

PROGRAM-SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS FOR VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION

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

Description (a) Input of State Rehabilitation Council

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

- (1) input provided by the State Rehabilitation Council, including input and recommendations on the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan, recommendations from the Council's report, the review and analysis of consumer satisfaction, and other Council reports that may have been developed as part of the Council's functions;
- (2) the Designated State unit's response to the Council's input and recommendations; and
- (3) the designated State unit's explanations for rejecting any of the Council's input or recommendations.

The Pennsylvania Rehabilitation Council (PaRC) used the following sources to develop its recommendations to the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR):

1. The PaRC annual report (FFY 2016)
2. PaRC Customer Satisfaction Survey
3. Review of items in 2016's Description (a) (formally know as Attachment 4.2(c))
4. Comments received at 2017 State Plan Meetings
5. Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) Monitoring Report
6. Statewide Needs Assessment
7. Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment FFY 2017 & 2018 Office of Vocational Rehabilitation and Institute on Disabilities at Temple University Project Proposal
8. Workforce Development Statistics
9. Local Citizen Advisory Committees (CAC) meetings and/or minutes as well as calls and meetings with CAC Chairs and the PaRC Executive Committee

Commendations:

The PaRC's efforts have benefited from a strong partnership with the leadership of OVR. The PaRC commends OVR's leadership for:

- A. Encouraging and supporting stakeholder input, based on their involvement in the Pennsylvania Disability Employment & Empowerment Summit (PADES) and transition conferences, and the customer satisfaction advisory committee meetings;
- B. The number of hours they have committed to learn and implement new Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) regulations and provide the PaRC with WIOA Wednesday updates;
- C. The creation and implementation of Innovation and Expansion Grants;
- D. OVR participation in and support of local CAC meetings, participating in and developing minutes for calls and meetings with CAC Chairs and the PaRC Executive Committee; and
- E. Their leadership of postsecondary education opportunities for the intellectual disability community through the Access College-Employment Success (ACES) grant to Dream Partnership.

THE DESIGNATED STATE UNIT'S RESPONSE TO THE COUNCIL'S INPUT AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Transition

Issue: Support for students with disabilities age 14 to 21 is critical to creating an expectation of competitive, integrated employment as they transition into adulthood. For example, post-secondary education programs are beginning to

demonstrate successful employment outcomes for people with intellectual disabilities. It is therefore critical that programs be available throughout the state to help transition age youth become working adults. The state plan specifically highlights the work of ACES grant and Dream Partnership's work in developing PSE programs. In a 2016 Executive Order, Governor Wolfe specifically recommends the continuation of the ACES grant.

Recommendations:

- A. Work with the Youth Leadership Network and Workforce Investment Board Youth Committees. (OVR Response: no change, refer to initial plan).
- B. Continue developing and strengthening relationships with the Department of Human Services—including the Office of Developmental Programs—and Department of Education to provide services to transition age youth. (OVR Response: no change, refer to initial plan).
- C. Provide data assessing the effectiveness of the Early Reach program and other programs that target transition age youth. (OVR Response: no change, refer to initial plan).
- D. Award innovation grants to programs developing pre-employment transition services for students with disabilities.

OVR Response: OVR has developed and implemented Innovation and Expansion Contracts across the state which include a variety of programs for students with disabilities ranging from work-based learning experiences, family engagement series, community based vocational instruction, and post-secondary exploration. OVR will continue to monitor these programs for successful practices for replication in the future.

- E. Continue to fund the ACES grant for continued expansion of PSE programs in PA. The ACES grant should contain student/parent outreach opportunities for students age 14 to 21.

OVR Response: In 2017 OVR received roll over Re-Employment Funds in the amount of \$100,000 to support the ACES grant for an additional year. Re-Employment Funds end in 2018, unless legislatively renewed, so no additional renewals are anticipated to reauthorize the ACES grant beyond that additional year. The ACES grant's primary purpose was to increase the proliferation of college-based certificate programs also known as Comprehensive Transition Programs (CTPs) for young adults with intellectual disabilities in Pennsylvania. OVR updated the college policy to be able to fund students at established CTP programs and continued work on other similar programs through LOU/Administrative Memos (ex: AACHIEVE).

- F. Document and share "Success Stories" to show youth and parents how services can help create positive employment outcomes.

OVR Response: OVR utilizes social media, including Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, and Instagram, to highlight success stories from across the state. Many of our staff will be presenting on effective programs and practices at the Annual PA Transition Conference. OVR will continue to look for opportunities to present to families and students on successful transition practices.

2. Training for OVR Staff and Counselors of Consumer Customers

Issue: The public face of OVR is and should remain one that is understanding and helps people with disabilities to achieve competitive, integrated employment goals.

Recommendations:

- A. Continue working to improve consumer customer satisfaction. (OVR Response: no change, refer to initial plan).
- B. Develop and test strategies for improving response rates for the consumer customer satisfaction survey. (OVR Response: no change, refer to initial plan).

- C. Train placement counselors reinstated or VR counselors to do federal resumes and Schedule A paperwork to get some customers placed in highly competitive employment.

OVR Response: OVR Business Services Division will continue to provide an annual conference and training so that all Business Services Counselors (BSCs formerly placement counselors), Business Services Representatives (BSRs), Business Services Supervisors and any District Administrator (DA) or Assistant District Administrator (ADA) local point of contact are trained and updated on federal resumes, USA Jobs web site, Schedule A federal civil service procedure and new Sec. 504 2% federal individual with a disability (IwD) workforce representation rule which becomes effective January 2018. Central Office business services staff and District Office Business Services Supervisors and BSCs will train all counseling staff on Federal Schedule A. District Office counseling staff will provide guidance and counseling to customers on federal job and career opportunities.

3. Citizen Advisory Committees (CACs)

Issue: CACs are a critical connection between OVR and consumer customers. Each OVR District Office has their own process for CAC meetings and meeting notification.

Recommendations:

- A. Take a more active role in the guidance and development of the CACs and have an open line of communication with the PaRC when issues arise. (OVR Response: no change, refer to initial plan).
- B. Issue a memo to DAs on expectations for utilizing and promoting CACs. (OVR Response: no change, refer to initial plan).
- C. Gather and share best practices among the CACs. (OVR Response: no change, refer to initial plan).
- D. Continue to advise the CACs on using the PaRC's website for publically posting CAC agendas and minutes. (OVR Response: no change, refer to initial plan).
- E. Implement the recommendations on CACs sent by the PaRC to the OVR Executive Director in 2016.

OVR Response: OVR's strategic goals have not changed; they continue to be: 1) Customer Service; 2) Transition; 3) Stakeholder Relations; 4) Workforce Development Collaboration; and 5) Public Awareness/Outreach. OVR will send those goals out to each CAC chairperson and ask them to share with their members. OVR also participated in the PaRC/OVR CAC meeting on 3/2/2017, at which time the basic organization of the CACs and guidance for future CACs was discussed. OVR executive staff participated in this meeting with the expectation for collaboration and strengthening of relationships. During each CAC committee call, Best Practice ideas are shared regarding increasing member participation and recruitment. Copies of OVR's Annual Report, containing data for the year, will be shared with each local OVR office to provide to their CACs. Although each local District Office activity varies, DAs are encouraged to share activity information with their CACs and extend an invitation to participate. OVR values the CACs' work and support, and continues to maintain that the intent of the CAC is to be locally-run, consumer-driven and responsive to CAC member recommendations.

- F. Discuss CAC progress and activities at DA meetings and training activities.

OVR Response: On March 2, 2017, the PaRC brought together PaRC members, OVR staff, and CAC Chairs to discuss the purpose, roles and goals of the CACs, and to brainstorm ways to increase engagement and improve collaboration. The issues discussed at this meeting were summarized and shared with all DAs and ADAs.

- G. Consider using OVR's social media platforms to advertise CAC meetings.

OVR Response: As OVR is informed of dates of local CAC meetings, these dates can be posted on OVR's Facebook and Twitter pages. PaRC has formed a Social Media committee, and these dates will be forwarded to them as well, so that dates can be shared via PaRC's social media outlets.

- H. Establish guidelines that allow CAC members to communicate with OVR central office staff when they need assistance.

OVR Response: CAC members can contact the OVR Specialist who serves as liaison to the PaRC and CACs. This staff member also participates in the PaRC CAC Committee calls on a regular basis.

4. Information Sharing

Issue: Accessible and timely information is important to consumer customers (Pennsylvania's Workforce Development Plan [PY 2016-PY 2019], Page 110) because it allows greater engagement and involvement and leads to a positive customer experience.

Recommendations:

- A. Use current technologies, such as e-mail and text messages, along with older communication technologies to communicate with consumer customers. (OVR Response: no change, refer to initial plan).
- B. Make sure all OVR communications are accessible. (OVR Response: no change, refer to initial plan).
- C. Make sure that accommodations such as captioning are available at all public OVR meetings. (OVR Response: no change, refer to initial plan).
- D. Review lead times for dissemination of information to ensure enough advance notice so all stakeholders have sufficient time to review, react and respond to opportunities.

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

5. Partnership with the PaRC

Issue: Collaboration between PaRC and OVR has provided mutual benefit for reviewing policies and priorities.

Recommendations:

- A. Continue OVR leadership's collaboration with the PaRC. (OVR Response: no change, refer to initial plan).
- B. Continue PaRC involvement in developing, reviewing, implementing, and evaluating OVR. (OVR Response: no change, refer to initial plan).
- C. Include the PaRC in OVR training and activities.

OVR Response: The OVR Policy, Staff Development, and Training Division will extend an invitation via e-mail message to PaRC members to participate in relevant video conference trainings as well as relevant In-Service/Out-Service training opportunities.

6. OVR Staff and Counselors as Role Models

Issue: OVR counselors, managers, and other staff with disabilities provide positive role models and examples for people with disabilities. This is a benefit to both consumer and business customers because it demonstrates the employment potential of people with disabilities.

Recommendations:

- A. Continue to recruit people with disabilities and other underrepresented groups into counselor and leadership roles within OVR. (OVR Response: no change, refer to initial plan).
- B. Review available hiring data and report on how the number of OVR staff with disabilities is changing over time. (OVR Response: no change, refer to initial plan).
- C. Have OVR counselors share OVR position openings with customers as appropriate.

OVR Response: OVR VR Specialist for Recruitment prepares quarterly updates and advertisements, in addition to collaborating with PA Civil Service to disseminate information to OVR staff and OVR customers. OVR customers who express interest in learning about employment opportunities within vocational rehabilitation are provided information as part of the vocational counseling process. District Office business services staff will distribute monthly OVR vacancies or internship opportunities to counselors so that qualified customers can be recruited and encouraged to take PA State Civil Service Commission tests to qualify for the eligible candidate list for OVR employment opportunities.

7. Policy Evaluation

Issue: Rigorous assessment of policy impacts is critical when OVR makes a policy change intended to achieve certain goals (or for which there is a concern about adverse consequences).

Recommendations:

- A. For any substantive policy change, decide whether an evaluation is needed and if it is, create an evaluation plan.

OVR Response: OVR will consult with the PaRC Policy/State Plan Committee and Client Assistance Program (CAP), when reviewing new policy or changes to existing policy, to determine what level of evaluation would be appropriate based on available resources. If a policy evaluation is considered appropriate, OVR will propose a plan for consideration to the PaRC Policy Committee and CAP before implementation.

- B. Monitor the outcomes of those affected by policy changes for a long enough period to understand the changes' longer term effects.

OVR Response: The OVR Systems and Evaluation Division will work along with the OVR Policy Specialist to monitor outcomes and report findings to the PaRC Policy/State Plan Committee and CAP, as determined according to established policy evaluation.

8. Customer Choice

Issue: Long waiting times for orientation and mobility training create a barrier to timely, effective provision.

Recommendations:

1. Customers who require Orientation and Mobility (OM) training should receive those services within 45 days of service approval.

OVR Response: The Bureau of Blindness and Visual Services (BBVS) endeavors to provide services to customers in a timely manner across each of our program areas. While the provision of OM services can at times be somewhat problematic, customers in the Vocational Rehabilitation program have priority for OM services, especially when there is an issue of maintaining employment or starting a new position. As a result, most VR customers receive services within 45 days of service approval. Customers of other BBVS programs such as the Independent Living Older Blind program can experience longer waits in some areas of the state due to staff shortages. There is a national shortage of OM Specialists. We have experienced that shortage in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania also. We continue to recruit nationally to fill these positions and are currently in the process of developing innovative programs with Commonwealth universities who train OM Specialists to provide paid internship opportunities that will lead to BBVS employment. BBVS is currently working with the Department of Labor and Industry to investigate salary structure as it relates to agencies and entities that we are in competition with in the hiring of OM Specialists. We are also investigating opportunities to cross train current employees which will result in their becoming certified OM Specialists.

2. OVR should work to approve enough OM training vendors so that it can provide services within the goal of 45 days.

OVR Response: BBVS does contract with outside agencies to provide OM training when District Offices have unfilled OM Instructor positions. However, outside vendors also have difficulty recruiting OM Specialists due to the nationwide shortage.

THE DESIGNATED STATE UNIT'S EXPLANATIONS FOR REJECTING ANY OF THE COUNCIL'S INPUT OR RECOMMENDATIONS.

OVR did not reject any of PaRC's input or recommendations.

Description (b) Request for Waiver of Statewideness

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

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

No change to report, refer to initial VR Services Portion of PA WIOA Combined State Plan (7/1/16 to 6/30/2020).

Description (c) Cooperative Agreements with Agencies Not Carrying Out

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

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

- Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) currently exist between OVR and the PA Department of Education and the Department of Human Services (DHS) Office of Developmental Programs (ODP); based on the Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act (WIOA) changes, discussion has been initiated to update the MOUs.
- Memorandum of Understanding has been developed between OVR and the Department of Human Services, Office of Office of Children, Youth and Families, Bureau of Juvenile Justice Services (BJJS)
- Institute of Higher Education (IHE) Agreements with the 14 State owned Universities referred to as the PA State System of Higher Education (PASSHE) have entered into a second five year MOU with OVR that will remain in effect through January 31, 2020.
- 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.

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

- Pennsylvania's Initiative on Assistive Technology (PIAT), a program of the Institute on Disabilities at Temple University, is Pennsylvania's statewide program under section 4 of the Assistive Technology Act. Activities that are proved by PIAT are: device demonstrations; device lending; device reuse; public awareness activities; and training to raise awareness and knowledge of AT topics. Any of these activities are available to OVR staff and customers, mostly at no charge.
- 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.

(3) 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.

- In 2017 OVR and the Pennsylvania State University, College of Agricultural Sciences, Penn State Extension approved an Administrative Memo for the AgrAbility program. The AgrAbility Project is a statewide project whose staff provides direct services for farmers and farm family members with a disability or long-term health condition who want to remain in production agriculture. This agreement does not guarantee a specific amount of total funds or total number of participants to be funded by OVR. OVR has modeled this agreement and payment structure after existing rates and services where applicable, but has taken into consideration additional supports and services that will be needed to ensure a successful partnership.

(4) *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 continues to develop more programs to partner with community service providers to target transition aged youth.

(5) *State use contracting programs.*

- As noted above, OVR has a MOU with ODP and is in the discussion stage of updating it.
- Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between OVR and ODP is being finalized to exchange information on the services delivered to individuals enrolled in DHS-ODP programs who also receive or received services through L&I-OVR.
- Memorandum of Understanding has been developed between OVR and the Department of Human Services, Office of Office of Children, Youth and Families, Bureau of Juvenile Justice Services (BJJS)
- OVR oversees funding supplied by the Pennsylvania Utility Commission (PUC) to Temple University for the TDDP program.
- OVR oversees funding supplied by the PUC to the National Federation of the Blind for the Newline Print Media Access Program.
- OVR has supported Temple University's efforts to begin a Wireless Expansion Initiative financially supported by the PUC.

