an individual’s ability to participate in training or work-related activities.

E. Self-direction: the ability to independently plan, initiate, organize, or carry out goal-directed activities or solve problems related to working.

F. Work skills: (1) the ability to do specific tasks required to carry out job functions; and (2) the capacity to benefit from training in how to perform tasks required to carry out job functions.

G. Work tolerance: the capacity or endurance to effectively and efficiently perform jobs requiring various levels of physical demands, psychological demands, or both.

**Serious Limitation**

A serious limitation in a functional area means that, due to a severe physical or mental impairment, the individual’s functional capacities in the specific area are restricted to the degree that they require services or accommodations not typically made for other individuals in order to prepare for, enter, engage in, or retain employment. Accommodations are defined as special working conditions, job re-engineering, rehabilitation technology, or substantial support and/or supervision.

**List of Physical or Mental Disabilities**

Physical or mental disabilities resulting from amputation, arthritis, autism, blindness, burn injury, cancer, cerebral palsy, cystic fibrosis, deafness, head injury, heart disease, hemiplegia, hemophilia, respiratory or pulmonary dysfunction, mental retardation, mental illness, multiple sclerosis, muscular dystrophy, musculoskeletal disorders, neurological disorders including stroke and epilepsy, paraplegia, quadriplegia, and other spinal cord conditions, sickle cell anemia, specific learning disability, and end-stage renal disease, or another disability or combination of disabilities determined on the basis of an assessment for determining eligibility and priority for services to cause comparable serious functional limitation.
B. The justification for the order. (General)

Minnesota Vocational Rehabilitation Services implemented an Order of Selection in 1993, setting forth who will be served first when the program cannot serve all eligible individuals. Determination of eligibility and qualification for service is based on the applicable Minnesota administrative rule and the Minnesota Vocational Rehabilitation Policy and Procedure Manual.

Annual State and Federal resources allocated for Minnesota’s Vocational Rehabilitation Services program continue to not be sufficient to serve all Minnesotans who are eligible for services. Conclusions regarding capacity of the Minnesota vocational rehabilitation program in any given year are based on:

1) An analysis of resources available for annual operation of the vocational rehabilitation program,

2) expenditures required to implement employment plans approved prior to commencement of the fiscal year,

3) the anticipated costs for determining eligibility and qualification for service of new applicants during the fiscal year,

4) the anticipated costs of implementing approved vocational rehabilitation plans for new applicants during the fiscal year, and

5) reasonable and necessary costs related to administration of the vocational rehabilitation services program.

Program expenditures were exceeding annual program resources, requiring the agency to use carryover funds from the previous year to meet all financial obligations. The budget forecast for FFY 2014 indicated a continuing trend in deficit spending. This fiscal situation required the agency to implement several budget reduction measures, including the closing of Priority Categories Two and Three on October 14, 2013. Priority Category Four (individuals who have a disability that makes them eligible for service but do not have a serious limitation in a functional area) has been closed since 1993.

The State Rehabilitation Council received monthly updates on the budget situation, including the impact of sequestration, and was actively involved in the process to determine if and when to close Priority Categories Two and Three.

As of March 15, 2016, there were 830 individuals on the waiting list: 7 on Priority Category Four, 270 on Priority Category Three, and 553 on Priority Category Two. Individuals on the waiting list are provided information and referral to other programs that may meet the person’s needs. Although the above categories remain closed, VRS used RSA reallocation dollars to take everyone off of the Category 2 and 3 waiting lists who had been found eligible for services prior to October 15, 2014.
C. The service and outcome goals. (General)

In FFY 2016, under the order of selection currently in effect, approximately 17,240 individuals will be served. Approximately 2,875 individuals will achieve employment outcomes in FFY 2015.

D. The time within which these goals may be achieved for individuals in each priority category within the order. (General)

**Priority Category 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of individuals to be served</th>
<th>Estimated number of individuals who will exit with employment</th>
<th>Estimated number of individuals who will exit without employment</th>
<th>Time within which goals may be achieved</th>
<th>Cost of Services</th>
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**Category 2**

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<td>1,270</td>
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**Category 3**

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Category 4

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E. How individuals with the most significant disabilities are selected for services before all other individuals with disabilities; and (General)

Service Priority: The order of selection establishes service priority based on the number of functional areas in which a person has significant limitations to employment. Persons with limitations in more functional areas are deemed to have more significant disability. It is intended by the order of selection that persons with the most significant disabilities will be served first when all persons who are eligible cannot be served.

**Service Priority Categories**

Persons are served according to their priority category. When priority categories must be closed, lower priority categories are closed before higher categories. Persons leave their waiting list according to the priority of their category and their date of application for VR services.

- Priority Category One (first priority for service) includes all individuals with a most significant disability, that is, persons whose condition results in serious limitations in three or more functional areas.

- Priority Category Two (second priority for service) includes all individuals with a significant disability that results in serious functional limitations in two functional areas.

- Priority Category Three (third priority for service) includes all individuals with a significant disability that results in a serious functional limitation in one functional area.

- Priority Category Four (fourth priority for service) includes all other eligible customers. These customers have a disability that makes them eligible for service but they do not have a serious limitation in a functional area. This category has essentially been closed since 1993.

Priority of categories to receive VR services under the order
2. If the designated State unit has elected to serve eligible individuals, regardless of any established order of selection, who require specific services or equipment to maintain employment. (General)

Vocational Rehabilitation Services has elected to not exempt individuals who require specific services or equipment to maintain employment from the Order of Selection.
n. Goals and Plans for Distribution of title VI Funds. (General)

1. Specify the State's goals and priorities for funds received under section 603 of the Rehabilitation Act for the provision of supported employment services. (General)

Estimate of the Number of Persons to Be Served

During FFY 2015, about 2,950 individuals will be served with Title VI, Part B funds supplemented by Title I funds, at a purchased service cost of about $2,610,000. Under the administrative rule that sets forth Minnesota’s priority–for–service categories, all persons receiving supported employment have three or more serious functional limitations.

The Contribution of State Funding

Title VI B and Title I funds are used to prepare people for supported employment. The VRS Extended Employment Program (VRS–EE) provides ongoing employment supports using state funding of $12,075,000 annually that flows to community rehabilitation programs. More than 80 percent of this state funding provides extended services for persons in competitive employment with supports. The VRS–EE "basic" program serves all disability groups. An additional state appropriation of $1,555,000 is dedicated to extended supported employment services for persons with serious mental illness since it has been historically difficult to obtain ongoing support services for this population.

System Complexity and Limited Capacity

Funding for supported employment, within which Title VI Part B funds play a relatively small part, is governed by a myriad of federal and state laws and rules covering many categories of services. For example, a network of private, not-for-profit organizations, licensed by the Department of Human Services Disability Services Division, provides training and habilitation services that may include supported employment. People with mental illness may receive work-related support through the State Comprehensive Mental Health Act. In these instances, each county determines the level of service that will be provided.

