

## **Vocational Rehabilitation Program**

*The Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Services Portion of the 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:*

### **Input of State Rehabilitation Council**

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

- (A) 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;*
- (B) the Designated State unit's response to the Council's input and recommendations; and*
- (C) the designated State unit's explanations for rejecting any of the Council's input or recommendations.*

The following documents were used to develop these recommendations to OVR:

1. The Pennsylvania Rehabilitation Council's (PaRC's) annual report (FFY 2014)
2. PaRC Customer Satisfaction Survey
3. Review of items in last year's Attachment 4.2(c)
4. Comments received at 2014 State Plan Meetings
5. Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) Monitoring Report
6. Statewide Needs Assessment
7. Workforce Development Statistics

### **Commendations:**

- PaRC commends the leadership of OVR for their partnership with PaRC in regard to policy development and review and Council representation on workgroups.
- PaRC praises OVR leadership for encouraging and supporting stakeholder input such as their involvement in the Pennsylvania Disability Employment & Empowerment Summit (PADES) and Transition conferences, and the customer satisfaction advisory committee.

### **1. Transition**

Issue: Support for students between ages 14 to 21 is critical to creating an expectation for employment after school is finished.

#### **Recommendations:**

- a. Work with Youth Leadership Network and Youth Workforce Investment Boards (WIB)

**OVR Response:** OVR continues to work with the Pennsylvania Youth Leadership Network (PYLN) through the Pennsylvania Community on Transition State Leadership Team. OVR is part of a subcommittee working on Youth Engagement led by members of the PYLN. Together, we are exploring new ways to reach out to local WDB Youth Councils and to increase participation of our youth with disabilities throughout the state in these organizations.

- b. Continue relationships established with the Department of Human Services (and the office of Developmental Programs), and Department of Education

**OVR Response:** OVR is represented on the PA Developmental Disabilities Council, the Governor's Special Education Advisory Panel and the Employment First State Leadership Mentoring Project, all of which are comprised of representatives from partnering agencies.

OVR continues to be a lead member of the Pennsylvania Community on Transition Statewide Leadership

Team (SLT). OVR has presented on various employment topics for the SLT's monthly webinar series this year and will continue to do so in the upcoming year. OVR is a member of the Renew Advisory Board through the Department of Education. This program works with the schools to assist youth who are at risk for dropping out.

OVR continues to work with the PA Department of Human Services, Office of Developmental Programs, the Bureau of Autism Services, the Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse, and the Office of Long Term Living. OVR has reached out to the Department of Health, Bureau of Children, Youth and Family Services to spread awareness of both agency's initiatives and services. OVR is also working with the Bureau of Juvenile Justice in understanding the services needed by adjudicated youth and in assisting our district offices in learning more about this population and how to best determine and provide appropriate services to them. OVR maintains contact with the agencies through monthly or quarterly phone calls. OVR also participates on Advisory Boards and Committees when invited by our collaborating partners. OVR has served on the Department of Health's Traumatic Injury Advisory Board for over 10 years.

- c. Continue evaluating Early Reach program for effectiveness

**OVR Response:** OVR is collecting Early Reach data. The expectation is that the numerical and student data collected early (beginning at age 14) will facilitate and streamline the application and eligibility process for youth with disabilities. This plan may take a few years to implement, but it is in the discussion stage. The criteria to measure the effectiveness of the Early Reach Initiative are still being determined. One method will include OVR better identifying how youth with disabilities first learned about OVR and how they were formally referred for services. In addition, there are requirements for data collection and services to youth and students with disabilities included in WIOA amendments to the Rehabilitation Act.

## 2. Training for OVR staff and Counselors of Consumer Customers

Issue: Important that the public face of OVR be one that is understanding and helping individuals to achieve employment goals.

Recommendations:

- a. Continue working on improving Consumer Customer satisfaction.

**OVR Response:** OVR has been committed to providing at least one general customer service video conference training each year. We will continue to develop and offer at least one customer service related video conference session in 2016.

- b. Work towards implementation of recommendations from "Defining Positive Customer Service in the State Vocational Rehabilitation System" report.

**OVR Response:** OVR will continue to collaborate with the PaRC to implement recommendations from Defining Positive Customer Service in the State Vocational Rehabilitation System. We have mutually decided to develop a subcommittee, made up of PaRC and OVR participants who will further evaluate necessary changes as a result of this report. We are confident the recommendations contained in the report will assist us in providing more effective and efficient customer service. OVR commends the PaRC for initiating this project which resulted in true collaboration and will positively impact service provision in the future.

## 3. CACs (Citizen Advisory Committees)

Issue: The CACs are the connection between OVR and Consumer Customers. Each district has their own process for the meetings and for notification about the meetings.

Recommendations:

- a. OVR to take a more active role in the guidance and development of the CACs.

**OVR Response:** Development and guidance of CACs can be added to the agenda at an Executive Director's meeting for discussion. However, the intent of the CAC is to be locally-run, consumer-driven and responsive to CAC member recommendations. OVR will promote CAC meetings as opportunities present themselves.

- b. OVR to issue a memo to District Administrators on expectations on utilizing and promoting CACs and citizen involvement (for example including a calendar of PaRC meeting schedule and request to not schedule local meetings at the same time).

**OVR Response:** OVR Bureau Directors will work with the new Executive Director to develop expectations for how CACs can best be utilized.

- c. OVR to gather best practices from the CACs that are effective and well attended by consumer customers and share with all CACs

**OVR Response:** Sharing of District Office CAC best practices can be added as an agenda item at an Executive Director's Meeting, at Regional DA/ADA Meetings and during DA/ADA Conference Calls for discussion.

- d. Continue to advise CACs on use of PaRC's website for agendas and minutes

**OVR Response:**

OVR liaison to PaRC sends monthly reminders to district offices and forwards updated information to PaRC for posting on their website.

### 3. Information Sharing

Issue: It is important to get information to consumer customer quickly and in a manner they can access. This will allow greater involvement and lead to a positive customer experience.

Recommendations:

- a. Use current technology to get word out.

**OVR Response:** OVR has already connected with 340 followers on LinkedIn and 580 on Facebook as part of our agency's social media initiative, which was launched in October 2013. OVR has been delivering content on a more frequent basis since the platforms became available. Information is gathered from local district offices, statewide events and national sources. Social media posts have highlighted OVR-sponsored activities and events, agency accomplishments, customer success stories and other information pertinent to our consumer and business customers. OVR will increase and refine our social media presence moving forward, with a continued emphasis on delivering quality content and relevant information to all of our customers in a timely manner. OVR will continue to evolve with the changing social media landscape and adapt our strategies as necessary in order to ensure that the material we provide is accessible and impactful.

- b. Make sure all communication is accessible.

**OVR Response:** In collaboration with the L&I Press Office, the Business Services and Outreach Division Chief and Communications Administrative Officer (position to be filled) will review accessible formats for all OVR web information to ensure that current brochures and publications can be provided in large print, Braille or read by using alternative speech recognition technology. Additionally, communication materials can be tested for accessibility, and recommendations can be made by OVR's Assistive Technology Specialist.

- c. Make sure captioning is available in all public meetings OVR holds.

**OVR Response:** All district offices ensure that captioning and/or signing is available at state plan public meetings.

- d. Review lead times for dissemination of information to make sure it is far enough ahead.

**OVR Response:** OVR will strive to provide information at least two weeks prior to meetings.

#### 4. Partnership with PaRC

Issue: PaRC and OVR have mutually benefited from a collaborative relationship as the advisory body in reviewing policies and priorities.

Recommendations:

- a. Continue involvement in OVR leadership with Council.

**OVR Response:** OVR will continue to partner with the Council as opportunities present themselves for mutual benefit and input. Specifically, we will be collaborating with PaRC on the results of the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA) and future planning based upon those findings. OVR will also have a presence on PaRC committees as needed. In addition, we will be requesting additional input on the ongoing development of the OVR/PaRC combined customer satisfaction survey process.

- b. Continue seeking involvement in policy review and implementation.

**OVR Response:** OVR involves Council members in policy workgroups. We provide subsequent drafts of new and revised policies to the PaRC Policy Committee. The workgroup leader also presents the draft to the PaRC at their full Council meetings to explain the policy and answer any questions.

#### 5. OVR Staff and Counselors as Role Models

Issue: People with disabilities need to see Counselors and Management and staff of OVR that have disabilities. This is a benefit to both Consumer and Business Customer to see the possibilities of people with disabilities.

Recommendations:

- a. Continue and increase outreach to people with disabilities and cultural minorities in Counselor and leadership roles within OVR.

**OVR Response:** Through collaborative initiatives with higher education institutions, OVR will continue to expand recruitment and outreach to students with disabilities for entry-level VR Counselor positions. Collaboration with universities on federal RSA grant applications that seek to provide scholarship opportunities for students with disabilities will further this initiative. This includes supporting the efforts of university programs to apply for and implement Long Term Training Grant programs to train VR Counselors to work for the public VR program in Pennsylvania. In addition, OVR will continue the following activities as part of its overall VR Counselor recruitment initiative:

- Expand and maintain OVR's partnership with Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU's) that offer a Master's Degree Rehabilitation Counseling Program. This includes campus visitations, presentations, use of telecommunication technology and meetings with students for targeted recruitment.

- Maintain active membership with the National Association of Multicultural Rehabilitation Concerns (NAMRC) and the National Council on Rehabilitation Education (NCRE).
- Visit colleges, universities, and appropriate job fairs in conjunction with the Office of Equal Opportunity in L&I in order to recruit potential job applicants who are from diverse cultural backgrounds and applicants with disabilities.

b. Review data (such as what is found in Attachment 4.10) to see if numbers are increasing.

**OVR Response:** Voluntarily disclosed data related to OVR counselors, management and staff that have disabilities shall be compiled, reviewed, and reported on in 6-month intervals. Results will reveal whether or not the number of OVR counselors, management and staff with disabilities has increased or decreased versus the previous 6-month period.

### **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;*
- (2) the designated State unit will approve each proposed service before it is put into effect; and*
- (3) requirements of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan will apply to the services approved under the waiver.*

1. OVR entered into an Interagency Agreement with Berks Career and Technology Center (BCTC) effective 10/1/14 to provide school-to-work transition services to OVR eligible youth with disabilities who are enrolled in approved training programs at the BCTC and attend one of 16 public school districts within Berks County.

The interagency agreement, named "Work Partners," provides for joint funding (including salary & benefits) of two positions which did not previously exist at BCTC:

- School-to-Work Coordinator (Professional)
- Job Trainer (Paraprofessional)

Services to be provided through this interagency agreement are career and technical education instruction, work-based experiences, job development, placement and follow-up and job coaching.

The goals of the Work Partners Interagency Agreement are:

- To serve 50-65 OVR eligible youth with disabilities during FFY 2015, 2016 and 2017
- To achieve greater than 50% successful competitive, community-integrated job placements among those served
- To increase the number of students served in the Service Occupations Cluster

The Interagency Agreement was approved by the Berks CTC Board of Directors on May 28, 2014 and signed by the school's authorized representative. Berks CTC provides 21.3% of project funding which serves as local/state match. OVR provides the remaining 78.7% from federal VR funds.

OVR is optimistic that this program has the potential for statewide replication. Pennsylvania has 67 counties, 15 OVR District Offices, and 85 Career & Technology Centers.

A second interagency agreement was developed with Greene County Human Services (GCHS), Intermediate Unit #1 (IU1) and OVR to provide school-to-work transition services for OVR eligible youth with intellectual disabilities enrolled in local education agencies within Greene County.

OVR, GCHS, and IU #1 will jointly provide funding in the amount of \$60,000 per year for a two (2) year period to be used exclusively for the operation, and administration of the "School-to-Work" services for OVR eligible youth with intellectual disabilities who are enrolled in local education agencies throughout Greene County.

Services to be provided through this interagency agreement are work-based educational experiences, on-the-job support through a job coach, independent living skills development and community involvement all oriented toward competitive, community-integrated employment.

The goals of the Greene County program are:

- During fiscal years 2014-2016 this pilot project will serve approximately 20 unduplicated OVR eligible and IDD waiver program eligible youth through this interagency agreement.
- As a result of the services provided through this agreement, it is expected that OVR will successfully place and vocationally rehabilitate approximately 54% of those individuals served.

For the Greene County Agreement, OVR will provide 78.7% of the funding (Federal- VR funding) and GCHS and IU #1 will each provide 10.65% of the funding, transferring to OVR 21.3 % of the total (Local/ State match) funding.

Statewide replication of this program will provide OVR with opportunities to braid funding to serve OVR eligible youth with disabilities and to collaborate with the Departments of Education & Human Services more effectively.

2. Each Interagency Agreement may be amended only by written consent of all parties. Such amendments become part of the Interagency Agreements upon the signature of the respective designees. Signatories on the Work Partners project are Berks CTC and OVR. Signatories on the Greene County project are Greene County Human Services (GCHS), IU1 and OVR.

The parties to these agreements shall provide the services as specified and described in Appendix A of each of the Agreements. Such services shall be provided consistent with the budget as described in Appendix B of said Agreements.

3. All other State Plan requirements of the VR services portion of the State Plan will apply to the services approved under the waiver.

### **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:*

*Federal, State, and local agencies and programs;*

- Memoranda of Understanding currently exist between OVR, PDE and the Office of Developmental Programs (ODP). In light of the WIOA amendments, discussion has been initiated to update the MOUs.
- Discussions are underway to partner with the Juvenile Justice System and Area Office of Aging.
- Institute of Higher Education (IHE) Agreements, typically valid for five years, are currently being renewed.
- Partnership with PA Centers for Independent Living (CILs) in the form of grants, contracts, and LOUs are on-going.
- Interagency Agreements are being developed with local Career and Technology Centers; Berks County is already established.

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

- OVR oversees agreements with Temple University's Assistive Technology Lending Library (ATLL), the Telecommunications Device Distribution Program (TDDP), and Pennsylvania Assistive Technology Foundation (PATF).
- OVR has multiple Assistive Technology (AT) providers on the fee schedule for customer services; some providers have LOUs.
- OVR establishes an annual contract via Invitation for Bid (IFB) with an AT provider for staff services.

