

VR Portion of WIOA State Plan for Minnesota Vocational Rehabilitation Services FY-2018

Program-Specific Requirements for Vocational Rehabilitation (General)

The Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Services Portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan* must include the following descriptions and estimates, as required by section 101(a) of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended by WIOA:

* Sec. 102(b)(D)(iii) of WIOA

a. Input of State Rehabilitation Council

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;

The State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) provides ongoing input and recommendations to VRS. The council's annual reports can be found online at: <https://mn.gov/deed/job-seekers/disabilities/councils/rehab-council.jsp>.

The SRC spent a substantial amount of time reviewing the designated State unit's Priority for Service criteria and Order of Selection in response to significant increases in the number of participants who are found eligible for Category 1 since the implementation of WIOA. In response, the council made the following recommendations:

- The designated State unit should continue the education of VR staff as it relates to Priority for Service/Order of Selection/Functional Limitations, and monitor efficacy and determine an ongoing education plan to insure organizational vitality.
- Given the current state of available funds for services, the VR program should gather appropriate data to support analysis of whether the SRC and VR pursue rulemaking processes related to Order of Selection criteria, and to better support potential advocacy needs. This data collection should include thoughtful discussion with the SRC around what data should be collected to best capture the reality of the environment for VR.

- In the event that funds are not available, VR should be diligent and intentional in the decision to close all categories by providing transparent communication in collaboration with DHS and MDE to share alternative options given category closures.
- The SRC requests ongoing updates on available funds and category status from the Director, and to revisit the review of changing Order of Selection criteria annually.

Public Forums: The State Rehabilitation Council has historically convened one or two public forums each year to gather grassroots commentary and input regarding Minnesota's Vocational Rehabilitation program. In April 2017, the SRC Executive Committee opted to cancel the public forum planned to discuss Customized Employment scheduled for August. At that time, appropriation of funding that would enable the VR program to keep Category 1 open for a period of time was not included in the senate or house bills. The Council decided it would be more fiscally responsible to use resources for program participants rather than to host a public forum on services that the DSU potentially would not have funding to provide.

2. the Designated State unit's response to the Council's input and recommendations; and

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 Order of Selection and the changes in participant demographics seen since the implementation of WIOA. The director has reviewed the recommendations put forth by the council and agrees to maintain transparency with the council and keep recommendations at the forefront in decisions regarding Order of Selection.

3. the designated State unit's explanations for rejecting any of the Council's input or recommendations.

There were no formal recommendations made to VRS that were rejected by the designated State unit.

b. Request for Waiver of Statewideness

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;

VRS has no waivers of statewideness at this time.

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

The written contracts provides that all non-federal funds allocated by the agreements are made available to VRS, and that all services provided under the agreement are subject to VRS approval.

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

All state plan requirements apply to all services approved under the contracts.

c. Cooperative Agreements with Agencies Not Carrying Out Activities Under the Statewide Workforce Development System.

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;

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.

A. 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.

B. Minnesota Autism Interagency Committee

Representatives from Minnesota's Departments of Education, Human Services, Health, and Employment and Economic Development meet monthly to share information, departmental innovation, and the ongoing needs of individuals and families affected by autism.

C. 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 2017 VRS dedicated \$1.2 million in SSA program income to fund benefit coaches who are housed in every VRS office. The benefit coaches provide benefits and financial planning services for eligible consumers who are receiving SSI and/or SSDI Social Security benefits. This funding continues and expands the services previously provided by the SGA Project, a RSA funded demonstration project to improve employment outcomes for SSDI beneficiaries.

D. Minnesota Employment Center for Individuals Who Are Deaf or Hard-of-Hearing

Provides VRS funded short-term employment services and state-funded long-term employment support services for individuals who are deaf or hard-of-hearing. Awarded \$450,000 for ongoing employment supports through June 30, 2018 to support five locations statewide. Services include supporting businesses and employers with education and training in how to work with employees who are deaf or hard of hearing, as well as supporting employees themselves.

E. Career Ventures, Inc.

Program provides transition services to students who are deaf or hard of hearing from identified schools in the seven county Twin Cities metropolitan area. Awarded \$87,786 to serve students from two schools and one school district through June 30, 2018. Students are offered opportunities to try work experiences, develop resumes, fill out applications and practice interviews while conducting career interest surveys.

F. 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.

G. 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.

H. 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.

I. The SGA Project

In 2017, Vocational Rehabilitation completed a two-year model demonstration project designed to provide SSDI beneficiaries information and support to develop an employment plan that maps out a pathway to achieve employment above Substantial Gainful Activity (SGA). The SGA Project utilized a rapid engagement approach in which eligibility is determined within three days, Transferable Skills and Labor Market Information are provided and Benefits Planning and Financial Education are initiated within seven days. Within 30 days of application, the IPE and a Placement Plan are developed. A benefits analysis is completed within eight weeks of application if needed. As a result of positive feedback from Treatment Team clients and staff, Minnesota has expanded the project statewide using a combination of SSA program income and state funding.

J. 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.

K. 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 when the first employment shift is completed, and a final outcome payment is paid with successful placement closure. Beginning July 1, 2017, VRS included Placement and Retention Services information in both VRS Policy and Guidance as well as an electronic link to that same guidance within the Professional/Technical Contract for all Community Rehabilitation Providers (CRP) and Limited Use Vendors (LUV). Guidance includes guidance on Performance Based Agreement (PBA) milestones and outcomes as well as definitions and Service Types and Titles. VRS staff and Community Rehabilitation Providers express that the consistent guidance has reduced confusion and is leading to better common understanding about PBA milestones, invoicing and payments.

L. Interagency Agreement with the Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS) and the Disability Hub

Beginning October 1, 2017, DEED-VRS developed an interagency agreement with the Department of Human Services to provide training and support for Benefit Coaches/Independent Living Specialists as well as the support of certified Work and Benefits Planners from the Disability Hub who conduct all Benefits Analyses for VRS clients who are referred by VRS or the IL Specialist.

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

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 their 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;

U.S. Department of Agriculture: Memorandum of Understanding establishes 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

The designated state unit maintains a close working relationship with the local Workforce Development Boards' Youth Programs, including the Youth Disability Employment Initiative. One of the service providers has become an Employment Networks so they can continue benefits planning and job retention services after WIOA services have ended.

VECTOR Youth Project for Deaf/DeafBlind: \$412,214 in VRS managed state funding provides support for enhanced transition services to youth who are deaf, hard-of-hearing, or DeafBlind in Minnesota through June 30, 2018. 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 students are supported.

5. State use contracting programs.

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

Describe:

1. DSU's plans

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 a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to achieve better coordination between schools and VR services and create a bridge from the school to VRS or SSB prior to school exit. Following is a discussion of the current agreement, which was updated in November 2016 to reflect WIOA requirements: Provide consultation and technical assistance to Local Education Agencies (LEA)s in planning for the transition of students with disabilities from school to post-school activities including post-secondary education, training, competitive integrated employment and independent living.
- Provide secondary transition planning by personnel of DEED's VRS alongside secondary special education and career and college readiness staff through the delivery of pre-employment transition services and vocational rehabilitation services under the Rehabilitation Act and transition services under the IDEA.
- Define the roles and responsibilities, including financial responsibilities, of each agency, including provisions for pre-employment transition services, vocational rehabilitation services and IDEA transition services.
- Designate procedures for outreach to and identification of students with disabilities who are in need of pre-employment transition services and/or vocational rehabilitation services. Outreach to students should occur as early as grade nine.
- Outline services and documentation requirements set forth in section 511 of the Rehabilitation Act, as added by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act

(WIOA), with regard to youth with disabilities who are seeking subminimum wage employment.

- Provide assurance that neither the SEA nor the LEA will enter into an arrangement with an entity holding a special wage certificate under section 14(c) of the Fair Labor Standards Act for the purpose of operating a program under which a youth with a disability is engaged in work at a subminimum wage.

A. 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.

B. Personal Learning Plans (PLPs)

Minnesota statute 120B.125, "Planning for Students' Successful Transition to Postsecondary Education and Employment" requires Minnesota school districts to assist all students by no later than grade 9 to explore their educational, college, and career interests, aptitudes, and aspirations and develop a plan for a smooth and successful transition to postsecondary education or employment. VRS staff work with students and schools to ensure that VRS pre-employment transition services and transition services align with and contribute to each student's Personal Learning Plan.