Description (d) Coordination with Education Officials

Describe:

- (1) *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.*
- (2) *Information on the formal interagency agreement with the State educational agency with respect to:*
 - (A) *consultation and technical assistance to assist educational agencies in planning for the transition of students with disabilities from school to post-school activities, including VR services;*
 - (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.*

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) of 2014, which reauthorizes the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, places significant emphasis on the provision of services to students and youth with disabilities. OVR estimates there are over 100,000 students with IEP's between 14 and 21 (transition age in PA) that are eligible for Transition Services and Pre-Employment Transition Services (PETS) in 2016. OVR is active with data collection and updating its case management

system, the Commonwealth Workforce Development System (CWDS), to capture the delivery of PETS, therefore the numbers were reported did not reflect actual service delivery. It is estimated that 35,000 students received PETS in 2016.

OVR continues to review existing policies and procedures to determine what additional updates will be necessary to ensure compliance with the final regulations. OVR's Systems and Evaluation Unit have been diligently updating our CWDS case management system to account for all the new federal reporting requirements. Over the next 8 months there are four new system releases that will address Pre-Employment Transition Services (PETS), Section 511 Tracking, RSA 911 reporting, as well as, other system upgrades and enhancements. The June 2017 release of CWDS included a revamp of the application and eligibility process that include necessary data tracking elements for RSA 911 reporting for the new reporting cycle that started 7/1/2017. Ongoing development and design of future CWDS enhancements remains a significant undertaking for the agency that requires system testing, multiple staff trainings, and the creation of reference materials and forms.

OVR's Transition Policy is targeted to be updated in the fall of 2017 to reflect changes specific to transition services and PETS as outlined in the final regulations authorized under title I of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended by WIOA title IV. Ongoing training and technical assistance will be provided to ensure OVR is effectively providing PETS 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 [PA State Act 26](#), *the Work Experience for High School Students with Disabilities Act*, is about collaboration with local education and public agencies to ensure that students with disabilities are prepared to enter the workforce after graduation. On June 17, 2017 notice of the appropriation of sufficient funds to carry out the provisions of this act was published in the [Pennsylvania Bulletin](#). Act 26 charges OVR with providing PETS and facilitating the process of job and career development between local education agencies and public and private employers, focusing on job skills training; job coaching; competitive integrated work-based learning experiences; and counseling on opportunities for enrollment in post-secondary education programs.

OVR is now required to report on Individualized Education Program (IEP) meeting attendance for PA State Act 26. We have been running preliminary numbers looking at both the PETS Potentially Eligible IEP meetings (entered in the PETS Screens) that have been attended, as well as, the Open Case IEP meetings that have been attended (entered on the Case CPN Screens). To help improve reporting on the number of IEP meetings attended by OVR staff, a future CWDS release enhancement will automatically default the Case Progress Note Type to PETS Student Services CPN for individuals with the student indicator. When added, the Case CPN PETS Service Student IEP meeting function will help improve reporting accuracy of IEP meeting attendance and demonstrate all the good work staff are doing for students with disabilities in collaboration with LEAs. Until then, staff are encouraged to change CPN note type to PETS Student Service CPN and select IEP meeting when appropriate. OVR staff continue to develop the infrastructure and procedures to deliver effective services that are allowable under the PETS requirements.

OVR has about 130 provider agreements for PETS and about 30 Innovation and Expansion Projects related to PETS delivery. All PETS provider agreements require providers to enter the student information that is required by the RSA 911. They also indicate the total number of days and hours at the student attended PETS so that OVR can provide accurate payment for services. OVR completes quarterly monitoring with its contractors as well.

In May 2017 a webinar between OVR and the Department of Education's Bureau of Special Education, Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network (PaTTAN) focused on agency collaboration, coordination, and on how to assist transition age students in accessing and engaging in PETS during the 2017-2018 school year. The webinar provided a Draft 2-year modification VR Services Portion PY2018

comprehensive review of the many aspects of OVR with education, including an overview of the VR process, Early Reach, business services, HGAC and Specialized Children's Services in BBVS.

2017 PA Community on Transition Conference: *Pathways to Success – Transitioning into Tomorrow Together* will be held at the Penn Stater Conference Center & Hotel State College, PA on August 8 - 11, 2017. This year's pre-conference theme, targeted for OVR staff, is "The Ever-Changing Landscape of VR in Pennsylvania" and will focus on WIOA and its impact on service delivery. More than 30 conference proposals/sessions will be presented by OVR staff, in collaboration with our partners, particularly school districts, in promoting the successful transition of youth/young adults with disabilities to post-school outcomes of employment, post-secondary education and training, community participation and healthy lifestyles.

A three-year contract (7/2017-6/2020 with 2 single year renewals) will continue to bring a Mobile FABLAB experience to OVR customers, including students and youth with disabilities, comprised of off-the-shelf, industrial-grade fabrication and electronic tools used to demonstrate a hands-on-approach to Science, Technology, Engineering & Math (STEM) applications. The two providers of the **Mobile FABLAB** experience are Carnegie Science with a statewide contract and the IU#1 with a regional contract. In the 2016-2017 FFY, OVR hosted FABLAB at the Transition Conference, the PADES Conference and the Summer Stem Academy at the Hiram G. Andrews Center.

The **Project SEARCH High School Transition Program** is a unique, business led, one-year school-to-work program that takes place entirely at the workplace. Total workplace immersion facilitates a seamless combination of classroom instruction, career exploration, and hands-on training through worksite rotations. Project SEARCH began in Pennsylvania through an RSA grant and 10 sites were started over the five year grant program. Currently OVR has 14 student sites and 3 young adult sites. In September 2017, two additional sites will open, Glaxo Smith Kline in Collegeville, PA and UPMC Jameson in Lawrence County (I&E project). In 2018, OVR will add new sites at Wayne Memorial Hospital, Penn State Physician's Group (Reading), and Mercyhurst University (Autism Curriculum). Glaxo Smith Kline and Kalihari Resorts have already indicated their wish to replicate and this will add an additional site to Philadelphia and Pocono Summit, respectively in the 2018-2019 school year. Additionally, OVR will have two sites dedicated to serving those on the autism spectrum (Drexel University and Mercyhurst University).

Project SEARCH statistics kept by the Cincinnati Hospital indicate that as of the close of the 2015-2016 school year, OVR had served 529 students. We have a 91.1% completion rate and an 80% placement rate. The placement rate is determined at the end of the Project SEARCH yearly program. It does not reflect those students who were placed after they had completed the Project SEARCH program.

In 2017, the National Project SEARCH conference was held at the Kalahari Resort and Convention Center in Pocono Summit, PA. This year's conference was attended by over 700 Project SEARCH team members from across the contiguous US, Alaska, Hawaii, England, Wales and Scotland. This was the highest attendance figure in the conference's 11-year history.

Description (e) 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.

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.

Over the course of the past year, OVR, Pennsylvania Academic, Career and Technical Training (PACTT) team members and staff from the Bureau of Juvenile Justice Services (BJJS) joined together in development of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to leverage state and federal funding to further support efforts. In May 2017 OVR received notification of final approval of the proposal and the result of that collaboration is access to \$3,360,000 to be utilized exclusively for PACTT youth during the coming fiscal year. The aforementioned parties will work together in partnership with PACTT Affiliate agencies and county juvenile probation offices to assist youth and students with disabilities who are involved with juvenile court. These funds may be applied to a wide range of services identified through Agency Support Plans, including but not limited to: the creation of summer programming, increased pre-employment transition services, paid work experiences, joint training programs, outreach to families and community partners focused on employment/education objectives, targeted curriculum & training development and a host of other opportunities designed to expand innovative programming designs that aim toward improved education and employment outcomes for youth.

Description (f) 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 coordinate 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.

Description (g) 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:

- (1) VR services; and*
- (2) transition services, including pre-employment transition services, for students and youth with disabilities.*

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 more successful in competing in today's global marketplace.

OVR, with its state and local governmental partners, community service providers, and employers have created various innovative and successful program strategies to address employment challenges for its customers with disabilities. As a result, effective programs have been developed with nationally recognized employers such as SAP, Lowes, Starbucks and Hershey in addition to other employers.

OVR created and repurposed staff for the establishment of a stand-alone business services unit (BSOD). This has allowed OVR to build greater capacity for statewide business customer engagement in a dual customer model. These steps included:

- OVR has imbedded non-counseling business services staff to support the work of all vocational rehabilitation counselors in direct engagement with business to increase placement results for VR talent (customers).

- OVR created a bureau district office specific talent pipeline report to better understand the available customer talent pipeline and to align it with the needs of businesses for their workforce.
- OVR bureau district office counseling staff and business services teams, use a point of contact model to insure consistent communications with business customers replicated after the CSAVR VR-NET single point of contact model (SPOC). This allows our combined district office bureau staff to initiate and maintain local business engagement, while regional business services division specialists and the BSOD Chief introduce new business customers from referral sources with the VR-NET, PA workforce partners, or through general outreach activities.
- In establishing customer relationships with business OVR has focused on assisting employers with high volume jobs and, if a federal contractor, on referring qualified, pre-screened OVR talent for all levels within their organization to meet U.S. Dept. of Labor, Office of Federal Contract Compliance (OFCCP) aspirational goals to achieve a 7% person with disability (PwD) representation within their workforce units under section 503 of the Rehab Act of 1973.
- OVR has trained our business services combined bureau and BSOD staff on Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) as amended leadership network modules from Cornell University through the mid-Atlantic ADA TransCen technical assistance center, for use in business consultation to create opportunities for employment, advancement within an organization and to create a workforce environment that is welcoming to all talent.

OVR has a strong tradition of collaboration with our colleagues in the American Job Center and local Workforce (WF) Boards. The following demonstrate increased level of collaboration between OVR and workforce various partners:

- OVR and the state WF partners have maintained a memorandum of understanding for vocational rehabilitation counselors to meet PwD in job centers, called CareerLinks® Offices in PA. Both OVR and state Workforce CareerLinks® programs share a common data management system called Job Gateway.
- OVR and CareerLinks® business services staff collaborate on job fairs with employer partners and community rehabilitation agencies across all regions of PA. Business services teams routinely communicate on providing VR and WF talent, requests for ADA compliance or accessibility consultation and disability etiquette training.
- OVR is working closely with the Department of Education and L&I's Apprenticeship office to identify post-secondary technical schools, community colleges, universities and local trade organizations that offer job training, micro and stackable skill credentials driven by PA employer demands for skilled workers.
- OVR considers both federal and state set aside community rehabilitation agency (CRP) job opportunities for VR customers when these positions/jobs pay competitive wages and offer employment and career advancement in integrated settings.

During the next two years OVR Business Services will continue to build employer engagement capacity through:

1. Annual training for all combined bureau and the Commonwealth Technical Institute (CTI) at the Hiram G. Andrews Center (HGAC) business services staff on best practices and the common measures of joint Workforce (WF), OVR, and Title II Adult Education performance indicators.
2. Implement the use of a collaborative WF, OVR CWDS/Job Gateway business design tool to communicate and document cross system business contacts, services and collaboration in supplying qualified pre-screened talent, on-boarding supports, accessibility consultation and disability etiquette information and training.
3. Refinement of data collection on key measures of WIOA Indicator six performance measures of:
 - a. Repeat Business Customers (percentage of repeat employers using services within the previous three years).
 - b. Employer Penetration Rate (percentage of employers using services out of all employers in the State).

OVR continues to expand its collaboration with employers, Industry Partnerships and other multi-employer workforce partnerships 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 employment. Last summer, the Pittsburgh BVRs rolled out the #MYWork Initiative: Municipalities & Youth Summer Employment Program, a pilot that matches high school students with disabilities to paid, summer work experiences in their communities.

Last Summer the SAP Autism at Work Enterprise Readiness Training Program 10 university students and four graduates completed a six-week paid summer apprenticeship. Throughout this apprenticeship program at SAP's headquarters in Newtown Square, made possible by the collaboration of the Arc of Philadelphia, SAP and OVR, participants, all of whom happen to have autism, learned the skills and strategies they need to be successfully employed at an international corporate enterprise, like SAP.

Description (h) Interagency Cooperation

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

- (1) the State Medicaid plan under title XIX of the Social Security Act;*
- (2) the State agency responsible for providing services for individuals with developmental disabilities; and*
- (3) the State agency responsible for providing mental health services.*

Section 511 of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), which amends the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, added new requirements that place limitations on the payment of subminimum wages by entities holding special wage certificates under Section 14(c) of the Fair Labor Standards Act. The provisions of Section 511 went into effect two years after the enactment of the statute on July 22, 2016. As a direct result of WIOA, certain criteria must now be satisfied before an employer hires individuals with disabilities who are age 24 or younger (youths) at subminimum wage or continues to employ individuals with disabilities of any age at the subminimum wage level. The purpose of Section 511 is to ensure that individuals with disabilities have access to information and services that will enable them to achieve competitive integrated employment. Section 511 includes requirements for State VR agencies, subminimum wage employers and local and/or State educational agencies, including specific requirements for youth prior to their participation in subminimum wage employment.

During the first year of employment at subminimum wage, the individual with a disability must receive career counseling and information and referrals that facilitate independent decision-making and possible pursuit of other employment choices every six months. Additionally, the individual must also be informed of self-advocacy and peer mentoring training opportunities. After the first year, such counseling and information and referral services must be provided at least annually. OVR's Section 511 Career Information and Referral Sessions focus on: reassuring individuals that they do not need to make any changes; promoting informed choice and independent decision making about competitive integrated employment; increasing awareness of OVR Services; and providing information about other agencies that can help.

Since December 2016, OVR's successful implementation of Section 511 has been conducted by providing the Career Information and Referral Sessions to all persons engaged in subminimum wage employment in PA. In addition, clerical support tracks 511 data and issues letters of attendance documentation to the participants. To date, over 160 facilities have been visited and 990 Career Information & Referral Sessions have been delivered to more than 9,950 participants.

The Pennsylvania Statewide Independent Living Council's (PA SCIL's) is primarily funded through the federal Administration for Community Living, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and collaborates with the 17 PA Centers for Independent Living (CILs) and other disability organizations across the commonwealth to promote

independent living for individuals with disabilities. Last year, PA SILC and the CILs collaborated on initiatives with OVR to employer youth and students with disabilities to access employment opportunities and post-secondary education. At the Early Reach Academy, PA SILC Executive Director and Disability Empowerment Center (DEC) Executive Director participated on a panel of successfully employed adults who have disabilities. Each of the panel members shared their personal stories, expertise and experiences in an open-ended discussion with students how happen to have disabilities and are preparing to attend college.

In June 2016, PA SILC, OVR and DEC were three of the partners who participated in a Youth Transition Summit at Millersville University, where high school students with disabilities had the opportunity to hear from representatives from the PA Department of Human Services, the Arc of Lancaster County, Goodwill Keystone, Self-Determination Housing Project of PA, Lebanon Transit, Red Rose Transit Authority, PA SILC, DEC, OVR and local providers about the resources, tools and services available for successful transition to employment and independence.

