

FLORIDA UNIFIED STATE PLAN

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SERVICES PORTION

2017-2020

**FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Division of Vocational Rehabilitation
4070 Esplanade Way, 2nd Floor
Tallahassee, Florida 32399-7016
Aleisa C. McKinlay, JD, MA
Division Director**

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DIVISION OF VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION (VR)**

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Section (a): Input of State Rehabilitation Council

The Florida Rehabilitation Council (FRC) acknowledges the many challenges and opportunities confronting the Florida Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) in preparing for a 2017-2020 state plan. The FRC recognizes the diligent efforts of the VR Director Aleisa McKinlay, and her staff for their contributions to the Council members' understanding of the Workforce Investment and Opportunity Act (WIOA) while navigating in a rapidly changing system. Although WIOA measures are being established and the rule development is still in process, the FRC supports high standards and expectations in every area of the VR system. Challenges may include: preparing for and implementing the requirements and new partnerships required under WIOA; ensuring high quality and consistent information and referrals for wait list customers; increased service availability for transition students; counselor retention; and continuing strong partnerships to facilitate best practices in policies and procedures to make the VR program even more successful. Opportunities for continued collaborative efforts are plentiful and communication has never been better between VR and the FRC; we look forward to continuing our positive relationship and to promoting increased employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities.

Public Forum Summary

The FRC continues to partner with VR to hold public forums; both entities are trying alternative methods to market and advertise these events for greatest client and community participation. This collaborative effort to reach customers, vendors, businesses and other stakeholders is a continued focus. The public forums are held at each FRC quarterly meeting or when policy changes may require public input; there were five public forums conducted during the state fiscal year 2014-2015. Access to these forums is not limited to individuals in the town of the meeting but is open to the public across the state via telephone or streaming text through the internet. Areas of comment have included: transition issues; standardizing curriculum for training employment support service providers; the need for more supported employment vendors; availability of assistive technology; Order of Selection and wait list concerns; third-party cooperative agreements with school districts; legislative outreach regarding supports for people with disabilities; vendor referrals; advocacy; and opportunities for rehabilitation engineering. Future forums are planned to promote and maintain open lines of communication with VR customers, stakeholders and interested parties.

Customer Satisfaction Survey

A new survey contractor, Market Decisions was hired in October 2014. The FRC and VR are excited about the Customer Satisfaction Survey and the wealth of information becoming available to both entities. Unlike the past, the new survey instrument provides analysis of process in addition to customer satisfaction and may allow VR to assess and ultimately offer quality ratings of vendor performance. Survey findings are now available to all VR employees for further comparison and analysis; and area offices have been encouraged to use the reports to identify potential opportunities to make real-time improvements in their customer service provision. The FRC commends VR on

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achieving an excellent rating with 87% of the successfully closed cases reporting job satisfaction. Although the sample size is still small for generalization we are encouraged when compared to a national survey conducted by the Conference Board (www.forbes.com/sites/susanadams/2014/06/20/most-americans-are-unhappy-at-work) that suggests only 47.7% of Americans are happy at work. During September 2015, focus groups are to be conducted as part of our customer survey to address satisfaction levels with the wait list and the appeals processes. Both FRC and VR are looking forward to hearing of the conversations with our customers and the future trends to be identified.

2017-2020 Council Recommendations

The FRC gathered to identify areas of interest of all members for input into the 2017-2020 state plan. The following recommendations rose to the level of importance in meeting the Council's federal mandates to review, analyze and advise VR.

Recommendation 1: Transition

The FRC applauds some of the great work of the agency in serving youth and those in transition. A June 2015 snapshot of transition age youth cases (16-21 years) presented in the VR Directors report indicated that 39% of cases statewide are serving this population. The FRC is complimentary of VRs efforts to work with this group and is encouraged by the agency's efforts to strengthen these programs and outreach further. In alignment with WIOA mandates, FRC supports early contact and the provision of Information and Referral (I&R) guidance to educate and encourage future training and employment for transition students. The Council supports VR engaging the Florida Department of Education to expand and offer additional opportunities for pre-, vocational and/or technical training for students who are interested in career technical programs. By providing more information to students and families about services available in the school districts' and VRs Third-Party Cooperative Arrangements (TPCA) we may increase the success for each individual entering the field of employment. The Council requests increased communication and collaboration by VR representatives with each school district and increased participation in the education of options available to Florida students. The FRC supports VR initiating peer mentoring in Florida; increasing the capacity of transition service providers while encouraging self-employment and entrepreneurial options.

Agency response:

WIOA provides great opportunities for VR to increase transition services and opportunities to youth with disabilities. Increased Information and Referral to transition age youth is built into WIOA, and VR has already begun providing more transition service-related information to youth. Although VR approaches and offers TPCA partnerships to all school districts in Florida, the partnership is dependent on the individual district's decision to participate. VR has recently hired another transition administrator to ensure that standard information is provided consistently to all school districts, and to coordinate and monitor active and potential TPCA partnerships.

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Two peer mentoring initiatives are planned at this time. A peer mentoring/ IPS project with a youth element is being developed in Broward County, and a youth-specific peer mentoring project is being developed in partnership with Florida Atlantic University. VR will keep FRC updated on their progress.

Additional initiatives are under way to increase provider capacity and offer more opportunities to youth. These include approval of CareerSource Florida to provide preplacement services, revision of Certified Business and Technical Assistance Consultants (CBTAC) recertification procedures, and increase in CBTAC and Discovery providers. VR is also partnering with Volunteer Florida, Centers for Independent Living, Florida ARC and High School High Tech to offer more OJT and work readiness opportunities.

Recommendation 2: Order of Selection

WIOA fosters new opportunities for innovation and collaboration across Federal, State, and local agencies, private organization, and employers. The shift in VRs role as a core partner in the workforce development system should enhance service options and job choices for those we serve. The FRC applauds VRs efforts to serve over 39,000 people during the SFY 14-15 while on an Order of Selection. Given the heightened emphasis on the provision of service to students and youth with disabilities under WIOA, the Council requests increased communication on how customers with the most significant disabilities will be served. FRC would like to see VR increase service capacity and reduce wait times for those currently on Order of Selection.

A very important piece in serving those on a wait list is the information our customers receive when they enter the VR system. Quality information from the start can empower individuals with disabilities to maximize employment, economic self-sufficiency, independence, inclusion and integration into society. VR continues to work on the information and referral (I&R) processes to enhance our customers' experience when they move into active services or remain on the wait list and may require additional community supports. FRC is proud of the advocacy and attention I&R has received and will continue to work with VR on the provision of effective and efficient processes during 2017-2020.

Agency response:

VR will continue to provide FRC with information on WIOA-related changes through quarterly director's reports and planning updates, and via email in between quarterly meetings. VR has been diligently working to reduce the number of people on the waitlist as well as time spent on the waitlist, and both have decreased over the past year. It is anticipated that the Category 2 waitlist will be empty by January 2016. As noted, VR continues to improve its information and referral materials, and welcomes FRCs feedback on this, as well as their recent offer to help with further revisions.

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Recommendation 3: Job Placement Initiatives

The FRC has encouraged increased use of rehabilitation engineering services in the area of employment. Home and vehicle modifications are important but if the end goal is employment, there is definitely a way rehabilitation engineering can make a positive change. The FRC recommends VR evaluate the rehabilitation engineering contract or the different types of services rehabilitation engineering contractors may offer to determine if there are incentives to increasing technology services directly tied to employment.

FRC commends VR for the hiring of twelve Area Business Relations Specialists under a Business Relations Program Administrator. VR should continue to strengthen engagement efforts with business leaders to develop long-range employment options for our customers and ways to maximize the employers' return on investment. The FRC appreciates the leadership of VR in collaborative efforts to develop and supervise the Abilities Help Desk; also VRs continued efforts to identify growing employment markets, potential areas for workplace re-engineering and opportunities for job customization. FRC encourages VR develop a deeper understanding of customer strengths and develop tools to communicate succinctly to potential employers. Focusing on the strengths may help businesses design job descriptions and identify specific training or educational opportunities with the goal of expanding the number of businesses interested in hiring VR customers to find productive and meaningful jobs. VR has also embraced and worked to increase On-the-Job Training (OJT) options for transition and post-secondary students. Emphasis on the availability of accommodations, increasing self-employment options and the use of the Discovery program models will also increase customer job possibilities and financial independence. Once all the employment specialists are hired and the Business Relations program becomes more active the FRC anticipates increased placement and employment returns for businesses, VR and our customers.

The FRC would encourage that all eligible individuals have access to Phase 2 supported-employment services. The Council is concerned with the limitations and restrictions of long-term funding and follow-along supports and encourages investigation of stronger resources. Council members would like to recommend additional supports be made available for job customization and that additional Innovation and Expansion grants be offered within the state to meet the growing needs. VR's efforts to provide services in rural areas of Florida are recognized and encouraged.

Agency response:

VR is currently working with the University of South Florida to update their contract, with the intent to strengthen the use of rehabilitation engineering services for VR customers. As with all services provided or funded by VR, environmental modifications are authorized on a case-by-case basis, according to the specific customer's employment needs and goals outlined in their Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE). As part of IPE development, VR uses the Engineer Evaluation to identify services needed.

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VR has formalized its Business Relations Program, and its vision is 'to build and sustain partnerships with business and industry through effective services that are driven by the needs of employers'. Efforts are currently focused on defining and customizing services to employers and creating strategic partnerships to support workforce needs. VR anticipates that this will increase competitive integrated employment and career exploration opportunities for jobseekers with disabilities.

The Supported Employment Service model is founded on two primary premises. Supported Employment assumes that all individuals, regardless of their disability, have the capacity and should be afforded the opportunity to engage in competitive integrated employment with appropriate support services. The second concept is the need for the support services to be available so that individuals are able to be successful in their employment outcomes for the long term, not just while VR is able to assist.

The recognition of the need for Follow Along or Extended services (Phase 2) is critical and VR has devoted trainings for Counselors to recognize all the opportunities for funding Phase 2, such as Private pay, Social Security Work Incentives, local community grants, as well as giving priority to Natural and Employer Supports. VR has also recognized that quality placements that are individually developed require less support in Phase 2 and make it much more likely that natural supports can provide the required supports.

VR has also worked to expand the Discovery as a person-centered planning tool that helps provide more opportunities for supported employment. In addition, VR is now adding a Customized Placement Benchmark as an option with a higher provider reimbursement rate for this benchmark. Part of the approval and success of that benchmark is that natural supports are prioritized and developed from the beginning of the job negotiation process.

