

OVR Public Meeting

Second DRAFT VR Services Portion of the WIOA
Combined State Plan (2 Year Modification)

January 12, 2022

The presentation today is intended to update the public on additions made to the VR Services Portion of the 2-year modification of the 2020-2024 Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Combined State Plan. A previous public comment period was held in October 2021 and public meetings were held on October 19 and 21, 2021.

A complete copy of the updated draft VR Services Portion of the Plan is available on [OVR's website](#).

Today's presentation will focus on highlighting the additions that have been added to the original draft of the VR Services Portion of the Combined State Plan. At the conclusion of the presentation, the public participants will have an opportunity to share comments. This is not a question-and-answer session.

OVR has also opened an additional 30-day comment period beginning Wednesday, January 5, 2022, through Thursday, February 3, 2022. Comments can be sent to ra-li-ovrfeedback@pa.gov until 5 p.m. on February 3, 2022.

As required by WIOA, Pennsylvania currently has a Combined State Plan in effect from July 1, 2020, to June 30, 2024. The VR Services Portion of the State Plan is one of the core program areas represented in the WIOA Combined State Plan. Other core program areas include Adult, Dislocated Worker, Youth, Wagner-Peyser and Adult Basic Education.

OVR is required to submit a 2-year modification to this plan to take effect July 1, 2022, through June 30, 2024.

Under 34 CFR 361.20, OVR must obtain public input prior to the adoption of any substantive policies or procedures governing the provision of VR services under the Combined State Plan.

- (a) Input of State Rehabilitation Council
- (b) Request for Waiver of Statewideness
- (c) Cooperative Agreements with Agencies Not Carrying Out Activities Under the Statewide Workforce Development System
- (d) Coordination with Education Officials
- (e) Cooperative Agreements with Private Nonprofit Organizations
- (f) Arrangements & Cooperative Agreements for the Provision of Supported Employment Services
- (g) Coordination with Employers
- (h) Interagency Cooperation
- (i) Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD)

- (j) Statewide Assessment
- (k) Annual Estimates
- (l) State Goals and Priorities
- (m) Order of Selection
- (n) Goals and Plans for Distribution of Title VI Funds
- (o) State's Strategies
- (p) Evaluation and Reports of Progress: VR and Supported Employment Goals
- (q) Quality, Scope and Extent of Supported Employment Services

1. The Closure of the Order of Selection (OOS) for All Categories

Issue: The closure of the OOS for all categories represents a significant challenge to people with disabilities having access to employment services when they are needed. OVR must develop appropriate internal controls and other adjustments in order to re-open the OOS as soon as possible and update the PaRC regarding progress on at least a quarterly basis.

Recommendation:

- A. OVR provides quarterly reports (at a minimum) to the PaRC on how many people were added to and removed from the waiting list in each category each quarter.

OVR Response:

OVR will provide quarterly reports to the PaRC during the quarterly full council meetings to address how many people were added to and removed from the OOS waiting list in each category.

Recommendation:

- B. OVR provides quarterly reports (at a minimum) to the PaRC and the State Board of VR on new application response times.

OVR Response:

*Per RSA Monitoring Report (Nov. 2020) and agency planned corrective action steps, OVR will update existing policies and procedures to ensure that the eligibility determination timeline commences at the time of application. OVR will offer alternative methods of referral to enhance the referral experience for stakeholders. OVR shall provide updated policy and procedures to RSA for review. OVR staff will receive future training related to these changes and the PaRC will be updated on progress on a quarterly basis.

Recommendation:

C. OVR establishes a clear deadline for reopening the OOS with intermediate steps and goals to re-open the OOS on time. OVR provides quarterly reports (at a minimum) to the PaRC on progress and factors affecting progress toward achieving the goal of re-opening the OOS on a permanent basis by the deadline.

OVR Response:

The goal of OVR is to open the OOS as soon as possible. The Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) has approved OVR to review and evaluate the ability to open the OOS on a quarterly basis. OVR has been evaluating the ability to open the OOS on a quarterly basis. OVR will report to the PaRC quarterly plans to re-open or close the OOS and factors affecting progress toward achievement of this goal.

Recommendation:

- D. Identify resources and opportunities outside of OVR for organizations to provide employment services to OVR customers on the waitlist.

OVR Response:

OVR will seek opportunities to leverage other public and private resources that may provide employment services to OVR customers on the waitlist. During the closed OOS, information and referral services will remain available. Individuals will be given information and referrals to other appropriate Federal and State programs, including programs carried out by other components of the Statewide Workforce Development System, such as the one-stop centers, known in the Commonwealth as the PA CareerLinks.