*Programs carried out by the Under Secretary for Rural Development of the Department of Agriculture;*

- Currently, OVR does not have any agreements with the US Department of Agriculture.
- OVR and Penn State University are currently in discussion about an amended LOU agreement for the AgrAbility program.

*Noneducational agencies serving out-of-school youth; and*

- OVR has numerous LOUs with a variety of service providers serving all populations, including out-of-school youth.
- OVR has developed an On-the-Job Training (OJT) initiative specifically targeting youth.
- OVR has a goal to partner with community service providers to develop more programs to target transition aged youth.

*State use contracting programs.*

- As noted above, OVR has a MOU with ODP and is in the discussion stage of updating it.
- The possibility of an Interagency Agreement with the Department of Human Services (DHS) is being investigated.
- OVR oversees funding supplied by the Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission (PUC) to Temple University for the TDDP program.
- OVR oversees funding supplied by the PUC to the National Federation for the Blind for the Newsline Print Media Access Program.
- OVR has supported Temple University's efforts to begin a Wireless Expansion Initiative financially supported by the PUC.

### **Coordination with Education Officials**

*Describe:*

- (a) 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.*
- (b) 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;*
  - b. transition planning by personnel of the designated State agency and educational agency that facilitates the development and implementation of their individualized education programs;*
  - c. roles and responsibilities, including financial responsibilities, of each agency, including provisions for determining State lead agencies and qualified personnel responsible for transition services;*
  - d. procedures for outreach to and identification of students with disabilities who need transition services.*

OVR continues to collaborate with its agency partners on the Pennsylvania Statewide Leadership Team (PA SLT) which evolved as the result of the IDEA Memorandum of Understanding implemented in 1999 and addended in 2006 and 2010. The PA SLT has recommended that the IDEA Memorandum of Understanding be revised to incorporate changes in Transition Services regulated by WIOA and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 as amended. OVR representatives meet regularly with representatives from the Pennsylvania Department of Education's Bureau of Special Education and Bureau of Career & Technology Education to review policies, procedures, initiatives, and projects to ensure that eligible students with disabilities who are still enrolled in secondary education and youth with disabilities who are no longer engaged in secondary education are receiving the vocational rehabilitation services that they need to successfully transition from school to work and independence.

As OVR awaits regulatory guidance from RSA, several initiatives are being developed to implement "pre-employment transition services" to increase interagency collaboration, to create and implement new interagency agreements and to update Memoranda of Understanding pertaining to transition from school to work and adult services. Technical assistance, agency cross-training and resource sharing will be required to assist LEAs to end utilization of sub-minimum wage employment as a model for transition planning. Discovery and customized employment as well as other innovative approaches will be utilized to assist the students with the most significant disabilities to exit secondary school with the goal of achieving competitive, integrated employment.

OVR's Transition Policy, which was updated as recently as 2013, will be updated again to reflect changes once final regulations of the Rehabilitation Act as amended by WIOA become available. Ongoing training and technical assistance will be provided to ensure that OVR is effectively providing Pre-Employment Transition Services to students with disabilities who are eligible or potentially eligible for VR services. Ongoing training is especially important due to the number of new OVR employees.

The policy provides for the following:

- Outreach to youth and young adults with disabilities and their families/advocates to provide information on OVR services and vocational planning beginning at age fourteen (14) or the age of onset of disability, if later.
- Accept referrals of students with disabilities at least two (2) years prior to graduation, or earlier on a case by case basis when appropriate.
- Provide consultation to students with disabilities, youth with disabilities, parents/families/advocates, LEAs, and other transition partners on vocational issues, the Rehabilitation Act as amended and other legislation that affects youth and young adults with disabilities, other partners, and other resources.
- Refer cases from OVR's Bureau of Blindness and Visual Services (BBVS) Specialized Services to BBVS Vocational Rehabilitation when the students with disabilities reach transition age and eligibility is determined.
- Develop an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) for eligible customers before students with disabilities graduate or exit high school.

Each OVR district office will have a point of contact to collaborate with LEAs in its district. This will enable each LEA to speak with one contact person at each District Office. This point of contact will be responsible for contacting the appropriate OVR staff person and following up to assure that all questions and issues are resolved. Duties include:

- Collaboration with local education agencies (LEAs) and other community agencies that serve students and youth with disabilities.
- Provision of cross training for VR staff and LEA staff to provide a better understanding of transition policies and procedures.
- Professional cooperation so that instruction as outlined on a student's Individualized Education Plan (IEP) is consistent with the vocational goal on the IPE of a student with a disability.

- Seamless coordination of programs and supports as students with disabilities and youth with disabilities transition from entitlement to eligibility systems.
- Facilitation of self-advocacy and self-determination for transitioning students with disabilities and youth with disabilities.

Students with disabilities and youth with disabilities may be eligible, but may not be otherwise entitled under State and Federal law, to other services, including but not limited to mental health and intellectual disabilities services, vocational rehabilitation services, employment and training services, drug and alcohol services and other health related services.

LEAs are responsible for the provision of necessary goods and services for students with disabilities to access “a free and appropriate public education” to include the provision of transition services that promote movement from school to post-school activities as outlined in the IEP. Students with disabilities who may not be entitled to special education services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), as amended, are entitled to related aids and services under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, as amended. LEAs are also responsible, under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), to ensure that their facilities, resources and technology are accessible to the public.

OVR is responsible for the development of an IPE that promotes or facilitates the accomplishment of short-term, intermediate and long-term vocational rehabilitation goals and objectives. OVR will provide Pre-Employment Transition Services as regulated by the Rehabilitation Act as amended for eligible or potentially eligible students with disabilities with 15% of its federal allocation of General Funds to the maximum extent possible. All other services will be provided when necessary to determine eligibility for OVR services and if the services are in the individual’s IPE.

OVR may agree to cover costs if a local interagency agreement exists in which it is indicated that OVR shall do so, or if it is in the best interest of the student. In the latter instance, OVR staff will consider pursuing reimbursement from the LEA utilizing the interagency dispute resolution mechanism outlined in the state MOU.

OVR representatives will:

- Meet with school personnel to discuss OVR transition services whenever possible.
- Provide information regarding OVR programs and services available to students with disabilities and youth with disabilities.
- Assist the transitioning students with disabilities and youth with disabilities as well as their family/advocate with an application for OVR services.
- Serve as a consultant regarding employment supports and services.
- Supply information to students with disabilities and youth with disabilities regarding other relevant agencies and organizations.
- Attend school functions (i.e. college fairs, career days, disability fairs, open houses, etc.).
- Collaborate with the educational staff in providing career counseling and vocational exploration activities.
- Ensure that students and youth with blindness or a visual impairment are informed of BBVS Specialized Services for Children.

In order to identify youth and young adults with disabilities who may not be served in public schools under an IEP or 504 Plan, OVR will continue its collaborative relationships through its Memorandum of Understanding and local interagency agreements. This includes students and youth with disabilities covered under [Chapter 15 of the Pennsylvania Standards and Regulations](#). Outreach will be conducted to identify youth and young adults with disabilities who are underserved through other community partners, such as, but not limited to:

- Intermediate Units

- Career and Technology Centers
- Private schools
- Home schools
- Student assistance programs
- Summer employment programs
- Local Workforce Development Boards
- Home school organizations
- Juvenile justice system
- Foster youth organizations
- Homeless shelters/programs
- Medical facilities

OVR is the designated agency responsible to promote the employment of individuals with disabilities by providing vocational rehabilitation, job training, and placement services pursuant to the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, (29 U.S.C. §§ 701- et seq.), the Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1988, (43 P.S. § 682.1 et seq.) and Article XXII of the Administrative Code of 1929, as amended, (71 P.S. §580.1 et. seq.).

Section 101(a)(8)(B) of the Rehabilitation Act requires OVR to have in place a mechanism for interagency coordination with public institutions for higher education to ensure the provision of vocational rehabilitation services that:

- identify financial responsibility;
- specify terms and conditions of reimbursement;
- provide a system for resolution of disputes; and
- set forth procedures for coordination of services to individuals with disabilities who are both customers of OVR and students of the institution of higher education.

Agreements have been achieved with the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education (PASSHE) and all 14 community colleges. Negotiations continue with the four state-related institutions to include Penn State University, Lincoln University, Temple University and the University of Pittsburgh.

### **Cooperative Agreements with Private Nonprofit Organizations**

*Describe the manner in which the designated State agency establishes cooperative agreements with private non-profit VR service providers.*

The PA Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) maintains negotiated Letters of Understanding (LOUs) with more than 200 community service providers covering more than 1,000 different rehabilitation, independent living and related services. Many of those organizations are private and/or not-for-profit community rehabilitation providers.

LOUs define service programs and the corresponding conditions of purchase, including fees and effective/expiration dates, which exist between a rehabilitation service provider and OVR.

A LOU entered between OVR and a community service provider creates a locally developed, locally negotiated, and locally sensitive response to the rehabilitation service needs of persons with significant disabilities in the diverse areas of the commonwealth.

A LOU is neither a contract nor an agreement. It does not commit either provider or OVR to the sale or purchase of the defined services.

The continuing use of a LOU for OVR customers is reliant upon customer choice, satisfaction with the service, affordability, and the existence of available alternative services.

### **Arrangements and Cooperative Agreements for the Provision of Supported Employment Services**

*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.*

OVR will coordinate with other State agencies such as the Office of Developmental Programs, Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services, Office of Long Term Living, and other entities to provide supported employment services and extended employment services. OVR will continue to communicate and collaborate with these agencies to provide quality supported employment services and provide referrals and information regarding mutual customers. OVR will provide up-to-date information and training to State agencies and other entities to ensure the provision of supported employment services and extended services.

### **Coordination with Employers**

*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:*

*VR services; and*

PA OVR is routinely engaged with employer/business customers to better understand their workforce needs and how public VR can build our supply side of talent, i.e. the job seekers' industry skills to meet the demands required to help our business customers to be successful in competing in today's global marketplace. To accomplish this, OVR has Central Office staff who are available to meet with an employer to listen and explore their organization's unique culture to learn about the services or products they produce, to learn about talent needs, and how the leadership of a company or organization envisions their future workforce succession planning.

1. In response to an organization's demand side needs, OVR can suggest a talent recruitment process to bring qualified pre-screened individuals with a disability into their organization.
2. OVR will work with each business to target career ladders and pathways in competitive integrated employment that is a match to each VR consumer customer's unique aspirations, capacities and career goals and the succession plans of an organization.
3. OVR will keep the process simple by using a Single Point of Contact (SPOC) approach modeled after the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR) model to provide a national network of Points of Contact when large employers have needs across several states and regions.

OVR will provide:

1. National outreach to employers/businesses through the CSAVR National Employment Team, the VR-NET, and by participation in the Talent Acquisition Portal (TAP).
2. Statewide outreach through the Business Services and Outreach Division (BSOD) Chief, with Western, Central and Eastern BSOD Specialists by in-person meetings, regional and statewide Chamber of Commerce membership, networking, and Society of Human Resource Manager (SHRM) statewide and local organization involvement.
3. Local outreach through local combined agency District Offices and Hiram G. Andrews Center-HGAC Business Services team outreach in follow-up to VR-NET national inquiries by business, or BSOD Chief, Western, Central or Eastern Specialist employer/business contacts. Local combined agency teams will then actively coordinate

recruitment, on-boarding supports for qualified pre-screened VR hires and successful job performance and follow-up to ensure the continuing success of new talent and the overall satisfaction of the businesses and organizations who recruit OVR talent.

4. No-cost consultation to employers on disability etiquette, accessibility, accommodation needs and assistance to help retain an employer's workforce members following an injury or the onset of a disability.

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

OVR will collaborate with employers to provide students and youth with disabilities opportunities for career exploration that would lead to competitive, integrated employment. Students and youth with disabilities will be given opportunities to complete work-based learning experiences to develop soft skills and work-related skills. Students and youth with disabilities may be afforded opportunities to complete mock interviews with employers, job shadowing experiences, career days, disability mentoring days with employers, and other pre-employment transition services to prepare students for competitive integrated employment.

### **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:*

*The State Medicaid plan under title XIX of the Social Security Act;*

As a key member of the PA Employment First State Leadership Mentoring Project currently sponsored by a grant administered by the Office of Disability Employment Policy, OVR will partner with agencies within the Department of Human Services to ensure that the employment needs of individuals with disabilities are met, that cost services are comprehensive, effective, innovative and not duplicative, and that every individual with a disability who wants to work to achieve self-support will be given the opportunity to do so. The Departments of Labor & Industry, Education, Human Services, Transportation and Health, under the leadership of OVR, will execute and commit to coordinating the interagency agreement and collaboration required to secure and maintain community integrated employment for youth and adults with disabilities. Elements of the inter-departmental and interagency agreement shall fully address:

1. interdepartmental eligibility and enrollment processes;
2. data collection, sharing and reporting;
3. service coordination, resource leveraging and braiding of funding; and
4. quality assurance and improvement resulting in the collective accountability and performance measurement needed to substantially increase the numbers of Pennsylvanians in competitive integrated employment.

*The State agency responsible for providing services for individuals with developmental disabilities; and*

The agreements below outline the responsibilities of each agency in the area of service delivery and funding. OVR and ODP are currently working on a coordination policy to enhance the employment outcomes for individuals with intellectual disabilities. The intended result is for a more seamless entry into employment for individuals with intellectual disabilities and for the coordination of extended services to allow individuals to maintain long-term employment. This is important because many of the supported employment services assist individuals with intellectual disabilities to gain, stabilize and maintain successful employment.

*The State agency responsible for providing mental health services.*

OVR uses many avenues to ensure collaboration and partnership in the delivery of supported employment and extended services. These include a formal written MOU at the state level between OVR, the Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (OMHSAS) and the Office of Developmental Programs (ODP). At the local level, agreements

between the 21 OVR District Offices and 43 ODP/OMHSAS Administrative Entities exist to ensure that shared customers of both funding sources are receiving needed services at the appropriate time.