Title VI B supported employment funds are distributed on a fee–for–service basis under fee schedules developed with service providers. VRS collaborates with the Departments of Education and Human Services and county and local service providers to facilitate access to other funding and service resources. During development of a vocational rehabilitation employment plan, the vocational rehabilitation participant and the service team design a supported employment framework that best meets the participant’s needs. Planning for
eventual long-term supports in the community is a crucial part of planning during VRS’ time-limited period of service. Minnesota has redistributed available VRS–EE funding to address waiting lists in some areas of the state.

**Strategic Goal for Effective Partnerships**

In FFY 2016, under the designated state unit’s strategic goal for effective partnerships, VRS will continue to facilitate a statewide planning collaboration to better understand Minnesota’s supported employment needs, revise the State Rule to shift more state dollars to integrated competitive supported employment work sites, address current service capacity and gaps, particularly those related to the development needs of community rehabilitation programs, the needs of transition-age youths, and the needs of underserved populations.

**2. Describe the activities to be conducted, with funds reserved pursuant to section 603(d), for youth with the most significant disabilities, including: (General)**

**A. the provision of extended services for a period not to exceed 4 years; and (General)**

As part of Olmstead Plan, VRS is working closely with the Department of Human Services, the Department of Education, and other departments to better leverage available dollars, including Medicaid waiver dollars, to ensure that the transition from VR dollars to other public funding will occur when the individual is ready for the transition.

**B. how the State will leverage other public and private funds to increase resources for extended services and expanded supported employment opportunities for youth with the most significant disabilities. (General)**

VRS is promulgating changes to the State rule governing the Extended Employment program, ending admissions to non-integrated and sub-minimum wage jobs and shifting this state funding to competitive, integrated employment with supports.
o. State's Strategies (General)

Describe the required strategies and how the agency will use these strategies to achieve its goals and priorities, support innovation and expansion activities, and overcome any barriers to accessing the VR and the Supported Employment programs (See sections 101(a)(15)(D) and (18)(B) of the Rehabilitation Act and section 427 of the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA)):

1. The methods to be used to expand and improve services to individuals with disabilities. (General)

Innovation and Expansion activities are developed in response to needs identified in the Comprehensive Statewide Assessment of Need, with a focus on ensuring equal access to services regardless of specific disability, impediment to employment, economic status, public assistance status, race, national origin, gender, sexual orientation or age.

This activity specifically addresses program access, and adherence to the employment non–discrimination principles requirements of Section 427 of the General Education Provisions Act. VRS seeks partnerships with other public and private entities to increase access to vocational rehabilitation services and other employment services.

The State Rehabilitation Council plays a crucial role in identifying the needs of citizens with disabilities. The council conducts 10 meetings annually, along with public forums and numerous committee meetings to carry out its consultative and participative roles in the work of Vocational Rehabilitation Services. In 2015 the council participated in updating the VR combined plan and the comprehensive needs assessment, engaged in strategic planning, reviewed the policies and practices that guide the delivery of VRS services, and assisted in identifying program evaluation needs.

The employment section of the Olmstead Plan, approved by the U.S. District Court on September 29, 2015, establishes two goals: 1) Increase the employment rate for people with disabilities so that it is comparable to the employment rate of people without disabilities, and 2) increase the earnings of people with disabilities so that it is comparable to people without disabilities.

There are four specific strategies that VRS will play an active role in:

1. Expand Individual Placement and supports in 17 additional counties,

2. promulgate changes to the State Rule governing Extended Employment, ending admissions to non–integrated and sub–minimum wage programs and shifting the state funding to integrated employment,
3) provide technical assistance to non-integrated employment programs to design new business models that lead to competitive employment in the most integrated setting, and

4) provide information about effective employment strategies, such as supported and customized employment, that make competitive employment possible for individuals with complex and significant disabilities.

VRS is currently clarifying policy to ensure that all vocational rehabilitation services are provided in the most integrated setting appropriate for the person.

In FFY 2015, VRS utilized $1,216,000 in funding for innovation and expansion activities. This includes funding for the State Rehabilitation Council, salaries for rehabilitation specialists focused on service innovation and program evaluation, and state funds for the Minnesota Employment Center for Individuals who are Deaf/Hard of Hearing. Identify how a broad range of assistive technology services and assistive technology devices will be provided to individuals with disabilities at each stage of the rehabilitation process; and describe how assistive technology services and devices will be provided to individuals with disabilities on a statewide basis.

2. How a broad range of assistive technology services and devices will be provided to individuals with disabilities at each stage of the rehabilitation process and on a statewide basis.

(General)

A rehabilitation technology specialist provides onsite assistive technology assistance to staff and consumers. He also coordinates with the Minnesota Department of Education to promote inclusion of assistive technology in transition plans, and coordinates with the national AgrAbility project to assist agricultural workers with disabilities maintain their employment. The specialist is supported by three regional liaisons and a local liaison on each VR team. Placement coordinators assist employers in using rehabilitation technology to resolve employment barriers. The VRS website has an assistive technology page with links to nationally recognized websites. VRS coordinates closely with the STAR Program which operates an equipment loan program that allows consumers to try the assistive technology for 30 days before VRS purchases the equipment.

3. The outreach procedures that will be used to identify and serve individuals with disabilities who are minorities, including those with the most significant disabilities, as well as
those who have been unserved or underserved by the VR program. (General)

VRS continues to expand services to minority populations. The New Americans VRS office in St. Paul employs multi–lingual staff of East African descent to provide outreach and services to recent immigrants, primarily from Somalia, who are not fluent in English. Other VRS offices hire bilingual staff as opportunities arise.

VRS and the Department of Corrections (DOC) utilize the same online interest and aptitude assessment to assist people make a smoother transition from incarceration to VR services. The goal is to assist people develop a vocational goal early, and then enroll in appropriate DOC adult basic education classes or other training programs while incarcerated. As part of the community release plan, the person then transitions to VR if appropriate for continued training and/or job placement assistance.

It is estimated that there are 315,000 Minnesotans of working age living with serious mental illness. VRS collaborates with the Department of Human Services (DHS) Adult Mental Health Division and with community partners to build supports and services for persons with serious mental illness (SMI), who now comprise 33 percent of the VR caseload and 32.5 percent of employment outcomes.

Individual Placement and Support (IPS) is the evidenced based practice of supported employment for persons with serious mental illness. IPS helps people in community mental health treatment services to become part of the competitive labor market. Research indicates that IPS is nearly three times more effective than other vocational approaches in helping people with mental illness to work competitively. Research also shows that people who obtain competitive employment through IPS have increased income, improved self–esteem, improved quality of life and reduced symptoms. Approximately half of the people who enroll in IPS become steady workers and remain competitively employed a decade later.

Historically, VRS has provided state funding to the Minnesota Employment Center (MEC) for Individuals who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing, using an annual pass–through appropriation of $300,000. VRS time limited services and MEC supported employment services have been closely coordinated to enhance employment opportunities for people who are deaf or have significant hearing loss. However, a legislative change in 2013 redirected the direct appropriation into a competitive grant pool. MEC has successfully competed for the available funding.