C. 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.

D. 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. 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.

E. Interagency Agreement to Purchase Used Assistive Technology Devices

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

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

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;

- DEED's VRS and MDE's Special Education and Career and College Success Divisions will work together to ensure that consultation and technical assistance, which could include video conferences and conference calls, is provided to LEA staff in planning for the transition of students with disabilities to post-school activities. This includes implementing a structure for ensuring pre-employment transition services and vocational rehabilitation services are made available statewide for those who need these services.
- DEED's VRS and MDE's Special Education and Career and College Success Divisions will collaborate and promote transition to adult services through participation in existing councils, committees, and other workgroups within respective agencies.
- DEED's VRS will ensure that a counselor(s) is assigned to each school district and charter school in the state who will provide consultation and technical assistance to LEA staff on an as-needed basis related to the transition of students with disabilities from school to post-school activities.
- MDE's Special Education and Career and College Success Divisions in consultation with DEED's VRS will develop training and communication tools for the LEA staff regarding WIOA and how it intersects with IDEA and the schools.

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

1. DEED's VRS and MDE's Special Education and Career and College Success staff will provide technical assistance and consultation regarding these five required pre-employment transition services made available to students with disabilities who need them in grade nine through age 21 statewide:

- Job exploration counseling to assist students with disabilities in understanding their work related strengths and interests and what career possibilities there are;
 - Work-based learning experiences, which may include in-school or after school opportunities, or experience outside the traditional school setting (including internships), that is provided in an integrated environment in the community to the maximum extent possible;
 - Counseling on opportunities for enrollment in comprehensive transition or postsecondary educational programs at institutions of higher education;
 - Workplace readiness training to develop social skills and independent living; and
 - Instruction in self-advocacy (including instruction in person-centered planning), which may include peer mentoring (including peer mentoring from individuals with disabilities working in competitive integrated employment).
2. DEED's VRS counselors will attend meetings for the development of Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) when invited. Counselors will use the IEPs with students to assist in developing the individualized plans for employment (IPE).
- DEED's VRS and MDE's Special Education and Career and College Success Divisions agree to share responsibility for ensuring that schools are aware of and how to use the tools to support students with disabilities to receive current information about their strengths, interests and preferences in order to make informed choices about competitive integrated employment prior to leaving school.
 - DEED's VRS and MDE's Special Education and Career and College Success Divisions agree to share responsibility for ensuring that schools which serve students with disabilities receive information about the benefits of providing career information.

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

DEED's VRS assist students with disabilities in making informed choices to prepare for, obtain, maintain, advance in, or regain competitive integrated employment. Services include the provision of pre-employment transition services for students who are eligible or potentially eligible for VR services. They also include assessing an individual's VR needs, developing and implementing an IPE, and assisting in the achievement of the employment goals for the individuals that have applied for VR services, have been found eligible and are in an open priority category.

MDE's Special Education Division is responsible for ensuring that local education agencies provide special education and related services as documented in students' IEPs.

DEED's VRS and MDE's Special Education and Career and College Success Division are responsible for coordination necessary to satisfy documentation requirements set forth in WIOA and 34 CFR 397.10 (b)(i) and (ii) with regard to students and youth with disabilities who are seeking subminimum wage employment.

DEED's VRS and MDE's Special Education and Career and College Success Divisions are financially responsible for the services they provide under their own laws and rules. Nothing will be construed to reduce the obligation under IDEA of a local educational agency or any other agency to provide or pay for any transition services that are also considered special education or related services and that are necessary for ensuring a free appropriate public education to children with disabilities within Minnesota.

DEED's VRS and MDE's Special Education and Career and College Success Divisions are responsible to ensure that neither the LEA nor VR agencies may shift the burden for providing a service, for which it otherwise would be responsible, to the other entity. Decisions related to which entity will be responsible for providing transition, pre-employment transition services or vocational rehabilitation services that can be considered both a special education and a VR service will be made at the state and local level as part of the collaboration between the VR agencies, SEAs, and LEAs.

Considerations in making funding decisions could include:

- The purpose of the service: Is it related to outcomes for employment or education?
- Which agency customarily provides the service?
- Is the student eligible for transition services under the IDEA and/ or pre-employment transition services or vocational rehabilitation services under the Rehabilitation Act?

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

Outreach and Identification:

1. DEED's VRS and MDE's Special Education and Career and College Success Divisions will work together to develop outreach tools related to competitive integrated employment for students with disabilities, parents or representatives of students with disabilities, school personnel, and other community agencies. Materials will include a description of the purpose of the VR programs, application procedures, eligibility requirements, priority for services, and scope of services that may be provided to eligible individuals.

2. DEED's VRS and MDE's Special Education and Career and College Success will work together with LEAs to ensure that outreach and identification of students in need of/ who could benefit from pre-employment transition services takes place statewide.
3. In order to provide information to students and their families/ guardians about pre-employment transition services and/or vocational rehabilitation services, DEED's VRS will be allowed to receive "directory information" from LEAs. In accordance with Minnesota (M.S. 13.32) and federal (20 U.S.C.A. 1232g (5)(A)) laws, "directory information" is defined, in part, as the student's name, address, telephone listing, and date of birth.
4. DEED's VRS and MDE's Special Education and Career and College Success will work together with LEAs to ensure outreach to: students receiving special education services under IDEA; students receiving accommodations under section 504; students receiving school psychological, health, nursing, or social work services; and other students who have disabilities as defined in Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, but who do not receive IDEA services nor have a 504 plan.
5. DEED's VRS will provide outreach to the following school staff to identify students in need of pre-employment transition services and/ or vocational rehabilitation services: teachers/case managers, work coordinators, guidance counselors, school nurses, 504 coordinators, school social workers, alternative learning center staff, principals, school mental health coordinators, and school psychologists.

Coordination and documentation requirements under WIOA Section 511 and 34 CFR 397, Limitations on use of subminimum wage

1. DEED's VRS, in collaboration with MDE's Special Education and Career and College Success Divisions will work together with LEAs to ensure that students with disabilities have meaningful opportunities to prepare for, obtain, maintain, advance in, or regain competitive integrated employment, including supported or customized employment.
2. DEED's VRS and MDE's Special Education and Career and College Success Divisions will work together with LEAs to ensure that outreach and identification of students with disabilities who are seeking subminimum wage employment in order for them to receive counseling and information and referral related to competitive integrated employment.
3. DEED's VRS will ensure, as appropriate, that students with disabilities that are seeking subminimum wage employment and who have applied for VR services are determined eligible or ineligible for VR services; have an approved IPE; receive pre-employment transition services; and receive appropriate reasonable accommodations and appropriate supports and services, including supported

and customized employment services, that assist in obtaining and maintaining a competitive integrated employment outcome.

4. DEED's VRS and MDE's Special Education and Career and College Success Divisions will provide LEAs the required processes and forms to document the required actions specified under WIOA for all students with disabilities who are seeking subminimum wage employment.
5. MDE's Special Education and Career and College Success Divisions will work with LEAs to ensure that documentation of completed IDEA transition services is provided to DEED's VRS within 30 calendar days of the completion of the IDEA transition services for students who are seeking subminimum wage employment and have applied for VR services.
6. DEED's VRS and MDE's Special Education and Career and College Success Divisions will work together with LEAs to ensure that in the event a student with a disability or, as applicable, the youth's parent or guardian, refuses, through informed choice, to participate in the actions required under WIOA, the refusal is documented. LEA staff will provide this documentation to VRS or within 5 calendar days of the refusal and VRS or staff will provide the documentation to students within 10 calendar days of the refusal.
7. DEED's VRS will ensure that all students with disabilities who are seeking subminimum wage employment receive documentation of the required actions specified under WIOA within 45 calendar days of completion of the required actions.

Assurance related to WIOA Section 511 and 34 CFR 397, Limitations on use of subminimum wage

In accordance with 34 CFR 397.31, MDE's Special Education and Career and College Success Divisions, through the MDE Career Technical Education Program approval and expense approval process, will ensure that neither the SEA nor LEAs enter into a contract with an entity, as defined in WIOA 34 CFR 397.5(d) for the purpose of operating a program under which a student with a disability is engaged in work compensated at a subminimum wage.

e. Cooperative Agreements with Private Nonprofit Organizations

(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.

1. 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.

2. 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).

3. 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 42 limited-use providers. Contracts are limited to \$20,000 annually.

4. 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 60 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:

1. Develop and maintain choices for consumers.
2. Meet workforce needs identified by the state's employers.
3. Ensure that services are provided in integrated settings.
4. Facilitate state-level planning and coordination of training needs of CRP staff.
5. Facilitate communication between VRS and CRP staff at the administrative level.