**Comprehensive System of Personnel Development; Data System on Personnel and Personnel Development**

*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:*

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

As of December 31, 2014 OVR had 1,029 filled salaried positions and 146 vacancies. This figure includes 198 filled salaried positions at the Hiram G. Andrews Center (HGAC). Statewide, OVR had a total of 405 filled Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Counselor positions, 23 Vision Rehabilitation Therapist positions, and 11 Orientation and Mobility Specialists positions. The current complement of VR Counselors requires that OVR maintain an Order of Selection in order to adequately serve and meet the needs of eligible VR customers at this time.

<b>Job Title</b>	<b>Filled Positions</b>	<b>Vacancies</b>	<b>Projected Vacancies Next 5 years</b>
VR Counselor	400	25	92
VR Counselor Deaf and Hard of Hearing	19	2	4
VR Counselor Placement	1	0	1
Vision Rehabilitation Therapist	23	1	3
Orientation and Mobility Specialists	11	7	6

OVR projects that in the next five years approximately 97 VR Counselors will become eligible to retire. This will be an average of 19 VR Counselors retiring per year. However, additional numbers of new VR Counselors will be needed due to promotions of VR Counselors to higher positions within OVR. OVR projects that an average of 20-25 new VR Counselors will be hired per year in the next 5-10 years. To assist with recruitment of VR Counselors, OVR plans to continue its expanded utilization of the "VR Counselor Internship" Program to attract qualified VR Counselors during their last semester of graduate school. There is expected to be an adequate number of VR Counselor candidates to fill vacancies over the next 5-10 years. However, certain locations within the state may require targeted recruitment efforts at any given time.

During FFY 2014, 21,264 individuals applied for VR services, 16,241 individuals were found eligible for VR services and approximately 55,000 individuals received VR services from OVR. As a result, 8,546 individuals were placed in employment in FFY 2014. In the same time period, 3,671 individuals received Independent Living Older Blind Services and 1,379 individuals were referred to the Hiram G. Andrews Center.

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

CORE-accredited university programs in Pennsylvania include: Pennsylvania State University, the University of Pittsburgh, the University of Scranton and Edinboro University of Pennsylvania. These programs graduate approximately 47 students per year with a Master’s Degree in Rehabilitation Counseling.

Institutions	Students Enrolled	Employees sponsored by agency and/or RSA	Graduates sponsored by agency and/or RSA	Graduates from the previous year
Penn State University	20	0	0 OVR & 6 RSA	21
University of Pittsburgh	39	0	0 OVR & 0 RSA	8
Edinboro University of PA	13	0	0 OVR & 0 RSA	7
University of Scranton	29	0	0 OVR & 0 RSA	11

By providing the number of individuals who have obtained a master’s degree in rehabilitation counseling, we are suggesting that this is also the number of personnel who are eligible for certification (CRCC) or licensure.

*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.*

OVR Counselor Recruitment

In addition to the 47 available students graduating from in-state graduate degree programs, Pennsylvania OVR can recruit students from CORE-approved and other universities that offer a Master’s Degree in Rehabilitation Counseling nationwide. Pennsylvania residency requirements are waived under the State Civil Service Commission for the VR Counselor Internship position and other VR Counselor classifications in OVR. This waiver provides OVR with an opportunity to recruit students nationwide and offer paid VR Counselor Intern positions to interested master’s degree students who are in their final semester of graduate school. This paid internship allows OVR to attract and recruit candidates for VR Counselor positions who have a Master’s Degree in Rehabilitation while they are still in school and before they are recruited by other agencies. The residency waiver and the paid Internship position also assist in OVR’s efforts to recruit and hire individuals with disabilities and those from diverse and minority backgrounds.

OVR’s Counselor Internship program continues to serve as an example amongst state VR agencies that seek to attract rehabilitation counseling students for employment. While surrounding states offer internship opportunities to students with competitive compensation, none within the northeastern region offer permanent positions to interns upon satisfactory completion of the probationary period and/or successful completion of the rehabilitation counseling graduate degree.

Through collaborative initiatives with higher education institutions, OVR will continue to expand recruitment and outreach to students with disabilities for entry-level VR Counselor positions. Collaboration with universities on federal

RSA grant applications that seek to provide scholarship opportunities for students with disabilities will further this initiative. This includes supporting the efforts of university programs to apply for and implement Long Term Training Grant programs to train VR Counselors to work for the public VR program in Pennsylvania. In addition, OVR will continue the following activities as part of its overall VR Counselor recruitment initiative:

- Expand and maintain OVR's partnership with Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU's) that offer a Master's Degree Rehabilitation Counseling Program. This includes campus visits, onsite presentations, use of telecommunication technology, and one-on-one meetings with students for targeted recruitment. OVR has established relationships with the following HBCUs nationwide: Alabama State University, University of the District of Columbia, Fort Valley State University, Southern University and A&M College, Coppin State University, University of Maryland Eastern Shore, North Carolina A&T State University, Winston-Salem State University and South Carolina State University. OVR will also continue to build relationships with program coordinators at graduate training programs in Puerto Rico who offer rehabilitation counseling disciplines including Bayamon Central University, Pontifical Catholic University of Puerto Rico and University of Puerto Rico.
- Maintain appointed membership on Coppin State University (CSU) and the University of Maryland Eastern Shore (UMES) Rehabilitation Counseling Program Advisory Committees. Both are HBCU's in the Mid-Atlantic region that prepare increased numbers of minority individuals for careers in the public VR program.
- Maintain active membership with the National Association of Multicultural Rehabilitation Concerns (NAMRC) and the National Council on Rehabilitation Education (NCRE).
- Visit colleges, universities, and appropriate job fairs in conjunction with the Office of Equal Opportunity in L&I in order to recruit potential job applicants who are from diverse cultural backgrounds and applicants with disabilities.

#### Orientation and Mobility Specialists and Vision Rehabilitation Therapists

Accredited university programs in Pennsylvania that train Orientation and Mobility Specialists and/or Vision Rehabilitation Therapists include: Salus University, the University of Pittsburgh's Vision Studies Program, and Kutztown University. These programs graduate a combined total of approximately 45 students per year. Graduates of these approved university programs are eligible for certification in Vision Rehabilitation Therapy or in Orientation and Mobility from the Academy for the Certification of Vision Rehabilitation and Education Professionals (ACVREP). In addition, OVR is able to recruit and hire Vision Rehabilitation Therapists and Orientation and Mobility Specialists who are being trained at universities nationwide and who reside outside of Pennsylvania.

Civil service test announcements for the Orientation and Mobility Specialist (O&M) Intern and Vision Rehabilitation Therapist (VRT) Intern positions were made available as of July 22, 2015. The Bureau of Blindness and Visual Services now offers paid internships for O&M and VRT students during their last semester of study. The O&M and VRT hourly wage is equivalent to the VRC Intern at Group 5 Step 1. This initiative will likely increase the candidate pool of available O&M and VRT professionals who are available for employment with PA OVR BBVS upon successful completion of their academic training.

*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 to ensure that designated State unit professional and paraprofessional personnel are adequately trained and prepared, including:*

- (i) *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*

- (ii) *the establishment and maintenance of education and experience requirements, to ensure that the personnel have a 21st century understanding of the evolving labor force and the needs of individuals with disabilities.*

Section 101(a)(7) of the Rehabilitation Act as amended, or the Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD), requires that State Vocational Rehabilitation agencies establish personnel standards for rehabilitation staff, including Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Counselors, that are consistent with any national or state-approved or recognized certification, licensing or registration that applies to a particular profession. The purpose of an agency's CSPD is to ensure the quality of personnel who provide VR services and who assist individuals with disabilities to achieve competitive employment outcomes through the VR program.

#### New Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors

In 2002, OVR raised the entry-level requirements for VR Counselor positions to reflect the requirements established by the Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification (CRCC) for Certified Rehabilitation Counselors (CRC). Specifically, all newly hired VR Counselors are required to possess a Master's Degree in Rehabilitation Counseling, Rehabilitation Administration or Rehabilitation Education; or CRC credentials or documented proof from CRCC of eligibility to obtain CRC credentials. The revised Civil Service Announcement for VR Counselor positions became effective on October 4, 2002. As of January 2015, a total of 672 VR Counselors and VR Counselor Interns were hired under the new entry-level requirements. All 672 new VR Counselors and Interns met CSPD standards for qualified rehabilitation professionals upon being hired.

The change in entry-level standards for VR Counselors, requiring a Master's Degree in Rehabilitation or CRC credentials or CRC eligibility, includes the following components that seek to ensure an adequate supply of VR Counselors to meet OVR's staffing needs for the next 5-10 years:

- Waiver of Residency - OVR has received, from the Pennsylvania Civil Service Commission, a waiver of Pennsylvania residency as a condition of application for the positions of Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor and VR Counselor Intern.
- Review of Experience and Training - OVR received approval from the Pennsylvania Civil Service Commission to implement an Experience and Training Examination as the means to assess a candidate's qualifications for the position of VR Counselor. This "review of experience and training" replaces the former written Civil Service Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Exam. The new VR Counselor Civil Service Position Announcement and the Experience and Training Review will remain open "until further notice" in order to assist with recruitment efforts and to ensure an adequate supply of qualified candidates.
- Designated Recruitment Specialist - OVR has designated a Rehabilitation Specialist position for the purpose of actively recruiting qualified VR Counselors within Pennsylvania and nationwide. This Specialist is assigned to work in the OVR Central Office and coordinates all OVR Counselor recruitment activities. The Recruitment Specialist, with the assistance of CORE-approved university faculty, field office staff, active OVR Advisory Councils, the Pennsylvania Social Services Union, and other key stakeholders, has developed and is implementing a proactive OVR Recruitment Plan. The goal of this plan is to attract and recruit adequate numbers of qualified VR Counselors, including those with disabilities and those from diverse cultural backgrounds and underrepresented groups, to fill future anticipated Counselor vacancies. The Recruitment Plan includes recruitment efforts to ensure an adequate supply of VR Counselors trained to provide services to specialty caseloads such as Counselors for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing and Counselors for the Blind and Visually Impaired.
- Paid Internship Program - OVR continues to utilize and expand the OVR paid Internship Program. This includes a waiver of Pennsylvania residency, so that the Internship Program can include out-of-state residents as

candidates for employment. This provides OVR with an edge in recruiting qualified VR Counselors while they are still in the final year of their Master's Degree in Rehabilitation Counseling Program. The Paid Internship Program offers a Master's Degree candidate, enrolled in an approved CORE accredited master's degree program in Rehabilitation Counseling, a permanent position as a VR Counselor upon graduation and the successful completion of the paid internship with OVR.

Effective January 7, 2006, OVR received approval to hire VR Counselor Interns as a salaried position instead of as an hourly position. This means that VR Counselor Interns will accrue sick days and vacation days and will receive health insurance, group life insurance and other employee benefits upon their date of hire. This change adds an additional employment incentive for Intern candidates to choose to work for Pennsylvania OVR. This continues to make Pennsylvania OVR an attractive and competitive employer of VR Counselors nationwide.

Effective November 1, 2006, OVR received approval to increase the pay scale for VR Counselor Interns statewide, and to hire staff above the minimum for VR Counselor Interns who choose to work in Norristown and Philadelphia District Offices. The annual salary statewide for the classification of VR Counselor Intern was increased from Pay Scale 4 to Pay Scale 5. Norristown and Philadelphia District Offices are authorized to hire VR Counselor Interns at Pay Scale 5, Step 9. This targeted increase for new staff in southeastern district offices provides an additional recruitment and hiring incentive for this challenging recruitment area and should help to relieve the higher numbers of vacancies in these offices.

Additional salary incentives have been implemented to assist with recruitment efforts to include:

- Norristown and Philadelphia District Offices are authorized to hire VR Counselors at Pay Scale 7, Step 5, which is consistent with the increase in these areas for VR Counselor Interns.
- VR Counselors for Deaf and Hard of Hearing in all offices across the commonwealth are authorized to be hired at a higher pay scale level (Pay Scale 7, Step 5).
- Vocational Rehabilitation Supervisors who are employed in the Philadelphia and Norristown District Offices receive a four pay step increase.

*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:*

- (i) 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*
- (ii) procedures for the acquisition and dissemination of significant knowledge from research and other sources to designated State unit professionals and paraprofessionals.*

OVR is committed to offering a plan for a comprehensive system of staff development and training. The goal is to ensure staff development for OVR personnel in areas essential to the effective management of OVR's program of VR services. OVR will no longer have the support of the RSA In-Service training grants, inclusive of the Basic and Quality Award Grants, as these programs were eliminated with the end of the five year grant in September 2015. Nevertheless, OVR will continue to provide for the training and development of personnel necessary to improve their ability to provide VR services leading to employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities, especially those with the most significant disabilities.

We are committed to a focus on certain priorities identified as "Customer Service" and "Multicultural Competency" in addition to the priorities included with the implementation of WIOA to include business services, transition services and

supported employment. In addition, particular attention will be devoted to offering training on assessment, vocational counseling, job placement, and rehabilitation technology.

Similar to past years, as part of developing a training plan, OVR will complete an annual internal survey to determine the training needs of professional and paraprofessional staff.

In order to ensure that OVR's personnel receive significant knowledge from research and other state-of-the-art methodologies, OVR seeks out and provides presentations by university faculty experts in the field of rehabilitation, and statewide and nationally known speakers at in-service training programs. In addition, OVR coordinates efforts with various professional associations such as the Pennsylvania Workforce Development Association, Pennsylvania Association of Rehabilitation Facilities, National Association of Multicultural Rehabilitation Concerns, Pennsylvania Rehabilitation Association and the Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired to train and retain qualified personnel.