Description (i) Comprehensive System of Personnel Development; Data System on Personnel and Personnel Development

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

1. DATA SYSTEM ON PERSONNEL AND PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT
A. QUALIFIED PERSONNEL NEEDS

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

- (i) the number of personnel who are employed by the State agency in the provision of VR services in relation to the number of individuals served, broken down by personnel category;*
- (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, 2016 OVR had 1162 filled salaried positions and 135 vacancies. This figure includes 232 filled salaried positions at the Hiram G. Andrews Center (HGAC). Statewide, OVR had a total of 394 filled Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Counselor positions, 14 Vision Rehabilitation Therapist positions, and 7 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. (Data provided is from a District Office survey conducted in January 2017 and complement report dated March 2017.

- VR Counselor: 375 Filled Positions; 29 Vacancies; 92 Projected Vacancies in Next 5 Years
- VR Counselor Deaf and Heard of Hearing: 15 Filled Positions; 2 Vacancies; 4 Projected Vacancies in Next 5 years
- VR Counselor Placement: 4 Filled Positions; 0 Vacancies; 1 Projected Vacancy in Next 5 Years
- Vision Rehabilitation Therapist: 14 Filled Positions; 4 Vacancies; 3 Projected Vacancies in Next 5 years
- Orientation and Mobility Specialists: 7 Filled Positions; 3 Vacancies; 6 Projected Vacancies in Next 5 Years

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 2016, 28,051 individuals applied for VR services, 17,261 individuals were found eligible for VR services and approximately 41,180 individuals received VR services from OVR. As a result, 8,438 individuals were placed in employment in FFY 2016. In the same time period, 3,742 individuals received Independent Living Older Blind Services and 872 individuals were referred to the Hiram G. Andrews Center.

B. PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT

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

- (i) a list of the institutions of higher education in the State that are preparing VR professionals, by type of program;*
- (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/CACREP-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 52 students per year with a Master’s Degree in Rehabilitation Counseling.

Institution	Students Enrolled	Employees sponsored by agency and/or RSA	Graduates sponsored by agency and/or RSA	Graduates from the previous year
Penn State University	11	6	0 OVR & 6 RSA	19
University of Pittsburgh	32	0	0 OVR & 0 RSA	14
Edinboro University of PA	12	0	0 OVR & 0 RSA	9
University of Scranton	19	0	0 OVR & 0 RSA	10

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.

2. PLAN FOR RECRUITMENT, PREPARATION AND RETENTION OF QUALIFIED PERSONNEL

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

OVR Counselor Recruitment:

In addition to the 52 available students graduating from in-state graduate degree programs, Pennsylvania OVR can recruit students from CORE/CACREP-approved and other universities that offer a Master’s Degree in Rehabilitation Draft 2-year modification VR Services Portion PY2018

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.
- Maintain appointed membership on Coppin State University (CSU) and the University of Maryland Eastern Shore (UMES) Rehabilitation Counseling Program Advisory Committees.
- 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 40 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.

OVR continues to use creativity in outreach strategies to attract and recruit new VR professionals nationwide. Several new initiatives have been added to already successful practices that have increased OVR's recruitment visibility.

- Palm card advertisements have been designed as a quick reference to showcase employment opportunities and attract potential applicants during career and internship fairs, conferences, and university presentations.
- The S.M.A.R.T. (social, media, alternative recruitment tool) Campaign was launched in August 2016 to increase visibility on a variety of professional positions (Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor, Orientation & Mobility Specialist, Vision Rehabilitation Therapist, Rehabilitation Counselor for the Deaf, Early Reach Coordinator, and Business Services Representatives). The campaign motto is “Our Journey Equals Your Success.” Select OVR staff were video recorded to share the message of their journey within OVR and these recordings can be found on the OVR Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/PAVocRehab/>.
- OVR partnered with the CRCC-ASPIRE (Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification) and AER (Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired) Job Exchanges to advertise key positions. Participation in these activities has increased our exposure and allowed our dedicated Recruitment Specialist to connect with additional candidates outside of our traditional focus.
- Quarterly electronic correspondence continues between OVR and CACREP/CORE and the ACVREP programs to attract entry level and intern opportunities.
- OVR continues close collaborations with the PA State Civil Service Commission and PA Bureau of State Employment to announce internship opportunities through regular announcements that feature information on salary and benefits.
- “New Staff Orientation” training continues to be a popular program to acclimate new employees with the Hiram G. Andrews Center (HGAC), OVR’s training facility, located in Johnstown PA. Participation in this program also provides an opportunity for interaction between employees and to promote a sense of inclusion.
- OVR’s Annual Report for 2016-2017 also features a variety of internship and entry level opportunities to attract potential candidates.

3. PERSONNEL STANDARDS

Describe the State agency's policies and procedures for the establishment and maintenance of personnel standards consistent with section 101(a)(7)(B) and 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

Section 101(a)(7) of the Rehabilitation Act as amended, or the Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD), requires that State VR agencies establish personnel standards for rehabilitation staff, including 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.

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 2017, a total of 742 VR Counselors and VR Counselor Interns were hired under the new entry-level requirements. All 742 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; Review of Experience and Training; Designated Recruitment Specialist; Paid Internship Program; Salary Incentives for VRCs and VRC Interns hired to work in Norristown and Philadelphia District Offices; and Salary Incentives for VRCDHHS hired in offices statewide.

OVR continues to maintain its primary standards in hiring candidates with Master's Degree in the mentioned fields; however, to assist with vacancies, OVR has collaborated with Human Resources, the Office of Administration and Pennsylvania State Civil Service in developing a new job classification, Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Trainee and Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Trainee, Deaf and Hard of Hearing. Graduation from an accredited college or university with a master's degree in social work, clinical mental health counseling, community counseling, career counseling, psychology, disability and human development, special education, or rehabilitative science, which includes three graduate credits in theories and techniques of counseling, is required for this classification. Pennsylvania residency is also requirement. An employee in this job will receive formal and on-the-job training designed to develop technical skills and knowledge in rehabilitation counseling. An employee may initially provide counseling services of limited scope and difficulty to individuals with disabilities who are customers of OVR to prepare for and engage in competitive integrated employment consistent with their unique strengths, priorities, concerns, abilities, interests, and informed choice. Training and development activities will be directed by a VR Supervisor who assures that trainee progress is monitored and that scheduled activities develop competence in conformance with federal regulations, departmental policies and procedures, and in the specialized area of vocational rehabilitation. Upon successful completion of the training program, trainees will be promoted to the VR Counselor position.

This classification continues to be under development with a projected posting in mid-Fall of 2017 or early Spring 2018.

(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.

OVR ensures that personnel have a 21st-century understanding of the evolving labor force and the needs of individuals with disabilities through staff training, professional development and continuing education on labor market information and trends, as well as, training on assessment, rehabilitation technology, Social Security work incentive programs, including programs under the Ticket to Work Incentives Improvement Act of 1999, training to facilitate informed choice under this program, and training to improve provision of services to culturally diverse populations.

4. STAFF DEVELOPMENT

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

- (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 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.

With the implementation of WIOA, training topics include:

1. Functional Limitations, Employment Implications, and Accommodations

2. Vocational Assessment: Tools, Interpretation, and Application
3. Counseling and Guidance
4. Caseload Management, Case Practices, and Service Planning
5. Employer Engagement, Job Development and Job Placement
6. Diversity, Inclusion, and Multicultural Competency
7. Leadership Development

In addition, we are committed to focusing on certain priorities identified as “Customer Service,” “Ethics,” “Confidentiality,” and “Transition” as they relate to the primary training topics outlined by WIOA. Beginning in January 2016, OVR delivers a monthly WIOA Wednesday Videoconference Series to update staff on a variety of WIOA changes and topics of interest. OVR’s Supervisor Training Initiative returned in 2017, following a one-year hiatus.

Acquisition and Dissemination of Significant Knowledge

As in 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.

OVR will capitalize on the in-house expertise offered by existing agency staff to share policy and procedure updates and information about best practices. 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 supports various out-service training opportunities and 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.

Beginning in 2016, OVR led interagency training efforts through Experience the Employment Connection (EEC): Possibilities in Action. Continuing in 2017, EEC is a joint training initiative between the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR), the Office Developmental Programs (ODP), the Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse (OMHSAS), and the Department of Education’s Bureau of Special Education. Driven by the Governor’s Executive Order on Employment First, EEC’s goal is to increase competitive, integrated employment for Pennsylvanians with disabilities by connecting professionals across systems. Participants learn about staff roles, policies, procedures, funding requirements, emerging practices.

OVR ensures that personnel have a 21st-century understanding of the evolving labor force and the needs of individuals with disabilities through staff training, professional development and continuing education on labor market information and trends. In 2016, PA OVR was selected as one of 12 state VR agencies to receive intensive Technical Assistance through the Job-Driven Vocational Rehabilitation Technical Assistance Center (JD-VRTAC) to learn about and implement job-driven practices from 10/15/15-10/14/16. We chose to work on a two-part project in-line with JD-VRTAC goals and the priorities set forth in WIOA.

One portion of this project focused on Integrating Labor Market Information (LMI) into the VR Process. The goal was to equip field staff with the knowledge to blend existing information about labor market trends with customer abilities, limitations and interests to develop appropriate job goals, with the hope of increasing successful long-term placements.

With Intensive Technical Assistance, a detailed Project was developed and modified as needed. PA OVR staff collaborated with the Center for Workforce Information and Analysis (CWIA) regarding available LMI tools and offered recommendations regarding valuable products and website redesign. PA OVR staff completed a survey regarding current LMI Awareness and Use to inform the training content. A two-hour videoconference was delivered on May 17, 2016. A post-test version of the survey was administered to measure changes.

Survey response data point to the effectiveness of the LMI training in several areas, however there were some challenges that impacted data analysis. Still, there was nearly a 50% decrease occurred in the proportion of respondents who indicated they “Disagree” or “Strongly Disagree” with the statement, “Labor market information should be included in vocational planning with OVR customers.” There was nearly a 4% increase occurred in the proportion of respondents who indicated they are familiar with the PA Workstats website from CWIA. There was more than a 6% increase in the proportion of respondents who indicated they use CWIA’s PA Workstats website as a resource for vocational planning with OVR customers. Statewide staff received suggestions for application for each agency role and worked together to brainstorm new ideas.

This videoconference session was recorded and archived. It is available through the online OVR Training Portal for use as a repeat, refresher, or training option for new PA OVR staff.

The goal of Part 2, Increasing Work-Based Learning Experiences for Students with Disabilities through Employer Engagement, was to prepare staff to engage in an informed, open dialogue with an employer to reach individualized solutions for hiring minors in order to increase paid work-based learning experiences for high school students with disabilities.

With Intensive Technical Assistance, a detailed Project was developed and modified as needed. Nine (9) representatives from local businesses participated in a Business Roundtable Discussion to give input about the benefits and challenges that businesses face when hiring students with disabilities who are under the age of 18. This input informed the training curriculum with topics including: Work Hours and Breaks, Prohibited Occupations, Confidentiality, Clearances, State Licensing Requirements, Civil Service Restrictions, Union Environments, and Other General Concerns. Statewide staff received suggestions for addressing each type of concern and worked together to brainstorm new ideas.

A two-hour videoconference was delivered on June 15, 2016. This videoconference session was recorded and archived. It is available through the online OVR Training Portal for use as a repeat, refresher, or training option for new PA OVR staff, particularly Business Service Representatives focused on working with the student population.

A similar session is scheduled as part of the 2017 PA Community on Transition Conference: Pathways to Success – Transitioning into Tomorrow Together in August 2017.

Personnel to address individual communication needs

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. 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 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. Throughout 2016, many OVR District Offices welcomed the Pennsylvania Family Support Alliance (PFSA) for an in-person, 3-hour workshop entitled Recognizing and Reporting Child Abuse.

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.

Description (j) Statewide Assessment

- (1) Provide an assessment of the rehabilitation needs of individuals with disabilities residing within the State, particularly the VR services needs of those:
 - (A) with the most significant disabilities, including their need for supported employment services;
 - (B) who are minorities;
 - (C) who have been unserved or underserved by the VR program;
 - (D) who have been served through other components of the statewide workforce development system; and
 - (E) who are youth with disabilities and students with disabilities, including, as appropriate, their need for pre-employment transition services or other transition services.
- (2) Identify the need to establish, develop, or improve community rehabilitation programs within the State; and
- (3) Include an assessment of the needs of individuals with disabilities for transition career services and pre-employment transition services, and the extent to which such services are coordinated with transition services provided under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act .

Findings from Comprehensive Needs Assessment for FY 2016

INTRODUCTION

In May 2010, RSA issued guidance, "Developing a Model Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA) with Corresponding Training Materials for State VR Agency Staff and SRC Members (Guidance)." This current CSNA reflects the 2010 Guidance. In its Introduction, the Guidance outlines the scope and focus of the CSNA:

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended (Act) calls for periodic comprehensive statewide needs assessments to be conducted jointly by each state's vocational rehabilitation (VR) agency and State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) to inform the State Plan. The Act is specific regarding areas that a needs assessment should address. In addition to the overall need for rehabilitation services in the state, the Act focuses on several VR subpopulations and services: individuals with the most significant disabilities, including those in need of supported employment; unserved and underserved individuals, including minorities; individuals served by other parts of the statewide workforce investment employment system; and establishment, development or improvement of community rehabilitation programs (CRPs).

OVERVIEW OF PENNSYLVANIA

Pennsylvania, the second largest of the seven Middle Atlantic States, is the 33rd most extensive (46,056 square miles), the 6th most populous (12,802,503 according to Census 2015 estimate), and the 9th most densely populated (284.3 per square mile) of the 50 United States. Of its population, 1,671,703 or 13.3% Pennsylvanians identified themselves as having a disability (American Community Survey 2014). In the 67 counties in Pennsylvania, 48 counties or 71.7% of counties are considered rural with a population density of 284 persons per square mile or less, while 19 counties are considered urban (28.3%) (www.rural.palegislature.us).

CURRENT POLICY UPDATES

Two major policy and funding changes that took place in Pennsylvania over the past fiscal year in relationship with Vocational Rehabilitation and employment for individuals with disabilities have created a new frame within which the CSNA has been conducted.

Executive Order 2016-03

Executive Order 2016-03, *Establishing "Employment First" Policy and Increasing Competitive Integrated Employment for Pennsylvanians with a Disability*, signed into order on March 10, 2016 by Governor Tom Wolf has created policies and procedures for Pennsylvania to become an "Employment First" commonwealth as a model state with a climate and culture of competitive integrated employment for individuals with disabilities. The executive order outlines the following major policy changes:

1. "Employment First" is the policy of all Commonwealth executive branch agencies under the jurisdiction of the Governor. This policy reflects the Commonwealth's goal of making the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania a model state when it comes to creating a climate hospitable to workers with a disability.
 - a. The definition of Employment First is that competitive integrated employment is the first consideration and preferred outcome of publicly-funded education, training, employment and related services, and long-term supports and services for working-age Pennsylvanians with a disability, as "disability" is defined in each agency's governing statutes and rules.
 - b. The definition of competitive integrated employment for purposes of this Executive Order is the definition contained in the WIOA, which is work performed on a full or part-time basis (including self-employment) for which a person is:
 - (1) Compensated at not less than federal minimum wage requirements or State or local minimum wage law (whichever is higher) and not less than the customary rate paid by the employer for the same or similar work performed by people without a disability;
 - (2) At a location where the employee interacts with people without a disability (not including supervisory personnel or people who are providing services to such employee); and
 - (3) Presented, as appropriate, opportunities for similar benefits and advancement like those for other employees without a disability and who have similar positions.
2. The Office of Administration will explore the means to reduce barriers to Commonwealth employment for Pennsylvanians with a disability.
3. The Secretaries of the Departments of Education, Human Services and Labor and Industry, working with other Commonwealth agencies or executive office officials as appropriate, will develop a written plan to address the implementation of the following goals:
 - a. Implement Employment First as the policy of all Commonwealth executive branch agencies;
 - b. Align funding, policy, data collection, and practice toward an emphasis on competitive integrated employment rather than non-competitive, non-integrated employment; and
 - c. Increase the number of Pennsylvanians with a disability employed in a competitive integrated job.
4. Progress toward meeting these goals is to be measured by gathering and evaluating, as permissible by law and as available:
 - a. The labor participation rate and unemployment rate of Pennsylvanians with a disability
 - b. The number and percentage of Pennsylvania youth with a disability who successfully complete at least one paid community integrated work experience or community integrated work-based learning experience before exiting secondary education;
 - c. The number and percentage of Pennsylvania youth with a disability who transition from secondary education to adult life with a competitive integrated job or an integrated post-secondary education or training opportunity intended to lead to a competitive integrated job;

- d. The number and percentage of Pennsylvanians with a disability employed in a competitive integrated job who are participants in a Medicaid-funded or state-only funded program that provides home and community-based services; and
- e. The number of private-sector businesses that have been provided requested technical assistance with the recruitment, hiring and retention of qualified Pennsylvanians with a disability.
5. The plan described in Section 3, of this Executive Order, will be developed with broad stakeholder input including but not limited to people with a disability, the Governor's Advisory Committee for People with Disabilities, potential employers, and disability advocacy groups.