6. Increase CRP awareness of vocational rehabilitation issues at state and national levels.
7. 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 in 2017 included discussion of Performance Based Agreement redesign and definitions for inclusion in DEED-VRS Professional and Technical Contracts, expanding Customized Employment capacity in Minnesota, Funding Customized Employment, Strategies for continued system transformation, Department of Human Services (DHS) new Waiver Services discussion, WIOA Section 511, Developing and Retaining Placement Professionals.

f. Arrangements and Cooperative Agreements for the Provision of Supported Employment Services

(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.

1. 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 24 months, 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 Medicaid-waiver funded services, and the Social Security Administration's Impairment-Related Work Expense exclusions and Ticket to Work funding for persons on SSI and/or SSDI.

2. State-funded VRS Extended Employment Program

Minnesota's Extended Employment Program, administered by VRS, provides ongoing employment support services for individuals to maintain and advance in employment. The direct services are delivered by CARF-accredited CRPs under performance-based contracts with VRS-EE. 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. It provides a \$13.825 million a year to CRPs to provide ongoing employment support services. VRS coordinates both vocational rehabilitation and extended employment services to maximize the impact of both time-limited and extended services. In state fiscal year 2017, the VRS Extended Employment program provided ongoing work supports to about 4,200 individuals working in the community, about half of whom had previously received time-limited VR services. The Extended Employment Program is governed by state rule and the VRS-EE program have initiated a rule revision. 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 and cap non-competitive employment, prioritizing funding for competitive, integrated employment.

3. Individuals with Serious Mental Illness and Individuals Who Are Deaf or Hard-of-Hearing

Minnesota VR has been a leader in implementing the Evidence Based Practice of Supported Employment for persons with serious and persistent mental illness known as Individual Placement and Support (IPS). IPS receives \$2.55 million in dedicated state funding, which is used for grants to local partnerships of mental health programs and employment providers (Community Rehabilitation Programs). These funds provide ongoing supports to persons with serious mental illness who are receiving community mental health services. Minnesota’s programs utilize the IPS fidelity scale (2008) to guide program development and implementation as well as program evaluation and outcome measurement. Another appropriation provides \$1,000,000 annually to provide long-term supported employment services for persons who are deaf, deaf blind or hard-of-hearing.

g. Coordination with Employers

(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

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.

As of July 2017, Workforce One (WF1), Minnesota's electronic case management system, has capacity to identify Talent Pool. VRS staff now must input key talent pool identification data which will greatly enhance the ability for Placement Specialists and Coordinators to identify pools of candidates based on Employer needs. More training will be needed by VRS staff to correctly utilize the talent pool refinement tools available in WF1.

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, Connect 700 program and Schedule A hiring.

DEED-VRS updated the process, policies guidance and definitions for an array of low risk hiring and retention options which are referred to as On-the-Job Work & Training Options in Policy and Guidance Manuals. This information, along with the Connect 700 hiring initiative, was shared with Community Rehabilitation Partners through statewide training to ensure consistency of understanding and application. VRS developed a series of new marketing materials for use by VRS and community partner providers to promote these programs with businesses (Internship, On-the-Job Training and Job Tryout brochures).

Metric: Create and deliver 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: 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:

1. 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.

2. 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. In addition to the single point of contact approach for employers, Placement Partnerships host opportunities to connect employers and qualified job seekers and reflect employer needs and interests from urban, metro and rural areas. In addition to supporting joint training to maintain qualified staff, the placement partnerships share job leads, host job fairs and other community events.
3. 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 2016 and 2017, Placement 101 was put on hold due to WIOA. Despite the training being put on hold, Community Rehabilitation Providers have continually asked for Placement 101 to be offered again. In 2018, VRS will be partnering with the Minnesota Rehabilitation Association's (MRA) Job Placement and Development (JPD) group who has expressed a desire to take on much of the training of Placement 101 going forward. VRS Placement Specialists will work closely with JPD staff who have been Placement 101 Trainers. It is anticipated that some of the materials will need to be updated as a portion of the curriculum is outdated.
4. VRS along with a key Community Rehabilitation Provider is developing a Minnesota centric Customized Employment Training and pursuing ACRE (Association for Community Rehabilitation Educators) certification for the training participants. This training will include hands on learning opportunities for Discovery Assessment and Job Development portions of Customized Employment. Each participant will also receive mentoring from VRS & CRP staff who are certified by one of the key CE training entities that provide certification. The goal of this Customized Employment Training is to assist placement professionals develop an understanding of CE and demonstrate proficiency in providing Discovery and Job Development. The training is also essential for Program Managers, Rehabilitation Area Managers who supervise staff who are providing CE services.
5. VRS developed and piloted a Business Feedback Survey in 2017. The purpose of the survey is to obtain feedback from businesses who have used VRS services. The brief survey asks businesses to let us know both how useful services were (i.e., prescreening applicants, on-the-job training, internship and job tryout programs, etc.) and how satisfied they are with VRS services. The survey was

piloted to approximately 20 employers and provides a foundation for future business surveys.

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

The need for Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) is assessed for all students, grade nine or age 14, whichever comes first, through age 21, that VRS serves. From there, the needed Pre-ETS are added to the employment plan and delivered either through one-on-one counseling sessions with the VRS counselor, the student's school, an internal VRS placement coordinator, or funds can be authorized to have them delivered via community rehabilitation programs, centers for independent living, etc. VRS staff work with local school districts to discuss how Pre-ETS are already available to students and where gaps are that VRS might be able to fill. VRS is also working to ensure that Pre-ETS are available statewide to students who are "potentially eligible" for VRS.

In February 2017, a request for proposals was issued for community organizations to apply for funds to provide this service on behalf of VRS. Nine organizations were selected, eight of which are Local Workforce Development Areas (LWDAs) who are well suited to provide the service being that they already operate youth programming to at-risk youth populations. These partnerships with the LWDAs is also enhancing the internal workforce development system partnerships to provide a seamless system of opportunities to youth with disabilities.

Other Pre-ETS service delivery options are being piloted in the areas where there currently aren't contractors (northwest Minnesota and a portion of the Twin Cities metro area). These include: an internal placement coordinator in Washington County reaches out to the local school districts to provide one on one and classroom Pre-ETS opportunities; VRS is working with special education staff within the Rosemount-Apple Valley-Eagan Independent School District No. 196 (the 4th largest district in the state) to offer a Pre-ETS course via their community education program.

h. Interagency Cooperation

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;

Medical Assistance, the state's Medicaid program, is administered by the Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS). Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VRS) collaborates closely with DHS in the provision of a variety of Medicaid services.

A. 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:

B. 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.

C. 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.

D. 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). The Department of Human Services has submitted amendment language to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) for an employment services waiver. The waiver amendment would create three new employment services. CMS needs to approve the amendment language before the services can be implemented. Employment Exploration Services which are defined as community-based services that introduce and explore employment, such as work experiences, assists people in making an informed choice about working in competitive, integrated employment. Employment Development Services are defined as individualized services that help people find competitive, integrated employment or attain self-employment. Employment Support Services are defined as individualized services and supports that assist people with maintaining community employment in an individual or group arrangement.

VRS accesses 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 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 utilizing grant funding have been continued through the use of state appropriations, including:

E. Disability Hub MN

The Disability Hub 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. Where space is available, the Disability Hub staff are co-located with VRS staff. The most recent expansion of the Disability Hub has been in the area of benefits planning and benefits summary and analysis for beneficiaries of Social Security benefits.

F. Disability Benefits 101

DB101 (www.db101.org) is a free online service operated by the Disability Hub 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 Hub 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 and RSA demonstration grant funds a section on Work Benefits for Youth has been enhanced.

2. the State agency responsible for providing services for individuals with developmental disabilities; and

The primary agency responsible for services for individuals with disabilities is the Minnesota Department of Human Services. In Minnesota, the Governor’s Council on Developmental Disabilities serves to advocate for all persons with developmental disabilities by carrying out activities in major areas of emphasis.

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 is involved in several joint projects with the above agencies:

A. Way to Work Pilot Project

VRS placed vocational rehabilitation counselors in a sheltered workshop to assess individual strengths and needs and develop strategies to move the employees from segregated employment to competitive integrated employment. The successful pilot project sunset in 2017 and all participants — VRS, Dakota County, and the Department of Human Services — are now implementing statewide the lessons learned to provide training, supports and benefits planning to assist people transition into the community.