*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.*

Entry-level requirements for Rehabilitation Counselors for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing require that candidates pass the Sign Communication Proficiency Interview (SCPI) before being offered a formal interview for employment. OVR district offices, in geographic areas where there are large numbers of individuals who speak Spanish, recruit and hire a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor who can speak both Spanish and English. In instances where there are no Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors who can communicate with a customer in his or her native language, an interpreter is hired to assist with communication.

#### Special Populations

OVR plans to continue efforts to work with the blind and deaf communities in order to recruit and hire qualified individuals who are deaf, blind, deaf-blind and hard of hearing. This includes recommendations and assistance provided by the OVR Advisory Committee for Persons who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing and the OVR Advisory Committee for the Blind of Pennsylvania. In addition, OVR has a Rehabilitation Specialist assigned to coordinate the Deaf, Hard of Hearing and Deaf-Blind Program in OVR. This specialist assists with recruitment and outreach to these special populations in order to attract qualified OVR candidates for employment.

*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.*

Training on OVR's Transition policy will be provided for the benefit of new counselors and Early Reach Coordinators (ERCs). The emphasis will be on their roles and responsibilities as Transition counselors and ERCs and their interactions with OVR's partners and stakeholders across the state.

The Transition Resource Manual has been placed on an internal computer drive and is available for viewing and reference by all OVR staff. Updates and additions will be made as necessary.

New transition brochures have been forwarded to be posted on the Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network (PaTTAN) website, [secondarytransition.org](http://secondarytransition.org). Information on OVR initiatives will be forwarded as they become available. Future updates to new and existing brochures and informational handouts will be developed and posted on the internal drive and [secondarytransition.org](http://secondarytransition.org) as necessary.

Mandated Reporter Training is available online through the Department of Human Services (DHS) and Rehabilitation & Community Providers Association. The training is required for any OVR personnel working with youth.

OVR counselors will continue to be encouraged to participate in local Transition Council meetings so that they may be of service to the families, students and professionals.

OVR will promote training opportunities provided by PDE and other Transition partners as a means of broadening the scope of topics available to OVR staff.

### **Statewide Assessment**

*Provide an assessment of the rehabilitation needs of individuals with disabilities residing within the State, particularly the VR services needs of those:*

This year OVR focused on the provider side of the equation to ensure the best service possible to meet the needs of our customers. OVR has worked on its public image and information sharing, relationships with other state agencies and community organizations, and creating more standard operating procedures so that each customer receives the same stellar service from OVR staff. Below are the categories outlined by RSA and an update on how we worked to set and meet goals in that category.

*With the most significant disabilities, including their need for supported employment services;*

Supported employment (SE) services are a mainstay for many OVR customers to gain competitive, community-integrated employment. These services offer supports that allow individuals with the most severe disabilities not only to gain employment, but also to become stable and hold their jobs and positions in the long-term. SE provides a support structure that allows customers to use their strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities, interests and informed choice in gaining employment in the community. It also provides a method of assisting customers to acquire new skills and talents in the search for employment and on the work site while employed. SE services are typically provided by community service providers acting in conjunction with the OVR counselor and customer to learn the aspects of the job setting, employer expectations, workplace etiquette and other skills needed to build a solid work performance. SE services benefit the employer as well by providing assistance in instruction and on-site problem-solving for the customer with a disability and helping the customer to learn work skills as quick and efficiently as possible.

*Who are minorities;*

A public awareness strategy was developed by the Public Awareness/Outreach in-house workgroup. Thus far, a media review of all OVR print and web media has been conducted. Out-of-date information and policies have been removed or updated and translated into other languages. OVR continues to have weekly meetings with the L&I Press Office to discuss the future media focus for OVR. OVR established the MOD Squad, a group composed of OVR counselors and Central Office staff to examine the many facets of social media and how OVR could best utilize it. In the fall of 2013, OVR launched its Facebook and LinkedIn pages providing more access, availability and awareness of OVR.

An increasing number of minorities who are applying for and becoming eligible for VR services within Pennsylvania have a criminal history. While having a criminal history/record is not a condition of eligibility for vocational rehabilitation services, the number of minorities who do have disabilities and involvement with the criminal justice system is rapidly increasing. It is important to involve as many partners as possible when working with these individuals because having a criminal record is a barrier to many employment opportunities. Additionally, there is an added level of issues that need to be addressed when a person has major criminal convictions and/or conditions of supervision, i.e. probation or parole. Helping OVR customers understand what responsibilities they have to meet such conditions or how their criminal charges and/or convictions affect their employment opportunities is critical to the success of customers in their pursuit

of employment. The ultimate outcome is to assist customers to gain competitive community integrated work by teaming collaboratively with the individual and community partners to remove all barriers.

*Who have been unserved or underserved by the VR program;*

Transition services within OVR have been identified as a core function of our public vocational rehabilitation program. An internal transition manual was created to help OVR VR professionals better serve this customer population. This guide was developed to assist all OVR rehabilitation professionals deliver services that result in optimal outcomes for youth and young adults with disabilities. The following document provides a comprehensive resource aligned with OVR's School to Work Transition policy.

Rehabilitation professionals work with transition age youth and young adults with disabilities beginning at age 14 through 21 years of age. For the Bureau of Blindness & Visual Services (BBVS), this means helping young children in school (and their families/advocates) so they may maximize their elementary, middle, and high school experiences, and in doing so optimize their chances of success when they transition to adult life, higher education and/or work. For the Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (BVRS), this means working with youth and young adults starting at an earlier age (and their families/advocates) so they know what services we offer and how they can maximize their high school experience, whether through general education or special education, to optimize their chances of success when they transition to adult life, higher education and/or work.

Rehabilitation professionals who work with youth and young adults are encouraged to coordinate their efforts with their BBVS/BVRS counterparts including Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors (VRC) from BBVS and BVRS, Early Reach Coordinators (ERC), BBVS Social Workers, Orientation and Mobility Specialists (O&M), and Vision Rehabilitation Therapists (VRT). All of these professionals should spend time in the schools forming relationships with transition partners, working with youth and young adults with disabilities and establishing consistent routines.

The Early Reach Initiative was started in OVR in response to a need in the BVRS district offices to increase capacity to prepare youth with disabilities, beginning at age 14, for vocational planning and future OVR services.

In 2012, OVR re-classified seventeen existing positions to the Pennsylvania State Civil Service Commission "Social Work 2" position. A formal job description for a Social Worker 2 in BVRS was finalized with a working job title of Early Reach Coordinator (ERC). An Early Reach Coordinator position was assigned to each of the 15 BVRS district offices, with a second Early Reach Coordinator position assigned to both Philadelphia and Pittsburgh. The scope of the Early Reach Initiative and the functions of an Early Reach Coordinator were developed and implemented by a Phase 1 Management Implementation Work Group.

Subsequently, the Early Reach Initiative was gradually implemented in BVRS district offices in three phases according to the following schedule:

- Fall 2013 - Phase 1 – DuBois, Harrisburg, Norristown, Philadelphia, Wilkes-Barre
- Spring 2014 - Phase 2 – Allentown, Altoona, Erie, Pittsburgh, Washington, York
- Fall 2014 - Phase 3 – Johnstown, New Castle, Reading, Williamsport

Comprehensive training was provided to all Early Reach Coordinators, supervisors and management in each BVRS district office during implementation of the three phases. In addition, monthly conference calls were held with offices in each phase to prepare for and facilitate a smooth implementation in each district office. In addition, for interested offices, a general overview that outlined the Early Reach Initiative was provided to all staff in each district office during implementation. The first statewide presentation that introduced the Early Reach Initiative in a public forum was at the 2014 Transition Conference held in State College.

As of the final Phase 3 Early Reach Coordinator Training held February 24 – 27, 2015, all BVRs District Offices are implementing the Early Reach Initiative.

*Who have been served through other components of the statewide workforce development system; and*

In the fall of 2013, an employer-friendly “how to” manual was introduced, to ensure consistent and excellent service when it comes to hiring people with disabilities. The manual was compiled by staff from OVR, PDE, DHS-ODP and DHS-OMHSAS. The materials appropriately identify OVR as the single-point-of-contact for employers who want to meet their workforce needs by hiring people with disabilities. This will build on the employer manual and encourage local team approaches to working with employers. The teams include representatives from OVR, local PDE agencies, and DHS-funded county-based human service agencies to support people with disabilities in securing employment and meeting the related needs of the employers.

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

This is a new category, so it was not included in the needs assessment for this reporting period. We have contracted with the Disability Institute of Temple University to conduct our next needs assessment. We have informed them of this new category, to ensure that it will be included in the next reporting period.

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

All LWDBs now have OVR representation, and trainings have been updated for both systems’ staff so an improved understanding of each other’s resources and roles occurs. An updated Citizen Advisory Committee handbook has been published.

OVR created the Business Services and Outreach Division (BSOD). OVR already has a single point of contact model with placement staff in most offices, but with our new business services and outreach division, this concept is now being directed towards all placement services that serve people with disabilities in the commonwealth. BSOD personnel are now meeting with current and potential employers and partners (government and community) to detail OVR’s services and how those services can benefit their agencies and organizations.

The merging of the customer satisfaction surveys of OVR and the Pennsylvania Rehabilitation Council (PaRC) was completed in July 2014. Both groups worked diligently to reword the survey to meet everyone’s needs. In addition, the workgroup is now creating surveys for current OVR customers and for unsuccessfully closed cases. OVR staff is also looking at a better vehicle for delivering the surveys. Two online survey models and delivery systems are being examined to determine whether they meet the needs of OVR and the PaRC. In addition, a meeting has been scheduled with DHS, which now uses an online performance survey tool to collect information from their customers.

*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 .*

This is a new category, so it was not included in the needs assessment for this reporting period. We have contracted with the Disability Institute of Temple University to conduct our next needs assessment. We have informed them of this new category, to ensure that it will be included in the next reporting period.

### **Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment for FFYs 2015-2017**

In conjunction with the PA Rehabilitation Council, OVR is required to conduct and interpret a Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA) every three years. The CSNA is the basis for developing state plan goals, objectives and

strategies. It is completed to identify needs for individuals with disabilities that can be addressed through the VR program. Our previous CSNA was completed January 2015 and the next cycle is effective July 2015 and will continue through June 30, 2016. After that date a new contracting process will be implemented to address the activities of the remaining two-year cycle. OVR has contracted with Temple University's Institute on Disabilities to assist OVR and the PA Rehabilitation Council to carry out the front line research, survey development, public forums, interpretation of results and report writing. The Temple staff are experienced research personnel very familiar with disability-related research and programming.

Many targeted activities planned for the next year were issues identified in the previous CSNA. Other activities were identified by OVR staff and agreed upon by the PaRC as important initiatives. Temple staff will coordinate their tasks with both OVR's Central Office staff and PaRC representatives. The following is an overview of the CSNA project for the next year.

1. Create and/or revise multiple customer satisfaction surveys for the agency. The surveys shall be prepared in a format for broad electronic distribution and electronic collection of data.
  - a. Revising and updating the customer satisfaction survey tool for status 26 closures;
  - b. Creating a customer satisfaction survey tool for status 28 closures;
  - c. Creating a customer satisfaction survey tool for open cases to assess specific services following their completion; and
  - d. Creating a transition-age youth survey to determine what is essential for a successful transition (what worked, what did not and what is still needed).
2. Gather information regarding the multifaceted programs of the Hiram G. Andrews Center (HGAC), including but not limited to:
  - a. Analyzing current educational programs (successful/unsuccessful, how to improve programs, relevancy with job opportunities in the community, potential new programs);
  - b. Comparing the quality and value of HGAC programs to other community based educational and rehabilitation programs;
  - c. Engaging the community to create a more accurate positive image of the HGAC;
  - d. Determining student satisfaction regarding all aspects of the HGAC;
  - e. Increasing referrals to the HGAC and increasing student census;
  - f. Increasing student graduation rate; and
  - g. Increasing student job placement rate.
3. Gather information from employers, VR professionals, community partners, etc. to increase competitive integrated employment for individuals with disabilities, especially those with the most significant disabilities, including but not limited to:
  - a. Increasing the knowledge of OVR services in the business and employment sector;
  - b. Identifying what is needed to increase competitive integrated employment for individuals with disabilities;
  - c. Engaging employers to effect an increase in the rate of employment for individuals with disabilities;
  - d. Identifying barriers to successful job search, job hire and job retention for individuals with disabilities;
  - e. Assisting employers in the hiring process of job candidates with disabilities;
  - f. Identifying post-employment supports employers need to retain employees with disabilities;
  - g. Determining employer-identified "good employee" work characteristics, i.e. soft skills; and
  - h. Identifying needs of older workers with disabilities.

4. Increase staff training targeted to providing consistent and equitable delivery of OVR information and services within district offices and across the commonwealth.
  - a. Identifying strategies to deliver equitable and consistent agency services throughout the commonwealth;
  - b. Enhancing counselor skills to better develop and provide individualized plans of service;
  - c. Identifying strategies to improve communication and follow-up services with customers;
  - d. Identifying strategies to shorten wait time for services; and
  - e. Identifying strategies to quickly refer job-ready candidates to employers for job vacancies.

### **Annual Estimates**

*Describe:*

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

790,000 individuals in Pennsylvania are eligible for services as of the end of 2014 (Source: Cornell University Employment and Disability Institute using data from the Current Population Survey (CPS), which is conducted by the Census Bureau and the Bureau of Labor Statistics - <http://www.disabilitystatistics.org/reports/cps.cfm?statistic=prevalence>)

*The number of eligible individuals who will receive services under:*

- The VR Program: 59,000
- The Supported Employment Program:
  - Most Significantly Disabled: 1,800
  - To be served in FFY 2016 with Title VI, Part B funds: 593
  - Title VI, Part B funds to be allocated: \$919,851
- Each priority category, if under an order of selection.
  - Most Significantly Disabled: 53,250
  - Significantly Disabled: 179
  - Not Significantly Disabled: 2

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

33 cases

*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.*

It is anticipated that approximately 1,845 Pennsylvanians with the most significant disabilities will receive SE services in FFY 2016. Of this number, approximately 593 individuals will be funded out of the \$919,851 Title VI, Part B Funds anticipated for distribution to Pennsylvania in FFY 2016.