While this order has taken effect, many government agencies are still finalizing their plans to comply and setting up new procedures and initiatives. We look forward to utilizing this legislation in our continued analysis of the vocational rehabilitation needs of stakeholders, both job seekers and employers, in Pennsylvania.

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act's (WIOA) Combined State Plan and the Expansion of OVR's Early Reach Program

On July 22, 2014, the President signed WIOA into law, which is designed to "help workers, including workers with disabilities, access employment, education, job-driven training, and support services that give them the chance to advance their careers and secure the good jobs of the future." WIOA's major changes to the Rehabilitation Act include increased role in transition; limitations on the use of subminimum wages; requirement for formal cooperative agreement between VR and State Medicaid and Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities agency (the Office of Developmental Programs in Pennsylvania); movement of federal programs; definition of competitive integrated employment; definition of customized employment; changes in the definition of supported employment; focus of supported employment state grants on youth; technical assistance for post-secondary education; funding of One-Stop infrastructure; role of VR in One-Stop system; and an increased emphasis on role of general workforce development system.

The WIOA Combined State Plan has led directly to the expansion of OVR's Early Reach Program. In order to assist youth with disabilities to better prepare for their transition into the world of work and independence, in 2013 OVR originated a program called Early Reach. OVR first introduced the Early Reach program in August 2013 in the DuBois, Harrisburg, Norristown, Philadelphia and Wilkes-Barre district offices when 1 Early Reach Coordinator (ERC) was hired for each office location. By the end of 2014 the program was expanded to all OVR districts. The Early Reach Coordinator works with youth with disabilities, their parents, schools, and community agencies. The purpose is to connect with youth at a younger age (beginning at age 14) so that they are more familiar with OVR services and can begin earlier to consider vocational options. Prior to the passing of WIOA the Early Reach program included: Assessment, Counseling and Guidance, Employment and Training Planning and AT Evaluation. The passing of WIOA and the bringing together of the Office of Developmental Programs (OPD) along with OVR to invest in workforce development has resulted in increased funding for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. ODP agreed to contribute \$500,000.00 which will become \$2,300,000.00 for OVR with the allotted federal matching structure. With this increased funding targeted at school age youth, the Early Reach program has gone from 17 local coordinators to 27 local coordinators. In addition to the aforementioned services of the Early Reach Program, it now offers enhanced services for school age youth both in group settings (group outreach services) and as individual customers (individual outreach services). Pre- Employment Transitions Services (PETS) now include: Job exploration counseling; Work based learning experiences; Counseling on post-secondary education; Workplace readiness training; and Instruction in self-advocacy. There are currently 77 PETS agreements signed with OVR and the changes and new services being developed under the expanded Early Reach program are just getting under way and will lead us to continued data gathering, analysis and findings the CSNA period continues.

DATA GATHERING

The RSA Guidance requires that information be obtained through both primary and secondary data collection. During this first year of the three-year CSNA data collection and analysis cycle, both quantitative and qualitative data collection tools were designed and submitted to the CSNA Steering Committee. Quantitative data collection tools included targeted online

surveys and secondary data sources included the American Community Survey, Current Population Survey, Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance Survey, disability population state estimates, population projections and economic forecasts, VR agency data and information, state level data from federal sources, state/local data and reports, and literature review. Primary data surveys targeted individuals with disabilities, including students and youth, advocates, employers, employment support professionals/providers, and community service professionals, and the Pennsylvania Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) staff. These surveys included close-ended and open-ended questions in order to gather the most relevant and informative data. Some of these surveys will be disseminated through OVR's mailing list while others will be accessible online through Survey Monkey® to ensure accessibility across the Commonwealth.

Qualitative data included key informant interviews with individuals with disabilities, minorities, youth and students, employers, OVR staff, workforce professionals, and representation from community rehabilitation programs (CRPs) as well as site visits to VR District Offices. The primary data were collected throughout the Commonwealth between August 18, 2015 and June 30, 2016. Additional qualitative and quantitative data will be collected over the next two years, including facilitation of focus groups with stakeholders across the Commonwealth. This data will continue to inform the RSA report and a second and final iteration of the report will be done in FY 2018. The sections below represent findings from the deliverables performed in the 2016 FY and will be reviewed, updated, and expanded with utilization of the primary and secondary data gathered in FY 2017 and FY 2018.

1A. Individuals with most significant disabilities, including their need for supported employment services

Individuals with the most significant disabilities include individuals whose disability significantly limits at least three areas of functional capacity, including mobility, self-care, work tolerance, interpersonal skills, work skills, communication, and self-direction (29 USCS 705(21)A, Title 29. Labor; Chapter 16. Vocational Rehabilitation and Other Rehabilitation Services; General Provisions).

Four customer satisfaction surveys were designed to elicit feedback from customers in Status 26 Closed Rehabilitated, Status 28 Closed after IPE Initiated, Transition Services for youth and students with disabilities, and for those currently undergoing job coaching. Data collected from these surveys will demonstrate successes in and barriers to receiving OVR services and gaining and retaining employment for individuals with the most significant disabilities. Analysis of this data will be included in the 2016-2017 interim report and 2015-2018 Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment report.

1B. Individuals with disabilities who are minorities

According to the 2010-2014 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates 81.8% of Pennsylvanians with disabilities identify as Caucasian or white; 12.4% of Pennsylvanians with a disability identify as African American; 6.2% of Pennsylvanians with disabilities identify as Hispanic or Latino; 0.3% of Pennsylvanians with a disability identify as American Indian and Alaska Native; and 1.4% Pennsylvanians with a disability identify as Asian/Pacific Islanders. Throughout data collection, efforts will be made to recruit stakeholders across all racial and ethnic demographics.

Analysis of customer satisfaction survey data according to participant race and ethnicity will elucidate the unique experiences of minority populations in accessing services and securing competitive employment. Analysis of this data will be included in the 2016-2017 interim report and 2015-2018 comprehensive statewide needs assessment report.

Qualitative data collected through site visits to three district offices and face-to-face interviews with VR staff, including VR administrators, Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors (VRC) and Supervisors (VR Sup), Early Reach Coordinators (ERC), Business Services Representatives (BSR), Vision Rehabilitation Therapist (VRT), Social Workers (SW), and Orientation and Mobility Specialists (OM) suggested that lack of English fluency has not presented significant barriers to ethnic and cultural minorities in receiving services and supports. According to the VR staff interviewed, language interpretation services have proved sufficient. However, Pennsylvania could benefit from trainings oriented to cultural competency in regard to the Pennsylvania Dutch, Amish, and Quaker populations as well as refugees.

Administrators and VR Counselors at multiple district offices cited familiarity and access to but no utilization of Language Line interpretation services. According to the October 2015 Census Report “Detailed Language Spoken at Home and Ability to Speak English for the Population 5 Years and Over for Pennsylvania: 2009-2013” of the 12,008,403 speakers in Pennsylvania over five years of age, 470,960, about four percent, speak English less than “very well.” Consequently, lack of utilization of interpretation services may suit statewide language demographics, but may also signal a population underserved by OVR.

1C. Individuals with disabilities who have been unserved or underserved by the vocational rehabilitation program

Individuals with disabilities that are considered unserved and/or underserved include those with multiple disabilities (such as deaf/blind), those in rural areas, transition age youth, and individuals with disabilities that are concurrently customers of other state systems (such as corrections, educational, and/or other human services systems).

Individuals with Multiple Disabilities

Analysis of customer satisfaction survey data according to participant disability type will elucidate the extent to which multiple disabilities impacts individuals’ receipt of VR services and employment opportunities and supports. Analysis of this data will be included in the 2016-2017 interim report and 2015-2018 comprehensive statewide needs assessment report.

Data collected at Bureau of Blindness and Visual Services (BBVS) district offices revealed that many customers have multiple disabilities and different employment goals, which impact their access to services. We heard, “Many customers have more than just vision needs” who “need comprehensive services” repeatedly across district offices. Additionally, BBVS Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors, Vision Rehabilitation Therapists, and Social Workers described a significant disparity between the services accessible by customers who are not pursuing employment but are interested in Independent Living Supports. Recently, due to a decrease in the state budget, funding has been eliminated to provide low vision aids to adults over 55 years of age who are not pursuing employment but seeking to live independently while customers of any age, pursuing employment, have access to low vision aids. Though BVRS’ mission is to promote employment, BBVS long-term mission has included enhancing the quality of life and independent living skills of children and seniors who are not pursuing employment. In other words, the application of overarching Vocational Rehabilitation objectives complicates BBVS’ ability to execute its mission and provide for the needs of its customers.

Rural Areas

Analysis of customer satisfaction survey data according to participant’s residential population will illuminate the extent to which urban, suburban and rural geographies impact individuals’ receipt of VR services while analysis of the data from the survey directed at employers, advocates, workforce professionals will elucidate the extent to which urban, suburban and rural geographies impact on employment opportunities and supports. Analysis of this data will be included in the 2016-2017 interim report and 2015-2018 comprehensive statewide needs assessment report.

Transportation rose as the most significant barrier to service provision and employment in the 2014-2016 Pennsylvania CSNA. During this cycle, we learned that “transportation is a trainer issue as much as a trainee. Many people would make great trainers but can’t always travel the distance necessary to meet customers across districts.” One BVRS VRC we encountered covered fourteen counties and often had to travel upwards of three hours to see a customer. She spoke of the frustration of spending more of her time travelling to customers than serving and supporting those customers. While all VR staff agreed that face-to-face customer service was best, they also described the unfortunate logic that visiting all customers face-to-face required so much travel time that their customer service was significantly limited.

Additionally, some rural counties are no longer receiving home delivery of mail. Individuals must visit the few remaining post offices during very small windows of time during the week to access their mail. Individuals with disabilities who have difficulty accessing transportation will often not have access to important communication from OVR. District

administrators suggested that regulations surrounding the protocols of counselor to customer communication should be updated to reflect current times and technology to include texting, email and other novel communication strategies. Recognizing that OVR regulations do allow for current technology modalities, it may be that this suggested limitation stems from willingness or lack of knowledge on the part of individual staff members and not lack of permission in accordance with OVR policy.

Transition Age Youth

Transportation was also cited as a barrier for youth and students to access employment and job training.

OVR administrators and staff also described tenuous relationships with school districts as a limitation to their ability to serve more transition age youth. “Hopefully there’s a change in culture at schools to not be so afraid of OVR. Hopefully success stories will help alleviate concerns” considered one administrator. The district offices have been eager to connect transition age youth with employers for On the Job Training (OJT) for which OVR can provide employers with 100% wage reimbursement. One district office approached a council consisting of school district representatives, superintendents and other stakeholders to offer students summer work through OJT, but only five students filed applications.

A customer satisfaction survey for transition age youth was designed during this cycle and will be implemented by OVR in the near future. Analysis of the survey’s results will reveal the extent to which transition age youth and customers in the educational system are being served by VR.

During the 2015-2016 cycle, data was collected at the Hiram G. Andrews Center through participant observation, interviews, and case studies. The Commonwealth Technical Institute (CTI) at the Hiram G. Andrews Center (HGAC) provides individuals who may have a variety of developmental, cognitive, and physical disabilities with career and technical training, postsecondary education, counseling, vocational evaluation, and physical restoration services. The majority of the student population is between the ages of 18 and 24. In order to be admitted to CTI training programs at HGAC, referred applicants must meet the following criteria: an intention to obtain employment upon completion of the training program, a desire to take an active role in their rehabilitation and vocational program, motivation and willingness to learn, stabilized disability status, an understanding of acceptable social behavior (e.g., getting along with peers, following rules, and accepting supervision), ability to live independently in a dormitory environment, potential to balance academic, social, and leisure activities, and no history of harm to others or self-harm. Students at HGAC typically live in dormitories on campus and can enroll in a range of degree or diploma programs. Student supports and counseling include a 24-hour student-elected dorm supervisor, person-centered life management class, tutoring, and individual and group counseling and support groups.

Throughout the years of 2014-2015, a total of 438 students enrolled in an educational program at HGAC. Program instruction is person-centered, hands-on, and designed to improve work tolerance, job specific skills, job site readiness, and socialization. More than half of these students (232) were enrolled in their program after July 1st, 2014; 181 (41%) students graduated from their programs during this time period; and sixty-eight (16%) of students withdrew from their programs during this time period. The additional 43% of students remained in their programs until their eventual graduation at a date outside the reporting period. Ultimately, the combined HGAC graduation rate for the reporting period was 81.5%. When looking comparatively at the Wilson Workforce and Rehabilitation Center (WWRA), which—along with HGAC—is one of seven state vocational rehabilitation centers across the nation, WWRA had an 81.3% graduation rate (WWRC Annual Report 2015). This comparison leads to the understanding that HGAC has similar, and slightly better, combined graduation rates as the other state vocational rehabilitation centers, yet specific programs still display greater graduation and employment success than others.

Before graduation, students have the opportunity to complete a practicum, or internship, in their field at a local business, which provides integral professional experience and can facilitate job placement. HGAC’s accrediting organization, the Accrediting Commission of Career Schools and Colleges (ACCSC), requires a 68% employment placement rate for graduates. According to HGAC’s 2015 ACCSC Annual Report, of the 15 degree granting programs, job placement was most

successful in mechanical drafting (100% employed, none in their field), nurse aide (93% employed, 87% in their field), automotive technology (83% employed; 67% employed in their field), and culinary arts (80% employed, 60% employed in their field), and kitchen helpers (68% employed, 59% employed in their field). The programs with the lowest job placement rates include networking and telecommunications technology (33% employed, 20% in their field), small engine and equipment (33% employed in their field), materials management and distribution (33% employed in their field), and building maintenance (34% employed in their field). The programs of architectural drafting, business retail sales, office technology, medical office assistant, printing technology, and dental laboratory technician were characterized by job placement rates between 50-67%. Comparatively the WWRA is characterized by graduation rates ranging from 71.6% to 93% (WWRC Annual Report 2015).

Surrounding vocational-technical schools, colleges, and universities offer student disability services and supports and include the Pennsylvania College of Technology with a 96.6% job placement rate (Pennsylvania College of Technology 2013-2014), University of Pittsburgh Johnstown with a 92% job placement rate (University of Pittsburgh Johnstown 2014), and Pennsylvania State University with an 83% job placement rate (Pennsylvania State University 2014). Comparatively the WWRA is characterized by job placement rates ranging from 44.6% to 90% (WWRC Annual Report 2015).