About 40 percent of VRS applicants receive SSA benefits. VRS was instrumental in establishing the Work Incentives Connection, a program of Goodwill Industries that provides work incentives planning and assistance for consumers and work incentives training for VRS staff.

SSA, VRS and State Services for the Blind co–host periodic meetings of the Employment Networks. In addition to providing in–service training, the meetings provide an opportunity to
learn more about the services offered by each Employment Network to assist consumers make informed choices when selecting a vendor for employment services and/or on-going job retention services. The current focus of this group is to expand the use of Ticket to Work funding to provide ongoing job retention supports, and to promote the use of PASS Plans.

Minnesota has been selected by the Institute for Community Inclusion (ICI) at the University of Massachusetts – Boston as a demonstration site for the RSA funded demonstration grant to improve employment outcomes for VR customers who are SSDI beneficiaries (“The SGA Project”). Minnesota VRS is working closely with the ICI to promote rehabilitation counseling techniques that promote consumer engagement, provide early access to financial planning and benefits planning services, and provides early job development activities. Goals include presuming eligibility within 3 days, holding a meeting with the consumer to start benefits planning and to discuss Labor Market information within 7 days, and to implement the Employment Plan within 30 days.

4. The methods to be used to improve and expand VR services for students with disabilities, including the coordination of services designed to facilitate the transition of such students from school to postsecondary life (including the receipt of VR services, postsecondary education, employment, and pre-employment transition services). (General)

VRS has a Cooperative Agreement with the College Financial Aid Administrators Association to assist in the development of financial aid packages with students with disabilities enrolled in all Minnesota–based public and most private post–secondary institutions. Most students receiving VRS services can complete a post–secondary program without taking out student loans.

The post–secondary options program allows students to take entry level college classes as part of their high school experience. Credits earned in college also apply toward their high school diploma. The local school district pays the tuition. This allows the student to gradually transition to post–secondary education during their senior year of high school.

Every Minnesota public college and most private colleges have offices to support students with disabilities. VECTOR, a program that supports high school students who are deaf, extends their services for the first year of college to promote a smooth transition to a new learning environment.

Employment and pre–employment services for youth are discussed in other sections of the State Plan.
5. If applicable, plans for establishing, developing, or improving community rehabilitation programs within the State. (General)

Program access to CRPs is monitored by reviewing compliance with CARF policies on program access, and by continuously monitoring the geographical coverage provided by the network of 63 CRPs. VRS has an active CRP Advisory Committee to assist in achievement of common goals. Priority topics include "telling our story" (development of a Community Outreach Team to develop a strategic marketing and communications plan for the public/private partnership), input into the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment through completion of a community survey to identify strategic priorities, enhanced placement services through collaboration, preliminary work on a return on investment study, CRP input into the VRS administrative structure, collaborating with CRPs to provide paid internships for consumers, enhancements to supported employment services, and shared coordination and delivery of staff training. A sub–committee is currently actively involved in developing and implementing training for VRS and CRP job developers (Next Generation Placement). The Advisory Committee is also engaged in defining CRP quality measures that will support VRS’ goals and priorities.

6. Strategies to improve the performance of the State with respect to the performance accountability measures under section 116 of WIOA. (General)

Performance, five–year trends, and specific strategies utilized to improve the agency’s performance in meeting the evaluation standards and performance indicators, are included in Section (P).

7. Strategies for assisting other components of the statewide workforce development system in assisting individuals with disabilities. (General)

WorkForce Centers (WFCs) serve a significant number of people with disabilities beyond the customers served by VRS and SSB. The needs assessment indicated that notable progress has been made toward achieving universal design; almost 100 percent of survey respondents indicated they felt WFC resources were universally available. However, WFCs need to articulate and better disseminate information about their program access. VRS provides consultation to the WFCs’ Disability Employment Initiative (DEI) federal grant to serve youth in transition and adults.
8. How the agency's strategies will be used to: (General)

A. achieve goals and priorities by the State, consistent with the comprehensive needs assessment; (General)

The agency’s strategies to achieve the goals and priorities, support innovation and expansion, and overcome identified barriers are fully discussed in Section (L) State Goals and Priorities.

B. support innovation and expansion activities; and (General)

C. overcome identified barriers relating to equitable access to and participation of individuals with disabilities in the State VR Services Program and the State Supported Employment Services Program. (General)
p. Evaluation and Reports of Progress: VR and Supported Employment Goals (General)

Describe:

1. An evaluation of the extent to which the VR program goals described in the approved VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan for the most recently completed program year were achieved. The evaluation must: (General)

A. Identify the strategies that contributed to the achievement of the goals. (General)

The State Rehabilitation Council and VRS are committed to a disciplined process for making decisions that shape and guide VRS as an organization. Consumers, stakeholders and VRS staff contributed insights over many months to the planning process, resulting in the five goals. A strategic planning process is never finished. Changing consumer needs – as reflected by the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment, program evaluation and ever-changing social, legal and economic circumstances – prompts an annual review of the goals and process measures.

Goal 1: More jobs, better jobs

The result of this goal is expanded job opportunities and improved employment outcomes for Minnesotans with disabilities. VRS will:

A. Increase the number of employment outcomes
B. Increase the quality of employment outcomes
C. Expand development of long-term supports
D. Improve consistency of transition services received by students who are in high school

Goal 1 Outcome Measures:

A1. Using FFY 2013 as the baseline, employment outcomes will increase by 25 annually in each of the next two FFYs (2014 and 2015).

Progress to Date: The 2013 baseline is 2,738 placements. The 2014 performance was 2,869, a 131 increase over the previous fiscal year. The 2015 performance was 3,104, a 365 increase over the 2013 baseline.
B1. All VRS managers, counselors and VR Technicians Seniors will have attended four informational sessions on Social Security work incentives and benefits planning by the end of FFY 2015.

Progress to Date: All teams participated in training on Developing PASS Plans and a Disability Benefits 101 refresher. New employees participated in benefits planning training provided by local WIPA staff. An advanced course on benefits planning was also offered to all staff. VRS is one of the sites for the Institute for Community Inclusion’s SGA Project. Eight staff completed a comprehensive three week training course on benefits and financial planning to help determine if in–house financial planning services will improve employment outcomes for SSDI beneficiaries. In addition to traditional benefits planning services, the financial specialist also helps people develop strategies to build savings, improve credit ratings, and achieve other financial goals.

B2. VRS will collect baseline data during FFY 2014 on consumer satisfaction with their employment outcomes. The baseline data will be used to establish future targets for customer satisfaction.