### **State Goals and Priorities**

*The designated State unit must:*

- (1) 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.
- (2) Identify the goals and priorities in carrying out the VR and Supported Employment programs.

*(3) Ensure that the goals and priorities are based on an analysis of the following areas:*

- 1. the most recent comprehensive statewide assessment, including any updates;*
- 2. the State's performance under the performance accountability measures of section 116 of WIOA; and*
- 3. 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.*

Any projections, program continuations, etc. in this Attachment are subject to the availability of supporting funding in the Plan year. Goals were developed jointly with the PaRC on December 8, 2014 and jointly agreed to revisions.

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

1. Expand the availability of apprenticeships, internships and on the job training (OJT) for individuals with disabilities.
2. Partner with the Bureau of Workforce Partnership and Operations (BWPO) to ensure programmatic and physical accessibility of the PA CareerLink® centers for equal access for individuals with disabilities.
3. Create and expand interagency agreements between OVR and local Career and Technology Centers and other community-based organizations.

### **Goal #2: Increase/Improve Transition Services for Students with Disabilities**

1. Increase pre-employment transition services for students with disabilities.
2. Increase opportunities for students to gain workplace skills and community-integrated work experiences.
3. Enhance collaborative relationships with DHS, PDE and higher education.
4. Expand BBVS Overbrook School for the Blind Summer Transition Initiative to create summer employment opportunities for transition age students who are blind.
5. Research best practices for the implementation of peer mentoring opportunities.

### **Goal #3: Increase community education and outreach.**

1. Work with the PaRC to share best practices and outreach methods to increase participation in the Citizens Advisory Committee meetings.
2. Continue to grow OVR's social media presence.
3. Educate staff on accessibility and technology based upon universal design principles.

### **Order of Selection**

*Describe:*

- (1) The order to be followed in selecting eligible individuals to be provided VR services.*
- (2) The justification for the order.*
- (3) The service and outcome goals.*
- (4) The time within which these goals may be achieved for individuals in each priority category within the order.*

- (5) *How individuals with the most significant disabilities are selected for services before all other individuals with disabilities; and*
- (6) *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.*

## **1. PRIORITY OF CATEGORIES TO RECEIVE VR SERVICES UNDER THE ORDER**

First Priority: Most Significantly Disabled (MSD)

Second Priority: Significantly Disabled (SD)

Third Priority: Non-Significantly Disabled (NSD)

### **DESCRIPTION OF PRIORITY CATEGORIES**

#### **First Priority: Most Significantly Disabled (MSD)**

- The physical, mental, or sensory impairment(s) must seriously limit three or more of the individual's functional capacities; and
- The individual must be expected to require two or more vocational rehabilitation services that are expected to last six months from the date of the Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) or be needed on an ongoing basis to reduce an impediment to employment.

#### **Second Priority: Significantly Disabled (SD)**

- The physical, mental, or sensory impairment(s) must seriously limit one or more of the individual's functional capacities; and
- The individual must be expected to require multiple vocational rehabilitation services that are expected to last six months from the date of the Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) or be needed on an ongoing basis to reduce an impediment to employment.

#### **Third Priority: Non-Significantly Disabled (NSD)**

- The individual has a physical, mental, or sensory impairment that does not meet the definition for MSD or SD.

## **2. JUSTIFICATION FOR ORDER OF SELECTION**

Because OVR does not believe it will be able to serve all eligible individuals with the available resources, it has adopted an Order of Selection.

### **3/4. SERVICE AND OUTCOME GOALS AND THE TIME WITHIN WHICH THE GOALS WILL BE ACHIEVED**

Given the projections of flat funding at both the Federal and State level, OVR will strive to maintain current service levels. As of December 1, 2014, OVR had a waiting list of about 25 customers whose severity of disability was either classified in the second or third priority. Based on actual FFY 2014 figures, OVR's outcome and service goals under the Order of Selection are projected as follows for FFY 2016:

- For the Most Significantly Disabled category, the number accepted is expected to be 16,000, while the number served will be 55,000. The number rehabilitated will be 8,575, of which 8,300 will be the number rehabilitated into the competitive labor market. The total cost of services for FFY 2016 is expected to be \$64,982,277, which will be revised following notification of the FFY 2016 Appropriation.
- For the Significantly Disabled category, the number accepted is expected to be 25 (newly accepted, but placed on a waiting list) while the number served will be 15. The number rehabilitated will be 3, of which 2 will be the

number rehabilitated into the competitive labor market. The total cost of services for FFY 2016 is expected to be \$17,722, which will be revised following notification of the FFY 2016 Appropriation.

- For the Non-Significantly Disabled category, the number accepted is expected to be 0 (newly accepted, but placed on a waiting list) while the number served will be 0. The cost for FFY 2016 is expected to be 0.

In total, the number accepted is expected to be 16,000, while the number served will be 55,015. The number rehabilitated will be 8,578, of which 8,302 will be the number rehabilitated into the competitive labor market. The service cost for FFY 2016 is expected to be \$65,000,000, which will be revised following notification of the FFY 2016 Appropriation.

Throughout the year, OVR senior management will evaluate the agency's available resources on a regular basis to serve individuals with disabilities considered to be Significant Disability (SD). If resources are available, the OVR District Offices will be informed that they can move individuals from waiting into an active status with OVR. Persons on the SD level will be served according to their date of application. If no resources are available, individuals will remain on the SD list until the next re-evaluation.

The time frame in which goals are to be achieved is approximately 30 months for both MSD and SD priority of service categories.

## **5. HOW INDIVIDUALS WITH THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES ARE SELECTED FOR SERVICES**

In keeping with federal mandates, it is the policy of OVR to operate on an Order of Selection when the agency is unable to provide services to all eligible individuals in the same state who apply for services. The Order of Selection in Pennsylvania gives priority first to individuals with the Most Significant Disabilities (MSD); secondly, to individuals with Significant Disabilities (SD); and third to individuals with Non-Significant Disabilities (NSD). All new applicants for services must be notified about the Order of Selection. Significance of disability is defined based upon the presence of functional capacities and the requirement of multiple vocational rehabilitation services, defined as two or more services that are expected to last 6 months from the date of the Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) or be needed on an ongoing basis to reduce an impediment to employment.

## **6. 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**

After dialogue with the Pennsylvania Rehabilitation Council and the State Board of Vocational Rehabilitation, OVR has determined that pending a state budget increase, if granted in FY 2015-16 and maintained in FY 2016-17, then OVR will consider the agency's option to serve eligible individuals with disabilities outside the current order of selection who have an immediate need for equipment or services to maintain employment. If no additional funding is received, then OVR will maintain its current Order of Selection while continuing to evaluate the agency's available resources on a regular basis.

### **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.*
- (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*

*(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.*

OVR will use Title VI, Part B Funds to provide Supported Employment (SE) services to customers throughout the commonwealth. Services are provided by way of contracts with community based rehabilitation providers using an individualized, performance-based job coaching model. Title I Funds will be used to provide Supported Employment services after Title VI, Part B Funds have been exhausted.

SE services are a vital part of OVR programming. SE services secure employment for individuals with the most significant disabilities who would not experience an employment outcome from less intensive job placement methods. It is anticipated that approximately 6,900 Pennsylvanians with the most significant disabilities will receive SE services in FFY 2015. Of this number, an anticipated 850 individuals will receive services funded out of the Title VI, Part B Funds projected for distribution to Pennsylvania in FFY 2016.

OVR is preparing to revise its SE policy during FFY 2015. OVR will consider providing more intensive evaluation throughout the life of a case to ensure that services will be provided to customers most in need. Increasing communication among VR partners is another area under consideration. The SE policy revision will focus on achieving a higher level of long-term stability as part of successful employment outcomes through SE funding.

OVR plans to continue to expand SE services for underserved populations. This includes providing quality services to individuals with the most significant disabilities, to increase successful outcomes for transition-aged youth, and to ensure accessibility of services for all potential customers. OVR plans to enhance OVR partnerships with provider agencies such as the Office of Developmental Programs, the Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services and the Office of Long Term Living. These agencies provide the necessary long-term supports needed to ensure the employment success of the individual with a disability.

### **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)):*

*The methods to be used to expand and improve services to individuals with disabilities.*

The 2016 state plan will need to focus on the implementation of WIOA, which reauthorizes the Rehabilitation Act in Title IV. The Act calls for increased emphasis on services to transition-aged youth, business services, and collaborations with other agencies and partners. This emphasis will result in expanded and improved services and outcomes for individuals with disabilities.

The concept of pre-employment transition services is introduced through WIOA. OVR will be required to perform the following activities under pre-employment transition services:

- 1) Job exploration counseling;
- 2) 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 to the maximum extent possible;
- 3) Counseling on opportunities for enrollment in comprehensive transition or postsecondary educational programs at institutions of higher education;
- 4) Workplace readiness training to develop social skills and independent living; and
- 5) Instruction in self-advocacy, which may include peer mentoring.

The provision of the above services will result in reaching students earlier to maximize their educational opportunities and best plan for transition to employment or postsecondary educational opportunities.

The second area of major emphasis in WIOA is business services. OVR has started to plan and implement a new Business Services Division with the following goals:

- Provide singularity of focus and resources to better understand and respond to business needs in a dual customer service model (talent supply and demand side).
- Make OVR the lead state agency and preferred resource for businesses or organizations to recruit and on-board people with disabilities through a single point of contact (SPOC) model.
- Promote agency-wide consistency and quality of business services, communication and stakeholder outreach through training, resources, collaboration, and development of innovative web, social media and print-based branding.
- Increase alignment with the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR) VR-National Employment Team (VR-NET) through the Business Services Division offering agency-wide consistency in delivery of high quality business services utilizing emerging practices in an evolving, national VR community of practice.
- Significantly increase the availability and number of successful agency-wide career employment outcomes or appropriate self-employment for all OVR consumer customers in emerging occupations, business and labor markets.

We will have one business services representative in each OVR District Office who will work as part of the business services team to focus on the above objectives.

The third major focus in WIOA is on collaboration. OVR will continue to develop, initiate or expand upon collaborative relationships with community stakeholders and partners and other state agencies to promote and expand opportunities for individuals with disabilities.

Finally, WIOA emphasizes the importance of Assistive or Rehabilitative Technology. OVR has hired a Business Analyst to serve as an Assistive Technology Specialist to assist staff with the maximization of assistive technology and how it can assist OVR customers to achieve their educational and employment goals. We are also committed to expanding the capacity to serve more customers and provide technical assistance regarding available assistive technology through a tele-rehabilitation pilot with the Center for Assistive and Rehabilitative Technology (CART) and the University of Pittsburgh located at our comprehensive rehabilitation center, Hiram G. Andrews Center (HGAC).

*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.*

The Center for Assistive and Rehabilitative Technology (CART) at the Hiram G. Andrews Center (HGAC) in Johnstown, PA is an available assistive technology (AT) resource to OVR customers throughout the commonwealth. Highly trained professionals evaluate and support people in the following areas of assistive technology: positioning and mobility, computer access, augmentative communication, environmental controls, driver training, vehicle modification, devices for activities of daily living (ADL), devices for visual and/or auditory impairment and home and work modifications. The Learning Technology Program (LTP) assesses student's needs in the classroom and trains them in the use of assistive technology, if necessary.

The Pennsylvania Assistive Technology Lending Library (PATLL) provides the opportunity for any Pennsylvanian to borrow and assess AT devices prior to purchase. The library is located on the HGAC's campus, and the services are free to all Pennsylvanians with disabilities.

Specific AT policies include: the Home Modification Policy, the Vehicle Modification Policy and the Farming and Agriculture Rehabilitation Management (FARM) policy. These policies provide a wide range of AT evaluation and services detailed to meet the needs of OVR customers in removing environmental barriers to employment.

A separate policy related to the provision of AT services and devices has been identified as a needed guide for OVR to address the increasing demand for "off the shelf" technology to provide parameters to meet the AT needs of VR customers in a cost-effective and consistent manner. The planning for this policy will likely take place in 2015.

The VR customer is provided AT services and devices are provided as the above listed resources are utilized by the VR counselor and customer throughout the rehabilitation process. Assessment always precedes use of any AT device or service to ensure provision of such items is appropriate and timely to meet the vocational needs of the individual.

OVR uses a number of vendors who are Rehabilitation Engineers and Assistive Technology Specialists on a "fee-for-service" basis throughout the commonwealth. Most providers can travel to the OVR customer's home and/or worksite to provide AT evaluation and training services. Staff from HGAC's CART will also travel to various parts of the commonwealth to assess an OVR customer's AT needs as well as to facilitate training when appropriate.

In accordance with OVR's policies, OVR purchases AT devices and services to support its customers in their vocational goals. OVR also provides information and referral services regarding other resources when the agency is unable to provide funding for AT devices and services. OVR's Statewide AT Coordinator regularly distributes information electronically to OVR's District Offices regarding non-VR funded AT services, programs, and resources.

OVR collaborates with the Pennsylvania Institute on Assistive Technology (PIAT) at Temple University to participate in training, maintain the PATLL, and develop AT resources for Pennsylvanians with disabilities.

Low interest loans are available through the Pennsylvania Assistive Technology Foundation (PATF) to customers who have a disability or any older or state resident who has need for AT.

OVR also collaborates with BWPO via the PA CareerLink® centers to better assist veterans who have disabilities in obtaining AT to remove barriers in locating and maintaining employment. The Statewide Veterans Coordinator attends PA Cares meetings monthly in order to learn about assistive technology/training programs offered by various community and state agencies and higher education institutions. This information is transmitted statewide to OVR Veteran Coordinators and Veteran Counselors in each field office who provide AT equipment and training to OVR customers who are veterans with disabilities.