B. 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.

The Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS) is responsible for coordinating mental health services for adults and youth.

Minnesota’s Mental Health system is a State mandated, county operated system. The State Mental Health Authority is responsible for ensuring that Minnesota’s 87 counties, the local mental health authority, provide an array of community mental health services including: Basic clinical services, community services and supports, hospitalization and residential treatment. Funding for Minnesota’s mental health system comes from health care insurance, including Medicaid, private Insurance and MinnesotaCare as well as county local tax levy funds, state mental health funds and Federal Block grant funds.

Minnesota’s Mental Health and Drug and Alcohol Divisions are merging to provide a combined state administration for adult and children’s mental health and alcohol and drug abuse. The emphasis is on moving to integrated care approaches.

The Minnesota General program has a long history of innovative collaboration with the State Mental Health Authority. This includes VR representation on the State Mental Health Planning Council and the newly formed State Behavioral Advisory Council.

The two agencies have also collaborated to implement, sustain and expand the evidence based practice of supported employment, Individual Placement and Support. Starting with 4 local partnerships between mental health and employment providers in 2006, the IPS provider network in Minnesota, funded in part with state appropriations dedicated to IPS, has expanded to 29 IPS programs (partnerships between mental health agencies and employment services agencies) in 47 of Minnesota’s 87 counties. Minnesota VR and Mental Health agencies are partners in the National IPS Learning Community.

i. Comprehensive System of Personnel Development; Data System on Personnel and Personnel Development

(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

A. Qualified Personnel Needs.

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;

In FFY 2016, VRS served 17,674 consumers and ended the year with an active caseload of 10,411 individuals. In FFY 2017, we served 17,554 consumers, ending the year with an active caseload of 10,954; an average case load for counselors of 67. U.S. Census Bureau data on the geographic distribution of Minnesotans with disabilities has been used to determine the distribution of staff. The metro region has 112 field positions, the northern region has 80 field positions, and the southern region has 99 field positions. To balance managerial oversight of field positions in the metro and southern region, there was a re-distribution in 2017.

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

The Vocational Rehabilitation Services leadership team consists of a director, ten managers and one Office Services Supervisors.

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 164 rehabilitation counselors, augmented by nine rehabilitation representatives, twenty seven job placement coordinators, 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.

VRS had 14 retirements in calendar year 2016. There were five voluntary resignations. The number of voluntary resignations has remained constant (around 2%) over the past five years. Between 2017 and 2022, 23% of VRS staff, 16% of counselors and 33% of managers and supervisors will be eligible to retire.

VRS program director/managers/supervisors (Admin)

Total positions: 12

Current vacancies: 0

Projected vacancies over the next 5 years: 4

Rehabilitation Area Managers/supervisors (field)

Total positions: 21

Current vacancies: 0

Projected vacancies over the next 5 years: 6

Rehabilitation Specialists

Total positions: 23

Current vacancies: 0

Projected vacancies over the next 5 years: 9

Rehabilitation Counselors

Total positions: 164

Current vacancies: 3

Projected vacancies over the next 5 years: 27

Rehabilitation Representatives

Total positions: 16

Current vacancies: 1

Projected vacancies over the next 5 years: 1

Job Placement/Business Services

Total positions: 27

Current vacancies: 1

Projected vacancies over the next 5 years: 4

Vocational Rehabilitation Technicians

Total positions: 66

Current vacancies: 1

Projected vacancies over the next 5 years: 23

Clerical Support

Total positions: 16

Current vacancies: 0

Projected vacancies over the next 5 years: 3

Other Admin/Field

Total positions: 8

Current vacancies: 0

Projected vacancies over the next 5 years: 5

TOTAL

Total positions: 353

Current vacancies: 6

Projected vacancies over the next 5 years: 82

B. Personnel Development

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;

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

Minnesota State University - Mankato

Students enrolled: 16

Employees sponsored by agency and/or RSA: 0

Graduates sponsored by agency and/or RSA: 0

Graduates from the previous year: 5

St. Cloud State University

Students enrolled: 35

Employees sponsored by agency and/or RSA: 1

Graduates sponsored by agency and/or RSA: 12

Graduates from the previous year: 12

University of Wisconsin - Stout

Students enrolled: 69

Employees sponsored by agency and/or RSA: 3

Graduates sponsored by agency and/or RSA: 10

Graduates from the previous year: 23

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.

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

- Minnesota State University - Mankato: 5
- St. Cloud State University: 12
- University of Wisconsin - Stout: 23

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

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. Five students completed internships in 2016. Six internships are currently in progress. We anticipate hosting additional interns beginning Spring 2018 semester. The staff development manager/specialist devotes approximately 5% 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, 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. Five VRS employee graduated with a Rehabilitation Counseling graduate degree in 2016, and all five were promoted to a counselor position. Four 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 online job sites.

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 fall 2017. Survey response rate was 84% this year. Findings indicate strong employee engagement on the key indicators measured. For example, 93% agreed that the VRS mission makes them feel their job is important, 89% agreed that they have the necessary training to do their job well, and 75% 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 enhancing organization communications, re-implementing external training opportunities, increasing recognition and feedback, and workload adjustment. 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 2017 data: 9% of VRS employees identify themselves as American Indian, Asian, Black or Hispanic/Latino, 88% identify themselves as White, and 3% are non-specified or undisclosed. At present, 15% 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

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**

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.

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. A Bachelor's degree substitutes for half of the experience requirement.

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.

Describe the State agency's policies, procedures, and activities to ensure that, consistent with section 101(a)(7)(C) of the Rehabilitation Act, all personnel employed by the designated State unit receive appropriate and adequate training in terms of:

A. 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. Staff Development and field managers meet regularly, as does the Policy Learning Team, 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.

Required training for new employees includes: New Employee Orientation, New Counselor Training, Data Practices, Mandated Reporting, Ethics, Information Management, Purchasing Procedures, Transition 101, Labor Market Resources and Updates, Vocational Assessment Interpretation, ADA, and Motivational Interviewing.

The field trainer manual was replaced with an on-the-job training comprehensive New Counselors mentorship program. This onboarding process is coordinated through RAMs or experienced counselors in the office of the new counselor.

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 many MI Refresher trainings. VR managers and supervisors have noted the strong correlation between motivational interviewing and skills needed for effective clinical supervision. Using MI, 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 is an important initiative.

In 2016, the VRS Policy Core Team and Policy Learning Teams were created consisting of staff from various roles and regions. The Policy Core Team analyzes the new law, drills into the legislation and determines the implementation priorities. The Policy Learning Team takes the implementation priorities, develops training and ensures effective training of staff through the Rehabilitation Area Managers. Training provided to staff through this training model to date is as follows: Ability to Benefit, Applicants with Visual Impairments, Competitive Integrated Employment, Eligibility and Priority for Services Time Frames, Limitations on Subminimum Wage for Youth/511 Process, On-the-Job Work and Training Options, Placement and Retention Services, Pre-ETS/Transition, Timely Employment Plan Development, and Trial Work Plans.

In 2017, VRS added a Staff Development Specialist to assist the PRE-ETS and Transition Services Specialist on the growing need to train staff to effectively work with the schools, individuals, and families of transition-age youth. This position will also focus on Autism training needs for staff.

VRS has offered several in-service programs to enhance counselor skills in assessment and employment planning. Completion of an ethics course once every five years is a minimum expectation for all staff. All field staff received training on Mandated Reporting policy and Data Practices. Training was offered on Mental Health First Aid. Assistive Technology Liaisons receive advanced training in Assistive Technology through UW Stout Vocational Rehabilitation Institute.

Transition 101 training for Transition Counselors that includes a subject matter expert training on “Understanding Special Education Evaluation Summary Reports” was extremely impactful on their ability to do meaningful assessments and plans. In development by our Transition and Staff Development Specialists is Pre-ETS Potentially Eligible training for staff.

The WorkForce One case management system was upgraded to a 6.0 version In July 2017. Staff training was provided in various modalities, provided by VRS field operations specialists. Fifteen video tutorials were recorded for anytime, anywhere learning opportunities. Several desk aids were also created. Nineteen in-person computer lab trainings were offered.

Extended Employment (EE) unit presented a webinar information session to staff. The presentation included what EE is and why it is important, the features, funding structure, how the grant process impacts EE, and understanding the service provider perspective. More training is planned for 2018.