The courses offered at HGAC and CTI are also available at the All-State Career School, Art Institute of Philadelphia, Art Institute of Pittsburgh, Automotive Training Center of Exton and Warminster, Baltimore School of Massage of York, Berks Technical Institute, Brightwood Career Institute, Cortiva Institute, Fortis Institute, Institute of Medical and Business Careers, ITT Technical Institute, Lansdale School of Business, Lincoln Tech, McCann School of Business and Technology, Star Career Academy, Universal Technical Institute, and YTI Career Institute. Access to full funding for these other vocational programs may allow students to develop and leverage social capital in their communities to facilitate their job placement upon graduation.

Case Study: Dental Laboratory Technician

During a site visit to HGAC, a dental laboratory technician student was shadowed during a typical day. The dental laboratory technician program prepares students for employment through hands-on skill development in a laboratory setting. The program requires a high reading and comprehension level and has faced decreasing enrollment. According to the Bureau of Labor and Statistics (May 2015) employment of dental and ophthalmic laboratory technicians and medical appliance technicians is projected to grow 10 percent from 2014 to 2024, faster than the average for all occupations. However, according to State Occupational Projections, dental laboratory technician jobs in Pennsylvania will continue to decrease .3% through 2022.

Originally the student intended to attend Pennsylvania State University, Harrisburg College or Pennsylvania College of Technology but OVR would only offer 50% tuition remission for these schools compared to the 100% tuition free HGA. She was currently unaware of who her counselor was, citing how frequently it changes.

An alumna of the dental laboratory technician program advises the student on how to become most marketable to future employers. The alumna earns \$16 per hour, below the mean hourly wage of \$19.04 in Pennsylvania (Bureau of Labor and Statistics May 2015).

“You don’t need to be ashamed of your disability here. They treat you like a human being. Like an adult, not like a kid.”

Case Study: Culinary Arts

A student in the culinary arts program was also shadowed. Culinary arts students receive hands-on training, earn a diploma or an Associate’s Degree (though an AD is not a requirement in the field), and have access to a number of externships through University of Pittsburgh Johnstown and Sodexo, and on-campus work experience in the café, cafeteria and kitchen. The student interviewed was interested in studying culinary arts and could not get OVR funding for “traditional

programs.” The student was pleased with the program but wished the student population was more diverse and included students without disabilities.

1D. Individuals with disabilities served through other components of the statewide workforce investment system

Other components of the statewide workforce investment system include PA CareerLinks® staff members and VR counselors from the Pennsylvania Departments of Human Services, Aging, Corrections, Education and Veteran Affairs. The survey directed at employers, advocates, workforce professionals will shed light on how these individuals engage with others parts of the statewide workforce investment employment system. Analysis of this data will be included in the 2016-2017 interim report and 2015-2018 comprehensive statewide needs assessment report.

Data gathered from site visits to district offices suggest OVR is working collaboratively with the CareerLinks®. However, OVR and CareerLinks® are cross-purposed, with the CareerLinks® targeting occupations of high demand whereas OVR targets customers’ employment goals. It was suggested that cross-training may enable VR counselors to make occupations in high demand more appealing to OVR customers. Additionally, VR staff recommended that the OVR- CareerLinks® collaboration could be improved by changing the program referral process. CareerLinks® and OVR are gathering the same information and would benefit from policies that facilitate data sharing.

The district offices visited exhibited positive relationships with the Veterans Administration but all admitted to losing qualified counselors and staff to the VA, which offered higher wages. This staff turnover results in greater wait time for services, strained counselor-customer relations, and consequently limits successful closures.

VR counselors also noted that customers entangled in the Corrections system faced greater barriers to employment. Advocacy to reduce the length of time a minimal infraction remains on a criminal background check could significantly improve customer outcomes.

1E. Youth with disabilities, and students with disabilities, including

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.

2. Identify the need to establish, develop, or improve community rehabilitation programs within the state

The Pennsylvania Governor’s Policy Office established the task force to include representatives of all agencies who administer workforce development programs. Participants have included Policy Office representatives as well as agency workforce development professionals. The group was tasked with increasing collaboration and communication across state agencies and with providing recommendations to the Governor’s Office to improve workforce development programs and activities in the Commonwealth. As is true throughout the nation, Pennsylvanians are looking for ways to maintain services while reducing costs.

OVR participates with many advisory committees that rely on the expertise of community leadership. OVR has continued to reach out to include the people and organizations that work for the vocational rehabilitative community. The following are just a few committees that OVR collaborates with:

- Advisory Committee for the Blind
- Advisory Committee for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing
- Business Leadership Networks
- PA Chambers of Commerce
- PA Council on Independent Living
- PA Developmental Disabilities Council

- PA Initiative on Assistive Technology
- PA Rehabilitation Council
- Pennsylvania Assistive Technology Foundation
- Pennsylvania Client Assistance Program
- Pennsylvania Rehabilitation Association
- Rehabilitation and Community Providers Association
- Society for Human Resource Management
- Statewide Independent Living Council

Inter-agency referrals greatly affect who learns about OVR and accesses services. While individuals may self-refer, many learn about OVR through county/administrative entities, supports coordination organizations and agencies, providers of employment-related services, high schools, universities and colleges, doctors and health agencies, and many other community organizations. These organizations do not adhere to a singular codified referral process. Some organizations refer everyone they come across while others filter individuals and recommend few, all of which affects how OVR can accomplish its mission. This likely disproportionality affects cultural and ethnic minorities, individuals of low socioeconomic status, those in rural areas, etc.

Community Rehabilitation Programs are private, community-based non-profit organizations that provide rehabilitation services to individuals with disabilities. According to the United States Department of Labor there are currently 106 certified CRPs operating in Pennsylvania, placing the Commonwealth in the 94th percentile of number of established CRPs following Ohio, Illinois, and California. A number of these CRPs are sheltered workshops. Best practices in the transition from sheltered or segregated environments to competitive and integrated employment will be detailed in the 2016-2017 interim report and 2015-2018 comprehensive statewide needs assessment report.

All VR staff noted the paucity of accredited programs in Rehabilitation Counseling. VR offices are forced to compete for qualified staff with the Veterans Administration and school districts. Additionally, some administrators expressed concern about the Bachelor's degree to Master's degree to OVR pipeline, which produces VR counselors with limited professional work and interpersonal office experience. The internship period was described as inadequate and some offices have extended the new counselor training period to ensure for more sufficient training and greater quality assurance.

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

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.

Four Targeted Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment Activities Accomplished in FY 2016

The following four sections display the findings from the assessment activities that took place during this first year of the three-year CSNA data collection and analysis cycle. Both the quantitative and qualitative data collection tools were designed and submitted to the CSNA Steering Committee. The primary data was collected throughout the Commonwealth between August 18, 2015 and June 30, 2016. Information gathering occurred in a variety of ways in order to highlight the authentic participation of persons with disabilities and other community stakeholders. Research guidelines and protocols were developed in close partnership with the input and expertise of OVR and PaRC. All information gathering utilized person-centered language and was accessible to individuals across the disability spectrum and throughout the community at large.

1. Customer Satisfaction Surveys

In order to evaluate customer satisfaction from individuals whose cases had been successfully closed (Status 26), individuals whose cases were unsuccessfully closed (Status 28), individuals with open cases and job coaches, and transition-age youth, the research team designed four unique survey instruments. First, we reviewed and analyzed a total of 56 customer satisfaction surveys from 28 other VR state offices. We also assessed a number of Pennsylvania Office of Vocational Rehabilitation publications, including OVR Individualized Employment Services, Employing People with Disabilities Toolkit, and On-the-Job Training (OVR 611) as well as PaRC and Tyree's October 2014 report "Defining Positive Customer Service in the State Vocational Rehabilitation System." Additionally, we examined the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) as well as the RSA Summary of WIOA and WIOA Changes, NCSRC CSNA National Teleconference presentation, the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2, and the New York State Office of Children and Family Services Vocational Rehabilitation Services Manual. Finally, we culled quantitative and qualitative data from Institute on Disabilities' resources including the Independent Monitoring for Quality (IM4Q) Transition Survey Pilot Summary 2013-2014 and Transition Discoveries. The compilation and analysis of the above sources allowed us to identify the most effective and generative questions for the four identified survey topics. Additionally, we reviewed current research on response rate success in the interest of structuring the survey and its dissemination strategies to elicit a stronger, more statistically significant response rate.

These surveys include close-ended and open-ended questions in order to gather the most relevant and informative data. Survey items were discussed among colleagues, including persons with disabilities, to determine relevancy and accessibility. Updated surveys were then submitted to the CSNA Steering Committee for further review and revision on November 3, 2015. On November 19, 2015, the research team and CSNA Steering Committee met via teleconference to discuss the four proposed customer satisfaction surveys in detail. During the call, question content, audience, wording, and format were discussed. On January 13, 2016, updated surveys were shared with the Steering Committee for feedback. Additionally, on January 15, 2016, Sally Gould-Taylor reviewed the survey updates via conference call. The four surveys have been adopted for implementation by OVR and will be launched to appropriate customers via OVR's internal data collection system, the Commonwealth Workforce Development System (CWDS).

2. Information Regarding the Multifaceted Programs of the Hiram G. Andrews Center

The Hiram G. Andrews Center (HGAC), formerly the Pennsylvania Rehabilitation Center, opened in 1959 in Johnstown, Pennsylvania. HGAC was the world's first and remains the largest comprehensive educational rehabilitation center of its kind. HGAC provides a comprehensive program of services featuring postsecondary education through the Commonwealth Technical Institute (CTI), counseling, vocational evaluation, and physical restoration for individuals who may have a variety of developmental, cognitive, and physical disabilities in an accessible campus environment. The majority of the student population is between the ages of 18 and 24.

Student applications are accepted throughout the year on a rolling basis, and training programs range in duration from four to sixteen months. The training programs are offered over three terms per year, i.e., spring (January to April), summer (May to August), and fall (August to December). A high school diploma or GED certificate is required for admission to any of the Specialized Associate Degree programs; however, individuals who are beyond the age of compulsory school attendance in Pennsylvania and who demonstrate potential to benefit from training offered at HGA may also be admitted. In addition, students can be referred to CTI at HGAC by the Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation Services district offices, Veterans Administration, Bureau of Blindness and Visual Services district offices, and Vocational Rehabilitation agencies outside of Pennsylvania, Private Insurance companies, and other state agencies.

After an individual has submitted an application, the Admission Office at HGAC reviews medical records (e.g., diagnosis or symptom/s, reports of general specialist examinations, hospital and clinical reports, and other supporting data), as well as the reason for admission, which could include a vocational evaluation report, previous training experiences, or Allied Health services, in order to determine whether an applicant meets criteria for admission. A designated member of the Admission Committee, which consists of a physician, psychiatrist, an at-risk committee, drug and alcohol counselor, dietician, and transition living coordinator, first screens applications to determine appropriateness of admission and may then include other members of the Admission Committee when necessary and relevant. In order to be admitted to CTI

training programs at HGA, referred applicants must meet the following criteria: an intention to obtain employment upon completion of the training program, a desire to take an active role in their rehabilitation and vocational program, motivation and willingness to learn, stabilized disability status, an understanding of acceptable social behavior (e.g., getting along with peers, following rules, and accepting supervision), ability to live independently in dormitory environment, potential to balance academic, social, and leisure activities, and no history of harm to others or self-harm.

Students at HGAC typically live in dormitories on campus and can enroll in a range of degree or diploma programs; however, many local students commute to campus. Program instruction is person-centered, hands-on, and designed to improve work tolerance, job specific skills, job site readiness, and socialization. Student supports and counseling include a 24-hour student-elected dorm supervisor, person-centered life management class, tutoring, and individual and group counseling and support groups.

A total of 438 students enrolled in an educational program at HGAC throughout the years of 2014-2015. More than half of these students (232) were enrolled in their program after July 1st, 2014; 181 students graduated from their programs during this time period; and sixty-eight (16%) of students withdrew from their programs during this time period. The additional 43% of students remained in their programs until their eventual graduation at a date outside the reporting period. Ultimately, the combined HGA graduation rate for the reporting period was 81.5%. When looking comparatively at the Wilson Workforce and Rehabilitation Center (WWRA), which—along with HGA—is one of seven state vocational rehabilitation centers across the nation, WWRA had an 81.3% graduation rate (WWRC Annual Report 2015). This comparison leads to the understanding that HGAC has similar, and slightly better, combined graduation rates as the other state vocational rehabilitation centers, yet specific programs still display greater graduation and employment success than others.

Before graduation, students have the opportunity to complete a practicum, or internship, in their field at a local business, which provides integral professional experience and can facilitate job placement. HGAC's accrediting organization, the Accrediting Commission of Career Schools and Colleges (ACCSC), requires a 68% employment placement rate for graduates. According to HGAC's 2015 ACCSC Annual Report, of the 15 degree granting programs, five met the 68% employment placement rate requisite (automotive technology, culinary arts, kitchen helpers, mechanical drafting, and nurse aide). Six programs had placement rates between 50-67% (architectural drafting, business retail sales, dental laboratory technician, medical office assistant, office technology, and printing technology). Four programs had job placement rates below 34% (building maintenance, materials management, networking and telecommunications technology, and small engine and equipment). In future academic planning, HGAC should attend to programs with low job placement rates overall and low job placement rates in the field of study.

Surrounding vocational-technical schools, colleges, and universities that offer student disability services and supports include the Pennsylvania College of Technology with an overall 96.6% job placement rate (Pennsylvania College of Technology 2013-2014), University of Pittsburgh Johnstown with a 92% job placement rate (University of Pittsburgh Johnstown 2014), and Pennsylvania State University with an 83% job placement rate (Pennsylvania State University 2014). Comparatively the WWRA is characterized by job placement rates ranging from 44.6% to 90% (WWRC Annual Report 2015).

The courses offered at CTI are also available at the All-State Career School, Art Institute of Philadelphia, Art Institute of Pittsburgh, Automotive Training Center of Exton and Warminster, Baltimore School of Massage York Campus, Berks Technical Institute, Brightwood Career Institute, Cortiva Institute, Fortis Institute, Institute of Medical and Business Careers, ITT Technical Institute, Lansdale School of Business, Lincoln Tech, McCann School of Business and Technology, Star Career Academy, Universal Technical Institute, and YTI Career Institute. Access to full funding for these other vocational programs may allow students to develop and leverage social capital in their communities to facilitate their job placement upon graduation.

3. Identify Barriers to and Strategies for Increasing Competitive Employment for Individuals with Disabilities

Surveys and interviews were utilized to gather information from employers, VR professionals and community partners to A) assess and increase the knowledge of OVR services in the business and employment sector; B) identify what is needed to increase competitive integrated employment opportunities; C) engage employers to increase the rate of employment for individuals with disabilities; D-F) identify barriers to successful job search, job hire and job retention facing individuals with disabilities and barriers to hiring and post-employment supports for employers; G) determine the work characteristics most desired by employers; and H) identify the needs of older workers with disabilities.

The research team began survey development by engaging in in-depth analysis of previous CSNAs, a large-scale national phone survey of employers conducted under the auspices of the United States Department of Labor, and data from the Office of Disability Employment Policy. The Employment Survey was submitted to the Steering Committee for review. The finalized Employment Survey was opened to respondents on June 17, 2016 and closed on August 1, 2016. Invitations to participate in the survey were sent to individuals on contact lists of employment stakeholders provided by OVR and Institute on Disabilities' mailing lists, as well as posted on the Institute on Disabilities' website and social media platforms. Individuals were incentivized to participate through the raffling of ten \$20 gift cards to Target.