1) Federal, State, and local agencies and programs:

Current agreements include the following:

1. The Pennsylvania Department of Health (DOH), Department of Labor & Industry (DLI), Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE), and Department of Human Services (DHS) entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in 1999, with a 2006 Addendum and a Transition MOU addendum in 2010, to devote staff and other agency resources to promote successful post-school outcomes for youth/young adults with disabilities in transition.

2. Per WIOA amendments to the Rehabilitation Act, an updated MOU was signed in October 2020 between OVR and PDE to share responsibility to prepare students with disabilities for successful community employment.

3. An MOU is in progress between OVR and the Bureau of Special Education (BSE) to share funds for technical assistance positions that will support the MOU between OVR and BSE.

4. A Data Sharing Agreement between OVR and the Office of Developmental Programs (ODP) has been finalized to exchange information on the services delivered to individuals enrolled in DHS ODP programs who also receive or received services through OVR. OVR and ODP are sharing data between the CWDS and the Home & Community Services Information System.

5. OVR and ODP issued a joint bulletin that dictates when an individual receiving Supported Employment (SE) services can move to ODP-funded extended services and documentation requirements.

6. An MOU was initiated between OVR and the DHS Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (OMHSAS) in 2017, which ends on June 30, 2022. The MOU allows for a funding transfer from DHS to OVR, which supports opportunities for customers with serious mental illnesses and serious emotional disturbances to participate in the Certified Peer Specialist (CPS) training opportunities to achieve competitive integrated employment.

7. An MOU has been developed between OVR and DHS, Bureau of Juvenile Justice Services (BJJS). The MOU was established in May 2017 to provide Pre-Employment Transition Services to adjudicated students and youth placed in Pennsylvania Academic Career Technical Training (PACTT) affiliate locations. The MOU was amended in July 2019 to also include dependent students and youth. OVR has collaborated with the PACTT affiliates to provide the 5 required Pre-Employment Transition Services to this vulnerable population to expose them to as many employment and post-secondary options as possible.

8. OVR has entered into Institute of Higher Education Agreements with the 14 State owned Universities under the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education and 14 Community Colleges.

9. VR partners with Pennsylvania Centers for Independent Living (CIL) by executing grants and contracts for CILs to provide services and outreach projects to individuals with disabilities within community settings.

10. OVR has entered into IGAs with the SDoL, ODP and OMHSAS for the provision of OVR services and referrals.

11. *OVR supports a variety of Project SEARCH programs across Pennsylvania that offer educational opportunities for individuals with significant disabilities, primarily intellectual and developmental. OVR's support is through cooperative agreements with county mental health offices, local school districts, and employers that include hospital systems and local government units.

4. Non-Educational Agencies Serving Out-of-School Youth; and

- *OVR supports a variety of Project SEARCH initiatives across Pennsylvania. Project SEARCH is a one-year internship program that provides educational opportunities for individuals with significant disabilities, primarily intellectual and developmental disabilities. The focus can be on students in their last year of high school, young adults with disabilities, or adults with disabilities. The program takes place at a host business in a healthcare, government, or other business setting where a total immersion in the workplace facilitates the teaching and learning process as well as the acquisition of employability and marketable work skills.

OVR strategies to achieve goals and priorities:

Goal #1: Increase Employment Opportunities for Individuals with Disabilities.

1. Expand the availability of apprenticeships, internships and OJTs for individuals with disabilities.

*Over the next two years, OVR intends to work collaboratively with the Department of Labor & Industry's ATO Office (Apprenticeship & Training). An agreement between OVR and ATO to use matching funds to promote pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship pathways for OVR customers will allow customers to achieve quality employment outcomes at high wages. This collaboration will include activities and services related to promoting opportunities, training OVR staff on how to facilitate customer access to pre-apprenticeships and apprenticeships, and forming connections with registered apprenticeship sponsors.

As of November 5, 2021, OVR had 815 filled salaried positions and 217 vacancies. This figure includes 149 filled salaried positions at the Hiram G. Andrews Center. Statewide OVR had a total of 313 filled Vocational Rehabilitation Counseling Professionals (including Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors, Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Trainees, and Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Interns), 19 Vision Rehabilitation Therapist positions, and 9 Orientation and Mobility Specialist positions.

In relation to the number of employees within OVR, the number of OVR customers who had an open VR case as of June 30, 2021, was 45,535 individuals.

*Over the next two years using information from the CSNA assessments, OVR will be evaluating the need and considering establishing agreements with the following governmental entities: PA Department of Education, DLI Apprenticeship Office, agreements with 10 local Workforce Development Boards, an agreement with the Commonwealth's Office of Administration, and an agreement with Human Resources within the Office of Administration.