Individual Placement and Support (IPS) Introductory Training is offered by the IPS State team for new IPS programs. All IPS VR Liaisons and RAMS are invited and

encouraged to attend these trainings with their IPS program teams. Multiple training opportunities were conducted statewide in 2015 and 2016. Several short, customized IPS Introductory trainings and brown bag lunches were held. VR Counselor liaisons connected with these programs were invited to participate.

IPS VR Counselor liaisons, supervisors and RAMS are offered the opportunity to complete an online course through the IPS Employment Center at Rockville Institute/Westat. Our IPS VR liaison helped design the course and serves as the instructor for MN VR staff members. The majority of VR IPS liaisons completed this course in 2015, seven completed the course in 2016, and one new VR Counselor completed the course in 2017.

IPS collaboration. Vocational Rehabilitation Services in the mid-state region was recognized with a Minnesota Social Services Association award for partnering in an IPS community collaboration with Functional Industries, Wright County Health & Human Services and Central MN Mental Health Center. Each agency brought their own mental health expertise to the table to support employment, therapy, and case management. This collaboration helps people with serious mental illness work in regular jobs, not jobs set aside for people with disabilities. Mental health practitioners not only help their clients consider employment but also provide employment specialists with their mental health expertise to assist with the individualized job search.

VRS and Community Rehab Partners (CRPs) in Minnesota continue to make a concerted effort to work in partnership to serve VR consumers. VRS hired a Customized Employment Specialist to be partner with CRPs and provide specialized training to VRS staff in 2016.

Customized Employment. VRS has partnered with ProAct, Inc. and Occupational Development Center, WIOA Technical Assistance Center (WINTAC), and the Youth Technical Assistance Center (Y-TAC) to provide Marc Gold & Associates' Customized Employment Training in Minnesota through June, 2018. Two cohorts began in 2017 that include 24 VRS placement professionals, counselors, RAMs and supervisors, along with community partner staff. Participants attend nine full days of certification training building skills to personalize the employment relationship between a job candidate and employer.

Person-Centered Thinking and Person-Centered Planning was a top strategic goal in 2017. Training was required for all VRS staff in fall of 2017. University of Minnesota Institute on Community Integration trainers were contracted to help staff understand the values-based concepts and incorporate client-centered practices in services we provide in accordance with WIOA, the Olmstead Plan and Employment First policy. Tools and techniques were introduced and practiced in the training. To further knowledge, skills and abilities in Person-Centered practices, a Community of Practice consisting of VRS staff will launch in December 2017. The purpose will be to create a culture of continuous improvement, construct processes, policy and

guidance that are person-centered, and utilize online coursework available through the University of Minnesota for ongoing training.

Several VRS staff participated in the Way to Work pilot project in Dakota County that completed its first year with mostly positive results. In 2016, 101 individuals - all working subminimum wage jobs at ProAct - expressed an interest in finding competitive integrated employment. Fourteen individuals started new jobs in the community. The operational lessons and methods used in the pilot project will be adopted and integrated more broadly across the state to help more individuals with significant disabilities make the transition from subminimum wage jobs into competitive, integrated employment in the community.

Substantial Gainful Activity (SGA) was 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). Half of VRS staff were trained in 2015, then participated in this major initiative to increase wage outcomes for SSDI customers. The project concluded mid-year 2016. Best practices from the SGA model were identified - rapid engagement and enhancing the ability to provide financial consulting to the customer through dedicated staff. These are now incorporated into policy and practice.

VRS field managers and supervisors participate annually in Clinical Supervision training offered by Christine Haddad Gonzalez, University of MN School of Social Work. VRS RAMs and Supervisors complete a full day of training annually focused on supervisory relationships, building trust and issues of race. RAMs and Supervisors will have access to up to 28 hours of consulting with the trainer and coach.

The VRS leadership team has defined a set of leadership competencies for the agency. Identifying a need for succession planning within Administrative leadership, VRS is supporting two employees with tuition reimbursement to complete Master's degrees; one in Data Science and one in Public Affairs.

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. No VRS employees participated in ELI in 2016.

The Department of Employment and Economic Development librarian 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.

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.

B. 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, work to strengthen staff skills in providing Person-Centered services in accordance with WIOA, the Olmstead Plan, and MN Employment First policy through the Person-Centered Community of Practice and evaluation of staff training needs.

Continue to address WIOA regulatory changes through the Policy Core Team and Policy Learning Team. Training development topics in progress are Performance Based Agreements, Pre-ETS for Potentially Eligible Students, Pre-ETS/Transition, Serious Functional Limitations, and Unable to Achieve an Employment Outcome-511 Closures.

Develop and implement online courses on Psychiatric Disabilities. This coursework will be specific to vocational rehabilitation and providing Individual Placement and Support (IPS) services and the Minnesota Mental Health system.

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 on Customized Employment through Marc Gold and Associates' Customized Employment training.

Develop and offer training on Pre-Employment Transition Services. Currently in development is the Pre-ETS for Potentially Eligible Students training for VRS Counselors and staff to understand the roles and responsibilities of the contractors providing Pre-ETS to potentially eligible students, what contractors can view in the WorkForce One system and identify scenarios where VRS and contractors can present ideas for successful collaboration.

Develop and offer training on Autism Spectrum Disorder. Through online courses or web-based platform, train staff on how Autism is diagnosed, what strengths and limitations individuals might demonstrate; behavioral aspects of autism and strategies for addressing the needs of individuals with autism.

Create a Waiver 101 training for staff to understand the purpose of a waiver, process for applying and who is eligible, know the different types of waivers, County Case Funding vs Waiver Based Funding, and how contracted Case Management works.

Develop a training program to understand the integration of WIOA components around Common Performance Measurements. Ensure staff know the new requirements for credential attainment indicators, measurable skill gains, etc. and their role to accurately report information. VRS field leadership and policy specialists are in a planning phase currently, working closely with WINTAC for guidance and evaluating existing training material.

Due to budget constraints and the high volume of internal WIOA-related training, external training was not funded for most of the calendar year 2017. We plan to reinstate the external training/continuing education funding policy in 2018. Professional expertise and leadership capacity is important for the vitality and sustainability of the agency. Staff will be able to take at least one self-initiated elective training activity outside VRS, or attend one conference related to their role annually.

5. Personnel to Address Individual Communication Needs

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.

Deaf and Hard of Hearing services are provided by highly qualified VRS staff including one State Coordinator for Deaf Services and 24 staff who are conversationally competent in American Sign Language. To be exact, we have three VRS managers/supervisors, fifteen counselors, three placement specialists, two VR technicians, a Rehabilitation Representative, an Office and Administrative Specialist, and two Occupational Communication Specialists (who are also certified sign language interpreters). Deaf and hard of hearing specialists in ten locations are using a video remote interpreting platform called Stratus VRI to supplement the use of onsite interpreting services and provide more options for accessibility. Counselors are also using videophones, FaceTime, Microsoft Lync and texting to communicate with people and providers who use our services.

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

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

(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:

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

The 2015 American Community Survey estimates that 304,800 non-institutionalized Minnesotans of working age, or 9.0% of the state's population, has a disability. This compares to 10.7% nationally. Males are slightly more likely to have a disability than females (9.2% versus 8.8%). 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;

According to the 2015 American Community Survey, individuals who are Black/African American represent 5.5% of the state population, compared with 14.1% of VR participants accepted for service. Individuals who are Hispanic/Latino represent 5.0% of the state population, and 4.8% of VR participants accepted for service. American Indians represent 1.0% of the state population, and 3.3% of VR participants accepted for service. Asians represent 4.4% of the state population, and 3.1% of VR participants accepted for service. 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;

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 constitute 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

People with disabilities are served in all components of the workforce development system, both as universal customers and in eligibility-based programs. The Governor's Workforce Development Board has established a Disability Equity Committee to address any disparities for individuals with disabilities in training and employment, with an emphasis on people on the VRS Waiting List.

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

The most recent data from the Minnesota Department of Education (school year 2016-17) shows that there were 42,465 students age 14-21 (the age for transition services in Minnesota) who received special education. (Note that there are not accurate numbers for those that receive 504 accommodations or have a 504 plan).

The need for Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) is assessed for all students, grade nine through age 21, that VRS serves. From there, the needed Pre-ETS are added to the employment plan and delivered either through one-on-one counseling sessions with the VRS counselor, the student's school, an internal VRS placement coordinator, or funds can be authorized to have them delivered via community rehabilitation programs, centers for independent living, etc. VRS staff discuss with local school districts how Pre-ETS are already available to students and where gaps are that VRS might be able to fill.