VR has the option under WIOA to provide up to four years of extended services for youth, if necessary, and if funding is available. The youth programs that VR is invested in are anticipated to help young adults move into supported employment with more skills, which will reduce their need for Phase 2 Services. The more experiences and work skills that individuals have the opportunity to develop, the increased likelihood of their supported employment placement being a successful experience.

It should be noted that the Agency for Persons with Disabilities (APD) received a \$1,000,000 allocation to provide employment related supports for individuals on APD's waiting list. These funds may be used for employment and employment-related services such as Phase 2, Internships, transportation, work clothes etc. VR is working with APD to help identify individuals who may be mutual customers who could benefit from this service. While it is not available to all VR customers, it is an additional funding option for Phase 2 services so that counselors are comfortable that there is a reasonable expectation of those necessary supports. VR will continue to work with APD and the

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Department of Children and Families' Mental Health Program Office to seek additional resources for Phase 2 of Supported Employment services.

More research and discussion is needed to determine where Innovation and Expansion grants can best serve Florida's jobseekers with disabilities. Opportunities, when identified, will be offered through formal procurement processes. VR recognizes this as an opportunity that could be beneficial and complimentary to WIOA-related initiatives.

Recommendation 4: Public Awareness of Vocational Rehabilitation

There is no more important time to make sure that the VR system is visible and understood than now. The FRC recommends that a media campaign be developed to share not only the history of this important national program but also to share Florida specific services, successes and accomplishments. The availability of VR on social media (Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter) is helpful and increases accessibility but there is still a need to expand information offered in multiple languages to decrease any potential barriers. FRC suggests an accessible online application system be investigated and implemented. Although not everyone may choose to access an online application, it should be an option. Feedback from the customer satisfaction survey indicates that some individuals have difficulty completing paperwork.

Council members are excited about engaging businesses as mandated partners in the implementation of WIOA and will support VR in the outreach and engagement of these stakeholders to meet their needs as well as finding jobs for the citizens of Florida.

Agency response:

VR acknowledges the need to better promote and market the valuable services it offers to jobseekers with disabilities. VR welcomes recommendations on documents and information needed in other languages, and the specific languages needed.

VR has engaged in multiple discussions with FRC about an online application. VR agrees that an accessible, online application would be valuable and has already started researching this option. However, WIOA modifications to case management and other IT systems have priority at this time. As VR has previously relayed to FRC, the online application will be further researched and discussed once WIOA modifications are complete.

Recommendation 5: Counselor Recruitment, Retention

The VR strategic plan SFY 2014-2016 contains a number of important areas that concentrate efforts on developing VR leadership candidates as well as an agency-wide workforce succession management plan. With potential changes from WIOA on staffing, FRC encourages VR to identify new ways to recruit employees while implementing long-term retention strategies. The Council supports VR in their efforts to have the highest level of counselor education and skill level available to support the best practices and quality of care so needed for this vulnerable population. This is critical especially in light of the continued level of counselor turn-over and staff retirement.

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The FRC is pleased to see revisions to the new employee training program and an increased number of course offerings in the learning management system (LMS). The professional development will strengthen the VR workforce further and could ultimately improve customer satisfaction of VR services. The FRC also has been a strong proponent of an advocacy curriculum within the counselor/employee training curriculum. Advocacy is an essential element for the success of this program and the Council renews collective efforts to increase understanding of the benefits of customer self-advocacy and the client development of their own Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE). FRC is working with VR on developing this self-advocacy module for system inclusion into LMS.

Agency response:

WIOA provides more flexibility in counselor education and credential requirements, which is anticipated to expand recruiting opportunities. VR will be able to hire candidates with business or related backgrounds who also have experience working with people with disabilities. Leadership Development and Succession Management projects are intended to increase VR employee retention while providing valuable professional development. Advocacy components are included in VR counselor training currently, and it is the understanding of VR that the FRC will develop additional content related to advocacy so that it can be delivered through the TED learning management system.

Recommendation 6: Mediation and Conflict Resolution

The FRC is pleased that Florida VR is one of only a few states that offer ombudsman services to its customers. The FRC continues to promote conflict resolution strategies including mediation prior to formal appeals. These strategies promote the early resolution of conflicts in an effective manner that will restore the relationship and move the rehabilitation process forward for the individual with a disability. The Council encourages VR to separate methods of reporting conflict resolutions to stakeholders for this may emphasize the many avenues open to our customers such as the Ombudsman office, an administrative review, mediation or an appeal.

Agency response:

VR has already agreed to report Dispute Resolution data in the manner requested by FRC. Additional measures taken by VR to alleviate this concern include multiple discussions and reviews of dispute resolution practices by FDOE legal counsel, presentation by and open discussion with legal counsel during the August quarterly meeting, and adding a series of survey items to the customer satisfaction survey that further identify customers' knowledge of options available if they do not agree with VR decisions about services.

FRC Strategic Plan Accomplishments

The FRC established our strategic plan in 2011 in accordance with the VR and the Florida Department of Education plans. Progress and areas of success and

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improvement are reviewed by the Council on an annual basis with new objectives added as appropriate.

Goal 1: To enhance VR Support and Service Systems – The FRC has had an impact on the VR implementation and review of policy and procedures; input on due process conflict resolutions; and increasing customer education and self-advocacy. Through constant opportunities for customers to comment at public forums and through the Market Decisions Survey the Council has provided insights into support and service systems effectiveness and efficiency. The Council focus and areas of concern regarding this goal are further expressed in Recommendations 5 and 6 provided above. FRC looks forward to working with VR on service enhancements and the implementation of best practices as appropriate to strengthen support and service systems within the agency.

Goal 2: To establish and strengthen collaborative strategic partnerships – The Council has developed in the past year a new recognition award for a group of most valued partners, our VR Counselors and front-line staff. It is important to appreciate these dedicated individuals for going above and beyond VR service expectations. The Council also has the annual Stephen R. Wise Award which recognizes a dedicated statewide leader, champion and advocate who embodies the qualities of passion and professionalism through public service making a significant difference in the life for persons with disabilities. Strategic partnerships are enhanced through the quarterly public forum invitation distribution and attendance; FRC member involvement in the Student Advisory Council (SAC) meetings; strategic planning and consortium support of the Florida Developmental Disabilities Council (FDDC) Employment First initiative; and other engagements with strategic partners such as the Florida Rehabilitation Council for the Blind. National level involvement has also been another way for FRC to obtain and increase stronger strategic partnerships and awareness of best practices. We have several Council members who represent Florida on the National Coalition of State Rehabilitation Councils (NCSRC) discussion groups on transitioning youth and the national WIOA implementation; we also had an FRC employee present at the Annual National Summit on VR Performance Management Excellence on the topic of Strategic Partnerships between Councils and VR agencies. The Council focus and areas of collaboration are further expressed in Recommendation 4 provided above.

Goal 3: To advocate for employment of persons with disabilities – The FRC continues to educate the public and legislative delegates on the benefits of hiring individuals living with a disability and the services that VR may provide. The Council is working with communities and VR to expand outreach to employers by offering disability employment information and resources for businesses. The Council focus and areas of collaboration are further expressed in Recommendations 1, 2 and 3 provided above.

Goal 4: To strengthen the management of FRC internal operation – This goal focuses on improving efficiency and effectiveness of the Council functions and program staff, especially during this period of change and WIOA implementation. FRC members

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discuss and review program budget and expenditures on a regular basis and are working toward streamlining internal processes to increase the efficiency of costs and efforts. Many actions this past year and for the future are focusing on utilizing electronic communication, access and media to educate and inform members as to the needs of VR and the customers we serve. At this time the FRC has 16 members on the Council with a variety of representative members, such as, a member of DOE, a VR Counselor, the Client Assistance Program (CAP), parents, the Florida Independent Living Council (FILC), vendors and CareerSource Florida to name a few. The Council continues to work with the Governors Appointment Office to meet the federal mandates of Council membership and the strategic partnerships represented as required. Communication and collaboration with VR is at its best, yet remains an important focus for FRC staff and members.

In closing, the FRC is focused on furthering the VR mission to help individuals with disabilities find and maintain employment and enhance their independence. The FRC would like to acknowledge the hard work and dedication of the counselors and field staff of VR. The Council will continue its review of VR service delivery through public forums, supporting strong survey initiatives, promoting effective and efficient methods while incorporating best practices and strategically planning with stakeholders. The recommendations identified in this plan are designed to strengthen the efforts of counselors, field staff, and the collective workforce system to employ all customers in competitive jobs of their choice.

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Section (b): Request for Waiver of Statewideness

Overview

The Florida Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) provides services throughout the state, including Transition Youth services that expand and improve vocational rehabilitation options for eligible customers. VR has entered into Third Party Cooperative Arrangements (TPCA) with some local school districts, but services are not currently available in all areas of the state. TPCA and other VR Transition Youth services align with the Pre-Employment Transition Services required under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). The State Plan cannot assure that the expanded services provided through the TPCAs will be available in all political subdivisions (school districts) of the state. A Waiver of Statewideness is requested in this State Plan.

Types of Services Provided

School and Community-Based Transition Services for Students with Disabilities

On an annual basis, VR offers new TPCAs to all 67 school districts in the state of Florida. Although VR approaches and offers TPCA to all districts, the partnership is dependent on the individual district's decision to participate. VR currently has TPCAs with 20 school districts and these arrangements expire in June 2016. The one-year arrangement will provide community-based work experiences to eligible students who have Supported Employment (SE) service needs identified in their Individual Educational Plan and Individualized Plan for Employment. This model reimburses school districts for services provided to VR-eligible students with the most significant disabilities and facilitates a seamless transition into postsecondary employment with supports.

On-the-Job Training (OJT), through VR providers, delivers needed community-based work experiences to VR-eligible students who do not require the intense supports provided through the TPCA. OJT services are available statewide.

Written Assurances

VR assures the Rehabilitation Services Administration that it has TPCAs with certain school districts and will provide written assurances as required. Specifically, each arrangement is formalized through the contract procurement process and contains the following:

1. The local school district will certify to VR that funds used for match funds are non-federal and are not used for match in any other federally- or state-assisted project or program.
2. VR approval will be obtained for all TPCA services.
3. All local school districts with TPCAs will abide by the state's Order of Selection policy.

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4. TPCA services are services not typically provided by local school districts, and TPCA services are only available to persons applying for, or already receiving VR services.
5. All other state plan requirements, including those found in the Unified State Plan required under WIOA, will apply to all services provided under the scope of the arrangement.
6. Program expenditures and employees providing services under the cooperative arrangement are under the administrative supervision of VR.