Progress to Date: VRS has decided to initially focus on determining the factors that keep consumers engaged in the VR process. Although satisfaction with employment outcome is very important, it is equally important that the person stays engaged in the process. A new Consumer Engagement survey has been developed. Consumer Engagement is operationalized by the measure of three constructs: empowerment, partnership and performance. The survey was developed through meetings with 5 teams who contributed input into the development of the constructs to measure consumer engagement and survey items for those constructs. Once a survey was drafted, meetings were conducted with 5 teams to review and suggest modifications of the survey. Once the survey was developed, it was field–tested with approximately 50 consumers. Modifications were made based on the consumers’ comments. The survey was administered to a statewide sample. Response rate was over 80% and composite scores for consumer engagement it constructs were compiled. Overall, engagement across the State was in the 89–90 range on a scale of 1 to 100. The responses to the statewide sample were used to conduct a statistical analysis (Factor Analysis) to validate the construct measurements. Modifications to the survey items were made based on this analysis. Some items thought to measure one construct actually measured another, or were equivocal. The survey will be offered to all consumers during the first counseling session after plan development.

C1. Increase annually the number of VRS consumers who are leveraging Extended Employment/Supported Employment funding for on–going supports.

Progress to Date: All direct service staff have received training on the available funding streams for supported employment. Measuring the impact of this training has been difficult due to the complexity of the funding streams, and the fact that a person may access multiple funding streams to meet specific needs. VRS works closely with the SSA funded Employment Networks to encourage leveraging of Ticket to Work funding to provide on–going supports. In FFY 2015, Employment Networks received over $250,000 in SSA funding for post–VR job retention services.

D1. Improve work experience opportunities for VRS consumers in school to work transition.
Progress to Date: The Olmsted Plan places heavy emphasis on “Work First”. Transition students will have opportunities for integrated work experiences in the community before less integrated options are considered. VRS continues to support work try–outs, on the job training and paid work experiences to assist students make the transition to integrated competitive employment.

Goal 2: Organizational vitality

The result of this goal is a vibrant organization providing the best possible services to Minnesotans with disabilities. VRS will:

A. Develop a program evaluation framework

Progress to Date: VRS has developed and implemented an evaluation framework with three aspects:

1) A Director of Program Evaluation and Service Quality has been hired. He has clarified and articulated a development model of program evaluation and created a plan to progressively move VRS’s evaluation work from compliance reports to sophisticated program analytics to measure State Plan and program outcomes and the factors supporting/hindering those outcomes;

2) revised internal operation details to support the model and ensure that there is alignment of evaluation efforts with VRS’s direction and that new initiatives develop an evaluation design prior to the start of the initiative, and

3) VRS took steps to “demystify” data and program evaluation and increase the data skills of staff and managers. For common reports and common requests, VRS has been creating a series of Excel spreadsheets which are populated with client data. Each spreadsheet has a specific topic, e.g., placement, assessment, service costs, and includes data elements for those topics. In this way, managers and staff only need knowledge of Excel, Excel’s Sort function, some capacity to create tables/charts and rudimentary skill with Pivot Tables to quickly answer their questions in these topic areas. This approach improved the productivity of evaluation staff to more quickly answer manager’s questions and continued to embed an “evaluation” culture within VRS. The Director position is currently vacant. An interim Director is continuing the focus on program evaluation, with an emphasis on identifying new data elements needed for WIOA reporting. Managers received initial training on using Excel spreadsheets. Additional training will be provided as the report structure Is finalized.

B. Establish a leadership development program for current and emerging leaders

Progress to Date: The VRS Leadership Exploration and Development (LEAD) Program was launched in November 2014. Thirteen VRS staff participated in the 12 month program, which included opportunities for self–assessment, increasing awareness of VRS strategic priorities,
developing skills in leadership related competencies, experiential learning through leading a project, and reflective learning via participation in a peer–coaching process. The State of Minnesota’s Emerging Leader’s Institute (ELI), a 7 month program designed to help participants explore leadership within State government, is available to a total of 60 State of Minnesota employees each year. Three VRS employees completed ELI in 2015, and one employee is participating in the 2015–16 ELI cohort.

Goal 3: Effective partnerships

The result of this goal is the strengthening of system–wide collaborative partnerships that fully use resources to serve Minnesotans with disabilities.

Strategic priority: A. In FFY 2014 and 2015 the State Rehabilitation Council and the Community Rehabilitation Program Advisory Committee will rate the effectiveness of their partnership with VRS as at least 80 percent effective.

The State Rehabilitation Council conducts an annual survey of the Council to rate the effectiveness of the Council. The average ranking for the questions ranged from 62% to 96%. Topics that exceeded the 80% threshold included VRS giving meaningful consideration to Council’s advice (94.5%), clarity of the information provided by VRS (92%), clarity of data submitted to RSA (92%), completeness of the information provided about the required data reports (96%), timeliness of discussions (91.5%), and informing the Council of their statutory responsibilities (87.5%). Two areas of concern emerged from the survey. Some members felt member training and development would be improved if members mentored each other and if there was an expanded orientation for new members (62% ranking). Some members were either unclear or was unaware that there was a Council Work Plan (78% ranking).

The Community Rehabilitation Advisory Committee meets an average of six times per year. There has been substantial discussion this year on deepening and strengthening collaboration. Activities included co–hosting a statewide community partners meeting, sharing an understanding of WIOA regulations regarding Pre–Employment Transition Services and the impact this will have on VRS and CRPs, discussing a pilot program at ProAct (a center–based employment site) that will help transform centered–based programs to competitive integrated work opportunities, and providing an effective conduit for sharing important information with community providers and consumers.

Goal 4. Employer engagement

The result of this goal is that VRS and the VR community will embrace serving businesses and other employers as key customers. This effort will produce long–term, enduring, mutually satisfying relationships and increased employment outcomes for VRS consumers. New strategic priorities are included in Section (G) Coordination with Employers.
Following is a progress report on the previous priorities:

**Strategic Priorities**

A. Throughout FFY 2014 and 2015 VRS and Community Rehabilitation Program (CRP) managers will continue to develop local placement partnerships throughout each of Minnesota’s three regions and to create a locally consistent framework for service that engages and meets the needs of businesses and employers.

Progress to date: There are currently 18 local placement partnerships operating across the state. Placement 101, the joint training of VRS and CRP placement specialists, continues. To date, over 300 placement specialists from VRS and our community partners have attended this training.

B. By the end of FFY 2014, an active placement partnership will be established for 80 percent of the VR teams. By the end of FFY 2015, an active placement partnership will be established for 95 percent of VR teams.

Progress to date: Each of the 17 VRS teams is represented on at least one of the 15 active placement partnerships. The more established partnerships are hosting job fairs, mentoring new staff, and operating as an effective partnership. Newer partnerships are still defining how they will operate and expanding community awareness of their services.

C. Placement partnership members will share and track job leads within the VR Community on a timely basis and in a coordinated manner in order to a) improve responsiveness to employers, and b) increase employment outcomes for VR consumers.

Progress to Date: Job leads are shared via email or Google, and successful placements are tracked. Members frequently co–host Career Fairs and other employer events to engage employers.