VRS is also working to ensure that Pre-ETS are available statewide to students who are "potentially eligible" for services. In February 2017 a request for proposals was issued for community organizations to apply for funds to provide this service on behalf of VRS. Nine organizations were selected, eight of which are Local Workforce Development Areas (LWDAs) that are well suited to provide the service being that they already operate youth programming to at-risk youth populations. These partnerships with the LWDAs are enhancing the internal workforce development system partnerships to provide a seamless system of opportunities to youth with disabilities.

Other Pre-ETS service delivery options are being piloted in the areas where there currently aren't contractors (northwest Minnesota and a portion of the Twin Cities metro area). These include: an internal placement coordinator in Washington

County reaches out to the local school districts to provide one-on-one and classroom Pre-ETS opportunities; VRS is working with special education staff within the Rosemount-Apple Valley-Eagan Independent School District No. 196 (the fourth-largest district in the state) to offer a Pre-ETS course via their community education program.

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

The largest unmet need has been 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, it was noted that there is limited culturally appropriate services available on the reservations. Services in neighboring cities are difficult to access and services are not culturally specific.

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 .

The Minnesota Department of Education, several local school districts, the Title 1 Youth programs, and VRS are currently assessing 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 (g.2.).

k. Annual Estimates

Describe:

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

Of the approximately 304,800 Minnesotans between the ages of 16 and 64 with one or more long-lasting disabilities (2015 American Community survey), it is estimated that approximately 150,000 are eligible for vocational rehabilitation services.

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

A. The VR Program;

In FFY 2019, Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VRS) anticipates serving about 17,200 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 16,856 (98 percent) will be persons who have a most significant disability, and about 344 (2 percent) will be persons with a significant disability.

B. The Supported Employment Program; and

It is estimated that 3,784 individuals will have individualized employment plans with a supported employment goal in FFY 2019 under Title VI Part B, Supported Employment Services Program. The approximate cost of purchased services for these individuals will be \$850,000. 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;

In FFY 2019, it is estimated that about 16,856 persons with serious limitations in three or more functional areas (priority category one) will be served at an approximate case service cost of \$18.2 million; about 269 persons will be served who have serious limitations in two functional areas (priority category two) at an approximate case service cost of \$280,500; and about 75 persons will be served who have a serious limitation in one functional area (priority category three) at an approximate case service cost of \$69,500.

3. The number of individuals who are eligible for VR services, but are not receiving such services due to an order of selection; and

The total waiting list under the current order of selection is 1,675 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 1,110 people. Category Three (one functional limitation) is closed with a waiting list of 545 people, and Category Four (no identified substantial functional limitations) has a waiting list of 20 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.

In FFY 2019, approximately 2,500 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

Estimated Funds: \$18,250,000

Estimated Number to be Served: 16,856

Average Cost of Services: \$1,082

Priority Category Two: Closed

Estimated Funds: \$280,500

Estimated Number to be Served: 269

Average Cost of Services: \$1,042

Priority Category Three: Closed

Estimated Funds: \$69,500

Estimated Number to be Served: 75

Average Cost of Services: \$926

Priority Category Four: Closed

Estimated Funds: \$0

Estimated Number to be Served: 0

Average Cost of Services: \$0

Totals

Estimated Funds: \$18,600,000

Estimated Number to be Served: 17,200

Average Cost of Services: \$1,081

I. State Goals and Priorities

The designated State unit must:

1. Identify if the goals and priorities were jointly developed

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, have jointly agreed to the following 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.

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:

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

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

The revised goals and priorities are based on an analysis of the comprehensive statewide assessment (completed December 2017), feedback from community partners, and public forums.

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

Vocational Rehabilitation Services continues to review and revise goals to align with the updated performance accountability measures of Section 116 of WIOA. In April 2018, VRS adopted a new strategic framework that includes the following strategic goals and priorities:

Goal 1: Promoting Jobseeker Success: Provide VR participants with person-centered, quality services that result in competitive integrated employment for Minnesotans with the most significant disabilities

Strategic Priorities

A. Focus on participant engagement and satisfaction

Action: Enculturate Person Centered practices throughout VRS

Action: Review and respond to SRC's participant engagement and satisfaction survey recommendations

B. Monitor and evaluate the quality and quantity of employment outcomes

Action: Conduct qualitative statewide review process

Action: Monitor quantitative statewide employment outcomes and job retention

Goal 2. Building Business Relationships — Build long-term, collaborative relationships with business partners to increase competitive, integrated employment for Minnesotans with disabilities.

Strategic Priorities

A. Assist VRS staff in matching qualified VRS job seekers with competitive, integrated employment opportunities.

Action: Leverage Talent Pool technology to identify qualified job seekers and connect them to employers with hiring needs

B. Assist Business Partners in building inclusive workplaces and developing best practices for recruitment and retention for individuals with disabilities.

Action: Work with Business Partners to increase knowledge related to employment and disabilities and increase awareness and value associated with VRS' expertise and services through education, engagement and support.

Action: Develop, implement, and refine low risk hiring options such as On the Job Training, Job Try Outs, Internships and Connect 700 Program. Increase Business Partners' use of these hiring options.

Action: Create and deliver training designed to help employers facilitate, and coordinate workplace supports for employees with disabilities requiring them.

C. VRS will lead and reinvigorate Placement Partnerships by strengthening partnerships among VRS, VR Community Partners and Business Partners

Action: Develop a two-year plan for Placement Partnerships focusing on assessing Employer needs and analyzing best practices in placement and employer engagement.

Action: Lead efforts to provide development opportunities for placement professionals

Action: Build and maintain collaborative relationships with business partners through tours, presentations and networking events.

D. VRS will measure its effectiveness in serving Employers/Business Partners

Action: Expand and reissue 2017 VRS Business Engagement Survey to determine where improvements can be made to better serve Business Partners

Action: Work with CareerForce System partners to develop and track indicators of effectiveness in serving employers

Goal 3: Enhancing Organization Vitality — Creating an environment for staff to be passionate about their work.

Strategic Priorities

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

Action: Provide innovative, timely, and in-depth training to VRS staff, using both internal and external learning opportunities

Action: Lead initiatives to incorporate person-centered language, tools and resources into every training, project and service provided by VRS B. Offer leadership development opportunities for current and emerging leaders.

Action: Utilize the Enterprise Talent Development programs to cultivate staff potential

Action: Provide guidance and opportunities to apply learning and project work within a VRS context

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

Action: Provide cultural competence training for VRS staff

Action: Utilize strategies to increase diversity in staff hiring and retention

D. Strengthen organizational communication internally and with system partners

Action: Provide frequent VRS organizational updates to staff

Action: Communicate major policy and practice decisions internally and/or with system partners

E. Develop strategies for overall organizational health

Action: Offer innovative workplace solutions to support organizational health

Action: Improve efforts to recognize staff and provide meaningful feedback

Goal 4. Leveraging Partnerships — To convene and strengthen collaboration to better serve Minnesotans with disabilities.

Strategic Priorities

A. Maintain and build partnerships with community-based rehabilitation providers and advocacy organizations

Action: Convene and leverage the VRS CRP Advisory Committee

Action: Provide timely communication and key updates to the VR Community

Action: Strengthen local relationships between VRS and community-based rehabilitation providers

Action: Collaborate with advocacy organizations to advance mutual agendas.

B. Expand our collaboration with other employment and disability services system partners to better coordinate and align services provided to Minnesotans with disabilities.

Action: Expand key partnership work with Department of Human Services (DHS), Minnesota Department of Education (MDE), counties, local school districts, and CareerForce System partners

Action: Partner with Department of Human Services (DHS) to finalize the WIOA required MOU.

Action: Facilitate collaboration of field staff, Medicaid lead agency staff, and Extended Employment (EE) providers to implement policies and practices that maximize Waiver, VR, and EE funding for employment services.

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

Action: Work in partnership with the SRC to develop and review state goals and priorities and seek input in the development of the State Plan and Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment

Action: Seek input from the SRC on substantive VR policy changes
Action: Seek input from the SRC on the Comprehensive System of Personnel Development

Action: Work collaboratively with the SRC to measure customer satisfaction and program effectiveness

Action: Work collaboratively with the SRC to maintain working relationships between VRS and external stakeholders, including Centers for Independent Living, other state agencies and other councils to coordinate activities and avoid duplication of efforts.