Third Party Cooperative Arrangement

During state fiscal year 2015-16, VR has arrangements with the school districts in the following counties:

1. Baker
2. Bay
3. Bradford
4. Calhoun
5. Columbia
6. Flagler
7. Gadsden
8. Gulf
9. Hendry
10. Jefferson
11. Leon
12. Liberty
13. Manatee
14. Monroe
15. Nassau
16. Putnam
17. St. Johns
18. Taylor
19. Volusia
20. Wakulla

The current arrangements will expire on June 30, 2016. New Third Party Cooperative Arrangements will be offered to all 67 school districts prior to that time.

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Section (c): Cooperation with Agencies Not Under the Workforce System

The Florida Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) maintains cooperative agreements with agencies and other entities not carrying out activities under the Workforce Investment System. The state of Florida no longer participates in the National Rural Development Program. A description of current VR partners and agreements is below.

The Able Trust

The mission of The Able Trust is to assist citizens with disabilities in the vocational rehabilitation process. This includes administering grants, as well as educational and public awareness programs. VR customers and other Floridians with disabilities receive direct support through funded community rehabilitation program employment projects and individual grants from The Able Trust. The Able Trust is a non-profit corporation, and VR does not provide any Title I funds to The Able Trust. The agreement promotes cooperation between The Able Trust and VR, which includes as provided for in Florida Statutes, the annual submission of The Able Trust's budget, annual report, annual audit, and any changes to the Articles of Incorporation or by-laws to the VR director. The Able Trust informs the VR director of all board meetings, as required by Florida statute. VR reviews the above documents and makes the necessary certification, based on statute.

Agency for Persons with Disabilities

The cooperative agreement between the Agency for Persons with Disabilities and VR contains a detailed and specific focus on collaborative planning and funding of Supported Employment services. Specifically, the agreement addresses the transition of secondary students to the community, to provide a seamless transition of services. The cooperative agreement includes local strategies and joint obligations for both agencies.

Both agencies have a common goal of assisting eligible persons to achieve greater independence through employment. The specific goal of this agreement is to coordinate support and services throughout the state, maintaining maximum customer satisfaction and informed choice. This agreement is currently being updated to ensure compliance with the new Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) regulations.

Brain and Spinal Cord Injury Program, Florida Department of Health

VR and the Brain and Spinal Cord Injury Program have agreed to expand referrals between the two agencies in order to improve employment outcomes for persons with a traumatic brain or spinal cord injury. The effort will include joint statewide training for those involved in the project and identification of local referral liaisons.

Florida Alliance for Assistive Services and Technology, Inc.

VR and the Florida Alliance for Assistive Services and Technology, Inc. agree to share specific information about their customers to optimize service delivery. Both agree to specific procedures that facilitate the delivery of services to their respective and mutual customers. Florida Alliance for Assistive Services and Technology offers an Alternative Financing Program for the purchase of assistive technology to all residents of Florida who have disabilities.

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Florida Independent Living Council, Inc.

VR coordinates with Florida Independent Living Council, Inc. (FILC), and the Centers for Independent Living throughout the state. Through memoranda of agreement with each of the 16 Centers, VR provides funding, outlines roles and responsibilities, and ensures cooperative planning. VR and the Division of Blind Services are both partners in the agreement with FILC, and both provide funds for council activities outlined in the agreement.

Florida School for the Deaf and the Blind

VR and the Florida School for the Deaf and the Blind agree to cooperate in serving students and customers who are deaf or hard of hearing, and in establishing transition meetings. Activities are implemented to increase public awareness of programs serving these customers and to improve transition between the school and local counselors.

Florida Small Business Development Center Network

Coordination with this network is carried out at the local level on a case-by-case basis. VR customers who are seeking self-employment can use a Business Planning Team. A representative from the Small Business Development Center Network can serve on such teams to help VR customers assess their potential for self-employment and analyze the various issues that need to be taken into account.

Institutions of Higher Education

VR has Memoranda of Understanding with the Presidents of Florida's public universities and the Florida College System. Both Memoranda outline the purposes, roles and responsibilities of VR and the educational institutions, as well as financial and programmatic responsibilities. The Memoranda of Understanding provides information regarding financial assistance, sharing of assessment findings, accommodations, rehabilitation technology services, academic advisement, counseling, confidentiality, and other topics.

The Lower Muscogee Creek Tribe

The Lower Muscogee Creek Tribe is located in southern Georgia and is the recipient of the Federal Section 121 Grant under Title I of the Rehabilitation Act, as amended. There is not a 121 program in Florida. However, VR and the Lower Muscogee Creek Tribe have a Memorandum of Understanding to coordinate services for eligible Native Americans with disabilities residing on or near the Lower Muscogee Creek Tribe Tama Reservation within a 150-mile radius. The agreement outlines the responsibilities of both groups, including services for joint customers and technical assistance.

Mental Health Program, Florida Department of Children and Families

VR coordinates with the state mental health authority to assist customers who have mental illnesses. One of these is participation on the Florida Assertive Community Treatment Team, a community-based, outreach-oriented method of delivering services to individuals with mental illnesses coordinated by the Mental Health Program. VR provides staff liaisons with many of these teams to help serve this group of customers in a comprehensive manner. In addition, VR is an active member of the State Mental Health Planning Council of Florida. The cooperative agreement promotes coordination

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so that appropriate services can be delivered to maximize customer choice and satisfaction. This agreement is currently being updated to ensure compliance with new WIOA regulations.

Division of Blind Services, Florida Department of Education

Both VR and Blind Services serve individuals with visual impairments. This agreement specifies the roles and responsibilities of each division, including those for individuals with one-eye pathology, bilateral visual impairment, multiple disabilities, and for individuals who are deaf-blind.

Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services, Florida Department of Education; Division of Blind Services; Florida Department of Health; Department of Economic Opportunity

The Florida Interagency Agreement for the Transfer of Assistive Technology, signed in 2006, establishes a framework for an efficient transition of technology as individuals with disabilities move through the continuum from educational services to employment. Specifically, the agreement ensures children and youth with disabilities and their families, educators, and employers are informed about the continued use and transfer of assistive technology devices. These devices may remain with the person as he or she moves from home to school and to post-school activities in order to assist in meeting transition needs. The agreement outlines the conditions for coordination, the authority for transfer of property by local education agencies, financial responsibilities, and other topics.

Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs, Employment Standards Administration

Both agencies agree to further the common goal of providing VR equal employment opportunities and protecting against discrimination. VR will provide expertise on matters relating to disability issues and employment, cross-referral of individuals with disabilities, and will participate in interagency training programs, staff meetings, and conferences. Both agencies agree to a coordinated public outreach effort.

Prison Rehabilitative Industries and Diversified Enterprises, Inc. (PRIDE)

VR uses the services and manufactured items produced in correctional work programs through PRIDE. PRIDE is a Florida corporation that provides these goods and services as a state-use contracting program. A similar product or service of comparable price and quality, found necessary for use by a state agency, may not be purchased from a source other than PRIDE. In addition, contracts between VR and any private vendor require all items be purchased through PRIDE. This is consistent with Section 946.515, Florida Statutes.

Rehabilitation Foundation of Northwest Florida

The purpose of this agreement is to maximize funding of vocational rehabilitation services for individuals with physical disabilities residing in northwest Florida. The Foundation contributes \$25,000 to VR toward meeting its non-federal funding requirements. In turn, VR will allocate an additional \$92,250 in federal funds to match

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the Foundation's contribution for vocational rehabilitation services in the following northwest Florida counties: Escambia, Santa Rosa, Okaloosa, and Walton.

The intent of these cooperative efforts is to increase the services leading to quality competitive employment outcomes that are responsive to the strengths, resources, interests, and capabilities of individuals with disabilities residing in northwest Florida. VR agrees to provide quarterly reports of expenditures to the Foundation's Trustees. Each report will include the number of individuals served and a description of services provided under the terms of the agreement.

Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Act

One of VR's ongoing objectives for the Ticket to Work Program is to increase the number of partnerships with Employment Networks (Employment and Rehabilitation Service Providers). VR hopes to expand the resources available to customers to meet the current and future levels of demand. It is also the goal of VR to ensure that customers have a choice in service providers available within their communities. VR has also implemented an Employment Network Referral and Partnership Agreement that creates more opportunity to develop partnerships with Employment Networks. The agreement features a transitional approach by assisting Social Security Administration customers in their efforts to achieve self-sufficiency through core VR services followed by ongoing support services from employment networks. VR will continue to monitor the Agreement's effectiveness in meeting the previously stated goal.

United States Department of Veterans Affairs

The need to serve Florida veterans who have disabilities led to the development of an agreement between the United States Department of Veterans Affairs and VR. The agreement outlines the roles and responsibilities of VR and the Department of Veterans Affairs. It clarifies which agency can provide specific services. It also includes information regarding shared planning, joint activities, and coordination.

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Section (d): Coordination with Education Officials

The Florida Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) updated the interagency agreement coordinating transition services with state education officials in July 2006. It is a state-level agreement, including agencies charged with providing transition services to students leaving high school and going to postsecondary education/training, support services, and/or employment. The agencies listed below agree to meet regularly to share information, ideas, and current initiatives, collaborate on training and special projects, cooperate in planning and budgeting, and generally support any areas of work that are mutually beneficial. These agencies include:

- Florida Department of Education:
 - Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services (BEESS)
 - Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR)
 - Division of Blind Services (DBS)
- Florida Agency for Persons with Disabilities (APD)
- Florida Department of Health, Children’s Medical Services
- Florida Department of Children and Families, Mental Health Services

This formal interagency agreement serves as a transition services model for improved collaboration, communication, coordination, and cooperation among local education agencies and local offices of VR, DBS, APD, Children’s Medical Services, and Mental Health Services.

VR has dedicated five program staff to administer the VR Transition Youth program. An administrator serves as the liaison for the 67 school districts and the Florida School for the Deaf and the Blind. Administrators coordinate and plan for effective transition services delivery with VR staff and external stakeholders statewide. The VR Transition Youth program is responsible for training internal employees and making presentations about VR transition services at conferences statewide in an effort to increase understanding and awareness of the agency’s role in assisting eligible students with disabilities.