OVR has collaborated with Penn State's AgrAbility Program and the Department of Agriculture in developing a policy to address the rehabilitation needs of farmers/ranchers with disabilities. This policy is known as the Farming and Agriculture Rehabilitation Management (F.A.R.M.) which is to assist farmers with disabilities. VR counselors, with technical assistance and guidance from Pennsylvania's AgrAbility Program, are able to assess the rehabilitation needs of farmers/ranchers with disabilities in order to provide the specialized rehabilitative and assistive technologies they may need to maintain their employment.

*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.*

OVR District Office staff provides outreach activities designed to educate and inform individuals with disabilities who are minorities, including those with the most significant disabilities. Each District Office will develop a forward thinking strategy of outreach for the year. Outreach activities will include information sessions regarding OVR services and how to access such services, including presentations where individuals who are minorities are the target audience. Some of

these will include presentations at community agencies that target the Latino population and participation in Asian-American events.

OVR has recently awarded, through an Innovation and Expansion project, the development of an Industry Integrated Employment and Training Program designed specifically for Latino Adults with Significant Disabilities in Berks County. This project will expand services to this targeted population.

OVR will continue to identify and expand key documentation and literature in Spanish, and further, will continue the use of language line for more effective communication with customers from different ethnic backgrounds to overcome language barriers.

OVR, in collaboration with the Office for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (ODHH) and the Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC) developed a Support Service Provider Initiative (SSP) for individuals who are deaf/blind. The purpose is to expand opportunities for individuals who are deaf blind in accessing educational, community and employment services. This collaborative effort will include the centers for independent living and the Helen Keller National Center. This significantly unserved population will now greatly benefit from this crucial service to promote independence.

OVR District Office staff provides outreach activities designed to educate and inform individuals with disabilities who are unserved or underserved. These targeted outreach activities will be designed to provide information about accessing OVR services. Early Reach Coordinators (ERC) will be conducting similar activities in schools to reach unserved or underserved students.

As a result of Section 511 in the re-authorization of the Rehabilitation Act in WIOA, OVR will be required to evaluate an individual with a disability who is age 24 or younger prior to them entering sub-minimum wage work. This will ensure this group of underserved youth has full opportunities to enter community integrated competitive employment.

*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).*

OVR will continue to develop the activities performed by Early Reach Coordinators to reach students with disabilities and their families earlier in the transition process (age 14–16). The Early Reach Initiative will be expanded in designated District Offices throughout the commonwealth due to increased demand. OVR will continue to explore opportunities to enter into Interagency Agreements and local Letters of Understanding to develop, expand and deliver pre-employment transition services and to update our statewide MOU to ensure that pre-employment transition services and general “School to Work” Transition services are delivered in an effective and consistent manner. OVR will continue to develop and expand innovative service delivery models such as Discovery, Customized Employment, Project SEARCH and Project PAS to ensure that students with disabilities are able to successfully transition from school to postsecondary life.

*If applicable, plans for establishing, developing, or improving community rehabilitation programs within the State.*

In response to WIOA, OVR is planning to pilot customized employment (CE) scenarios that involve the use of supported employment (SE) services. This would be an improvement to community rehabilitation programs as providers would be required to be certified in order to provide CE services. This blend of CE and SE is intended to improve employment outcomes for individuals with the most significant disabilities (MSD). The OVR SE policy is in the process of revision to reflect the new WIOA regulations. We hope to improve community rehabilitation program (CRP) outcomes for those with the MSD by increasing communication among partners and providing supports for as long as needed and required.

Letters of Understanding (LOUs) will continue to be developed with new providers in an effort to offer an array of service choices for OVR customers throughout the state. OVR is in the process of renewing existing LOUs. This involves a

review of overall quality of services and of past OVR customer success. As provision of quality customer service is important to OVR, we are developing a plan that will monitor all OVR providers, not just those with LOUs.

*Strategies to improve the performance of the State with respect to the performance accountability measures under section 116 of WIOA.*

OVR reviews the performance standards and indicators monthly. As an agency we constantly strive to meet or exceed the standards and indicators through training, policy development, and the addition or creation of new and innovative programs that will benefit our customers. We are also going through an extensive CSNA that will help guide us regarding service provision and to address system gaps to ensure that as many positive outcomes are achieved as possible. We are also exploring services such as customized employment and implementing interagency agreements that will assist with federal match generation to serve additional customers. OVR will continue to monitor the standards and indicators and incorporate stakeholder input into our program to ensure a cycle of constant reflection and program improvement.

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

Local OVR Veterans' Counselors and Coordinators continue to work collaboratively with the Local Veterans Employment Representatives (LVER) and Disabled Veterans Outreach Program Specialists (DVOPS) within the PA CareerLink® system to coordinate services for veterans with disabilities. OVR regularly participates in the PA CARES Consortium with other agency partners including BWPO and the VA Vocational Rehabilitation & Education (VA-VRE) Program to ensure access to services to all veterans through information and referral services. In addition, OVR has sponsored employees in Forensic Training related to Veterans with mental health, traumatic brain injury and/or substance abuse issues.

*How the agency's strategies will be used to:*

*Achieve goals and priorities by the State, consistent with the comprehensive needs assessment;*

Any projections, program continuations, etc. in this Attachment are subject to the availability of supporting funding in the Plan year. Goals were developed jointly with the PaRC on December 8, 2014 and jointly agreed to revisions.

### **Goal #1: Increase Employment Opportunities for People with Disabilities**

1. Expand the availability of apprenticeships, internships and on the job training (OJT) for people with disabilities.

OVR is planning to increase workplace skill and employment opportunities for Adults and Youth through several new initiatives. In 2014 OVR initiated a wage reimbursement On-the-Job Training (OJT) targeting youth 25 years of age or younger who enter active plan status. This initiative will help youth gain work experience prior to career placement and during the process of rehabilitation while they are in secondary or postsecondary education. This involves OVR reimbursing wages of students while they participate in full- or part-time, limited seasonal or summer employment, internships or apprenticeships. OVR also initiated a thirty day 100% wage reimbursed OJT for all ages of OVR consumer customers. This initiative may help offset a small- to mid-sized business or organizations costs in hiring and on-boarding additional workforce talent.

BSOD will work closely with the Business Services Committee and local Eastern and Western combined Agency District Office Business Services teams to develop apprenticeship, internship and paid time-limited job experiences through use of on-the-job wage reimbursement agreements with both public and private employers and local trade unions. Outreach will be organized by development of combined bureau District Office regional plans with involvement of Eastern and Western Business Outreach Specialists. Combined bureau District Office Single Points of Contact (SPOC's) will use an Excel spreadsheet to track local employer contacts that use an OJT as part of employment experience and on-boarding of permanent new hires.

2. Partner with the Bureau of Workforce Partnership and Operations (BWPO) to ensure programmatic and physical accessibility of the PA CareerLink® for equal access for people with disabilities.

OVR will analyze WIOA and implement a strategy for partnership with BWPO that satisfies all aspects of its language. OVR's strategy for partnership will focus on increased awareness of individuals with disabilities and the vocational rehabilitation process. This will ensure that individuals with disabilities receive consistent and relevant information, services and referrals within BWPO's infrastructure. OVR must also ensure that people with disabilities have unabated physical and attitudinal access to the critical services that BWPO offers, including those found within the PA CareerLink® centers. OVR strives for increased collaboration and improved communication strategies between our two agencies.

3. Create and expand interagency agreements between OVR and local Career and Technology Centers and other community-based organizations.

Effective October 1, 2014 OVR entered into an interagency agreement with the Berks County Career & Technology Center (CTC) to jointly fund two positions, a School-to-Work Coordinator and a Job Trainer who will serve OVR eligible youth with disabilities in order to increase and improve their community-integrated, competitive employment outcomes. If successful, this model will be replicated at other CTCs of which there are 85 across the commonwealth. Progress monitoring is being conducted and outcomes will be reported at the 2015 PA Community of Practice on Transition Conference as well as annual conferences held for career and technology education professionals.

Another interagency agreement with Greene County Human Services and Intermediate Unit #1 will jointly fund one School-to-Work Coordinator position that will be dedicated to serving OVR eligible youth with intellectual disabilities who are between the ages of 14 and 21 who are enrolled in local education agencies within Greene County. The agreement targets more effective vocational evaluation, increased service coordination, and interagency collaboration with the goal of achieving increased and improved community-integrated, competitive employment outcomes.

## **Goal #2: Increase/Improve Transition Services for Students with Disabilities**

1. Increase pre-employment transition services for students with disabilities.

The term "pre-employment transition service" is new in WIOA. OVR is well positioned to respond to expanding pre-employment transition services in Pennsylvania as defined in WIOA. OVR continues to implement the following initiatives that focus on services needed by transitioning youth with disabilities in Pennsylvania:

- Annual Transition Conference planning and staff participation
- Designated Transition VR Counselors
- Transition Coordinating Council participation
- Early Reach Coordinators in each district office
- Project Search
- Project PAS
- IEP staff participation for appropriate students
- Transition Policy and Guidelines for staff
- Jobs for All - On the Job Training
- Business Services Representatives to assist with job placement
- Access College – Employment Success grant to D.R.E.A.M. Partnership
- Discovery Pilot in three district offices

Comprehensive efforts to implement WIOA and the corresponding "pre-employment transition services" as outlined in the new law will be determined by the regulations as promulgated by the Rehabilitation Services Administration.

2. Increase opportunities for students to gain workplace skills and community-integrated work experiences.

OVR continues to increase workplace skill and employment opportunities for youth through several new initiatives. As discussed previously, in 2014, OVR initiated a wage reimbursement On-the-Job Training (OJT) program targeting youth 25 years of age or younger who enter active plan status. This initiative will help youth gain work experience prior to career placement and during the process of rehabilitation while they are in secondary or postsecondary education. OVR will reimburse wages of students while they participate in full- or part-time, limited seasonal or summer employment, internships or apprenticeships. The Jobs for All- OJT can assist employers to hire and provide employment opportunities for OVR transition customers while they are still in school to assist them in building their workforce talent and experience. The key to the success of the Jobs for All - OJT will be flexibility with business and industry in meeting their unique needs while offering youth a chance to join the workforce for a time-limited, paid work experience. Ultimately, we hope that the soft skills learned, the coordination of transportation and technology to get to and from work, the performance of job tasks, and the value of having paid, real work experiences on their resumes will enable young people with disabilities to eventually achieve an employment outcome in their IPE targeted career goal.

OVR has also developed two blended funding interagency agreements, Work Partners with Berks Career and Technology Center and Greene County Human Services and Intermediate Unit #1 to jointly fund newly created staff positions at the respective sites. At Work Partners, a School to Work Coordinator and job coach will work with OVR eligible Service Occupation students to develop workplace skills via career instruction and to develop practicum and internship work based experiences leading to permanent, community-integrated, competitive employment. At Greene County, a School to Work Coordinator position was developed to provide OVR eligible transition aged youth with disabilities various work-based educational experiences, on-the-job support, independent living skills and community involvement oriented toward competitive integrated employment.

3. Enhance collaborative relationships with the Department of Human Services (DHS), Department of Education (PDE) and higher education.

OVR has regular meetings and conference calls with our partners at DHS and PDE. OVR participates in educational opportunities through PA Training and Technical Assistance Network (PATTAN) both by providing training on relevant OVR topics and by attending trainings relevant to OVR's Transition Program. OVR works with postsecondary education entities by supporting and promoting the Promoting Academic Success (PAS) program. OVR works closely with the Intermediate Units on Project SEARCH. The Office of Developmental Programs is becoming increasingly involved with Project SEARCH. OVR has been an active participant in the Office of Developmental Programs "Futures Planning." OVR maintains these relationships by recommending and attending professional conferences with training relevant for all collaborating agencies.

OVR representatives regularly attend the Special Education Advisory Panel, Pennsylvania Developmental Disabilities Council, and the Pennsylvania Employment First State Leadership Mentoring Project with members of other agencies in order to collaborate with agency partners in order to coordinate services to mutual customers.

OVR issued a "Joint Bulletin" with the Office of Developmental Programs to better direct the referral process as well as to provide direction on the requirements for documentation by the supports coordination organizations.

OVR has issued funding to the D.R.E.A.M. Partnership from the Access College- Employment Success (ACES) grant to develop and implement college certificate programs for persons with intellectual disabilities. The grant stipulates that the programs developed will focus on employment, following the Transition and Post-Secondary Programs for Students with Intellectual Disabilities (TPSID) model and utilizing the Think College guidelines. OVR is collaborating with other state VR programs to seek guidance on the development of agency policy on the provision of financial aid to such programs.

4. Expand BBVS Overbrook School for the Blind Summer Transition Initiative to create summer employment opportunities for transition age students who are blind.

The Transitional Vocational Initiative summer program is now being expanded to three weeks. The third additional week will involve students actually working in jobs in the community that they shadowed the prior week.

5. Research best practices for the implementation of peer mentoring opportunities.

OVR will collaborate with the Centers for Independent Living (CILs) to identify service gaps in the area of peer mentoring, specifically as it relates to transition services for young adults with disabilities. Once specific need areas are identified, OVR will research best practices for transition youth peer mentoring.

### **Goal #3: Increase community education and outreach.**

1. Work with the PaRC to share best practices and outreach methods to increase participation in the Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) meetings.

OVR is very interested in receiving input and welcomes advice from the PaRC on how to increase participation in the district office CACs. In addition, OVR intends to share district office CAC best practices at statewide and regional meetings that bring together district office management staff. District office CAC minutes are shared with the PaRC for its reference and are available to identify promising practices. However, the intent of the district office CAC is to be locally-run, consumer-driven, and responsive to local CAC member recommendations. Therefore, each CAC is autonomous and develops strategic planning that is relevant to local concerns, issues and priorities, with input from OVR local management. OVR supports sharing of CAC information while preserving each CAC's autonomy to develop local goals.