B. Describe the factors that impeded the achievement of the goals and priorities. (General)

VRS achieved all of the performance indicators except RSA indicator 1.5: Consumer’s average wage compared to all other Minnesota workers. This indicator continues to be difficult to achieve because the salaries of youth entering employment for the first time are being compared to the salaries of long–term employees. Many jobs in Minnesota are unionized, and many of the jobs require a high level of skill such as medical professionals at the Mayo clinic and medical device manufacturing. The revised Goals and Priorities are designed to help address this.

2. An evaluation of the extent to which the Supported Employment program goals described in the Supported
Employment Supplement for the most recent program year were achieved. The evaluation must: (General)

A. Identify the strategies that contributed to the achievement of the goals. (General)

VRS utilized a Request for Proposals process to shift Extended Employment funding from areas with surplus capacity to areas with limited resources. This expanded Minnesota’s service capacity for supported employment, including the supported employment needs of transition-age youths and young adults, low incidence populations of persons with disabilities and other unserved and underserved populations. VRS is currently engaged in the rule making process to shift Extended Employment state dollars from center-based employment to integrated competitive work sites.

B. Describe the factors that impeded the achievement of the goals and priorities. (General)

Substantial effort has been made in the past year to bring together all interested parties to plan for implementation of WIOA and the Olmstead Plan. This process is helping the State to develop a strong vision for the future focused on the full integration of people with the most significant disabilities in community living including competitive, integrated employment with supports. Development of this comprehensive vision is time-consuming and has potentially delayed immediate results, but it will allow the state to move forward with a coordinated, comprehensive approach that meets the needs of people with the most significant disabilities.

3. The VR program's performance on the performance accountability indicators under section 116 of WIOA. (General)

Following are the performance measures and the five-year trends:

Indicator 1.1: Number of consumers achieving an employment outcome:

RSA National Standard: Equal or exceed previous year.

2011: 2,477
2012: 2,490
2013: 2,738
2014: 2,869
2015: 3,014

**Indicator 1.2: The percentage of consumers with employment outcomes who exited the program after receiving services.**

RSA National Standard: 55.8%
2011: 60.2
2012: 56.7
2013: 59.5
2014: 61.4
2015: 61.9

**Indicator 1.3: The percentage of consumers with competitive employment outcomes.**

RSA National Standard: 72.6%
2011: 99.1
2012: 99.0
2013: 99.6
2014: 80 (Percentage declined due a significant increase in the state minimum wage)
2015: 99.4

**Indicator 1.4: The percentage of consumers with significant disabilities.**

RSA National Standard: 62.4%
Under the Order of Selection, 100% of consumers served have a significant disability.

**Indicator 1.5: Consumers’ average wage compared to all other Minnesota workers.**

RSA National Standard: .52
2011: .458
2012: .457
2013: .463
2014: .472
2015: .457

Indicator 1.6: Percentage change, from application to closure, of earned income as the primary source of financial support.

RSA National Standard: 53.0
2011: 67.9
2012: 64.4
2013: 67.8
2014: 69.3
2015: 64.3

Indicator 2.1: The ratio of minority and non–minority service rates.

RSA National Standard .80
2011: .81
2012: .85
2013: .86
2014: .85
2015: .85

The following performance accountability factors are based on FFY 2014 closures, and includes only employment that was reported to Minnesota Wage Detail. VRS does not currently have access to wage detail for people employed by the federal government, placed in employment in other states, or people employed by employers not required to report wages.

1) the percentage of program participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the second quarter after exit from the program: 56.6%

2) the percentage of program participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the fourth quarter after exit from the program: 55.2%
3) the median earnings of program participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the second quarter after exit from the program: Quarterly median earnings was $3,255. Average quarterly earnings was $4,154. Average earnings increased to $4,481 at the end of the fourth quarter.

4) the percentage of program participants who obtain a recognized postsecondary credential, or a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent, during participation in or within 1 year after exit from the program: VRS does not currently track this data. Strategies are being developed to measure.

5) the percentage of program participants who, during a program year, are in an education or training program that leads to a recognized postsecondary credential or employment and who are achieving measurable skill gains toward such credential or employment: VRS currently only measures the number of program participants enrolled in a for–credit college or university program. The agency is currently developing strategies for measuring participation in other post–secondary training programs.

6) the indicators of effectiveness in serving employers: VRS and the State Rehabilitation council are currently establishing the indicators of effectiveness in serving employers.

4. How the funds reserved for innovation and expansion (I&E) activities were utilized. (General)

About 3.3 percent of Minnesota’s VR appropriation ($1.216 m) was used for innovation and expansion activities to improve and increase services to historically underserved populations with the most severe disabilities. These activities represent program response to identified need.

State Rehabilitation Council

Ten monthly meetings of the SRC, committee meetings, and public forums are where council members carry out their consultative and participative roles in the work of VRS. Primary contributions are annual participation in development of the VR Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment and State Plan; study of consumer satisfaction, VRS strategic planning, and review of the policies and practices that guide the delivery of services.

Persons with Mental Illness

Collaborative activity at state and local levels between VRS, DHS Mental Health Division, and community partners continues to build supports and services for persons with serious mental illness (SMI), who now comprise 33 percent of the VR program’s total caseload and 32.5 percent of employment outcomes. Innovative projects developed with dedicated state funds are increasing the quality of services and outcomes for this population in urban and rural Minnesota.
SSDI and SSI Beneficiaries

SSA, VRS and SSB continue to co–host periodic meetings of the Employment Networks. One result of this is more Employment Networks are providing Ticket–to–Work funded job retention (Partnership Plus) services following VRS intensive services. There are currently 188 consumers receiving Partnership Plus services. Ticket–to–Work funding is used to supplement Supported Employment funding or to provide continued job retention services beyond the 90 days VRS typically provides. Work incentives basic and advanced training for counselors was provided by work incentives specialists at the Work Incentives Connection.

All counselors received SSA sponsored training on how to coordinate VRS and PASS Plan services. There are currently 80 consumers receiving coordinated services. The most typical PASS Plan services are private college tuition above what VRS pays and the purchase of “gently used” cars for reliable transportation.

VRS is currently implementing the “SGA Project” to improve the employment rate and income level for SSDI beneficiaries. The project is part of an RSA funded research project at the Institute for Community Inclusion at the U of M–Boston.

Rehabilitation Technology

Rehabilitation technology, also referred to as assistive technology, enhances employment outcomes, leading to better employment outcomes including higher paying jobs. VRS continues to provide training and coaching to increase the use of rehabilitation technology by both experienced and new staff. Implementation of the VR Rehabilitation Technology Services Plan has involved widespread staff participation, brought focus to rehabilitation technology activity, and honored the work of VR program counselors serving as a technology liaison to their own VR teams. Several staff have completed the RSA funded TechSpec program at the U of W–Milwaukee.