Additionally, the VR Transition Youth program provides transition-related technical assistance to the Florida Rehabilitation Council. An administrator serves as a representative on the State Secondary Transition Interagency Committee and works closely with the regional representatives of Project 10: the Transition Education Network. Project 10 is funded through a grant from BEESS to the University of South Florida, St. Petersburg. Project 10 helps Florida school districts and stakeholders increase their ability to provide secondary transition services to students with disabilities in order to improve their academic success and postsecondary outcomes. Project 10 helps implement secondary transition services, interagency collaboration, transition legislation and policy, and student development and outcomes. VR counselors serving transition students participate in each area’s local interagency councils. The interagency councils are a collaborative effort between VR and Department of Education partners, public high schools, adult service agencies, workforce programs, parents, students,

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advocates, and employers working together to meet the transition needs of students with disabilities.

The VR Director or designee serves on the State Advisory Committee (SAC) for the Education of Exceptional Students. This committee is administered by BEESS. The SAC includes parents of children with disabilities, individuals with disabilities, educators and administrators from secondary and postsecondary institutions as well as foster care and juvenile justice representatives. The SAC also includes representatives of various state agencies that provide transition and other services to children, youth and young adults with disabilities. The committee advises the state education agency on what children with disabilities need and helps them develop corrective action plans to address findings in related federal monitoring reports. The committee also helps the state education agency develop evaluations and policies, implement policies, and report data. The committee may comment publicly on rules and regulations proposed by the state relating to the coordination of services for children with disabilities.

The VR Transition Youth program provides individualized services to help eligible students with disabilities with a seamless transition from high school to an identified career path. Under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), every student with a disability has the opportunity to participate in Pre-Employment Transition Services including sponsored career exploration, work readiness training, and work experiences. The focus is to develop work skills, practice social skills, and acquire a network of community supports while the student is still in high school. VR services delivered under WIOA do not remove, reduce, or change the school district's responsibility to deliver a *free and appropriate public education* (FAPE) for students served under the auspices of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. VR services supplement, but do not supplant services delivered through the school districts.

The VR Transition Youth program collaborates with education officials and partners to offer youth with the most significant disabilities opportunities to gain work experiences that help them prepare for successful employment. Collaborations such as High School High Tech (HSHT), Project SEARCH, and Postsecondary Education programs engage youth in experiences that blend academics with career and technical education. They also provide hands-on career exploration and preparation activities where learned skills, attitudes, and behaviors can be applied. These evidence-based applications of learning, which includes internships and On-the-Job Training (OJT), often lead to successful employment. For some students, these programs include earning postsecondary credentials which allow them to explore professional jobs that may lead to higher-wage careers. VR involvement in these collaborations provides funding for participants to receive needed services and other supports. This shared support helps partner programs serve more youth. VR partnerships deliver career development and employment options through direct services to youth who would not otherwise have access to these opportunities.

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VR adopted an early referral/application process for transition students during SFY 2008-2009 to better coordinate with state and local education agencies. Brochures for the VR Transition Youth Program are available to students and families so they can begin gathering information at age 14. The referral process for VR services was updated for SFY 2015 so that students with disabilities may begin to receive VR services at age 15. Students with disabilities who are at high risk for dropping out of school may be referred at any age. This early referral process allows the counselor to develop a rapport with the transition student and family, explore vocational options and comparable benefits, and begin necessary guidance and counseling.

Provisions for Development and Approval of Individualized Plans for Employment for Students with Disabilities

The Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE), Supported Employment IPE, Individual Support Plan, and/or Care Coordination Plans are completed or updated as early as possible prior to graduation or leaving school to allow a seamless transition to a student's desired postsecondary outcome.

VR counselors, with assistance from VR technicians, serve as representatives to work with all public high schools statewide and any private high school requesting assistance. They provide outreach and vocational rehabilitation services orientation to students, school officials, parents, and others involved in transition services. Only the counselor may determine a student's eligibility for VR services, develop an approved IPE, and sponsor the delivery of necessary transition services to help the student with planning, preparing for, and achieving successful employment.

Information on Formal Interagency Agreements with Respect to:

Employment First

As an employment leader, VR strongly encourages partner agencies, organizations, and employers to promote competitive integrated employment in the community as the first and preferred option for individuals with disabilities. People with disabilities who are employed experience enhanced independence and quality of life. They are also contributing to the rich diversity of the workforce so the entire community benefits.

Technical Assistance and Consultation

Local education agencies are strongly encouraged to have written agreements with VR, DBS, APD, Children's Medical Services, and Mental Health Services. The agreement addresses consultation, coordination, and providing technical assistance to each other, as well as to students and their families/guardians/surrogates to plan for the transition from high school to postsecondary activities and becoming part of the adult community.

Transition Planning by VR and Educational Agency Representatives for Development and Completion of the Individual Education Plan

Local education agencies work collaboratively with VR, DBS, APD, Children's Medical Services, and Mental Health Services in the Transition Individual Educational Plan process. Local education agencies that are considering transition services

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during the Individual Educational Plan meeting will invite representatives from any other agency who may be responsible for providing or paying for transition services, after obtaining permission from the parent, guardian, or age-of-majority student. If the agency representative does not attend the meeting, the school will do its best to get someone else to come. If the agency representative will not attend the meeting, the school will then look for alternative ways to provide for the student's transition needs. The local education agency must reconvene the Transition Individual Educational Plan team to identify alternative strategies for providing a student's transition needs if an agency fails to do so.

In order to plan effective transition services for students with disabilities, it is essential that all invited partner agencies encourage and support participation in the Transition Individual Educational Plan process.

VR invests 35-40 percent of its statewide staffing resources in transition services to serve students with disabilities in Florida's 67 school districts and the Florida School for the Deaf and the Blind. Additional improvements to the rehabilitation information and billing systems for transition students' data collection were implemented on April 22, 2015 to collect transition data elements and track expenditures for transition youth. The Rehabilitation Services Administration will announce any additional data enhancements to meet WIOA requirements once the associated rules and regulations have been finalized. The enhancements will enable VR to conduct differential analysis to better evaluate agency performance and identify how to best improve service delivery and outcomes for students with disabilities.

Roles and Responsibilities

The roles and responsibilities for each partner agency as required by federal and state regulations are as follows:

1. Local education agencies provide a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) for students with disabilities, including preparation for transition from school to work or other postsecondary activities.
2. VR and DBS assist with student transition from secondary school to work through postsecondary training, education, or direct placement services necessary to achieve a successful employment outcome.
3. The Agency for Persons with Disabilities tries to "reduce the use of sheltered workshops and other noncompetitive employment day activities and promote opportunities for gainful employment for persons with developmental disabilities who choose to seek such employment," (Chapter 393, Florida Statutes). Additionally, "to promote independence and productivity, the agency shall provide support and services, within available resources, to assist customers enrolled in Medicaid waivers who choose to pursue gainful employment." If an individual is eligible for APD waiver services and employment is a needed service, then this service must be provided to meet standards as outlined in Florida rule.

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4. Children's Medical Services ensures a smooth and successful transition process to adult healthcare services and providers for youth and young adults with special healthcare needs.
5. Mental Health Services, in partnership with families and the community, provides a system of care that enables children and adults with mental health or emotional disabilities to live successfully in the community, become self-sufficient or to attain self-sufficiency at adulthood, and realize their full potential. Mental health support and services enable adults and transitioning students to participate in community activities such as employment and other valued community roles.

Specific Purpose

Specific intent of the interagency agreement is to:

1. Provide guidance to the local education agencies, VR, DBS, APD, Children's Medical Services, and Mental Health Services' front-line employees, when serving students transitioning from school to work or postsecondary activities.
2. Provide information to parents/students so they know what they can expect from the local education agencies, VR, DBS, APD, Children's Medical Services, and Mental Health Services during the transition process.
3. Provide parameters to the local education agencies, VR, DBS, APD, Children's Medical Services, and Mental Health Services' administrators/managers/nursing supervisors when developing, negotiating, and implementing local cooperative agreements.
4. Encourage and support the participation of all agency personnel in the IEP process at the local level through the development of guidelines, policies, and/or procedures.

Financial Responsibilities

The Department of Education, VR, DBS, APD, Children's Medical Services, and Mental Health Services are committed to meeting financial responsibilities as required by law. Agency/Division heads for the organizations will periodically identify areas for improved programmatic and financial efficiencies and develop strategies to meet financial responsibilities, including joint appropriations requests from the state legislature and negotiations with federal agencies. Each party is financially responsible for the services it provides under its own laws and rules.

Conditions and Terms of Reimbursement

If a non-education agency fails to provide or pay for services for which they are responsible, and which are also considered special education and related services, the local education agency (or state agency responsible for developing the student's Individual Educational Plan) shall provide or pay for these services to the student in a timely manner. The local education agency or state agency may then claim reimbursement for the services from the non-education agency that was responsible for

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the provision of the services and failed to provide or pay for these services, and that agency shall reimburse the local education agency or state agency in accordance with the terms of this agreement.

Procedures for Outreach to and Identification of Students with Disabilities who need Transition Services

Outreach and Identification of Students

Local education agencies are strongly encouraged to enter into written agreements with VR, DBS, APD, Children's Medical Services, and Mental Health Services employees, on the outreach methods used to inform students with disabilities who may need, and could benefit from these agencies.

Brochures, flyers, website resources, presentations, transition fairs, or informational letters are available to the local education agency, students, and their parents or guardians, to explain the role that VR and other agencies play in the transition process, and the agencies' referral/application policies and procedures.

VR has executed 20 Third Party Cooperative Arrangements (TPCA) for SFY 2015. The goal of these arrangements is to create new or expand existing transition services with a vocational rehabilitation focus. The costs are shared between the agencies. In order for the cooperating agency to receive matching vocational rehabilitation dollars, it must provide a cash match of non-federal funds. Recipients of the TPCA began providing job coaching to eligible students with a Supported Employment IPE in SFY 2011. In SFY 2014, TPCA were redesigned to serve only those students with the most significant disabilities who require Supported Employment services to become employed.

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Section (e): Cooperative Agreements with Private Nonprofit Organizations

The Florida Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) has a variety of agreements with private non-profit organizations. These include contracts, rate agreements, and other cooperative, non-financial agreements.

Specifically, VR contracts for three core components: employment services, supported employment, and On-the-Job Training (OJT). Additionally, some VR services are purchased through registered vendors. All new vendors/providers, whether through a contractual or vendor relationship, must go through a registration and approval process. VR reviews the qualifications of vendors providing services to our customers in order to ensure the quality of these services, as well as the safety of the public. In addition to approving and registering vendor/provider services, VR conducts employment verifications on all customer placements facilitated by vendors/contract providers.

VR policy ensures that customers have a choice of qualified service providers to select from. Customers are also informed if the provider has employees experienced in working with special disability populations, foreign languages, and other communication skills. Customers have a choice of necessary services, service providers, and settings in which to receive the services included in the written Individualized Plan for Employment.