2. Continue to grow OVR's social media presence.

OVR has already connected with 340 followers on LinkedIn and 580 on Facebook as part of our agency's social media initiative, which was launched in October 2013. OVR has been delivering content on a more frequent basis since the platforms became available. Information is gathered from local district offices, statewide events and national sources. Social media posts have highlighted OVR-sponsored activities and events, agency accomplishments, customer success stories and other information pertinent to our consumer and business customers. OVR will increase and refine our social media presence moving forward, with a continued emphasis on delivering quality content and relevant information to all of our customers in a timely manner. OVR will continue to evolve with the changing social media landscape and adapt our strategies, as necessary, in order to ensure that the material we provide is accessible and impactful. OVR has also added an Administrative Office position to the Business Services and Outreach Division, which will focus on direct marketing, branding and public outreach using print, web applications and social media. This new position will allow a dedicated staff member with experience and expertise in the field to focus on the proper evolution and growth of OVR's social media strategy.

3. Educate staff on accessibility and technology based upon universal design principles.

OVR is committed to ensuring that staff members utilizing assistive technology (AT) are knowledgeable and proficient in its use. AT utilized by staff include screen readers, screen magnifiers, speech recognition software, and more. OVR offers trainings, presentations, conferences, and customized training materials to staff to ensure the highest level of proficiency. OVR employs staff who provide direct instruction to individuals with a broad range of disabilities, and through the above mentioned offerings, staff can gain information and experience used during direct instruction. Additionally, OVR has AT coordinators in Central Office and in each district office to be an educational resource to field

staff, partners, customers and their families. These resources can assist staff and customers to use AT that is not limited in design, but have longer use and more effective use due to its universal design. The Center for Assistive Rehabilitation Technology Lending Library at the Hiram G Andrews Center is another educational resource which OVR staff can access to learn about AT universal design and incorporate this knowledge in AT recommendations to the OVR customer.

*Support innovation and expansion activities; and*

OVR continues to support innovation and expansion approaches through ongoing Letters of Understanding (LOU) that are developed between community rehabilitation providers and OVR to support the expansion of services to individuals with disabilities, particularly individuals with the most significant disabilities. This allows us to constantly evaluate and develop new service activities that bring about innovative approaches to serving customers with disabilities more effectively.

OVR continually considers the development of new and emerging services with existing community rehabilitation providers to meet the needs of our customers. As funds are available, OVR will develop a Request for Quote (RFQ) for Innovation and Expansion Projects to provide new strategies and programs to improve employment outcomes for individuals with the most significant disabilities. These projects will target expansion of employment services into rural and underserved counties, job readiness and job placement of customers with the most significant disabilities who have traditionally been underserved, transition services for students with disabilities, pre-employment transition services for students with disabilities, replication of Project SEARCH for students or youth with disabilities, and/or the development of Industry Integrated Employment programs, as well as other innovative strategies identified by local OVR staff. OVR anticipates that potential contracts would generally be up to \$150,000 for the initial project year. Higher contract awards could be accepted for proposals of exceptional activity, as funds are available.

Innovation and Expansion funds will be used to support the funding of the State Rehabilitation Council.

Innovation and Expansion funds have not been used to support the Statewide Independent Living Council's resource plan as other sources of funding have been available. Centers for Independent Living have received funds for innovation and expansion projects in the past.

*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 continues to collaborate with other supported employment (SE) funding sources to overcome issues of dwindling resources. OVR participates in a cross-agency workgroup with the Office of Developmental Programs (ODP), the Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (OMHSAS), and the Office of Long-Term Living (OLTL) to address systemic barriers to employment for persons with disabilities. OVR is taking proactive steps with ODP to develop and use communication tools for interagency collaboration. Our intention is to provide seamless services to those individuals who can benefit from multiple service providers/funders and, at the same time, to allow for successful and stable community integrated and competitive employment. OVR is participating on a Cross Agency Workgroup with ODP, OMHSAS, and OTL to address systemic barriers to employment for persons with disabilities, particularly those identified with regard to service definitions, funding, and legislation for supported employment. OVR is actively looking for ways to provide more opportunities to support individuals in competitive, community-integrated employment who have multiple sources of funding and who may not have considered competitive, community-integrated employment previously.

The inclusion of customized employment services as a tool used alongside SE services can allow more intensive services to be offered for individuals with disabilities who are seeking competitive, community-integrated employment and historically may not have been able to benefit from VR services. Additionally, the OVR SE policy is under review both to address these issues and to align with new WIOA provisions. Any recommendations for revision will address the use of

the most appropriate and cost effective services for VR customers and how best to plan for sustaining employment as VR services fade and eventually come to an end. OVR is working with various Centers for Independent Living (CILs) across the state to develop SE services that are provided by vendors who can offer a full range of independent living supports beyond employment. The intention of collaborating with CILs is to ensure that individuals who are using VR services are getting a full range of services fostering rehabilitation and independence at the same time to the benefit of the VR customer.

### **Evaluation and Reports of Progress: VR and Supported Employment Goals**

*Describe:*

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

#### **Goal #1: Increase Employment Opportunities for People with Disabilities**

- 1) Increase the number of Business Enterprise Program (BEP) locations as well as people who go through training in the BEP.

BEP analyzed the Hadley online training and made plans to test the system to see what could be eliminated from the HGAC program. The online Hadley training program was tested by a representative of the Elected Committee, as well as BEP staff, to determine the best utilization for online training for customers. BEP also continued to review the training program at HGAC to ensure training materials and equipment were current and relevant to customers in the program. BEP continued to do outreach and interview candidates for the program. BEP also continued to investigate online training opportunities to increase customer participation in the BEP program. Additionally, BEP collaborated with the Elected Committee of Blind Operators to consider and promote opportunities for individuals who are blind.

- 2) Partner with the Bureau of Workforce Partnership and Operations (BWPO) to train or retrain PA CareerLink® on disability awareness and OVR fundamentals.

OVR developed an "Introduction to OVR" training, which was made available on the Employee Self Service training site in 2013. This training provides a general summary of OVR, the VR process and how to initiate services. OVR also developed "Disability Awareness, Etiquette and Sensitivity: A Training Program for PA CareerLink® Personnel" which was updated and made available in 2014. This training summarized the effective "Ten Commandments of Communicating with People with Disabilities" training video. OVR staff have also provided numerous in-person training events for PA CareerLink® personnel at local sites which covered topics such as the VR process, AT, disability awareness and sensitivity topics, the 2008 ADA Amendments Act, and the new rules for Section 503 of the 1973 Rehabilitation Act and the 1974 Vietnam Era Veteran Readjustment Assistance Act (VEVRAA) guiding businesses with federal contracts on the hiring for individuals with disabilities and protected veterans. OVR staff members actively participate on the PaRC PA CareerLink® subcommittee which is focused on making PA CareerLink® centers programmatically and physically accessible to individuals with disabilities. Currently, a Regional Manager, a District Administrator and a VR Specialist participate on this subcommittee.

- 3) Evaluate the cost-effectiveness and structure of current Supported Employment (SE) programs.

OVR established a goal of providing services to 875 customers via Title VI, Part B Funds distributed to Pennsylvania in FFY 2014. This goal was based on the Title VI, Part B allotment for FFY 2013 divided by the average cost per rehabilitation case for the previous year. 663 customers received Supported Employment

services via the available \$818,794 Title VI, Part B funds. The reason in the discrepancy of the goal and the actual numbers was that cost for services increased while the amount of Title VI, Part B funds were less than anticipated. However, the number of VR customers served through SE services did not decrease. In fact, the number increased. Unfortunately, the amount of funds available was not sufficient to reach the intended goal. During FFY 2014, SE services were provided to 6,967 individuals with disabilities. Of that number, 1,492 were placed of which 1,458 were placed in competitive employment and 1,145 were working 20 hours or more a week. Reviewing OVR SE data allowed field staff to analyze trends and patterns to determine where in the VR process customers experienced challenges to success in community, competitive, and integrated employment. Review of data also allowed for a better understanding of which customers are receiving supported employment services. This knowledge assisted OVR staff in being able to clarify issues, address them and in turn increase the success of customers receiving supported employment services. Overall, SE services are the most effective cost service used by OVR. In 2013/14 the successful closure rate of customers via SE services was over 60%.

## **Goal II. Increase/Improve Transition Services for Students with Disabilities**

- 1) Continue collaborative activities that include projects with the PA Community on Transition Employment Practice Group and development of joint training modules for OVR and Department of Education staff, families, advocates, educators and youth.

OVR continued to work through the Community of Practice State Leadership Team (SLT) on Transition to provide trainings on OVR services and procedures to all of our partner agencies. This was done through SLT sponsored webinars, the Statewide Transition Conference and monthly SLT meetings when OVR provided updates to the members on activities, programs and new initiatives within OVR. Local District Office staff participated in School to Work Transition Council meetings and provided guidance to families, advocates, educators and youth. OVR staff also regularly provided informational trainings to county and regional service providers to keep them updated and aware of OVR's mission. The Early Reach Coordinators continued to reach out to schools and provide information to educational staff, families, and students about OVR services. Through our participation in the annual Statewide Transition Conference, OVR developed sessions which were presented to all attendees on OVR programs and policies.

- 2) Continue the Cognitive Skills Enhancement Program (CSEP) to assist District Offices in the transition needs of students with disabilities and to reflect the stated needs of VR Counselors; and continue to offer CSEP as a service to OVR customers who wish to pursue postsecondary training at HGAC or elsewhere.

Hiram G Andrews Center continued to work collaboratively with the University of Pittsburgh in offering the Cognitive Skills Enhancement Program (CSEP). The program continued to have a full complement of students throughout 2014, serving customers from OVR District Offices across the state. There were 45 students enrolled in CSEP during 2014. The majority completed CSEP and moved into employment or a vocational training program at HGAC or another postsecondary institution.

- 3) Continue implementation of Articulation Agreements between the Commonwealth Technical Institute at HGAC and secondary schools to improve accessibility of post-secondary programs at HGAC to eligible high school students.

The Commonwealth Technical Institute continued to pursue articulation agreements as a Perkins-Funded Postsecondary Institution with Secondary Schools with Department of Education-Approved Career and Technical Education Programs of Study. In 2014, articulation agreements were completed for Building Maintenance, Small Engine Mechanic Technology, AST Computer Technology/Computer Systems Technology, AST Culinary Arts, Automobile/Automotive Mechanics and Carpentry programs with effective dates through 2017.

- 4) Begin working with students starting at age 14 (and their parents) so they know what services we offer and how they can maximize their high school experience, whether through general education or special education, to increase their opportunity for success when they transition to adult life through higher education or employment.

In order to assist youth with disabilities better prepare for their transition into the world of work and independence, OVR started a new initiative called Early Reach. Early Reach is an outreach initiative intended to promote successful outcomes for youth with disabilities by increasing awareness of OVR services and the benefits of early career planning. The initiative adds a new position called an Early Reach Coordinator (ERC) to the rehabilitation team in OVR's fifteen district offices.

The ERCs reach out to youth with disabilities, their parents, local schools and community agencies that serve youth. The purpose of this outreach is to connect with youth with disabilities early, beginning at age 14, so that they know more about OVR services and can better prepare for vocational choices and living independently. In addition, ERCs are knowledgeable about other services that are available to youth with disabilities who are transitioning from school to adult life. An ERC is available in each of the 15 OVR BVRs District Offices.

- 5) Maintain and strengthen specific working relationships between Department of Human Services (DHS), Department of Education (PDE) and OVR on transition-related issues, including reviewing and updating transition policies.

OVR continued to collaborate with its partners in DHS and PDE on a number of interagency initiatives. OVR continued to be represented on the Pennsylvania Developmental Disabilities Council and the Pennsylvania Special Education Advisory Panel. OVR continued to co-lead the PA Community of Practice on Transition with the Bureau of Special Education on which representatives from all MOU partners serve. OVR also worked with partners in the Office of Developmental Programs (ODP) Employment First State Leadership Mentoring Project in order to promote employment for youth with disabilities across all public agencies.

- 6) Develop a social media plan, as well as traditional outreach materials, tailored to students and families.

OVR has already connected with 340 followers on LinkedIn and 580 on Facebook as part of our agency's social media initiative, which was launched in October 2013. OVR has been delivering content on a more frequent basis since the platforms became available. Information is gathered from local district offices, statewide events, and national sources. Social media posts have highlighted OVR-sponsored activities and events, agency accomplishments, customer success stories and other information pertinent to our consumer and business customers. OVR will increase and refine our social media presence moving forward, with a continued emphasis on delivering quality content and relevant information to all of our customers in a timely manner. OVR will continue to evolve with the changing social media landscape and adapt our strategies, as necessary, in order to ensure that the material we provide is accessible and impactful. OVR has also added an Administrative Office position to the Business Services and Outreach Division, which will focus direct marketing, branding, and public outreach using print, web applications, and social media. This new position will allow a dedicated staff member with experience and expertise in the field to focus on the proper evolution and growth of OVR's social media strategy.

- 7) Develop a transition resource manual (tool kit) for OVR staff.

The OVR Transition Resource Manual has been developed and posted electronically on the agency's shared drive. It will be monitored and updated as necessary as resources and tools are further developed. Training was provided in the spring of 2015.

- 8) Expand the capacity of programs targeted toward transitioning students to postsecondary or employment opportunities.

The Business Services and Outreach Division (BSOD) launched the Jobs for All - OJT for time-limited, paid work experiences to help OVR consumers under age 25 to increase their access to work while in school and active plan status, prior to achieving their OVR IPE placement goal. Training on the use of the Jobs for All - OJT was provided to all staff via a video conference presentation in June 2014. Sites developed and used by counselors since launch in October have included: Allegheny National Forest, Allied Barton Security Services LLC, Juniper Village at Meadville, Great Lakes Cast Stone, Prime Lawn Care Service, Faith in Action, Grandma's House Childcare, Sterling Technologies, Inc., Luxe Salon and Spa, K&D Auto Electric, Inc., Windber Medical Center, Under the Horizon, Golden Living Center-Oil City, Starbucks Coffee Co. and Landis Homes.

### **Goal III: Improve Community Education and Outreach**

- 1) Develop a public awareness and outreach strategy.