In the dissemination of the survey invitation, the research team also solicited employers to participate in brief, informal phone interviews. Specific employers identified by OVR were also targeted for phone interviews through individualized email messages. Though we reached out to over eight hundred employment stakeholders, only two responded to be interviewed. This paucity of participation is due in part to the high rate of messages returned as undeliverable. 253 of the 571 email addresses (44%) provided by OVR proved invalid. This concern indicates that OVR may want to reach out to its employer partners in an attempt to edit the contact information and make it current. Temple's employer contact list, had less invalid email address, yet also turned up little response in terms on invitations to be interviewed. As displayed in the following section, the survey respondents we must more robust and may indicate the amount of time or ease that employers are willing to spend in response to the topic.

Respondent Demographics

A total of 261 people responded to the survey, of which 72 (28%) identified as an employer; 49 (19%) identified as an advocate (family member, teacher, doctor, etc.); 84 (32%) identified as an employment support professional/provider; and 56 (22%) indicated some other role. Respondents who identified as another role provided written responses indicating their affiliation to the disability community. Of those respondents who wrote in responses, 16 people (29%) indicated working within a school district; 30 people (54%) indicated working with individuals with disabilities in some sort of professional capacity, i.e., transition coordinator, administrator, support coordinator, physical therapist; and the remaining 10 people (18%) wrote in various responses that could generally be categorized into one of the response choices, e.g., nurse, nonprofit advocacy executive director, entrepreneur, supervisor. Respondents who selected the "other" response choice on this item were automatically routed to complete the same set of survey items as respondents who identified as employment support professionals/providers; therefore, the total number of respondents who completed this set of items was 189 (54%). It is interesting to note that the primary intended audience for this survey was employers; however, the majority of respondents (72%) identified as employment support professionals/providers, or "other" types of roles within the disability community.

Self-identified employers were asked to indicate which Pennsylvania County their business primarily operated within, and 29 (43%) PA counties were represented. The response rate for this item was 94%. A total of 16 counties were considered urban, and 51 employer respondents came from these counties. The remaining 13 counties were considered rural, and a total of 17 employer respondents came from these counties. The following survey item asked respondents to indicate how they perceived the urbanity or rurality of the location in which they primarily conducted business. Twenty-eight percent of employer-respondents (n=19) indicated they primarily conducted business in urban areas; 43% (n=29) indicated primarily conducting business in a suburban environment; and 29% (n=20) indicated primarily conducting business in a rural environment.

The majority of employer-respondents indicated that their company or business was a private non-profit (50%), 29% indicated their business or organization was a private for-profit, and 12% said that their company or business was a governmental agency or organization. Half of all employer-respondents' companies/organizations selected the education or mental and behavioral health services industries/sectors, and 35% of employer-respondents selected the "other" response choice and provided written responses. The majority of written responses consisted either of a public library, or residential/healthcare services for elderly individuals and individuals with intellectual/developmental disabilities. The majority of respondents (64%) indicated that they were either a director or manager within their company or organization. Written responses (13%) included positions related to human resources, and "executive director."

Self-identified advocates were asked to indicate which Pennsylvania County primarily advocated within, and 19 (28%) PA counties were represented. The response rate for this item was 92%. A total of 13 counties were considered urban and 32 advocate respondents came from these counties. The remaining 6 counties were considered rural, and a total of 13 advocate respondents came from these counties. The following survey item asked respondents to indicate how they perceived the urbanity or rurality of the location in which they primarily advocated within. Twenty percent of respondents (n=9) indicated they primarily advocated in urban areas; 44% (n=20) of respondents indicated primarily advocating in a suburban environment; and 37% (n=17) of respondents indicated primarily advocating in a rural environment. The following item asked advocates how long they had identified as an advocate for individuals with disabilities and 15% (n=7) said 0-5 years; 20% (n=9) said 6-10 years; 20% (n=9) said 11-20 years; and 46% (n=21) said 21 years or more.

Self-identified employment support professionals/providers, as well as respondents who identified as another role were asked to indicate which Pennsylvania County they primarily worked within, and 35 (52%) PA counties were represented. The response rate for this item was 94%. A total of 16 counties were considered urban, and 90 employment professional/provider and "other" respondents came from these counties. The remaining 19 counties were considered rural, and a total of 41 employment professional/provider and "other" respondents came from these counties. The following survey item asked respondents to indicate how they perceived the urbanity or rurality of the location in which they primarily worked or provided services. One third of respondents (n=43) indicated they worked or provided services in urban areas; 40% (n=52) of respondents indicated working in a suburban environment; and 28% (n=36) of respondents indicated working in a rural environment. The following item asked employment support professionals/providers, and "other" respondents how long they had been employed in the field of disability-related services and 12% (n=16) said 0-5 years; 18% (n=23) said 6-10 years; 28% (n=37) said 11-20 years; and 42% (n=55) said 21 years or more.

The remaining survey items were designed to inform the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation on how to a) increase knowledge of OVR services in the business and employment sector; b) identify what is needed to increase competitive integrated employment for individuals with disabilities; c) engage employers to effect an increase in the rate of employment for individuals with disabilities; d) identify barriers to successful job search, job hire, and job retention for individuals with disabilities; e) assist employers in the hiring process of job candidates with disabilities; f) identify post-employment supports that employers need to retain employees with disabilities; g) determine employer-identified "good employee" work characteristics, i.e. "soft skills"; and h) identify needs of older workers with disabilities. Respondents who identified as employers answered a set of questions designed specifically to address their experiences hiring individuals with disabilities and working with OVR; respondents who identified as advocates, as well as respondents who identified as employment support professionals/providers as well as those who identified as "other" answered questions related to barriers for individuals with disabilities to find and secure competitive integrated employment, as well as which services they were most commonly advocating or providing.

The two employers interviewed were managers of Human Resources, one from a public organization in a rural setting and the other from a private company in an urban setting. The employers stressed the importance of hiring individuals with disabilities. Both HR Managers mentioned their company's affirmative action program more than once.

Employer Respondents: Employment of Individuals with Disabilities

The first set of questions directed toward employer-respondents asked a series of questions related to the employment of individuals with disabilities. First, employer-respondents were asked how important it was to their company or organization to employ individuals with disabilities, and 86% of respondents indicated that it was somewhat or very important while the remaining 14% said that it was not important to employ individuals with disabilities. When asked whether employer-respondents' companies or organizations currently employed people with disabilities, 78% said yes; 14% said no; and 8% did not know. When asked in a separate question whether their company or organization had hired any people with disabilities in the past year 60% of respondents said yes; 28% said no; and 11% did not know.

The next item in this section of the survey asked employer respondents whether or not their company or organization proactively recruited applicants who have disabilities, and if so, how they did so. Over 30% of employer-respondents indicated that their company or organization proactively recruited applicants who have disabilities in the following ways: posting jobs with a job service or workforce employment center (40%), creating partnerships with disability-related advocacy organizations (36%), contacting career centers at colleges and universities (34%), and posting jobs with unemployment offices (30%). Thirty-percent of employer-respondents indicated that their company or organization does not actively recruit job applicants with disabilities. When asked where their company or organization posts job openings, employer-respondents provided a variety of responses, with over 25% of respondents indicating posting jobs in the following places: Career Builder, Career Link/Job Gateway, Local Newspaper, Indeed.com, Monster.com, a University/college career center, the company website, and Craigslist. The qualitative data captured from interviews with employers, detailed below, corroborates these findings.

Employer Respondents: Employee Characteristics and Hiring Strategies

The next item on the survey asked employers to indicate which types of information would help persuade them or other business leaders to proactively recruit individuals with disabilities, and the top four responses were as follows: information about the programs offered by state and local agencies to assist workers with disabilities (40%), information about financial incentives to hire individuals with disabilities (e.g. tax credits) (39%), information on satisfactory job performance, attendance, and retention of people with disabilities (33%), and information showing how hiring people with disabilities has benefited other companies in the industry (32%).

When asked what was the top three most important characteristics to consider when hiring a new employee, employers ranked good communication/interpersonal skills, good work ethic/hard worker, and reliability as the most important new employee characteristics. When asked the same question, both employers interviewed responded that the most important characteristics were soft skills, and being reliable and a good communicator.

Employers were also asked to indicate how challenging a number of factors were to their company or organization when hiring people with disabilities, and the majority of respondents identified the following five factors as somewhat to very challenging: actual cost of accommodating disability (68%), not knowing how much accommodating disability (62%), employee availability (57%), issues with employee interpersonal communication skills (54%), and lack of training (54%).

The following five factors were considered not challenging when hiring people with disabilities: lack of knowledge or information about people with disabilities (78%), extra paperwork (78%), discomfort or unfamiliarity regarding hiring people with disabilities (74%), fear of litigation (68%), and concern about the cost of worker's compensation premiums (67%).

Employer-respondents were asked to rate the degree to which a number of statements relating to potential issues when hiring a person with a disability applied to the attitudes of their company or organization, and 30% agreed that supervisors are not sure how to take disciplinary action for a person with a disability, and 25% agreed that supervisors are not sure how to evaluate a person with a disability. In contrast 50% of employer-respondents disagreed that supervisors are not comfortable managing people with disabilities, and 57% disagreed that people with disabilities may not be as safe and productive as other workers. Both interviewees described established, standard review and training processes that they felt defined policies regarding performance and made supervisors and staff comfortable.

When asked whether their company or organization currently employs, or previously employed individuals who acquired disabilities due to their age that require/d specific job modifications, 32% said yes; 30% said no; and 38% did not know.

Employer Respondents: Knowledge and Relationship with Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) and other OVR Services

The next set of questions directed toward employer-respondents asked questions related to their relationship with OVR and the services provided through OVR. Over half (55%) of employer-respondents indicated that they had previously worked with OVR. When employer-respondents were asked how they had learned about OVR, 34% said they had previously worked with OVR; 23% said they learned of OVR through a professional event; 18% said they heard about OVR through a website; and 16% said they had heard about OVR through a community event. Only 11% of employers indicated that this was the first time they were hearing about OVR. An interviewed employee suggested that OVR counselors could reach out to employers by phone or email and have an annual meeting to coordinate interviews and review contracts for potential candidates. The other interviewed employee proposed that VRCs visit companies in-person, tour the facilities and meet with Human Resources to better identify and place qualified candidates. Turnover among VRCs and within Human Resources departments would impact the success of these strategies.

The next survey item polled employers to identify which type of workplace OVR services for individuals with disabilities that they were familiar with. The majority of employer-respondents (70%) said they were familiar with job coaching services, 40% were familiar with assistive listening devices, and 37% were familiar with services related to information regarding the hiring and employment of individuals with disabilities. In contrast, only 2% of employer-respondents were familiar with scanning software services, 7% were familiar with CART (Communication Access Realtime Translation) services, and 7% were familiar with optical character recognition (OCR) services.

When employers were asked what would be the most effective way to let other businesses and employers know about OVR and their services, half of respondents indicated that direct outreach from OVR would be most effective, while 32% said that targeted announcements (fliers, radio/TV announcements, web advertisements, email blasts, etc.) would be most effective.

Employers were then asked to rank a number of items related to what OVR could do to improve their relationship with employers, and ultimately improve services for individuals with disabilities. The top three ranked items were as follows: better communicate available services, clearer explanation of additional costs for services/accommodations, and more clarification on service eligibility requirements. When asked about their previous experience working with OVR, employer-respondents overall indicated that they were happy with their experience working with OVR, that their interactions with OVR staff had been professional and pleasant, and that they would recommend working with OVR to other employers.

Finally, employer-respondents were asked whether their company or organization utilized OVR services to provide job assistance or modifications to older workers with age-related acquired disabilities, and 20% said yes; 57% said no; and 23% did not know.

Advocate, Employment Support Professionals/Providers, and Other Respondents: OVR and OVR Services for Individuals with Disabilities

In order to better understand any differences in how advocates and employment support professionals/providers viewed the barriers to finding and securing competitive integrated employment, as well as how OVR and OVR service delivery functions, these groups of respondents' answers to survey items were separated. Although respondents who selected the "other" category may not all have been related to employment support professionals and providers, the majority of their written-in roles could generally be classified into this category; therefore, they can likely be considered to be demographically and professionally similar to the employment support professional and provider respondent group.

The first question on this section of the survey asked respondents to rate how challenging a number of potential barriers for individuals with disabilities were to finding and securing competitive integrated employment. Following are listed the top five barriers identified by the majority of advocate-respondents and employment support professionals/providers as well as “other” respondents, and the corresponding percentage of respondents’ who said that the specific barrier gets in the way “a lot” for individuals with disabilities to find and secure employment. In addition to the barriers identified as getting in the way “a lot”, advocate-respondents said that criminal history was “not at all” (52%) a factor for individuals with disabilities to find and secure employment. Employment support professionals and providers, and “other” respondents also said that criminal history (31%) as well as explicit or implicit employer discrimination (14%) were not at all challenging for individuals with disabilities to find and secure competitive integrated employment. It is important to note here that in our interviews with OVR counselors about what they felt prohibited their customers to obtain jobs issues pertaining to restrictions due to criminal history came up as common themes and concerns from the perspective of the counselors. The employer survey results show that employers and advocates overwhelmingly report that criminal history is “not at all” a challenge in securing employment. This contrast helps to highlight the continued concern that point of view of the professionals involved in the process of job seeking for individuals with disabilities still is greatly varied and greater training is most likely need for both OVR counselors and potential employers.

Four out of the five top barriers identified by both groups of respondents were the same; however, the barrier with the highest percentage of employment support professionals/providers and “other” respondents saying that it gets in the way “a lot” did not appear on the top five barriers identified by advocate respondents, i.e., employers’ lack of knowledge regarding employment for individuals with a range of disability types. The percentage of advocate-respondents who identified this factor as getting in the way “a lot” was 75%, which may suggest that advocates perceived many more factors as getting in the way of individuals with disabilities finding and securing employment. Another interesting note is that percentages of advocate respondents were greater among all identified barriers to employment, suggesting that this group agreed more on which factors were getting in the way “a lot” for individuals with disabilities to find and secure employment.

Advocate respondents identified the top five barriers to finding and securing employment for individuals with disabilities as: significant mobility or transportation need (88%); not enough jobs able to be customized to needs of individuals with disabilities (84%); employers are unaware of what individuals with disabilities can offer to their company/organization (84%); not enough funding to provide and maintain services (81%); and misunderstanding of specific type of disability (e.g., high functioning autism, traumatic brain injury)(78%).

Employment support professionals/providers and “other” respondents identified the top five barriers to finding and securing employment for individuals with disabilities as: employers’ lack of knowledge regarding employment for individuals with a range of disability types (69%); significant mobility issue or transportation need (68%); not enough funding to provide and maintain services (66%); not enough jobs able to be customized to needs of individuals with disabilities (65%); and employers are unaware of what individuals with disabilities can offer to their company/organization (61%).

The following survey item asked respondents to indicate what kinds of services they were most commonly advocating for or providing. The top five services that advocate-respondents said they were most commonly advocating for (and the corresponding percentages of advocates who selected these services) are as follows: education/training (46%), opportunities for real-world work experience in secondary education (36%), job placement (33%), transportation (30%), and transition planning assistance (27%).

The top five services that employment support professionals or providers, and “other” respondents said they were providing (and the corresponding percentage of these respondents who selected these services) are as follows: job placement (50%), job coaching (42%), education/training (31%), transportation (28%), and job planning and evaluation (16%).