Currently, VR has approximately 190 rate contracts that include employment, supported employment, and OJT services. Additionally, VR maintains the following contracts and/or agreements:

- 16 agreements with the Centers for Independent Living located throughout the state to provide independent living services
- 20 Third Party Cooperative Arrangements with local school districts
- Additional contracts with agencies for services such as delegable VR services, outreach for migrant and seasonal farm workers, interpreting services, and rehabilitation engineering

VR currently has one Innovation and Expansion (I & E) project through the University of South Florida, Center for Rehabilitation Engineering and Technology. This project involves the use of virtual reality simulators for customers with severe disabilities.

VR recognizes I & E grants as an opportunity that could be beneficial and complementary to WIOA-related initiatives. In the upcoming year, VR will be looking for innovative opportunities that could improve employment services to and successful closures for individuals with “unique abilities,” defined in Florida legislation as including individuals who have intellectual disabilities or Autism Spectrum Disorders. These opportunities, when identified, will be offered through formal procurement processes.

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VR also has collaborative, non-contractual arrangements and agreements with non-profit organizations that provide referrals, other vocational rehabilitation services, and comparable benefits. Through coordinating with Centers for Independent Living, individuals with disabilities receive life skills training, employability skills training, and support such as transportation, clothing, and emergency funds. Relationships with organizations that serve customers with hearing impairments provide opportunities for support groups, sign language classes, and placement assistance.

Throughout the state, many VR employees serve as liaisons with specific groups and organizations. Individuals are referred to those groups if it is determined that they can benefit from their services. Services are coordinated with numerous non-profit hospitals and clinics for referrals and medical assistance. Foundations and associations such as the Easter Seals Society, Muscular Dystrophy Association, National Kidney Foundation, Brain Injury Association of Florida, Epilepsy Foundation, Family Network on Disability of Florida, and others provide individual and family support groups and disability education to mutual customers.

It is the intent of VR to continue with the above referenced contractual agreements, cooperative arrangements, and liaison relationships through FFY 2016.

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Section (f): Cooperative Agreements for the Provision of Supported Employment Services

The Florida Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) currently has cooperative agreements with the Agency for Persons with Disabilities (APD), Department of Children and Families Mental Health and Substance Abuse Program and the Department of Education.

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) requires VR to enter into an additional cooperative agreement with the state agency responsible for administering the State Medicaid Plan and the agency primarily responsible for providing services to persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities. To meet this requirement VR will be updating the cooperative agreement with APD as well as including the Agency for Healthcare Administration in an agreement specifically focused on Supported Employment services.

VR is working closely with APD to develop competitive integrated employment alternatives for individuals receiving services in a segregated setting. VR will provide technical assistance and support as APD expands these program options. Under WIOA requirements, VR will provide or coordinate information and education for individuals receiving services in sheltered workshops receiving sub-minimum wages. VR is working with APD to refine the referral process so that youth and adults have the opportunity to experience competitive integrated employment prior to entering a sheltered workshop that may pay sub-minimum wages.

VR is currently a partner with other state agencies and organizations in implementing Employment First, a national effort to assure individuals with disabilities are offered employment on a preferred basis in planning their lives. Employment First is consistent with VR's belief that individuals with disabilities, even the most significant disabilities, can achieve meaningful employment when provided with appropriate supports.

Executive Order 13-284 (Reaffirming Commitment to Employment for Floridians with Disabilities) was signed by the Governor of Florida in October 2013. The order mandates that an Interagency Cooperative Agreement be developed and requires agencies and organizations to participate in the agreement. VR is one of the mandated partners and played a significant role in drafting the order. The following agencies were named as mandatory partners and have signed this agreement formalizing efforts to improve and increase opportunities for people with disabilities.

- The Department of Education-Division of Blind Services
- The Department of Education-Division of Vocational Rehabilitation
- The Department of Education-Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services
- The Agency for Persons with Disabilities
- The Department of Children and Families-Mental Health and Substance Abuse
- The Department of Economic Opportunity

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- CareerSource Florida
- The Florida Developmental Disabilities Council
- Respect

VR collaborates and contracts with approximately 190 private, non-profit Community Rehabilitation Programs across the state of Florida. Contracts were recently revised to allow any qualified program to provide Supported Employment services, which is anticipated to increase the capacity for these programs to provide SE services.

In addition to these collaborations, VR works in partnership with education officials and partners to offer youth with the most significant disabilities opportunities to gain work experiences that help them prepare for successful employment.

Collaborations such as High School/ High Tech (HSHT), Project SEARCH, and Postsecondary Education programs engage youth in experiences that blend academics with career and technical education. They also provide hands-on career exploration and preparation activities where learned skills, attitudes, and behaviors can be applied. These evidence-based applications of learning, which includes internships and On-the-Job Training (OJT), often lead to successful employment.

For some students, these programs include earning postsecondary credentials which allow them to explore professional jobs that may lead to higher-wage careers. VR's involvement in these collaborations provides funding for participants to receive needed services and other supports. This shared support helps partner programs serve more youth. VR partnerships deliver career development and employment options through direct services to youth who would not otherwise have access to these services.

Six broad-based objectives govern Florida's interagency supported employment programs.

1. Continue to develop and enhance supported employment for persons with the most significant disabilities. The state system for the provision of supported employment reflects: (a) mutually agreeable definitions of the services to be provided; (b) administrative responsibility of the intensive component of supported employment services to eligible individuals as the primary responsibility of VR for individuals with the most significant disabilities; and (c) administrative responsibility of the extended services component as the primary responsibility of other stakeholders, including APD and the Department of Children and Families, Mental Health and Substance Abuse Program.
2. Continue to improve the statewide management of supported employment programs by avoiding duplication of effort and funding while ensuring accountability. This process will provide a coordinated system of program development for supported employment services.
3. Maximize the quality of service delivery ensuring a comprehensive, continuous, efficient, and effective referral process, individual program planning, coordination

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of intensive vocational services with extended services, information collection and dissemination, confidentiality, and technical assistance.

4. Identify issues, policies, and practices that present systemic barriers to effective participation of individuals with the most significant disabilities, and develop appropriate resolutions to remove such barriers.
5. Continue to implement an interagency planning process for budget coordination, which defines and projects the number of people in need of intensive and extended services for each fiscal year and facilitates program and fiscal planning.
6. Support the belief that all individuals with disabilities can work if provided appropriate services and supports and that a team approach is needed to facilitate quality and appropriate services.

Supported Employment Services

VR is responsible for Phase 1 of Supported Employment services. In Phase 1, VR provides intensive vocational services until the individual and employer are satisfied with the supported employment placement, and then the individual phases to a plan for extended services. Supported employment services consist of intensive, time-limited vocational rehabilitation services (the responsibility of VR) and extended services, also known as Phase 2. Funding for Phase 2 services is provided by other sources that may be, but are not limited to, APD, the Department of Children and Families Mental Health and Substance Abuse Program, natural supports or other identified funding sources.

Extended Services

The purpose of extended services is to maintain the individual in supported competitive employment, enhance the individual's involvement in the workplace culture, and provide supports for career advancement. The nature of services provided during the intensive and extended services of supported employment may be similar to the initial services but may differ in intensity.

VR and its partners continuously seek alternative methods to provide extended services (e.g. social security incentives, natural supports, etc.). VR has encouraged supported employment providers to focus on developing natural supports and to focus efforts on encouraging employers to accept the support role since this is the most natural arrangement for employers and VR customers.

Implementation of WIOA will provide the opportunity to fund Extended Services for youth with the most significant disabilities for a time period of up to four years, if necessary, and funding permits. Allowances would be made for individuals who, while receiving extended services, require re-intervention of intensive services through VR because they have destabilized on the job. When appropriate, VR will again assume the responsibility and cost of providing intensive vocational services, including necessary job-related support services.

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Section (g): Coordination with Employers

The Florida Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) has formalized a Business Relations Program, with the vision to build and sustain partnerships with business and industry through effective services that are driven by the needs of employers. These partnerships will lead to competitive integrated employment and career exploration opportunities for VR customers.

Efforts are underway in the Business Relations Program to define and customize services to employers, create strategic partnerships to support workforce needs, and establish an employment-focused culture within the rehabilitation process. Listed below are the program's goals, objectives, and strategies.

Goal 1: Become the foremost recognized and trusted resource for employers' disability inclusion needs.

Objective: Increase the number of employers engaged as business partners.

Strategies:

1. Develop and use a standard business needs assessment.
2. Develop and use a business customer satisfaction tool.
3. Staff and train a team that is responsive to business. The team includes: the program administrator; a senior VR consultant; a business projects specialist; and 12 business relations representatives located across the state, two in each of VR's six administrative areas.
4. Implement a business customer relationship management tool.
5. Define the services offered to employers and customize them to meet business needs.
6. Create statewide consistency in business relations outreach and services.
7. Use targeted marketing to engage employers across multiple industries.
8. Participate in business-led organizations, such as Chambers of Commerce, US Business Leadership Network, etc.
9. Create strategic practices that can be replicated.
10. Align services with the Workforce Development Boards and other community partners.
11. Participate in the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation's National Employment Team (NET) and the NET-Southeast regional team to share referrals and best practices.

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12. Engage with Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) core partners to share best practices.

Goal 2: Become a top resource for employers in need of qualified employees.

Objective: Increase referrals of qualified applicants to business partners.

Strategies:

1. Facilitate direct access to qualified applicants through business relationships.
2. Market career opportunities internally to VR staff.
3. Use the AbilitiesWork Help Desk for applicant-matching services for employers.
4. Coordinate support services provided by VR contractors.
5. Provide a seamless connection to VR services and qualified applicants across a company's footprint locally, regionally, statewide, and nationally through the NET.
6. Engage in local talent pool coordination with other agencies to meet businesses' workforce needs.
7. Participate with the NET and the Talent Acquisition Portal (TAP) to create increased opportunities for VR jobseekers and employers recruiting VR jobseekers.
8. Collaborate with business to create a pipeline of qualified candidates.

Goal 3: Expand career opportunities for VR candidates.

Objective: Prepare ready-to-work applicants for in-demand careers and jobs that are available now.

Strategies:

1. Meet with business and industry to assess workforce needs to better align training with those needs.
2. Communicate information from employers about business needs and qualification requirements to VR staff.
3. Engage in sector partnerships.
4. Provide information to VR staff about in-demand jobs and high growth industries and sectors using labor market information.
5. Collaborate with business and education to determine industry recognized training opportunities and inform VR staff about them.
6. Collaborate with WIOA core partners to share resources and best practices.
7. Generate opportunities for worksite training with business partners.