Minorities with Most Significant Disabilities

State demographic data indicates Minnesota’s minority populations are growing at a much higher rate than the white, non–Hispanic population. Minnesota has the largest Somali refugee population in the United States.

The New Americans office in St. Paul specializes in addressing the needs of Somali and other East African immigrants who lack fluency in English. In FFY 2013, there were 38 new applications and 15 people achieved an employment outcome.

Collaborative Projects with Centers for Independent Living

Since 2008, the VRS–IL collaboration has served Minnesotans with the most significant disabilities that require both vocational rehabilitation and independent living services to meet their goals for working and living in the community. In FFY 2015 DEED–VRS dedicated
$1,027,446 in SSA program income to fund locally designed collaboration grants with each of Minnesota’s eight Centers for Independent Living. The employment rate for consumers who received coordinated services continue to exceed the rate for people who received only VR services.
q. Quality, Scope, and Extent of Supported Employment Services. (General)

Include the following:

1. The quality, scope, and extent of supported employment services to be provided to individuals with the most significant disabilities, including youth with the most significant disabilities. (General)

Supported employment services promote the integration of people with the most significant disabilities into the Minnesota workplace. The use of funds from Title VI Part B of the Rehabilitation Act initially allowed for expansion of supported employment services and outcomes. Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VRS) continues to work cooperatively with consumers, family members, advocates, employers, service providers and State, county, and local agencies to improve and expand the use of supported employment services statewide.

Approximately 3,000 vocational rehabilitation consumers were served in FFY 2015 with SE funds. VRS uses all federal funds authorized under Title VI, Part B in addition to Title I funds to purchase services for customers on a fee for service basis. Funds are distributed to field offices to purchase needed services for those consumers with a vocational goal that requires ongoing supports. Supported employment expenditures are administered and tracked separately in accordance with federal requirements. The quality of supported employment services in Minnesota is assured by a State administrative rule requirement that vendors from whom more than $20,000 in services are purchased annually must be fully accredited by the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF) or have applied for and are actively pursuing accreditation. In addition, vendors who agree to meet professional standards of service but are not CARF–accredited may be granted a limited use provider status, under which their services are limited to $20,000 or less annually.

The state’s major challenge regarding supported employment is one of consumer access to extended ongoing supports when they are needed. Agency structures and funding systems for extended support are governed by a myriad of federal and State laws and rules, each governing a specific piece of the categorical funding available to people with disabilities. A network of private not–for–profit organizations in Minnesota licensed by DHS Disabilities Services Division provides day training and habilitation services that may include such extended supports.

The agency’s coordination of vocational rehabilitation services with its extended employment services contributes significantly to the quality, scope, and effectiveness of the State’s overall SE efforts. When developing a customer’s employment plan, the consumer and VR counselor identify the time–limited services to be provided by VRS, the expected ongoing supports
needed, and the source of those supports. This may include natural supports. VRS is a partner in several state level agreements that facilitate provision of these services. With respect to extended employment services, VRS develops contracts with each accredited community rehabilitation program (CRP) that includes an outline of expectations for extended support. Each program submits an application for funding which becomes part of the contract and specifies the number of employment hours that will be funded by VRS. VRS provides $11,942,000 in state funding annually to community rehabilitation programs to support ongoing vocational services through community based supported employment. By coordinating its short-term vocational rehabilitation services and long-term extended employment services, VRS facilitates optimal benefit from time-limited and extended funding for persons in supported employment.

VRS, through state-funded extended employment services, provides ongoing work supports to approximately 5,100 individuals in SE annually. Many of these individuals received time-limited vocational rehabilitation services prior to entering supported employment. Part of Minnesota’s supported employment funding is dedicated to extended supports for persons with serious and persistent mental illness. VRS and the Department of Human Services Mental Health Division collaborate on Individual Placement and Support (IPS) projects to promote innovation in service delivery, including supported employment services, for this population. The projects are designed to provide functional assessment, individualized career planning, job skill acquisition, job placement, job development, and non-time-limited supports necessary to maintain and advance in employment. All recipients of grants under these projects are required to demonstrate collaboration with counties, the local community support program, VRS, and providers of employment services such as CRPs, regional treatment centers, and community mental health centers.

2. The timing of transition to extended services. (General)

The timing of the transition to extended services is highly individualized based on the needs of the person. The need for extended services is usually identified during the assessment of VR needs, and the consumer makes an informed choice of vendor for long term supports as a part of Individualized Plan for Employment development. However, the need can be identified at any point in time, and the plan can be amended. The consumer will frequently select the same vendor to serve as their placement provider and extended services provider to reduce the stress of changing providers.

The transition to extended services typically starts when training is completed and the person has stabilized on the job for 60 days. Both VR and the Extended Services provider provides joint services for at least 30 days ensure the transition has been successful. As needed, VR can continue supports for up to 18 months for adults and 48 months for youth. If the person becomes ready for job promotion VR may re-engage to provide additional training to ensure the person’s success in their career-laddering efforts.
Certifications (General)

Name of designated State agency or designated State unit, as appropriate Vocational Rehabilitation Services

Name of designated State agency Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development

Full Name of Authorized Representative: Kimberley T. Peck

Title of Authorized Representative: Director, Vocational Rehabilitation Services

States must provide written and signed certifications that:

1. The designated State agency or designated State unit (as appropriate) listed above is authorized to submit the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan under title 1 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Rehabilitation Act), as amended by WIOA*, and its supplement under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act.** Yes

2. As a condition for the receipt of Federal funds under title I of the Rehabilitation Act for the provision of VR services, the designated State agency listed above agrees to operate and administer the State VR Services Program in accordance with the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan, the Rehabilitation Act, and all applicable regulations, policies, and procedures established by the Secretary of Education. Funds made available under section 111 of the Rehabilitation Act are used solely for the provision of VR services and the administration of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan; Yes

3. As a condition for the receipt of Federal funds under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act for supported employment services, the designated State agency agrees to operate and administer the State Supported Employment Services Program in accordance with the supplement to the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan*, the Rehabilitation Act, and all applicable regulations, policies, and procedures established by the Secretary of Education. Funds made available under title VI are used solely for the provision of supported employment services and the administration of the supplement to the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan;** Yes

4. The designated State agency and/or the designated State unit has the authority under State law to perform the functions of the State regarding the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement; Yes

5. The State legally may carry out each provision of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement. Yes

6. All provisions of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement are consistent with State law. Yes
7. The **Authorized Representative listed above** has the authority under State law to receive, hold, and disburse Federal funds made available under the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement; **Yes**

8. The **Authorized Representative listed above** has the authority to submit the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and the supplement for Supported Employment services; **Yes**

9. The agency that submits the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement has adopted or otherwise formally approved the plan and its supplement. **Yes**

**Footnotes (General)**

**Certification 1 Footnotes**

* Public Law 113-128.

** Unless otherwise stated, "Rehabilitation Act" means the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended by WIOA, signed into law on July 22, 2014.