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

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

Describe:

1. Whether the designated State unit will implement and order of selection.

If so, describe:

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

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:

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

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:

- An analysis of resources available for annual operation of the vocational rehabilitation program,
- expenditures required to implement employment plans approved prior to commencement of the fiscal year,
- the anticipated costs for determining eligibility and qualification for service of new applicants during the fiscal year,
- the anticipated costs of implementing approved vocational rehabilitation plans for new applicants during the fiscal year, and
- 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 January 29, 2018, there were 1,675 individuals on the waiting list: 20 on Priority Category Four, 545 on Priority Category Three, and 1,110 on Priority Category Two. Individuals on the waiting list are provided information and referral to other programs that may meet the person's needs.

C. The service and outcome goals.

In PY 2019, under the order of selection currently in effect, approximately 17,200 individuals will be served. Approximately 2,570 individuals will achieve employment outcomes in PY 2018. (Although Category 1 is the only priority for service category currently open, a small number of individuals in Categories 2 and 3 were enrolled and receiving services from the VR program prior to closing those categories. Individuals who were identified in Categories 2 and 3 prior to closure continue to have open case files and are receiving services. Their numbers are reflected in the estimates below.)

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

Priority Category 1

Number of individuals to be served: 16,856

Estimated number of individuals who will exit with employment: 2,320

Estimated number of individuals who will exit without employment: 1,109

Time within which goals may be achieved: 20.3 months

Cost of Services: \$18,250,000

Category 2

Number of individuals to be served: 269

Estimated number of individuals who will exit with employment: 194

Estimated number of individuals who will exit without employment: 75

Time within which goals are to be achieved: 43.9 months

Cost of services: \$280,500

Category 3

Number of individuals to be served: 75

Estimated number of individuals who will exit with employment: 56

Estimated number of individuals who will exit without employment: 21

Time within which goals are to be achieved: 40.1 months

Cost of services: \$69,500

Category 4

Number of individuals to be served: 0

Estimated number of individuals who will exit with employment: 0

Estimated number of individuals who will exit without employment: 0

Time within which goals are to be achieved: 0

Cost of services: 0

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

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.

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.

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.

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.

A. Estimate of the Number of Persons to Be Served

During Program Year 2017, about 3,332 individuals will be served with Title VI, Part B funds supplemented by Title I funds, at a purchased service cost of about \$750,000. 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.

B. The Contribution of State Funding

Title VI B funds are used to provide supports after placement and before closure. The VRS Extended Employment Program (VRS-EE) provides ongoing employment supports using state funding of \$13,194,433 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 program serves all disability groups. An additional state appropriation of \$12,555,000 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. Another appropriation provides \$1,000,000 annually to provide long-term supported employment services for persons who are deaf, deaf blind or hard-of-hearing.

C. System Complexity and Limited Capacity

Funding for supported employment, within which Title VI Part B funds play a relatively small part, is governed by myriad 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 day 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

D. Strategic Goal for Effective Partnerships

In FFY 2018, 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 VRS-EE 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:

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

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. Per requirements under 363.4(2), VRS will provide extended services to youth with the most significant disabilities for a period not exceed four years, or until such time that a youth reaches the age of 25.

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.

VRS is promulgating changes to the State rule governing the Extended Employment program, ending admissions to non-integrated and sub-minimum wage jobs, capping other non-integrated employment and prioritizing this state funding for competitive, integrated employment with supports.

o. State's Strategies

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.

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 2017 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 three specific strategies that VRS will play an active role in:

- 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,
- provide technical assistance to non-integrated employment programs to design new business models that lead to competitive employment in the most integrated setting, and
- 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 continues to clarify policy to ensure that all vocational rehabilitation services are provided in the most integrated setting appropriate for the person.

In FFY 2017, VRS utilized \$736,924 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.

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.

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.

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.

The current estimate is that 5.4 percent of the population, or at least 203,540 Minnesota adults, have 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 in FFY2017 comprised 34.2 % of the VR caseload and 36.8 % 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 \$450,000. 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 SSA funded program of Goodwill Industries that provides work incentives planning and assistance for consumers.

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, to promote the use of PASS Plans, and to ensure the continuation of benefits planning services as people transition from VRS services to job retention services.

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).

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 transition-age 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.

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 60 CRPs. VRS has an active CRP Advisory Committee to assist in achievement of common goals. 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.

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

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

WorkForce Centers (WFCs) serve a significant number of people with disabilities beyond the customers served by VRS and SSB. 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. The Governor's Workforce Development Board has established a committee to explore how the workforce centers can best serve individuals on the VRS waiting list.

8. How the agency's strategies will be used to:

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

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

The agency's strategies to support innovation and expansion are fully discussed in Section (L) State Goals and Priorities.

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.

The agency's strategies to support innovation and expansion are fully discussed in Section (L) State Goals and Priorities.

p. Evaluation and Reports of Progress: VR and Supported Employment Goals

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:

A. Identify the strategies that contributed to the achievement of the goals.

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.

Goal1: 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

Progress achieved: In 2017, DEED administered a randomized statewide participant satisfaction survey of Vocational Rehabilitation Services participants who had completed an individualized employment plan as part of their program activities.

Mathematica, as part of a grant received from RSA that was completed in 2017, studied the impact rapid engagement and benefits planning had on SSDI beneficiaries participating in the SGA Project. On average, eligibility was determined within 6.5 days of application, and the IPE was developed within 49 days of application. 48% of the participants participated in benefits planning as part of plan development. The research showed people who participated in the research project were more likely to stay engaged with VR, and they were more likely to exit services with employment above SGA.

DEED also contracted with Orman Guidance, a consumer insights firm, who took a mixed methods approach to a VRS participant satisfaction study with the objective of exploring the quality, timeliness, and effectiveness of VRS.

The overall results found that VRS participants feel high levels of comfort, satisfaction, and support in their current work with VRS counselors and staff, and that the counselor-participant relationship is key for success and satisfaction.

B. Increase the number of employment outcomes

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

Progress achieved: In FY2017, 2,715 VR participants obtained employment, which exceeded the successful employment target of 2,550 by 165.

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

Progress achieved: The agency continues to develop strategies for measuring and recording credentials and skill gains. Updated case management system to record credentials and skill gains, and have begun staff training to capture the data accurately.

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

Progress achieved: Further communications with administration revealed that Common Performance Measures are not a measure of retention, therefore, this goal will no longer be measured.

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 Pre-ETS requirements stipulated in WIOA

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

Progress achieved: VRS delivers pre-employment transition services (Pre-ETS) through counseling staff (VR eligible persons) and contracts (VR potentially eligible persons). An Employment Plan is developed and services are tracked.

VRS issued nine fee for service contracts in July, 2017 to vendors to provide required services to VR potentially eligible people. Requests for Proposals are currently being developed to expand the availability of Pre-ETS services within the Twin cities metropolitan area and northwestern Minnesota.

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.

Progress achieved: Counseling staff have been assigned to every school district in the state, including private schools. Time spent providing Pre-ETS services is tracked through the statewide payroll accounting system. Within the statewide accounting system, there are designated account codes for Pre-ETS expenses. In addition, separate project codes are required to differentiate work hours between required activities and coordinating activities. VRS is currently not spending funds on authorized services.

Each month, program accounting staff runs a budget report to determine the percentage of federal funds that have been spent on Pre-ETS activities. It is expected that the 15% mandate will be met for FFY 2017.

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.

Progress achieved: Service codes have been developed and implemented to track Pre-ETS purchased services.

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

Progress achieved: Person-Centered Thinking and Person-Centered Planning was a top strategic goal in 2017. Training was required for all VRS staff in fall of 2017. University of Minnesota Institute on Community Integration trainers were

contracted to help staff understand the values-based concepts and incorporate client-centered practices in services we provide in accordance with WIOA, the Olmstead Plan and Employment First policy. Tools and techniques were introduced and practiced in the training. To further knowledge, skills and abilities in Person-Centered practices, a Community of Practice consisting of VRS staff will launch in December 2017. The purpose will be to create a culture of continuous improvement, construct processes, policy and guidance that are person-centered, and utilize online coursework available through the University of Minnesota for ongoing training.

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

Progress achieved: WIOA priorities have and still are driving our staff development initiatives. Staff Development added one employee in 2017 to meet training needs around PRE-ETS and Autism. Staff development resources are at full capacity with program and policy training development and delivery. The use of the State of MN Enterprise Talent Development's Emerging Leadership Institute is a viable approach vs. our strategic plan to develop our own leadership development program within VRS. The VRS Leadership team will consider selecting 3-4 staff to participate in the cohort starting September 2018. The Staff Development Director can collaborate side-by-side with VRS participants in the Emerging Leadership Institute to provide guidance and opportunities to discuss and apply learning and project work with administrative and field leadership.