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Section (h): Interagency Cooperation

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) requires the Florida Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) to enter into an additional cooperative agreement with the state agency responsible for administering the State Medicaid Plan and the agency primarily responsible for providing services to persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities. To meet this requirement VR will be updating the cooperative agreement with The Agency for Persons with Disabilities (APD) as well as including the Agency for Healthcare Administration in an agreement specifically focused on Supported Employment services.

VR is working closely with APD to develop competitive integrated employment alternatives for individuals receiving services in a segregated setting. VR will provide technical assistance and support as APD expands these program options. Under WIOA requirements, VR will provide or coordinate information and education for individuals receiving services in sheltered workshops receiving sub-minimum wages. VR is working with APD to refine the referral process so that youth and adults have the opportunity to experience competitive integrated employment prior to entering a sheltered workshop that may pay sub-minimum wages.

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Section (i): Comprehensive System of Personnel Development

Data System on Personnel and Personnel Development

Assurance of an adequate supply of qualified rehabilitation professionals and paraprofessional personnel is the major driver for the Florida Division of Vocational Rehabilitation’s (VR) Human Resource Development Section. Data from numerous sources is used to determine current and projected needs, as well as VR’s progress toward meeting them. The table below includes VR personnel and turnover data for SFY 2014-15, and projected staffing requirements for SFY 2015-16. It should be noted that positions are vacated for many reasons, including termination, promotion, lateral position transfers, or retirement. VR continues to employ strategies to address turnover as well as develop and prepare staff for advancement opportunities.

Personnel Category*	Number of Personnel, as of 10/1/15	Turnover Rate for SFY 2014-15	**Projected Staffing Needs for SFY 2015-16
Counselor Staff	415	29%	120
Staff Supporting Counselor Activities	360	23%	84
Administrative Staff	156	17%	27
Total Full-time Equivalents	931		
Contracted Counselor Staff	84		
Total Contracted Field Staff	148		

*Categories are based on RSA-2 Report definitions, and positions included in each category.

**This number is an annual average derived by multiplying the number of positions for the job category by the percentage of vacated positions.

Staffing needs for Transition Youth Program counselors remains consistent with overall counselor staffing projections. When factoring in population growth, the projected five-year staffing needs are slightly higher than noted above, but would require that VR be provided with additional FTEs, which is unlikely in the current economic climate.

The state’s automated People First personnel system maintains employment histories to help project human resource needs. The state continues to make available a deferred retirement option program (DROP) that allows individuals to continue working for the state for five years beyond their original retirement date. Because it is impossible to anticipate how many individuals will accept the deferral option, projecting future employment needs is difficult. However, it is known that there are currently 73 individuals in DROP, 66 individuals with 30 or more years of service, and 119 individuals over the age of 62.

VR collects data from the Rehabilitation Information Management System (RIMS) to calculate the counselor-customer ratio. This is another tool for assessing current and projected staffing needs. The average counselor-customer caseload is 1:81 in relation

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to assisting customers from the application phase to case closure. This ratio is based on both regular counselor positions and contracted counselor positions.

VR uses People First and RIMS data, as well as internal reports, to obtain:

- The number and classification of authorized positions for each local unit and state headquarters in relation to the number of individuals served
- The number and classification of personnel currently needed by the state agency to provide vocational rehabilitation services
- The projected number and classification of personnel who will be needed in five years to provide vocational rehabilitation services
- The state institutions of higher education that are preparing vocational rehabilitation professionals, by program type
- The number of students in each of these institutions, by program type
- The number of students graduating from each program and the credentials they have received

In order to ensure the continuity of quality rehabilitation services and to address employee vacancies and turnover in particularly difficult to fill geographic areas, VR has contracted for employees. The contracts ensure that qualified personnel are hired to provide necessary rehabilitation services. A VR supervisor or counselor/analyst supervises these employees and performs the activities that federal regulations (34 CFR 361.13) specify are the responsibility of VR, and cannot be delegated to private providers. These activities include:

- All decisions affecting eligibility for VR, the nature and scope of available services and the provision of these services, and the suspension, reduction, and termination of these services
- The determination to close the records of services of an individual who has achieved an employment outcome
- Policy formulation and implementation
- Allocation and expenditure of VR funds
- Participation as a partner in the CareerSource service delivery system

Described in the following table is information from institutions of higher education in Florida that prepare vocational rehabilitation professionals, categorized by institution and type of program.

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Program Data for Institutions of Higher Education

Institution, Type of Program and Degree	Students Currently Enrolled	VR/RSA Sponsored Employees	VR/RSA Sponsored Graduates	Previous Year Graduates
Florida Atlantic University- Graduate-level Rehabilitation Training Program; MEd and PhD	MEd- 20 PhD- 4	MEd- 0 PhD- 0	MEd- 0 PhD- 0	MEd- 6 PhD- 0
Florida International University- Rehabilitation Counseling Program; MS in Counselor Education	MS- 9	MS- 0	MS- 0	MS- 0
University of South Florida- Rehabilitation and Mental Health Counseling Program; MA	MA- 147	MA- 1	MA- 0	MA- 50

Plan for Recruitment, Preparation, and Retention of Qualified Personnel

VR maintains close relationships with universities including minority institutions such as Historically Black Colleges and Universities and disability-specific organizations. VR employees collaborate with universities in securing grant funding, invite university employees to help with training and education activities, and provide practicum and internship slots for students.

VR acknowledges that it will not be able to recruit an adequate number of qualified rehabilitation counselors to replace those retiring and departing for other reasons. VR is currently engaged in the activities indicated below to address recruitment, preparation, and retention of counselors.

Personnel Standards

There is not a state-approved or recognized certification, licensure, or registration of Vocational Rehabilitation counselors. VR, in conjunction with the Florida Rehabilitation Council (FRC) established the Certified Rehabilitation Counselor (CRC) educational eligibility requirement as its standard.

Efforts are made to recruit and hire counselors who meet the CRC educational eligibility status. If VR is unsuccessful in finding enough qualified applicants, it will accept those who meet the minimal initial standard for providing counseling and guidance services. The individual(s) must have a bachelor's degree from an accredited university and one year of experience counseling individuals with disabilities. Alternative majors other than social, behavioral, or rehabilitative science may be considered along with the minimum qualification requirements for the position. When evaluating the suitability of alternative majors, the hiring authority should consider the major area of study's applicability to the required knowledge, skills, and abilities. A master's degree from an accredited university in a social, behavioral, or rehabilitative science can substitute for the year of required experience.

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The State of Florida allows employees to use a tuition waiver to enroll in six hours (or less) of courses per semester on a space-available basis at public universities. This approach is how many counselors worked to reach the CSPD standard until fall 2006. As recently as five years ago, Florida had six Masters in Rehabilitation Counseling (MRC) programs, five of which were CORE-accredited. As of 2015, Florida now has three CORE-accredited programs (Florida Atlantic University and the University of South Florida, and the recently accredited Florida International University).

In recent years, VR has implemented a more aggressive approach in meeting the CSPD standard. VR employees will be encouraged to use the State of Florida Tuition Waiver program as much as possible, since it represents a significant savings to VR. A substantial portion of the in-service training grant was allocated solely to VR's CSPD activities. In-service training grant funds were used to pay tuition for individuals who could not get the coursework they needed through the waiver program, such as those who do not live near a public university or who otherwise cannot use the waiver program. In-service training grant funds were also allocated for textbook reimbursement. The elimination of the in-service training grant to states has severely reduced VR's ability to continue support for these activities. It is not currently clear how much of the basic support grant will be available for this kind of support. The Human Resource Development (HRD) Section has implemented a data system to track academic classes taken and progress toward certification eligibility.

In addition to the Florida public universities referenced above, Florida VR uses the resources of Auburn University, Southern University, Virginia Commonwealth University, the University of Kentucky, the University of Arkansas-Little Rock, the University of West Virginia, and the University of Wisconsin-Stout, all of whom provide online Masters-level rehabilitation programs. VR also uses the resources of the University of North Texas and San Diego State through the Consortium on Distance Education in Rehabilitation. VR will continue to use additional programs, as appropriate.

Personnel Development

HRD efforts will continue to be oriented toward appropriate and adequate training for all employees, with available resources allocated to the CSPD effort. Although the in-service training grant was the primary funding source for these activities, it was not the only money used to fund staff development and training activities. Supplemental funds were provided from other budget resources.

Although there has been an emphasis on helping counselors meet the CSPD standard and on developing the technical, managerial, and leadership skills of supervisors and managers, VR provides staff development opportunities to employees at every level. For example, four internal lunch & learn events covering a broad range of topics from Assistive Technology, to 25 Years of the ADA, were attended by headquarters staff.

VR continues to offer individual training allocations for each staff member. This allocation can be used for job-related professional development activities, such as attending conferences, purchasing books, CDs, DVDs, or other materials, taking online

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short courses, or any other approved professional development activity. Supervisory approval is required for these professional development activities to ensure that employees participate in activities consistent with their individual needs and job responsibilities and requirements. The HRD Section provides consultation and technical assistance to VR employees as needed.

Florida State University offers a Certified Public Manager (CPM) program, which requires a two-year commitment. In support of leadership development, VR has developed an internal application, selection, and CPM mentoring process. VR tries to support 2-4 new candidates each year through the program, and once they obtain the CPM credential, VR works to involve staff appropriately in division-wide improvement projects. There are currently six employees from HQ and field operations enrolled in some phase of CPM.

VR purchased a learning management system (LMS) in the spring of 2013 and began implementation in May 2014. The system is named TED, for Training, Education, and Development. The system not only tracks learning participation, but also serves as a host for online learning activities for all employees. Additionally, VR purchased licenses for WebEx for training purposes. Every effort is made to ensure that the correct medium is used to address each particular issue. The ability to deliver interactive training through the LMS greatly expands the capacity of VR to provide a more extensive and comprehensive array of learning activities for all employees.

VR produces a monthly newsletter for all employees, as well as a quarterly newsletter for supervisors to share information about what is happening in the different areas, keep them up to date on new policies and procedures, and offer articles that can help them do their jobs better.

Whether offered directly or contracted by the HRD Section, VR's staff development and training programs are designed with the goal of maintaining a well-prepared, competent workforce equipped with the knowledge, skills, and abilities needed to successfully facilitate the rehabilitation of persons with disabilities. VR is responsible for ensuring that employees, including contracted employees, receive necessary development and training. Accordingly, HRD includes contracted employees at all training programs.