**Certification 2 Footnotes**

* All references in this plan to "designated State agency" or to "the State agency" relate to the agency identified in this paragraph.

** No funds under title 1 of the Rehabilitation Act may be awarded without an approved VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan in accordance with section 101(a) of the Rehabilitation Act.

*** Applicable regulations, in part, include the Education Department General Administrative Regulations (EDGAR) in 34 CFR parts 76,77,79,81, and 82; 2 CFR part 200 as adopted by 2 CFR part 3485; and the State VR Services Program regulations.

**Certification 3 Footnotes**

* No funds under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act may be awarded without an approved supplement to the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan in accordance with section 606(a) of the Rehabilitation Act.

** Applicable regulations, in part, include the citations in *** under Certification 2 footnotes

**Certification Regarding Lobbying — Vocational Rehabilitation (General)**

Certification for Contracts, Grants, Loans, and Cooperative Agreements The undersigned certifies, to the best of his or her knowledge and belief, that:
(General)

(1) No Federal appropriated funds have been paid or will be paid, by or on behalf of the undersigned, to any person for influencing or attempting to influence an officer or employee of an agency, a Member of Congress, an officer or employee of Congress, or an employee of a Member of Congress in connection with the awarding of any Federal contract, the making of any Federal grant, the making of any Federal loan, the entering into of any cooperative agreement, and the extension, continuation, renewal, amendment, or modification of any Federal contract, grant, loan, or cooperative agreement.

(General)

(2) If any funds other than Federal appropriated funds have been paid or will be paid to any person for influencing or attempting to influence an officer or employee of any agency, a Member of Congress, an officer or employee of Congress, or an employee of a Member of Congress in connection with this Federal contract, grant, loan, or cooperative agreement, the undersigned shall complete and submit Standard Form-LLL, "Disclosure of Lobbying Activities," in accordance with its instructions.

(General)

(3) The undersigned shall require that the language of this certification be included in the award documents for all subawards at all tiers (including subcontracts, subgrants, and contracts under grants, loans, and cooperative agreements) and that all subrecipients shall certify and disclose accordingly. This certification is a material representation of fact upon which reliance was placed when this transaction was made or entered into. Submission of this certification is a prerequisite for making or entering into this transaction imposed by section 1352, title 31, U.S. Code. Any person who fails to file the required certification shall be subject to a civil penalty of not less than $10,000 and not more than $100,000 for each such failure.

**Statement for Loan Guarantees and Loan Insurance (General)**

The undersigned states, to the best of his or her knowledge and belief, that:

If any funds have been paid or will be paid to any person for influencing or attempting to influence an officer or employee of any agency, a Member of Congress, an officer or employee of Congress, or an employee of a Member of Congress in connection with this commitment providing for the United States to insure or guarantee a loan, the undersigned shall complete and submit Standard Form-LLL, "Disclosure of Lobbying Activities," in accordance with its instructions. Submission of this statement is a prerequisite for making or entering into this transaction imposed by section 1352, title 31, U.S. Code. Any person who fails to file the required statement shall be subject to a civil penalty of not less than $10,000 and not more than $100,000 for each such failure.
Applicant’s Organization: Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development - Vocational Rehabilitation Services

Full Name of Authorized Representative: Kimberley T. Peck

Title of Authorized Representative: Director, Vocational Rehabilitation Services

SF LLL Form – Disclosure of Lobbying Activities (only if applicable) (http://www2.ed.gov/fund/grant/apply/appforms/appforms.html). If applicable, please print, sign, and email to MAT_OCTAE@ed.gov

**Certification Regarding Lobbying — Supported Employment (General)**

Certification for Contracts, Grants, Loans, and Cooperative Agreements: The undersigned certifies, to the best of his or her knowledge and belief, that:

(General)

1. No Federal appropriated funds have been paid or will be paid, by or on behalf of the undersigned, to any person for influencing or attempting to influence an officer or employee of an agency, a Member of Congress, an officer or employee of Congress, or an employee of a Member of Congress in connection with the awarding of any Federal contract, the making of any Federal grant, the making of any Federal loan, the entering into of any cooperative agreement, and the extension, continuation, renewal, amendment, or modification of any Federal contract, grant, loan, or cooperative agreement.

(General)

2. If any funds other than Federal appropriated funds have been paid or will be paid to any person for influencing or attempting to influence an officer or employee of any agency, a Member of Congress, an officer or employee of Congress, or an employee of a Member of Congress in connection with this Federal contract, grant, loan, or cooperative agreement, the undersigned shall complete and submit Standard Form-LLL, "Disclosure of Lobbying Activities," in accordance with its instructions.

(General)

3. The undersigned shall require that the language of this certification be included in the award documents for all subawards at all tiers (including subcontracts, subgrants, and contracts under grants, loans, and cooperative agreements) and that all subrecipients shall certify and disclose accordingly. This certification is a material representation of fact upon which reliance was placed when this transaction was made or entered into. Submission of this certification is a prerequisite for making or entering into this transaction imposed by section 1352, title 31, U.S.
Any person who fails to file the required certification shall be subject to a civil penalty of not less than $10,000 and not more than $100,000 for each such failure.

**Statement for Loan Guarantees and Loan Insurance (General)**

The undersigned states, to the best of his or her knowledge and belief, that:

If any funds have been paid or will be paid to any person for influencing or attempting to influence an officer or employee of any agency, a Member of Congress, an officer or employee of Congress, or an employee of a Member of Congress in connection with this commitment providing for the United States to insure or guarantee a loan, the undersigned shall complete and submit Standard Form-LLL, "Disclosure of Lobbying Activities," in accordance with its instructions. Submission of this statement is a prerequisite for making or entering into this transaction imposed by section 1352, title 31, U.S. Code. Any person who fails to file the required statement shall be subject to a civil penalty of not less than $10,000 and not more than $100,000 for each such failure.

Applicant’s Organization **Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development - Vocational Rehabilitation Services**

Full Name of Authorized Representative: **Kimberley T. Peck**

Title of Authorized Representative: **Director, Vocational Rehabilitation Services**

SF LLL Form – Disclosure of Lobbying Activities (only if applicable) (http://www2.ed.gov/fund/grant/apply/appforms/appforms.html).

**Assurances (General)**

The designated State agency or designated State unit, as appropriate and identified in the State certifications included with this VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement, through signature of the authorized individual, assures the Commissioner of the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA), that it will comply with all of the requirements of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement, as set forth in sections 101(a) and 606 of the Rehabilitation Act. The individual authorized to submit the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement makes the following assurances:

**The State Plan must provide assurances that:**

1. **Public Comment on Policies and Procedures: (General)**

The designated State agency assures it will comply with all statutory and regulatory requirements for public participation in the VR Services Portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan, as required by section 101(a)(16)(A) of the Rehabilitation Act.
2. Submission of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and Its Supplement: (General)

The designated State unit assures it will comply with all requirements pertaining to the submission and revisions of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement for the State Supported Employment Services program, as required by sections 101(a)(1), (22), (23), and 606(a) of the Rehabilitation Act; section 102 of WIOA in the case of the submission of a unified plan; section 103 of WIOA in the case of a submission of a Combined State Plan; 34 CFR 76.140.