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

Progress achieved: All managers and supervisors completed training on Building an Inclusive Workplace offered through the Minnesota State Enterprise Learning Management office. DEED has implemented a monthly Diversity Spotlight series as part of the Governor's and DEED's initiative to create a more diverse and inclusive workforce, ODEO is hosting sessions on a variety of diversity topics that directly affect how we treat employees in the workplace and how we serve our customers through our programs.

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

Progress achieved: VRS implemented a regularly featured communication on the internal SharePoint site to highlight changes to policy and practice, messages from the VRS Leadership Team, updates on training and staff development opportunities, and team profiles, etc.

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

Progress achieved: The State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) provides ongoing input and recommendations to VRS.

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

Progress achieved: VRS has an active CRP Advisory Committee. Priority topics discussed in 2017 included discussion of Performance Based Agreement redesign and definitions for inclusion in DEED-VRS Professional and Technical Contracts, expanding Customized Employment capacity in Minnesota, Funding Customized Employment, Strategies for continued system transformation, Department of

Human Services (DHS) new Waiver Services discussion, WIOA Section 511,
Developing and Retaining Placement Professionals

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

Progress achieved: 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. VRS has entered into discussions with the Department of Human Services and the Department of Education to develop a memorandum of understanding on how to better coordinate WIOA services and to develop a federal waiver request to use Medicaid funding for long-term supports.

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

Progress achieved: VRS worked closely with DHS to develop a federal waiver request to use Medicaid funding for long-term supports. Additionally, the Extended Employment program has rewritten the EE rule to shift funding from segregated employment to competitive integrated employment with supports. The new rule is expected to take effect in 2018.

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

Progress achieved: As of July 2017, Workforce One (WF1), Minnesota's electronic case management system, has capacity to identify Talent Pool. VRS staff now must input key talent pool identification data which will greatly enhance the ability for Placement Specialists and Coordinators to identify pools of candidates based on Employer needs. More training will be needed by VRS staff to correctly utilize the talent pool refinement tools available in WF1.

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, Connect 700 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

Progress achieved: DEED-VRS updated the process, policies guidance and definitions for an array of low risk hiring and retention options which are referred to as On-the-Job Work & Training Options in Policy and Guidance Manuals. This information, along with the Connect 700 hiring initiative, was shared with Community Rehabilitation Partners through statewide training to ensure consistency of understanding and application. VRS developed a series of new marketing materials for use by VRS and community partner providers to promote these programs with businesses (Internship, On-the-Job Training and Job Tryout brochures).

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

Progress achieved: 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.

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. In addition to the single point of contact approach for employers, Placement Partnerships host opportunities to connect employers and qualified job seekers and reflect employer needs and interests from urban, metro and rural areas. In addition to supporting joint training to maintain qualified staff, the placement partnerships share job leads, host job fairs and other community events.

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 2016 and 2017, Placement 101 was put on hold due to WIOA. Despite the training being put on hold, Community Rehabilitation Providers have continually asked for Placement 101 to be offered again. In 2018, VRS will be partnering with the Minnesota Rehabilitation Association's (MRA) Job Placement and Development (JPD) group who has expressed a desire to take on much of the training of Placement 101 going forward. VRS Placement Specialists will work closely with JPD staff who have been Placement 101 Trainers. It is anticipated that some of the materials will need to be updated as a portion of the curriculum is outdated.

VRS along with a key Community Rehabilitation Provider is developing a Minnesota centric Customized Employment Training and pursuing ACRE (Association for Community Rehabilitation Educators) certification for the training participants. This training will include hands on learning opportunities for Discovery Assessment and Job Development portions of Customized Employment. Each participant will also receive mentoring from VRS & CRP staff who are certified by one of the key CE training entities that provide certification. The goal of this Customized Employment Training is to assist placement professionals develop an understanding of CE and demonstrate proficiency in providing Discovery and Job Development. The training is also essential for Program Managers, Rehabilitation Area Managers who supervise staff who are providing CE services.

VRS developed and piloted a Business Feedback Survey in 2017. The purpose of the survey is to obtain feedback from businesses who have used VRS services. The brief survey asks businesses to let us know both how useful services were (i.e., prescreening applicants, on-the-job training, internship and job tryout programs, etc.) and how satisfied they are with VRS services. The survey was piloted to approximately 20 employers and provides a foundation for future business surveys.

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

Significant progress has been made on most of the goals and priorities. Uncertain funding has been a contributing factor in completing all of the goals. We have also had to reconsider some of the regulations because of early misunderstanding or misinterpretation.

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:

A. Identify the strategies that contributed to the achievement of the goals.

VRS and the Department of Human Services meet regularly to develop policy and guidance to blend VR, Extended Employment, Medicaid waiver and County dollars to serve more people in need of long term supports. Emphasis has been placed on how to fund services for people currently employed in segregated in-house employment who want to work in competitive integrated settings. Videos have also been produced to highlight success stories.

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

VRS and the Department of Human Services are waiting for final federal approval of changes to the state's Medicaid waivers. In addition to providing additional funding for supported employment services, the requested changes would provide funding for benefits planning for people on a waiver who want to transition from sub-minimum wage jobs to jobs that pay a competitive salary.

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

The following performance accountability factors are based on Program Year 2015, 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.

- the percentage of program participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the second quarter after exit from the program: 59.9% (down from 65.1% at the time of exit).

- the percentage of program participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the fourth quarter after exit from the program: 58.9%
- the median earnings of program participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the second quarter after exit from the program: Quarterly median earnings was \$3,275.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.

About 1.8 percent of Minnesota’s VR appropriation in FFY2017 (\$736,924) 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 in FFY2017 comprised 34.2 percent of the VR program’s total caseload and 36.8 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 and VRS continue to co—host bi-annual meetings of the Employment NetworksTicket—to—Work funding is used to supplement Supported

Employment funding or to provide continued job retention services beyond the 90 days VRS typically provides. Benefit coaches have been added to each office to ensure beneficiaries fully understand the impact income will have on benefits.

All counselors participated in SSA sponsored training on how to coordinate VRS and PASS Plan services. There are on average 80 consumers receiving coordinated services at any point in time. The most typical PASS Plan services are private college tuition above what VRS pays and the purchase of “gently used” cars for reliable transportation (typically a new car with slight body damage).

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. Since its inception in 2007, the New Americans Project has served over 140 participants.

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 2017 DEED—VRS dedicated \$1,204,226 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.

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.

Minnesota Employment Center (MEC): a unique collaborative program that is supported by two Community Rehabilitation Programs, provides ongoing supported employment services statewide. These services are funded through a grant supported by state legislative dollars and are offered only to people who are deaf, hard of hearing or deaf blind. Currently housed in five different cities, and staffed by people fluent in American Sign Language (ASL), this program has provided services for over twenty years. Services aim to help people who are deaf, hard of hearing or deaf blind retain their jobs and secure advancement in competitive employment settings. MEC also provides education and training for employers in how to support their employees who are deaf, hard of hearing or deaf blind.

q. Quality, Scope, and Extent of Supported Employment Services.

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.

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 3,332 vocational rehabilitation consumers were served in PY 2017 with Supported Employment funds. Supported Employment 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 Supported Employment 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 \$13,194,433 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 Supported Employment 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.

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 to 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

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 I 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

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

Additional Comments on the Certifications from the State

Certification Regarding Lobbying — Vocational Rehabilitation

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

(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.

(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.

(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

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

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

(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.

(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.

(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

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

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:**

C. 1. Public Comment on Policies and Procedures:

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.

D. 2. Submission of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and Its Supplement:

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.

E. 3. Administration of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan:

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.

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

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.

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).

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.

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.

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.

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. No

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.

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

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

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.

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.

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

F. 4. Administration of the Provision of VR Services:

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.

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 .

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?

Agency will provide the full range of services described above: No

d. determine whether comparable services and benefits are available to the individual in accordance with section 101(a)(8) of the Rehabilitation Act.

e. comply with the requirements for the development of an individualized plan for employment in accordance with section 102(b) of the Rehabilitation Act.

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.

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.

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.

- 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*
- 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)).*

G. 5. Program Administration for the Supported Employment Title VI Supplement:

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.

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.

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.

H. 6. Financial Administration of the Supported Employment Program:

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.

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.

I. 7. Provision of Supported Employment Services:

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

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.*

Additional Comments on the Assurances from the State