Additional Personnel Development Activities

The Organization and Employee Support Team (OES) recently designed a new human resource information site, available through VR's SharePoint application. Using SharePoint increases the level of support and customer service provided to VR's employees, volunteers, contracted staff, supervisors, and personnel liaisons. The intent is to provide user-friendly experiences for new and existing employees. The OES Homepage provides job opportunity announcements, access to more than 900 HR forms, procedures, and policies, and a calendar of upcoming important HR dates and events.

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Onboarding

Onboarding helps new personnel successfully assimilate into their new position, with a quicker ramp-up to productivity. VR wants to help all personnel be successful in their new job, get up-and-running with their new duties quickly and smoothly, and contribute to VR's success. Since VR personnel includes career service, selected exempt service/senior management service and OPS employees, as well as volunteers and contracted staff, all with differing onboarding needs, it became apparent that a one-size-fits-all approach to onboarding was not sufficient.

Based on that, OES created Onboarding resource sites specific to needs of our career service, selected exempt service/senior management service, and OPS employees, as well as sites specific to our volunteers and contracted staff. Each site provides onboarding information for the specific personnel category, such as New Hire Paperwork that provides the new employee with all of the required hiring forms and related policies, VR Mentorship Program information, TED - Training, Education, and Development links and resources, and the Human Resources Page.

VR's Mentorship Program

A major reason why newly hired employees struggle and ultimately leave is a failure to establish connections and build strong interpersonal relationships within the organization. Understanding that new employees need connection, a sense of belonging, a sense of their potential, and a need to feel valued, OES worked with various sections within VR to create a Mentorship Program.

Mentors often play an important role in making new employees feel valued, developing co-worker relationships, and helping new employees feel comfortable during the first few months of employment. Each new employee, or protégé, will be assigned to a mentor for a period of up to a year. No mentor will be assigned to more than two active protégés at any one time.

The Mentorship Program is composed of two parts. The first is a comprehensive information resource site delivered through SharePoint. The site has information specific to mentors, protégés, Subject Matter Experts (SME), and supervisors. The second component is the Individualized Mentoring Action Plan, or IMAP. The IMAP is a software application designed specifically for the mentorship program. In the IMAP, mentors and SME's create personalized profiles. The profiles are used to assist with assigning mentors and SME's to appropriate protégés. The software is designed to quickly sort through hundreds of mentor and SME profiles that match the needs identified in the protégé's profile.

Human Resources Page

The Human Resources page is a one-stop information resource for VR personnel. The Human Resources page consists of six functional groups, which are further divided into subject groups, specific categories, and detailed information pages. Topics include employee rights, benefits and responsibilities, resources such as forms, procedures,

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and policies, and useful information about VR and state government. Most pages have embedded links to either an internal portion of the VR Intranet, or to an outside website. Each employee can then bookmark any page for easy access.

Needs Assessment and Evaluation

A bi-annual training needs assessment is conducted using information from a number of sources. These include a formal needs assessment instrument, performance evaluation data, training evaluation sheets obtained from every sponsored program, exit interviews, and supervisory input. The needs assessment data determines program development and modification.

Annual performance evaluations are conducted on each employee, with intermittent evaluation, if indicated. Performance is evaluated according to standards and goals established at the beginning of the evaluation period. Employees are evaluated in the context of their knowledge, skills, and abilities within the field of rehabilitation, and on policy about priority of service to individuals with the most significant disabilities. If circumstances change, training and professional development activities are provided to help the employee meet his/her goal in support of VR's mission.

In-Service Training Grant (please note this grant ended on 9/30/15)

Funds were requested for the in-service training grant based on current and anticipated needs. VR continues to provide a variety of in-house training programs, including counselor training, supervisory training, policy training, new legislation, casework review training, etc.

In carrying out its staff development and training program, VR addresses several topics in its training curricula. The training curricula include (but are not limited to) modules on the following: preliminary assessment, eligibility determination, assessment, IPE development, vocational counseling (within the modules on eligibility determination and individualized plan for employment development), job placement, rehabilitation technology, cultural competence, ethics, supported employment, transition from school to work, medical and psychological issues, caseload management, and special programs.

VR places emphasis on the professional development of unit supervisors, area supervisors, and area directors. Topics are selected based on policy or procedure changes, new initiatives, audit and review findings, and general professional development.

Counseling and non-counseling employees, including administrative employees, will continue to receive training in core subjects through distance and on-site learning. As caseloads and customer needs grow increasingly more complex, the role of the paraprofessional technician becomes more and more critical to the effective management of caseloads. All counseling staff will continue to work toward CRC

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eligibility and/or degrees in rehabilitation or counseling through tuition waivers and other mechanisms.

Engineers from the Rehabilitation Technology Engineering Program, contracted through the University of South Florida, provide training on rehabilitation technology and engineering. The contract ensures that rehabilitation technology engineers are available statewide.

State labor market information, as well as national data, provides information on the employment and advancement of qualified individuals with disabilities. Job announcements are published online through the People First website, providing access to all state jobs through one internet portal.

Manuals related to policy and rehabilitation information management are available online. Employees can access the internet to find information about medical and psychological conditions, rehabilitation technology, Federal/State Plan, legislation and regulations, and employment-related information.

Coordination of Personnel Development under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

Presenters provide orientation and training for employees serving transition students with disabilities from VR, the Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services (BEESS), and community partners. Cross-training between BEESS and VR staff is emphasized through interagency agreements as presented in Section (d) of this plan portion. The Department of Education's State Education Agency (SEA) and Local Education Agencies (LEAs) profiles are used to gather important statistical information on graduation rates, dropout rates, Individual Educational Plan compliance, and postsecondary outcomes for students with disabilities. Additionally, BEESS and VR continue to share and analyze student data to identify students with Individual Education Plans or 504 Plans who can benefit from VR services and any potential gaps in service.

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act was signed into law on July 24, 2014. The new law required VR to fund specific Pre-Employment Transition Services to youth while still in high school, including career exploration, work readiness training and work experiences. VR updated the Rehabilitation Information Management System (RIMS) and the Rehabilitation Electronic Billing Application (REBA) to collect transition data elements and track expenditures for transition youth. The Rehabilitation Services Administration will announce any additional data enhancements to meet WIOA requirements once the associated rules and regulations have been finalized.

VR strives to help LEAs meet the mandates of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004. VR support includes offering an early VR referral and application process beginning at age 15, VR Transition Liaisons Contact List, VR Transition Brochures, and coordination of the Individual Education Plan with the

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Individualized Plan for Employment when served by both agencies. VR endorses evidence-based LEA services that benefit students with disabilities, including educating students in the least restrictive environment with their non-disabled peers and having access to the original curricula. VR counselors continue to attend regular in-service training that specifically targets transition youth issues and helps meet the requirements of the CSPD.

VR and community partners continue to make presentations and participate in annual transition conferences at the national, state, and local level to better serve students with disabilities. These events allow for agency updates, contributing information on promising initiatives and sharing evidence-based best practices. When VR employees and local educators are assigned to teams at events, they use this time to discuss issues and learn from one another about effective transition practices. This information is often incorporated into VR staff trainings.

Statewide transition training is provided on yearly basis. New counselors also receive this training which includes resources from the VR Transition Youth Program. The *VR Transition Youth Guidelines and Best Practices* is a resource for VR transition teams to assure statewide consistency in coordinating services to students with disabilities. VR employees have access to the “*Effective Practices for Working with the School System*” and the “*Outreach for the School System*” presentations developed to improve collaboration between VR and the LEAs. At the local level, VR employees participate in interagency groups with a transition focus to improve local coordination and services to students, families, schools, employers, and agency partners.

Personnel to Address Individual Communication Needs

VR employees need to be able to work with Florida's diverse population. One way VR does this is to actively recruit counselors and support employees who have diverse backgrounds. VR places advertisements in ethnic newspapers and collaborates with local civic and social service groups. Bilingual individuals are on staff, but qualified interpreters or translators will continue to be used when a counselor is unable to communicate directly with a customer in his/her preferred language. VR will continue partnerships with local vendors to offer this service.

American Sign Language interpretation needs for customers who are deaf or deaf-blind are met using a combination of employee positions and arrangements with qualified local interpreter service providers. When either staff interpreters or local interpreters are not available, VR will reschedule appointments or use available text communication devices with customers. VR also has assistive listening devices available in most offices for VR employees to communicate with individuals who are hard of hearing or late-deafened and do not know sign-language.

VR complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act by providing materials in Braille and large print, through having qualified sign language interpreters, and offering text-based communication access. In addition, VR arranges for foreign language translators when needed.

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Section (j): Statewide Assessment

During FFY 2014-15, the Florida Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR), in partnership with the Florida Rehabilitation Council, conducted a comprehensive statewide needs assessment (CSNA) to identify factors that affect VR customers' ability to get and keep jobs, and any barriers or limitations they may experience. The CSNA consisted of the following components: state demographic profiles, a statewide public survey, stakeholder interviews, and additional information from agency performance data, customer satisfaction surveys and public input. Findings and recommendations from the CSNA will guide agency planning and development of state plans for federal fiscal years 2016 through 2018.

Table A summarizes key results from the needs assessment survey, and Table B provides CSNA findings, strategic references, and future considerations. Findings have been considered during statewide planning and Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) implementation activities. VR will continue to use this information to guide statewide and agency planning, as well as future collaborations with WIOA core programs and other stakeholders.