- *An MOU is being developed between OVR and the PA Department of Education's Bureau of Special Education to increase engagement of students with the most significant disabilities. The MOU will enable the creation of a Transition Employment & Agency Mentor-Navigator (Team Navigators) within each Intermediate Unit (IU). OVR, subject to availability of funds, will jointly provide funding over four (4) years to be used exclusively for the operation and administration of technical assistance.
- *An agreement is being considered with the DLI Apprenticeship Office for the use of matching funds to promote pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship pathways for OVR customers that will allow them to achieve quality employment outcomes at high wages.

- *In addition, OVR will explore the development of agreements with 10 local Workforce Development Boards under the Commonwealth's Workforce Development Program to pilot a jointly-funded Disability Employment Initiative that will allow the creation of disability navigators to work closely with OVR Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors to serve students, youth, and adults with disabilities.
- *OVR will also explore an agreement with the Commonwealth's Office of Administration to develop accessibility testing through the use of Information Technology Accommodation Personnel throughout all OVR combined District Offices. Accessibility testing verifies that digital content and services are usable by people with disabilities. Information Technology Accommodation Personnel will also coach, mentor, and train others who are learning to do accessibility testing.

- *Finally, OVR will explore an agreement with Human Resources within the Office of Administration for the development of a Career Transition Professional (CTP). The CTP may serve as the Commonwealth of PA Employer Single Point of Contact (SPOC) in the recruitment, retention, and onboarding of all individuals with disabilities that meet the employer identified requirements for employment.

- B. THE STATE'S PERFORMANCE UNDER THE PERFORMANCE ACCOUNTABILITY MEASURES OF SECTION 116 OF WIOA
- *Using guidance received in TAC-22-02 related to performance goals and instructions for the core programs, OVR will be establishing these measures and negotiating with RSA to confirm expected performance levels.

- *The decision to retain the OOS option is based on projections in description k. Annual estimates, and the expectation that as our country experiences economic recovery post-Covid, indicate that more individuals will once again be seeking employment opportunities and will likely seek vocational rehabilitation services through OVR.

- *Over the next two years, OVR intends to work collaboratively with DLI's ATO office. An agreement between OVR and ATO to use matching funds to promote pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship pathways for OVR customers will allow customers to achieve quality employment outcomes at high wages. This collaboration will include activities and services related to promoting opportunities, training OVR staff on how to facilitate customer access to pre-apprenticeships and apprenticeships, and forming connections with registered apprenticeship sponsors.

*In addition, HGAC is consulting with the ATO and OVR BSOD to develop a pre-apprenticeship training program. A short-term, pre-apprenticeship training program will be designed to provide the necessary preparatory safety skills and certifications for individuals who are interested in entering registered apprenticeships. HGAC will provide the pre-apprenticeship training on site and registered employers will provide the technical training. Specific preparatory skills and certifications will be determined by participating employers, based on their industry's respective needs for skilled workers. OVR intends to explore an agreement between the Hiram G. Andrews Center and the Mon Valley Initiative to use matching VR grant funds to create pre-apprenticeship pathways to traditional apprenticeship in the trades as well as non-traditional apprenticeships (e.g., IT, Healthcare/Medical, Manufacturing, Customer Service and Hospitality, Conservation, Renewable Energy & Natural Resources, Service industries, Culinary and Food Service).

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.

*OVR will explore an agreement with the PA Office of Administration Human Resources Office for the development of a Career Transition Professional (CTP). The CTP may serve as the Commonwealth of PA Employer Single Point of Contact (SPOC) in the recruitment, retention, and onboarding of all individuals with disabilities that meet the employer identified requirements for employment.

8. HOW THE AGENCY'S STRATEGIES WILL BE USED TO:

B. SUPPORT INNOVATION AND EXPANSION ACTIVITIES; AND

*OVR will explore agreements with 10 local Workforce Development Regions within the Commonwealth's Workforce Development Program to pilot a jointly funded Disability Employment Initiative that will allow the creation of disability navigators to work closely with OVR Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors to serve students, youth, and adults with disabilities.

8. HOW THE AGENCY'S STRATEGIES WILL BE USED TO:

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.

*OVR will explore an agreement with the Commonwealth's Office of Administration to develop accessibility testing through use of Information Technology Accommodation Personnel throughout all OVR combined District Offices. Accessibility testing verifies that digital content and services are usable by people with disabilities. Information Technology Accommodation Personnel will also coach, mentor, and train others who are learning to do accessibility testing.

- Thank you for taking the time today to listen and learn about additions to OVR's 2-Year Modification to the VR Services Portion of the State Plan.
- A complete copy of the draft VR Services Portion of the Plan is available on [OVR's website](#).
- Public Comments will be accepted at this time, until the end of the session. Those wishing to comment should remain on the call.
- Additional comments can be sent to ra-li-ovrfeedback@pa.gov until 5:00 p.m. on Thursday, February 3, 2022.