Members of the Executive Team met in December 2014 to consider a draft Invitation for Bid (IFB) to retain a marketing and advertising agency to review current outreach materials and web site and social media content with a goal to create a strategic plan for increased name recognition, increased business/employer recognition and improved consistency of the OVR message on services to consumer and business customers.

- 2) Combine OVR's and Pennsylvania State Rehabilitation Council's (PaRC) Customer Satisfaction Surveys.

This was completed in September of 2014 and was implemented in CWDS. The surveys are sent to customers exiting the VR program as successful closures electronically via e-mail. Their responses are compiled within CWDS for analysis.

- 3) Strengthen relationship with Citizen Advisory Committees (CAC) and ensure that CAC activities are posted on the PaRC web site.

All district offices send meeting information (date, time, location, agenda and approved minutes) which are then posted on the PaRC website on a monthly basis.

- 4) Continue an emphasis on OVR's employer outreach to promote the employment of individuals with disabilities.

Presentations on the new Business Services and Outreach Division have been made at the 2014 Pennsylvania Workforce Development Annual Conference, Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation National Employment Teams (CSAVR NET), Central Penn Business Journal (CPBJ) Summer Business Profiles Edition, Pittsburgh Regional Governors Jobs 1st Employment Summit, L&I North-Central and Southwestern On-the-Road Economic Development outreach events with L&I Secretary and workforce teams, Rehabilitation Community of PA (RCPA) 2014 Annual Conference, 2014 PA Disability Employment and Empowerment Conference (PADES), University of Scranton North Eastern U.S. Disability Employment Conference, local Society of Human Resources (SHRM) and Chamber of Commerce meetings, NDEAM regional Business and Employer Outreach Events, combined PA OVR BSOD and local PACareerLink®/WDB employer presentations on ADA and Section 503 regulations on individual with a disability federal contractor hiring goals, and through use of OVR Social media pages.

- 5) Increase outreach to OVR stakeholder groups and the public to increase dialog, public awareness of OVR services, and expand opportunities for individuals with disabilities.

OVR expanded its participation in National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM). In 2014, OVR created, sponsored, or took part in 65 NDEAM-associated events, including job fairs, trainings and special presentations – an increase of 15 events (thirty percent) from the previous year's activities. A detailed social media plan was operationalized, including an OVR Facebook page and LinkedIn platform, which expanded knowledge-sharing among VR professionals and outreach to current and potential customers. These platforms were especially helpful in publicizing NDEAM events. Each District Office was required to submit an annual stakeholder outreach plan in advance, as well as quarterly updates on the plan status. District Offices were also instructed to attend and participate in their local WIB meetings and provide updates.

*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:*

- 1) Identify the strategies that contributed to the achievement of the goals.*
- 2) Describe the factors that impeded the achievement of the goals and priorities.*

OVR established a goal of providing services to 875 customers via Title VI, Part B Funds distributed to Pennsylvania in FFY 2014. This goal was based on the Title VI, Part B allotment for FFY 2013 divided by the average cost per rehabilitation case for the previous year. 663 customers received Supported Employment services via the available \$818,794 Title VI, Part B Funds. The reason in the discrepancy of the goal and the actual numbers was that cost for services increased while the amount of Title VI, Part B funds were less than anticipated. This did not decrease the number of VR customers served through SE services, in fact the number increased, it is just the amount of Title VI, Part B funds available was not sufficient to reach the intended goal.

During FFY 2014, Supported Employment services were provided to 6,967 individuals with disabilities. Of that number, 1,492 were placed of which 1,458 were placed in competitive employment and 1,145 were working 20 hours or more a week. Reviewing SE data allowed field staff to analyze trends and patterns in the rehabilitation process in which customers experienced challenges to success in community, competitive, and integrated employment.

Review of data also allowed for a better understanding of which customers are receiving SE services. This knowledge assisted OVR staff to clarify issues, address them and, in turn, increase the success of customers receiving SE services. Overall, SE services are the most effective cost service used by OVR. In 2013/4 the successful closure rate of customers receiving SE services was over 60%.

OVR will use Title VI, Part B Funds to provide Supported Employment services to customers throughout the commonwealth. Services are provided by way of contracts with community-based rehabilitation providers using an individualized, performance-based job coaching model. Once the Title VI, Part B Funds have been exhausted, Title I Funds are used to provide Supported Employment services.

Supported Employment (SE) services are a vital part of OVR programming. SE services secure employment for individuals with the most significant disabilities who would not experience an employment outcome from less intensive job placement methods. It is anticipated that approximately 6,800 Pennsylvanians with the most significant disabilities will receive SE services in FFY 2014. Of this number, approximately 875 individuals will be funded out of the \$926,000 Title VI, Part B Funds anticipated for distribution to Pennsylvania in FFY 2015.

OVR is preparing to make revision to its supported employment policy during FFY 2014. Changes that may be considered include: looking to provide ongoing evaluation to ensure services are being provided to those customers most in need; increasing communication among VR partners; and achieving a higher level of stability as part of successful employment outcomes through supported employment funding.

An important goal for OVR is to continue to expand SE services for underserved populations. This goal includes providing quality services to rural areas, to continue to increase successful outcomes for transition-aged youth and to ensure accessibility of services for all potential customers. Another goal is to enhance OVR partnerships with provider agencies such as ODP, OMHSAS and OLTL. These agencies provide the necessary long-term supports needed to ensure the employment success of the individual with a disability.

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

These are new indicators, so we have not been able to capture that data for 2014. However, we are putting reports in place so that we will have this information ready for the next VR portion of the State Plan.

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

OVR continues to support innovation and expansion approaches through ongoing Letters of Understanding (LOU) that are developed between community rehabilitation providers and OVR to support the expansion of services to individuals with disabilities, particularly individuals with the most significant disabilities. This allows us to constantly evaluate and develop new service activities that bring about innovative approaches to serving customers with disabilities more effectively.

OVR continually considers the development of new and emerging services with existing community rehabilitation providers to meet the needs of our customers. As funds are available, OVR will develop a Request for Quote (RFQ) for Innovation and Expansion Projects to provide new strategies and programs to improve employment outcomes for individuals with the most significant disabilities. These projects will target expansion of employment services into rural and underserved counties, job readiness and job placement of customers with the most significant disabilities who have traditionally been underserved, transition services for students with disabilities, pre-employment transition services for students with disabilities, replication of Project SEARCH for students or youth with disabilities, and/or the development of Industry Integrated Employment programs, as well as other innovative strategies identified by local OVR staff. OVR anticipates that potential contracts would generally be up to \$150,000 for the initial project year. Higher contract awards could be accepted for proposals of exceptional activity, as funds are available.

Innovation and Expansion funds will be used to support the funding of the State Rehabilitation Council.

Innovation and Expansion funds have not been used to support the Statewide Independent Living Council's resource plan as other sources of funding have been available. Centers for Independent Living have received funds for innovation and expansion projects in the past.

### **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.*
- 2) The timing of transition to extended services.*

OVR provides SE services to Pennsylvanians with disabilities through a network of community-based Community Rehabilitation Providers (CRPs). Services provided through these vendors/partners are described below:

#### **Background**

Beginning in the early 1980s, OVR developed a system of SE services using a fee-for-service payment system. Initially, 17 CRPs of SE services were funded through a 5-year, OSERS, Title III supported employment State Change Grant. The number of SE CRPs approved to provide services to OVR has since grown to over 100. There are over 50 SE CRPs

contracted specifically with OVR's Bureau of Blindness and Visual Services (BBVS) program. SE services are now provided statewide and include time-limited and, to a much lesser degree, time-enduring services.

OVR SE services include transitional employment through the Clubhouse model for persons with significant mental health disabilities. Also, SE services have been provided on a broader basis since the late 1990's to persons who are deaf via contracting with SE CRPs fluent in American Sign Language. The use of SE for customized employment (CE) cases is being piloted in 2015 to expand the breadth of SE services OVR offers. The use of CE in addition to SE will allow OVR to assist individuals who require very intensive services but are interested in and working towards competitive community integrated employment. OVR District Offices continue to work with other key state and private agencies, such as OHMSA), ODP, OLTL and PDE. In addition, OVR partners with private community service CRPs to expand and develop all types of community-integrated competitive employment as defined by the individual needs of customers.

OVR currently uses what is commonly known as the milestone SE method. OVR has termed its version "Performance Based Job Coaching" (PBJC) and has used this method of funding community-based SE vendors since 1999. This format was based upon research completed by OVR in the mid-1990's to determine best practices for SE service provision. The above-mentioned format was reviewed in 2013 and 2014 for areas of improvement. Additionally, OVR has reviewed SE data for a three-year funding cycle to determine what policy revisions should be considered to improve the provision of SE services.

#### Quality Standards

OVR provides technical assistance and training for its staff through the use of seminars, conferences, and training programs. SE services provided by community based service CRPs are reviewed at least every 5 years to look at relevance and costs related to such services.

Staff from Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU), OVR and the Pennsylvania Association of Rehabilitation Facilities (PARF) developed statewide standards for OVR and CRPs of SE services. These standards continue to guide all contracts and contract reviews for provision of SE services. The standards (as updated) are as follows:

1. The population to be served
  - a. Individuals served are those eligible for the state/federal VR program.
  - b. Targeted consumers are individuals with disabilities needing services to obtain, retain, or prepare for community based competitive employment that is consistent with their capacities and abilities.
  - c. The SE program is responsive to customer needs and to the employment opportunities available in the community.
2. Outcomes for SE Program Participants
  - a. The program encourages, promotes, and provides for integration in the competitive work force.
  - b. Skill acquisition challenges the individual's potential to be productive as defined by the employer and employment market.
  - c. The number of hours worked by the participants should be the maximum hours possible based upon the unique strengths, resources, interests, concerns, abilities and capabilities of individuals with the most severe disabilities. The maximum number of employee benefits possible must be sought as well. A competitive employment situation is the intended result, and ideally, it is a position that is full-time with benefits and provides the best opportunity for independence.
3. The SE Community Rehabilitation Provider (CRP) Organization
  - a. The CRP mission statement is consistent with the planned services.
  - b. There is evidence that the CRP has the ability to deliver vocational rehabilitation services in the form of community based work assessments, job readiness training, job development, job placement, job analysis, job skills training, on-the-job supports, itinerant supports and extended services among others.

- c. The CRP demonstrates prior experience or otherwise presents the capability to deliver services, such as linkages with other services, adequate staff, training for staff and other supports for staff, etc.
- d. The CRP has a method in place to measure and report the outcomes of services, e.g., automated or alternative method of service reporting and tracking.
- e. There are job descriptions for all service CRP staff.
- f. Staff development is an integral part of the CRP's budget or annual plan.
- g. The CRP demonstrates that individuals with disabilities have a substantial role in the establishment of organizational policy and delivery of services.

#### 4. The Service Design

- a. The CRP presents for consideration:
  - i. Definitions of Services
  - ii. Staffing pattern that includes individuals with disabilities
  - iii. Model to be used including plan for community integration, job development, placement, training and extended services
  - iv. Linkage with OVR and other funding sources (DHS, PDE)
  - v. Consistent opportunities for informed customer choice

#### 5. Local Linkages:

- a. The CRP demonstrates a knowledge and ability to develop and maintain linkages with other ancillary services in the community, e.g., the L&I BWPO, the PDE Bureau of Special Education (BSE), the DHS (OMHSAS, ODP), the PA Department of Aging (Office of Long Term Living (OLTL), Drug and Alcohol Single County Authorities (SCA), Chambers of Commerce and other extended service agencies and organizations.
- b. OVR reviews, discusses, and works closely with the CRP for mutually responsive programs. The OVR counselor is integral to customer progress, service delivery, and placement activities occurring in concert with the CRP. A process is in place to measure and report the outcome of services.

#### Scope and Extent

SE services provided to individuals include: evaluations, skills training, job modification and/or customization, transportation and transportation training services, coordination of ancillary services, advocacy and socialization skills, among others. All services are provided on an individual basis and are tailored to the individual's needs to achieve a specific vocational goal.

Pennsylvania has established local mechanisms through which funding for intensive training and extended services is available for all eligible populations. Populations receiving SE includes individuals with developmental disabilities, mental health issues, physical disabilities, blindness, deafness, autism and traumatic brain injury, among many other needs. SE services are also available within the special education, mental health and developmental disability systems. OVR is actively engaged in collaborative relationships with those systems to ensure the provision of effective services, to reduce duplication of efforts, to share resources, and to improve employment outcomes for those served mutually by multiple systems.

In Pennsylvania, three major sources of extended service funding are available to ensure availability to customers who require long term support such as those who receive services from ODP and OLTL. OVR also has a limited amount of funds for customers who do not have other sources of long-term funding. These funds are the VR state SE funding. They are intended for customers who need extended services and who have no other source for extended services after the intensive supports are faded from the employment situation.

Actual funding available from ODP and OLTL varies from county to county depending upon each county's situation. Other resources sought for extended service funding are natural supports, SSA work incentives, private foundations, etc.

### Timing of the Transition to Extended Services

The timing of the transition of an individual with a disability to extended services is dependent upon the needs of the customer and the employer, and in most cases, available funding from one of the DHS agencies (OMHSAS, ODP and OLTL). Extended services may not be needed for the individual who has appropriate natural supports such as the employer, co-workers, family, and friends. However, extended services must be offered for situations where natural supports for the needs of the employee are missing or incomplete.

The determination of the need for extended services begins at the assessment stage of the VR plan. At that time the rehabilitation team, OVR staff, the individual, the individual's family, and, if applicable, the individual's Case Manager/Supports Coordinator determine what resources are needed for long-term supports. This team collaboratively determines what resources are available to meet the extended services need.

Due to the intensive and short-term nature of OVR supports, other partners (including funders) must be involved to ensure long-term success for the worker with a disability. The rehabilitation team must plan carefully for the needs of an individual with a disability to determine the best time for the employee with a disability to transition to extended services. The sooner the team can be assembled and focused on supporting the customer, the better the transition to extended services will be to meet the needs of the customer and employer.