3. Administration of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan: (General)

The designated State agency or designated State unit, as appropriate, assures it will comply with the requirements related to:

a. the establishment of the designated State agency and designated State unit, as required by section 101(a)(2) of the Rehabilitation Act. (General)

b. the establishment of either a State independent commission or State Rehabilitation Council, as required by section 101(a)(21) of the Rehabilitation Act. (General)

The designated State agency or designated State unit, as applicable (B) has established a State Rehabilitation Council

c. consultations regarding the administration of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan, in accordance with section 101(a)(16)(B) of the Rehabilitation Act. (General)

d. the financial participation by the State, or if the State so elects, by the State and local agencies, to provide the amount of the non-Federal share of the cost of carrying out the VR program in accordance with section 101(a)(3). (General)

e. the local administration of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan, in accordance with section 101(a)(2)(A) of the Rehabilitation Act. (General)

The designated State agency allows for the local administration of VR funds Yes

f. the shared funding and administration of joint programs, in accordance with section 101(a)(2)(A)(ii) of the Rehabilitation Act. (General)

The designated State agency allows for the shared funding and administration of joint programs: Yes

g. statewideness and waivers of statewideness requirements, as set forth in section 101(a)(4) of the Rehabilitation Act. (General)
Is the designated State agency requesting or maintaining a waiver of statewideness for one or more services provided under the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan? See Section 2 of this VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan. Yes

h. the descriptions for cooperation, collaboration, and coordination, as required by sections 101(a)(11) and (24)(B); and 606(b) of the Rehabilitation Act. (General)

i. all required methods of administration, as required by section 101(a)(6) of the Rehabilitation Act . (General)

j. the requirements for the comprehensive system of personnel development, as set forth in section 101(a)(7) of the Rehabilitation Act. (General)

k. the compilation and submission to the Commissioner of statewide assessments, estimates, State goals and priorities, strategies, and progress reports, as appropriate, and as required by sections 101(a)(15), 105(c)(2), and 606(b)(8) of the Rehabilitation Act. (General)

l. the reservation and use of a portion of the funds allotted to the State under section 110 of the Rehabilitation Act for the development and implementation of innovative approaches to expand and improve the provision of VR services to individuals with disabilities, particularly individuals with the most significant disabilities. (General)

m. the submission of reports as required by section 101(a)(10) of the Rehabilitation Act. (General)

4. Administration of the Provision of VR Services: (General)

The designated State agency, or designated State unit, as appropriate, assures that it will:

a. comply with all requirements regarding information and referral services in accordance with sections 101(a)(5)(D) and (20) of the Rehabilitation Act. (General)

b. impose no duration of residence requirement as part of determining an individual’s eligibility for VR services or that excludes from services under the plan any individual who is present in the State in accordance with section 101(a)(12) of the Rehabilitation Act . (General)

c. provide the full range of services listed in section 103(a) of the Rehabilitation Act as appropriate, to all eligible individuals with disabilities in the State who apply for services in accordance with section 101(a)(5) of the Rehabilitation Act? (General)

d. determine whether comparable services and benefits are available to the individual in accordance with section 101(a)(8) of the Rehabilitation Act. (General)
e. comply with the requirements for the development of an individualized plan for employment in accordance with section 102(b) of the Rehabilitation Act. (General)

f. comply with requirements regarding the provisions of informed choice for all applicants and eligible individuals in accordance with section 102(d) of the Rehabilitation Act. (General)

g. provide vocational rehabilitation services to American Indians who are individuals with disabilities residing in the State, in accordance with section 101(a)(13) of the Rehabilitation Act. (General)

h. comply with the requirements for the conduct of semiannual or annual reviews, as appropriate, for individuals employed either in an extended employment setting in a community rehabilitation program or any other employment under section 14(c) of the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, as required by section 101(a)(14) of the Rehabilitation Act. (General)

i. meet the requirements in sections 101(a)(17) and 103(b)(2) of the Rehabilitation Act if the State elects to construct, under special circumstances, facilities for community rehabilitation programs (General)

j. with respect to students with disabilities, the State,

   i. has developed and will implement,

      A. strategies to address the needs identified in the assessments; and

      B. strategies to achieve the goals and priorities identified by the State, to improve and expand vocational rehabilitation services for students with disabilities on a statewide basis; and

   ii. has developed and will implement strategies to provide pre-employment transition services (sections 101(a)(15) and 101(a)(25)). (General)

5. Program Administration for the Supported Employment Title VI Supplement: (General)

   a. The designated State unit assures that it will include in the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan all information required by section 606 of the Rehabilitation Act. (General)

   b. The designated State agency assures that it will submit reports in such form and in accordance with such procedures as the Commissioner may require and collects the information required by section 101(a)(10) of the Rehabilitation Act separately for individuals receiving supported employment services under title I and individuals receiving supported employment services under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act. (General)
c. The designated state unit will coordinate activities with any other State agency that is functioning as an employment network under the Ticket to Work and Self-Sufficiency program under Section 1148 of the Social Security Act. (General)

6. Financial Administration of the Supported Employment Program: (General)

a. The designated State agency assures that it will expend no more than 2.5 percent of the State’s allotment under title VI for administrative costs of carrying out this program; and, the designated State agency or agencies will provide, directly or indirectly through public or private entities, non-Federal contributions in an amount that is not less than 10 percent of the costs of carrying out supported employment services provided to youth with the most significant disabilities with the funds reserved for such purpose under section 603(d) of the Rehabilitation Act, in accordance with section 606(b)(7)(G) and (H) of the Rehabilitation Act. (General)

b. The designated State agency assures that it will use funds made available under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act only to provide supported employment services to individuals with the most significant disabilities, including extended services to youth with the most significant disabilities, who are eligible to receive such services; and, that such funds are used only to supplement and not supplant the funds provided under Title I of the Rehabilitation Act, when providing supported employment services specified in the individualized plan for employment, in accordance with section 606(b)(7)(A) and (D), of the Rehabilitation Act. (General)

7. Provision of Supported Employment Services: (General)

a. The designated State agency assures that it will provide supported employment services as defined in section 7(39) of the Rehabilitation Act. (General)

b. The designated State agency assures that:

i. the comprehensive assessment of individuals with significant disabilities conducted under section 102(b)(1) of the Rehabilitation Act and funded under title I of the Rehabilitation Act includes consideration of supported employment as an appropriate employment outcome, in accordance with the requirements of section 606(b)(7)(B) of the Rehabilitation Act

ii. an individualized plan for employment that meets the requirements of section 102(b) of the Rehabilitation Act, which is developed and updated with title I funds, in accordance with sections 102(b)(3)(F) and 606(b)(6)(C) and (E) of the Rehabilitation Act. (General)