The next question on the survey asked respondents to select among a number of response choices what most often impedes people with disabilities from receiving services. The top five barriers to receiving services as reported by advocate-respondents (and their corresponding percentages) are as follows: long wait lists/times to receive services/accommodations (39%), transportation issues (36%), unaware of available services (27%), problems with OVR counselor (e.g., unfamiliar with process, too many cases in their caseload, lack of commitment, etc.) (27%), and systems barriers (problems with accessing, understanding, and navigating) (24%). The top five barriers to receiving services as reported by employment support professionals/providers and “other” respondents (and their corresponding percentages) are as follows: transportation issues (35%), unaware of available services (27%), long wait lists/times to receive services/accommodations (25%), soft skills deficit (interpersonal relations, cleanliness, flexibility/adaptability) (25%), and employer perceptions of incapability to perform duties of job (23%).

Respondents were next asked to rank the top three ways out of a number of potential items that OVR could do to improve service delivery for individuals with disabilities. Advocate-respondents ranked the following three items as the best ways for OVR to improve service delivery: 1) better communicate available services to all stakeholders (customers, advocates, job training agencies, community partners, and employers); 2) more coordination and earlier involvement with school district in transition planning; and 3) more personalized and relevant job placements specific to employment goals of individual.

Employment support professionals/providers and “other” respondents ranked the following three items as the best ways for OVR to improve service delivery: 1) better communicate available services to all stakeholders (customers, advocates, job training agencies, community partners, and employers); 2) more coordination and earlier involvement with school district in transition planning; and 3) more coordination and earlier involvement with school district in transition planning.

Finally, respondents were asked to identify three ways out of a number of items that would most encourage employers to hire people with disabilities. Advocate-respondents nearly unanimously (97%) said that education/training about the benefits of hiring employees with disabilities would be one way to encourage employers to hire people with disabilities. They also identified simplified service delivery (e.g., one person vs. many people) (46%), tax credit (39%), and less paperwork (36%) as additional ways to encourage employers to hire people with disabilities.

Employment support professionals/providers and “other” respondents also by and large (82%) identified education/training about the benefits of hiring employees with disabilities as one way to encourage employers to hire people with disabilities. They also identified providing a tax credit (51%), as well as providing job seekers with technical skills/training (42%) as additional ways to encourage employers to hire people with disabilities. Written responses for this group of respondents on this item included more job coaching services for longer periods of time, and additional financial incentives for employers.

4. Assess the Provision of Consistent and Equable Delivery of OVR Information and Services

From June 20-22, 2016, the research team conducted site visits to three VR District Offices, all of which had co-located Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation Services and Bureau of Blindness and Visual Services. We conducted participant observation and face-to-face interviews with VR staff and administrators. We engaged with four district administrators, three assistant district administrators, six vocational rehabilitation counselors, two social workers, one orientation and mobility specialist, two vocational rehabilitation supervisors, two vision rehabilitation therapists, one business services representative, and one early reach coordinator.

Prior to the visits, the research team designed and submitted a site visit dossier, which included a summary of the visit’s objectives and interview protocol, to the Pennsylvania Social Services Union (PSSU). The PSSU reviewed and approved the research protocol and identified individual participants.

Identify Strategies to Improve Communication with Customers

“The most common thing [to cause an unsuccessful closure] is we lose contact with the customer” identified one district administrator. Accordingly, identifying strategies to improve communication with customers is of utmost importance to achieving the OVR mission. Currently, VR Counselors are mandated to attempt at least three contacts prior to officially closing a case. The first two times may be by phone and the final correspondence must be by letter. This final correspondence is a “closure letter” that serves as a physical documentation of the attempt to reach and consequently serve the customer. One district administrator declared that “For the most part the counselors are doing phone, email, text, or whatever works for that customer.” Yet a district administrator in a different site warned that not incorporating “email, text, and whatever works for that customer” formally into the policy prevents counselors from providing the best customer service possible. This administrator explained that despite having work cell phones, many counselors rely on the “old fashioned letter system,” which is particularly problematic in rural areas where post offices no longer offer home-delivery of mail. Without steady access to transportation, many individuals will be unable to regularly access their postal mail and receive communications from OVR. This is one example of how transportation presents a fundamental barrier to services for individuals with disabilities. Additionally, many customers or potential customers have medical assistance phones, which allow them to text for free. Therefore, greater training on the policy that allows for the incorporation of text messages into OVR’s communication policy would improve communication with customers and service provision. Recognizing that OVR regulations do allow for current technology modalities, it may be that this suggested limitation stems from willingness or lack of knowledge on the part of individual staff members and not lack of permission in accordance with OVR policy.

While cell phone technology can improve counselor-customer communication, staff admitted that work phones do not wholly improve workflow. Staff members lamented the difficulty of accessing and inputting data into the Comprehensive Workforce Development System (CWDS) through the mobile site. Staff across different roles explained that if they were in the field and an appointment was canceled, if they were too far from sites participating in the Statewide Workforce Investment Employment System. “You can’t just go to a library, or go to a Wendy’s, or even just sit in your car –so sometimes there’s a big disconnect where that kind of [customer service] calling only happens when you’re in the office.” This inflexibility limits the amount of time VR staff can provide customer service. While all VR staff acknowledged the import of face-to-face customer service, the inability to easily make calls or process paperwork during travel to face-to-face meetings paradoxically limits direct communication with customers. One counselor explained that traveling to a customer’s home, meeting, and traveling back may exhaust an entire day, whereas the counselor may have been able to satisfactorily serve that customer and others by phone in the same time frame.

Identify Strategies to Shorten Wait Times for Services

There are a number of factors that prolong wait times for services. One significant factor is counselor caseloads. The average caseload for VR counselors is intended to be 120 customers. However, during our site visits we spoke with counselors with caseloads of 200 to 250 customers. One counselor admitted to having 285 customers until just recently. Another explained, “I have 240 on my caseload. And I could close 5 today and be back up to 240 tomorrow.” One counselor calculated that their caseload only allotted 8.25 hours annually per customer.

“With WIOA, there are more tasks added with none removed.”

“Our job has changed overnight and we’re expected to do 1000 more things that we’ve never had to do. More customers, bigger caseload...We’re asked to do so much that doesn’t even go to our 26s.”

The majority of counselors interviewed indicated that counselor caseloads have been significantly impacted by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and its major changes to the Rehabilitation Act (Title IV). The WIOA requisite that 15% of VR Funds must be used for pre-employment transition services expands the role and responsibilities of VR counselors to devote time and attention to transition-age youth. All VR staff acknowledged the importance of WIOA’s legislation and the focus on transition-age youth but simultaneously recognized the profound effects this would have on their ability to be successful as currently defined.

Currently, counselor success is defined by their number of successful (Status 26) closures. However, with the reoriented focus upon pre-employment transition-age youth, VR counselors are now engaged in a number of activities that will not culminate with successful (Status 26) closures for many years. We asked the VR counselors to walk us through their work process. One counselor described a work week earlier that month, characterized by hours talking to an employer about a transition-age job candidate, sending emails, setting up the work contract, and preparing the transition-age youth for the work. In the end, the counselor succeeded in securing the work opportunity for the youth. However, the counselor spent 24 hours of their 37.5 work hours that week serving a transition-age youth and thus meeting the objectives of WIOA but without the credit of a successful (Status 26) closure. A VR district administrator explained that the reporting system currently makes it difficult to determine how many customers in a counselor's caseload are currently looking for employment or are students early in the transition process. The establishment of the Early Reach Coordinator role has been crucial in addressing WIOA's objectives related to transition age youth. However, one early reach coordinator at a district office would be hard pressed to open cases for every eligible student in each high school in all the counties that district office covers.

The inadequacy of measuring counselor success by their number of successful (Status 26) closures is even more significant for BBVS counselors serving individuals with multiple disabilities, children, and older adults not pursuing employment. BBVS is serving more customers in the Independent Living Older Blind Program than in Vocational Rehabilitation. Additionally, a BBVS counselor may be actively engaged with a child's case for 15 years. The counselor would not be able to successfully (Status 26) close this case for over a decade and would appear delinquent despite their years of dedicated customer service. Additionally, BBVS staff explained that the Business Service Representatives retained in BVRS are overburdened with work and "not really tuned into" BBVS' customer needs and employment opportunities.

VR staff members are engaged in a number of activities that fall beyond the domains of staff roles (secretarial roles were sited that majority of the time). Suggestions were made to reduce the successful (Status 26) closure goals; to demonstrate counselor workload and ethic via other data such as referrals, eligibility, creation of individualized service plans, and pre-employment transition services.

Another prominent barrier to timely service provision defined across roles is paperwork requirements. WIOA has increased reporting requirements. VR Counselors must collect substantially more data than previously and process the associated paperwork, which limits the time they can be providing rehabilitation counseling. A staff member also announced, "I have to document it in like five different places!"

Enhance Counselor Skills to Better Develop and Provide Individualized Plans of Service

The district and assistant district administrators across regions spoke with great enthusiasm of the DA/ADA meetings. The administrators commented that through these meetings Central Office becomes transparent, and it becomes clear what is happening or what may happen in the future. "I feel so well informed after I leave those meetings, I think that they're definitely an asset. I wouldn't change a thing about them" commented one district administrator. Another commented, "Quarterly DA/ADA meetings are very beneficial. The networking about best practices is invaluable." Administrators were also pleased that they were invited to provide input on future meeting topics.

Feedback regarding counselor trainings proved more ambivalent. First, "strongly suggested" video trainings were described as taking too much time away from working with customers. A whole day dedicated to training, or even a "training week," was recommended as opposed to repeated hour-long trainings. Second, while some trainings were considered "really beneficial," many others were found "unrelative" to their daily activities.

District offices also have diverse training processes for incoming VR counselors. Across all BVRS and BBVS offices, incoming VRCs undergo a minimum of six-months in training status. During this period, new VRCs are supported by a training supervisor(s), who review manuals, processes, and other information with them. When there is only one training supervisor in an office, it can be a very demanding role. In one district office we visited, new VRCs remained in training status for one year to ensure quality through direct supervision. One district administrator expressed concern about the

Bachelor's degree to Master's degree to OVR pipeline that many VRCs now traverse. The administrator expressed that staff lacked training on case management skills and interpersonal office experience, which impacted their efficacy.

Identify Strategies to Deliver Equable and Consistent Agency Services

Along with minimizing wait times and engaging in useful trainings, BVRS and BBVS relationships with other agencies influence their ability to deliver equable and consistent services. One VR staff member commended the ease with which they were able to connect with other public and private agencies. However, as demonstrated in the sections above (Transition Age Youth; Individuals Served by Other Parts of the Statewide Workforce Development Employment System; and Establishment, Development or Improvement of Community Rehabilitation Programs), the referral process plays a major role in OVR's ability to provide equable and consistent service.

OVR administrators and staff described tenuous relationships with school districts as a limitation to their ability to serve more transition age youth. "Hopefully there's a change in culture at schools to not be so afraid of OVR. Hopefully success stories will help alleviate concerns" considered one administrator. The district offices have been eager to connect transition age youth with employers for On the Job Training (OJT) for which OVR can provide employers with 100% wage reimbursement. One district office approached a council consisting of school district representatives, superintendents and other stakeholders to offer students summer work through OJT, but only five students filed applications. Part of the strain on the relationship between OVR and schools was identified by VR administrators and staff as misunderstanding of roles and eligibility during and outside of the school year. One VR staff member explained "We can't do the same thing that [schools] do at the same time, but I don't think we do the same thing but somehow that doesn't get translated...so our staff are pretty much relegated to provide services in the summer, which is not very useful."

Lack of communication between the entities comprising the Statewide Workforce Development Employment System was raised as a concern by district administrators and staff alike. Both district administrators and a Business Service Representative argued that collaboration with CareerLinks® could be improved by changes in the program referral process.

While individuals may self-refer, many learn about OVR through county/administrative entities, supports coordination organizations and agencies, and providers of employment-related services. These organizations do not adhere to a singular codified referral process. Some organizations refer everyone they come across while others filter individuals and recommend few, all of which affects how OVR can accomplish its mission. This likely disproportionality affects cultural and ethnic minorities, individuals of low socioeconomic status, those in rural areas, etc.

Equable and consistent service delivery and wait times are also impacted by VR counselor understaffing. Across each office visited, and across all roles, VR administrators and staff cited understaffing as a major barrier to service provision. Understaffing stems from the lack of accredited university rehabilitation curriculums and programs across the state for VR counselors and instructional staff, like Orientation and Mobility Specialists and Vision Rehabilitation Therapists. District offices in rural areas lamented their difficulty filling open positions while offices located near accredited university programs secured VRCs more easily.

Yet even offices that don't suffer from understaffing recognize increased turnover. "OVR is a first stop rather than the final destination" commented one administrator. District administrators across the sites were open to revising the Master's degree requirement for VRCs. The majority of administrators and staff expressed confidence that revising the requirement from a Master's degree in vocational rehabilitation to a Master's degree in a related field would be beneficial. Another district administrator argued that a Bachelor's degree with years of office and field experience and local knowledge would generate even better candidates. All VR Counselors expressed the need for more counselors. Some believed the establishment of an intermediary counselor assistant to perform the intake, process paperwork, and acquire records would enable the VRCs to perform more vocational rehabilitation. However, other VRCs expressed concern that such an intermediary would increase inaccurate assessments.

Interoffice dynamics and collaboration also affect consistency and service delivery. A key dynamic uncovered across each district office was the strained relationship between VRCs and other staff, such as Vision Rehabilitation Therapists, Orientation and Mobility Specialists, and Business Service Representatives. Non-VRC staff expressed frustration that VRCs “believe they can do my job.” There were examples of VRCs providing AT to customers without VRT training and circumventing BSRs to reach out directly to employers. We learned about these instances from both VRC and non-VRC staff. VRCs admitted to bypassing BSRs, “I’ll reach out to employers myself just because I know it’s something I can do quicker than giving it to someone else to do. I know the customer and what their needs are better than they do.” When VRCs undertake BSR activities, they risk confusing and frustrating employers and consequently may undermine the BSR’s success in forging and maintaining employer relationships.

Identify Strategies to Expediently Refer Job Candidates to Employers

Due to their increased caseloads, activities, and objectives consequent of WIOA, VR counselors have been less able to attend meetings and market OVR to employers as much as they had in the past. However, according to district administrators, employer relationships have increased due to the establishment of the Business Service Representative and OVR’s ability to offer employers 100% reimbursement for On the Job Training. According to the Business Service Representative, the “biggest part of the job is educating employers on what a disability is. Not just obvious physical disabilities, but explaining capabilities, Workers’ Compensation and liability.”

In addition to the targeted sub-goals sought by OVR in this comprehensive assessment of the provision of consistent and equitable delivery of OVR information and services, the research team also identified a few areas OVR may be interested in investigating further. As described above, VR staff agreed that face-to-face customer service was best, which predominantly meant meeting with customers in their home. This is particularly true for VRTs and O & Ms, who often need to train customers in their home environment. But one staff member expressed the concern that in-home meetings could endanger staff members. “Counselors have to go into a home and assess it but no one assesses the safety for the counselor.” This employee recounted feeling unsafe meeting alone with a customer. This vulnerability was exacerbated by the meeting’s rural locale at a time of inclement weather.

Another concern raised during the site visits to district offices was compensation between administration and Pennsylvania Social Service Union (PSSU) staff. The research team learned that administration and VRCs were not receiving pay increases at the same rate and therefore there may be PSSU staff making nearly the same wage as a district administrator or the same wage as an assistant district administrator. One district administrator explained that this discrepancy discourages VRCs from advancing into management positions. Another expressed concern that in the absence of the district administrator, the assistant district administrator can be undermined if they are in the same wage class as VRC Supervisors.

****Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment for FFYs 2017-2018**

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 2 years’ 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 PA Rehabilitation Council as important initiatives. Temple staff will coordinate their tasks with both OVR’s Central Office staff and PA Rehabilitation Council representatives. Here is an overview of the CSNA project for the next two years (FY’s 2017-2018). The research outcomes from the following

activities will be combined with the activities and report from the first year of the CSNA cycle (FY 2016) to create a comprehensive set of data, analysis, reports, and recommendations that will ultimately be the combined 2016-2018 Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment. The data collection and analysis of the activities below are ongoing at this time.

1. Identify strategies and best practices relevant to students and youth with disabilities to increase services and support opportunities, including:
 - a. Engaging students, youth and school representatives to solicit their input and perspectives
 - b. Practicing and improving workplace skills necessary for competitive integrated employment
 - c. Making available and enhancing pre-employment transition services (PETS)
 - d. Strengthening and enhancing transition from school to higher education or competitive integrated work.
2. Identify needed services delivered by Community Rehabilitation Programs (CRP), particularly in rural areas, such as:
 - a. Increasing available services, including pre-employment services (PETS)
 - b. Identifying strategies and best practices to assist CRPs to transition from sheltered and/or segregated employment programs to competitive integrated employment services.
3. Investigate and evaluate effective strategies and protocols for building more effective partnerships with other non-VR organizations* to improve cross-agency collaboration and service delivery by:
 - a. Researching best practices, strategies and protocols of other states' VR programs and relevant national organizations to support the agency's development and modifications of Memorandum of Understanding;
 - b. Examining and evaluating current cross-agency collaboration and service delivery of OVR and other Pennsylvania non-VR organizations, particularly as it reinforces building effective partnerships of support of the Governor's Employment First Initiative;
 - c. Examining and evaluating OVR's current informational materials, website and social media protocol and make recommendations to enhance the agency's informational campaign to all OVR's customers.

* PA Department of Education (PDE), Office of Developmental Programs (ODP), Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (OMHSAS), community rehabilitation programs (CRP), etc.
4. Identify barriers and strategies to improve services to the broad spectrum of ethnic and cultural minorities with disabilities and to increase the rate of employment for these groups, particularly individuals who are Latino.
 - a. Identify internal and external barriers to services for cultural and ethnic and cultural and minorities, particularly individuals with disabilities who are Latino
 - b. Identify best practices and strategies leading to improved VR services to ethnic and cultural minority groups, particularly individuals with disabilities who are Latino
 - c. Identify strategies to develop improved relationships and outreach with ethnic and cultural minority community organizations.
5. Identify strategies and best practices relevant to improving transportation services that enable individuals with disabilities to acquire and retain competitive integrated employment. Consideration should include the array of both public and private transportation services.
6. Survey the needs of college students with disabilities and determine how college/university disability service offices and/or other college/university job placement service offices can:
 - a. Increase the satisfaction rate of students with disabilities with their educational experiences

- b. Develop internship opportunities for students with disabilities
- c. Increase the success rate of students with disabilities at the completion of their educational programs
- d. Increase staff/faculty knowledge of disability-related programming and accommodations
- e. Engage state-related universities in cooperative agreements.

Description (k) Annual Estimates

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:

1. The VR Program: 41,180
2. The Supported Employment Program; and
 - A. **Supported employment
 - B. Most Significantly Disabled: 4,602
 - C. To be served in FFY 2017 with Title VI funds: 421
 - D. Title VI funds to be allocated: \$860,335
3. each priority category, if under an order of selection.
 - A. Most Significantly Disabled: 38,387
 - B. Significantly Disabled: 170
 - C. Not Significantly Disabled: 7**

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

** 0**

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.

1. In FFY 2016 the number of SE customers served by OVR with title VI funds:
 - Total Number Served - Title VI Funds: **445**
 - Amount Spent - Title VI Funds: **\$887,749.74**
 - Total Number Served under Age 25 - Title VI Funds: **445**
 - Amount Spent - Title VI Funds (under 25): **\$887,749.74**
2. Additional SE customers served by OVR with title 1 funds:
 - Total Number Served - Title I Funds: **4,467**
 - Amount Spent - Title I Funds: **\$8,854,097.28**
 - Total Number Served under Age 25 - Title I Funds: **1,687**
 - Amount Spent - Title I Funds (under 25): **\$3,109,250.24**

Based on actual FFY 2014 figures, OVR's outcome and service goals under the Order of Selection are projected as follows for FFY 2017:

- For the Most Significantly Disabled category, the number accepted is expected to be 17,261, while the number served will be 41,180. The number rehabilitated will be 8,575 8,438, of which 8,351 will be the number rehabilitated into the competitive labor market. The total cost of services for FFY 2016 is expected to be \$58,886,399, 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.

Description (l) 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:
 - (A) the most recent comprehensive statewide assessment, including any updates;
 - (B) the State's performance under the performance accountability measures of section 116 of WIOA; and
 - (C) other available information on the operation and effectiveness of the VR program, including any reports received from the State Rehabilitation Council and findings and recommendations from monitoring activities conducted under section 107.

**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 Pennsylvania Rehabilitation Council (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 Pennsylvania CareerLinks® 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 Department of Human Services, Pennsylvania Department of Education 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 Pennsylvania Rehabilitation Council to share best practices and outreach methods to increase participation in the Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) meetings.
2. Continue to grow OVR's social media presence.
3. Educate staff on accessibility & technology based upon universal design principles.

Description (m) 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

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.

No change to report at this time, refer to initial VR Services Portion of PA WIOA Combined State Plan (7/1/16 to 6/30/2020).

OVR remains on an Order of Selection (OOS). Individuals with most significant disabilities are given first priority. OVR continues its position not to elect to serve eligible individuals, regardless of the OOS, who require specific services or equipment to maintain employment.

Description (n) Goals and Plans for Distribution of Title VI Funds

OVR will use Title VI 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 SE services after Title VI 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. OVR has a number of changes planned for individuals receiving SE services, such as expanding Discovery and Customized Employment (D/CE) pilots. The following improvements listed are intended to be considered OVR goals for title VI funds. For example, OVR is revising its SE policy that 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. Title I Funds will be used to provide Supported Employment services after Title VI Funds have been exhausted.

OVR's implementation of Discovery and Customized Employment (D/CE) rolled out to District Offices in three pilot phases. Phase I Pilot offices were implemented in November 2015 and included our Washington, Harrisburg, and Philadelphia District Offices. Phase II D/CE implementation began in January of 2017 and included our Pittsburgh, Erie, Altoona, York, Allentown, and Norristown offices. In June 2017 Phase III D/CE implementation was completed for New Castle, Williamsport, Dubois, Reading, Johnstown, Wilkes-Barre with staff training via videoconference and the final in a series of trainings by Marc Gold and Associates (MG&A) held in Cranberry. All offices involved in the pilot have received an informational training session for their supported employment providers and intensive face to face training for their staff. Additional providers for Discovery have been added in all district offices and additional providers have expressed interest or are currently going through certification. OVR will continue to work with the provider community to inform and recruit providers who have gone through the Discovery training process.

Another goal includes 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 service coordination with

partner 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.

Description (o) State's Strategies

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.*

1. Increase Employment Opportunities for Individuals with Disabilities.

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

- OVR linked with Director of L & I Apprenticeship & Training Office to increase apprenticeship opportunities.
- OVR Business Services and Outreach Division supported CTI/HGAC by connecting with L&I's Apprenticeship Office & CVS to help promote opportunity for "stackable skills training" for pre-apprenticeship in Pharmacy Tech and in building trades.
- New pilot of "My Summer Work" Project in New Castle, Wilkes-Barre, York, Allentown, Phila., and Reading DO's.
- Four co-located District Offices (Harrisburg, Philadelphia, Altoona, Erie) and OVR Central Office participated in the 2017 State/Local Internship Project this summer. Central Office will work with 2 interns and all others will have 1 intern for the full 8- week program. Program runs from June 19-August 11, 2017. OVR is focused on offering the opportunity to students who are PETS eligible. Students will be engaged in a variety of office related tasks and projects with focus on development of soft-skills for future employment.

b. OVR continues to partner with the Bureau of Workforce Partnership and Operations (BWPO) to ensure programmatic and physical accessibility of the PA Career Link Centers.

- In 2016 OVR training for all combined bureau District Office Business Service Teams on the Cornell University ADA Leadership Training and provided hands-on training to offer accessibility training through use of the accessibility tool kits, that were developed by Misericordia University in Scranton. As a result of this training and outreach there have been increased requests for training from different Career Link Offices.

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

- The Bureau of Special Education and OVR are holding regional meetings/trainings with local CTC's to increase awareness and interest in collaboration.
- Currently the Berks CTC is the remaining program. This program has expanded to include paid internships, travel training, driver's education, and has hired two job trainers.

2. Increase/Improve Transition Services for Students with Disabilities

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

- OVR continues to approach PETS implementation through three avenues: Staff, Fee for Service agreements, and contracts. The WIOA requisite that 15% of VR Funds must be used for pre-employment transition services expands the role and responsibilities of VR counselors to devote time and attention to transition-age youth. PETS funds for the entire FFY are estimated to be \$20M. OVR is focused on developing more summer programs. In addition to the Summer Academies for Visual Impairment, Deaf and Hard of Hearing, and Individuals with Autism, OVR's working with the Bureau of Special Education on the AACHIEVE Program. This is a summer program that bridges the gap between high school, summer employment, and college to assist students with Autism to transition. The colleges involved are Edinboro, Indiana University of PA, Kutztown, and West Chester. Local High Schools located near these college setting are participating.
- Section 511 added new requirements that place limitations on the payment of subminimum wages by entities holding special wage certificates under Section 14(c) of the Fair Labor Standards Act. As a direct result of WIOA, certain criteria must now be satisfied before an employer hires individuals with disabilities who are age 24 or younger (youths) at subminimum wage or continues to employ individuals with disabilities of any age at the subminimum wage level. The purpose of Section 511 is to ensure that individuals with disabilities have access to information and services that will enable them to achieve competitive integrated employment. OVR on target to reach all individuals affected before the July 22, 2017 compliance deadline for the first year of implementation.
- **Increase opportunities for students to gain workplace skills and community-integrated work experiences.**
OVR works to increase customer employment outcomes (26 closures and Work Based Learning Experiences) through increased engagement with multiple employers; use of permanent and non-permanent OJT's; increased awareness of internships, both paid and nonpaid, and apprenticeships; and involvement with Work Partners @ CTC's (example: Berks Career and Technology Center).

b. Enhance collaborative relationships with DHS, PDE, and higher education.

- **Experience the Employment Connection** – With a successful first year as a foundation, Experience the Employment Connection (EEC): Possibilities in Action is returning for a second year! EEC is a joint training initiative between OVR, the Office Developmental Programs (ODP), the Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse (OMHSAS), and the Department of Education's Bureau of Special Education (BSE). This year the EEC Steering Committee have put together a program that is bigger, better and even more engaging. 15 full-day regional training sessions are planned for Fall 2017 with dates and locations determined by Suasion, an external conference planner and facilitator determined by bid award for this initiative. Focus topic being considered is around the Governor's Employment First Legislation.
- **OVR's 2017 Summer Academy Programs prepare high school students for success in college include:** Youth with Visual Impairment BBVS in State College, partnership with Penn State University (Final week included STEM activities); new for 2017 will be a Summer Academy for Students who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing Impaired at PSU; and the Early Reach Summer Academy 2017 at PSU Harrisburg Campus.

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

- Summer Academy- This year the STEM activities have added an additional week of activity for participants.

d. **Research best practices for the implementation of peer mentoring opportunities. Staff continues to collaborate with the Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (OMHSAS) to develop Peer Support Training Curriculum.**

- OVR is working with OMHSAS to identify formal pathways within which to develop training and implementation of Peer Supports within PA.

3. Increase Community Education and Outreach

a. **Work with the PaRC to share best practices and outreach methods to increase participation in the Citizens Advisory Committee meetings.**

- OVR Central Office staff participated in the CAC meeting on March 2, 2017. Information was shared with DA's and CAC liaisons within OVR by e-mail message.
- PaRC is planning an Empowerment Summit on August 24, 2017 with the State Board of VR, Client Assistance Program (CAP), Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC), and OVR to learn about each group's missions, roles, goals, activities, etc. to see where our missions/goals cross and how we can work together for change especially as related to the Council's goal of employment for persons with disabilities.

b. **Continue to grow OVR's social media presence.** OVR's Social Media Manager continues to ensure OVR have an active Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn page.

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

- Accessible Document Training was conducted for interested staff in May/June 2017 provided by Rick Fox, B & F Teaching and Technology.

Description (p) Evaluation and Reports of Progress: VR and Supported Employment Goals

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

- (A) *Identify the strategies that contributed to the achievement of the goals.*
(B) *Describe the factors that impeded the achievement of the goals and priorities.*

**OVR will use Title VI 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 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 Funds anticipated for distribution to Pennsylvania in FFY 2015.

OVR is preparing roll out the new Supported Employment policy this fall. Change that may be considered will look to provide ongoing evaluation to ensure services are being provided to those customers most in need. Increasing communication among VR partners is an area that is to be addressed. A considered focus is 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 under-served 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 the Office of Developmental Programs (ODP), the Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services

(OMHSAS), and Office of Long Term Living (OLTL). These agencies provide the necessary long-term supports needed to ensure the employment success of the individual with a disability.

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

OVR has met or exceeded its goals during the preceding 2-year period. For Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2016, OVR served more than 72,000 individuals with disabilities, worked with over 6,000 employers and helped place more than 8,300 individuals with disabilities into competitive integrated employment. During 2016, OVR and our partner providers delivered an extensive array of pre-employment transition services to students with disabilities across Pennsylvania.

In order to align the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program (which operates on a Federal fiscal year (FFY) basis) with the other five WIOA core programs (which operate on a program year (PY) basis) to the extent practicable, VR agencies must report participant data in a manner consistent with the jointly-administered requirements set forth in the final joint WIOA regulations and the WIOA Common Performance Reporting Information Collection Request (ICR).

In accordance with section 506(b) of WIOA, the performance accountability system requirements of section 116 of WIOA took effect July 1, 2016. At that time, VR agencies were expected to begin the process of implementing the final RSA-911-16 data collection. The federal Department of Education exercised its transition authority under section 503 of WIOA to ensure the orderly transition from the requirements under the Act, as amended by the Workforce Investment Act of 1998, to the requirements of WIOA. The primary indicators of performance are calculated on a PY basis (i.e., July 1-June 30). Because the VR program's FFY (i.e., October 1-September 30) spans two different PYs by an overlap of one quarter (July 1-September 30) and, therefore, many participants are served by the VR program for more than one PY, the data must be reported on a quarterly basis to ensure the required data are available for the entire PY. In so doing, the VR program can ensure compliance with the performance accountability requirements of section 116 of WIOA and data comparability with the other core programs.

OVR will begin collecting Common Performance Measure data on July 1, 2017, and the first quarterly reports containing Common Performance Measure data and other 911 client data are due November 15, 2017. In addition to the quarterly reports, OVR will submit the Statewide and Local Performance Report annually with their WIOA Core Partners.

Description (q) Quality, Scope, and Extent of Supported Employment Services

No change to report at this time, refer to initial VR Services Portion of PA WIOA Combined State Plan (7/1/16 to 6/30/2020).