Table A

CSNA Survey Items	Results
Factors rated most important to jobseekers with disabilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Type of job matches personal abilities (83.65%) • Work location / available transportation (79.59%) • Work environment / culture (72.73%)
VR services rated most important to jobseekers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training (61%) • Job Search, Placement and/or Coaching (60%) • Supported Employment (52%)
VR services rated most needed now by jobseekers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supported Employment (34%) • Job Search, Placement and/or Coaching (30%) • Training (29%)
VR services rated most in-demand in the future	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Job Search, Placement and/or Coaching (66%) • Supported Employment (65%) • Training (64%)
Groups rated as having least access to services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individuals living in rural areas (58.86%) • Individuals with a criminal background (48.57%) • Individuals on waiting list (43.95%) • Individuals with a mental health disability (43.57%) • Individuals with an intellectual disability (43.42%)
Greatest barriers to employment for jobseekers with disabilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jobseekers need transportation (personal or public) (76.16%) • Employers underestimate the talent and skills of people with disabilities (70.67%) • Employers need training on working with people with disabilities (66.9%)

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Table B

CSNA Findings	Strategic References and Future Considerations
VR needs to make a stronger case for hiring individuals with disabilities because of their skills, abilities, and qualifications.	Goal 1 of VRs strategic plan focuses on ensuring customer success and satisfaction by improving business and support processes. All strategies are anticipated to increase opportunities for jobseekers with disabilities, as well as increase VRs community presence and marketing. Strategies within that goal include the following. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and implement all components of the VR Business Relations Program. • Redesign and implement pre-employment services for transition-age customers. • Design and implement a program about service alternatives for customers to use in making an informed choice prior to entering subminimum wage employment. • Design and implement enhancements to the Vendor Profile document for customer use in making informed choices regarding employment providers.
VR needs to have greater community presence, and increase its marketing and outreach to employers and businesses.	
VR needs to better match customer skills to jobs available. This requires first knowing what jobs are available and understanding the needs of employers.	
VR needs to support better alignment between job coaches and employers.	
VR's current benchmark payment system disincentivizes working with customers who have more difficulty or require more time, finding a job.	VR has recently added a customized placement benchmark payment to its reimbursement schedule, with a higher reimbursement rate. This will be monitored for effectiveness in the future.
VR needs to explore collaborative opportunities to increase access to services and employment for people with mental health or intellectual disabilities.	VR is piloting innovative service models such as Individual Placement and Support (IPS) / peer mentoring to provide more service options to individuals with severe and persistent mental illness. VR has expanded the use of Discovery and Customized Employment statewide, and is now focusing on increasing provider capacity to provide these services. VR continues to develop agreements and partner with other agencies and organizations to provide customers more access to community resources.

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Section (k): Annual Estimates

Number of Individuals in the State Who are Eligible for Services under this State Plan

According to the 2009-2013 American Community Survey, an estimated 2.3 million Floridians age 16 and over with a disability could be eligible for vocational rehabilitation services.

Annual Estimates of Individuals to be Served and Cost of Services with Funds Provided Under Part B of Title I and Part B of Title VI of the Act

From July 1, 2016, to June 30, 2017, the Florida Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) anticipates a workload of 37,146 individuals. Because of limited resources, VR has determined that vocational rehabilitation services cannot be provided to all individuals with disabilities in the state who apply for services. The following projections for State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2017 are based on case management projection and budget prediction models.

The projected number of eligible individuals to receive vocational rehabilitation services by priority category, and cost of services per category are as follows:

Category	Projected Number Served	Projected Cost
Priority Category 1	23,502	\$59,050,598
Priority Category 2	13,600	\$23,891,066
Priority Category 3	44	\$294,958
Total	37,146	\$83,236,622

The estimated number of customers to be served in Supported Employment (Part B of Title VI of the Act) is 6,630.

Total projected costs for IPE services are \$83,236,622. Additionally, the cost for assessment services for SFY 2017 is projected at \$10,489,102. Total projected revenue needed for IPE and assessment services for SFY 2017 is \$93,725,724. The SFY 2017 revenue available for IPE and assessment services is estimated to be \$99.7 million.

All expenditures associated with new Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) initiatives such as 511 subminimum wage services, pre-employment transition services, and discretionary services under Order of Selection have not been factored into these projections. Until these costs are fully realized and included into service and cost projections, VR will continue its current management of waitlist categories under Order of Selection.

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Section (I): State Goals and Priorities

VR Vision

To become the first place people with disabilities turn when seeking employment and a top resource for employers in need of qualified employees.

VR Mission

To help people with disabilities find and maintain employment, and enhance their independence.

Three Year Strategic Goals and Priorities (FFY 2014-2016)

During FFY 2014, VR, in collaboration with the Florida Rehabilitation Council (FRC), completed its three-year comprehensive statewide needs assessment. Information obtained from the needs assessment, management reports, and feedback from VR employees, stakeholders, and customers, is used to evaluate current goals, objectives, and projects, and establish new strategic priorities.

Following the planning process established in 2012, the Senior Leadership Team has held quarterly meetings to review progress and update strategies as needed. Annually, the Senior Leadership Team completed a thorough review of the strategic plan, and then held a planning meeting to determine which projects to include in the updated strategic plan. The Team confirmed all changes and made revisions during a final planning meeting before presenting the updated draft strategic plan to the FRC for review and input.

Current Goals, Objectives, and Strategies

Goal 1: Ensure Customer success and satisfaction by improving business and support processes.

Objective 1.1: Improve and align VR business processes to support WIOA implementation

Strategy: 1. Develop and implement all components of the VR Business Relationship Program.

Measure of Success:

- Full integration and implementation of all components, including business services, field services operations and IT support systems

Strategy: 2. Redesign and implement pre-employment services for transition-age customers.

Measures of Success:

- Services re-aligned to new WIOA guidelines and implemented within required timeframes
- Budget set-aside requirements met

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Strategy: 3. Design and implement a program about service alternatives for customers to use in making an informed choice prior to entering subminimum wage employment.

Measure of Success:

- Number of people diverted from or transitioned out of subminimum wage jobs

Strategy: 4. Design and implement enhancements to the Vendor Profile document for customer use in making informed choices regarding employment providers.

Measures of Success:

- Establish baseline use of Vendor Profile
- Customer satisfaction with Vendor Profile

Objective 1.2: Redesign supports for VR service & business processes

Strategy: 1. Coordinate and develop the VR services portion of the statewide plan.

Measure of Success:

- Timely submission of all required information

Strategy: 2. Design and implement an approach for integration of performance and business intelligence information.

Measures of Success:

- Number of revised management reports implemented
- Satisfaction of affected VR Managers with revised reports

Goal 2: Ensure Employee success and satisfaction by improving development opportunities and workplace environment.

Objective 2.1: Provide a comprehensive workforce planning and development system

Strategy: 1. Implement employee onboarding and mentoring processes statewide.

Measures of Success:

- Percentage of new employees completing all requirements within 90 days
- Percentage of new employees assigned a mentor within 10 days from start date
- Protégé/mentor/supervisor satisfaction ratings

Strategy: 2. Develop an agency-wide workforce and succession management plan, including a process to capture organizational knowledge.

Measures of Success:

- Process accurately identifies critical positions and information
- Participant satisfaction with process / components

Strategy: 3. Design a program for identifying and developing VR Leadership candidates.

Measures of Success:

- Successful pilot/ rollout of program
- Percent of VR employees initiating participation
- Participant satisfaction with program components

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Strategy: 4. Develop standards, guidelines and curriculum for VR employee training.

Measures of Success:

- Improvement in climate survey items: Q8. Opportunities to learn and grow- 83.61%
- Q11. I am satisfied with the training provided by VR- 77.19%
- Percentage of VR employees successfully completing identified training requirements

Objective 2.2: Provide a safe, accessible, and adequately equipped work environment

Strategy: 1. Develop a comprehensive safety plan for monitoring VR facilities statewide. Specific components include a process for reporting defective/unsafe working conditions, safety and facilities management training for area staff, a move manual, a statewide safety manual, statewide first aid info, furniture inspection instructions, and a facility security / building access policy at HQ.

Measures of Success:

- Improvement in climate survey item: Q17. Physically safe work environment- 81.94%
- Pulse survey results following implementation of each improvement

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Section (m): Order of Selection

Justification for the Order of Selection

The Florida Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) determined that sufficient resources were not available to provide rehabilitation services to all individuals with disabilities who apply. Consequently, VR established an Order of Selection (OOS) within the state to ensure that individuals with the most significant disabilities are selected first for vocational rehabilitation services, those with significant disabilities second and all other eligible individuals selected last. This decision was based on use of funds in the preceding years, projected funding, projected number and types of referrals, number of eligible individuals, and counselor caseloads.

A historical account of VR's management of OOS categories is as follows.

- August 4, 2008 - the Order of Selection was initially implemented, closing all categories
- February 15, 2010 - VR determined that sufficient fiscal and human resources were available to serve all Priority Category 1 individuals and opened Priority Category 1
- August 2, 2010 - Priority Category 2 was opened, but Priority Category 3 remained closed
- November 15, 2013 - VR again closed Priority Category 2
- February 19, 2014 - VR again closed Priority Category 1, but received an additional \$1.4 million in nonrecurring general revenue. This state match funding allowed VR to draw down an additional \$5,172,770 of its federal grant.
- June 2014 - VR opened Priority Category 1 and began a structured release
- February 2015 - VR opened Priority Category 2

The OOS remains in effect statewide and does not select one type of disability over another. The OOS is not established based on age, sex, marital status, religion, race, color, national origin, or political affiliation, and is not based on the vocational goal of the individual with a disability. Elements that relate to the significance of disability are the only factors used in OOS.

As of September 30, 2015, 4,154 individuals remain in Priority Category 2 and 1,781 individuals remain in Priority Category 3 of the waiting list. It is anticipated that all individuals in Priority Category 2 will receive services by January 2016.

Outcome and Service Goals, and Time Frames for SFY 2017

Priority Categories	Existing and New IPE to be Served	Average Case Cost for 12 Months	Annual Cost for Purchased Client Services	Projected 26s	Projected 28s	Time/ Months
Priority 1	23,502	\$2,513	\$59,050,598	3,427	4,653	27
Priority 2	13,600	\$1,757	\$23,891,066	2,266	2,785	26
Priority 3	44	\$6,704	\$294,958	67	71	18

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Service Costs for SFY 2017

Total projected costs for IPE services are \$83,236,622. Additionally, the cost for assessment services for SFY 2017 is projected at \$10,489,102. Total projected revenue needed for IPE and assessment services for SFY 2017 is \$93,725,724. The SFY 2017 revenue available for IPE and assessment services is estimated to be \$99.7 million.

All expenditures associated with new Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) initiatives such as 511 subminimum wage services, pre-employment transition services, and discretionary services under Order of Selection have not been factored into these projections. Until these costs are fully realized and included into service and cost projections, VR will continue its current management of waitlist categories under Order of Selection.

Order of Selection Policies

Individuals needing Supported Employment services are assessed as having a most significant disability. Additionally, individuals receiving Supplemental Security Income or Social Security Disability Insurance benefits as a result of being determined to be disabled or blind are assessed as having at least a significant disability and are evaluated to determine whether they meet the criteria for individuals with most significant disabilities.

After an individual is found eligible for VR services, an OOS determination is completed. Additional evaluations or assessments to make this determination may be needed. The VR counselor and individual jointly determine the individual's OOS priority category by evaluating his or her functional limitations, anticipated services needed, and the duration of the services.

This policy does not affect an individual who began to receive services under an approved individualized plan for employment prior to the implementation date of OOS, or those individuals who are in need of post-employment services.

VR officially notifies all individuals of their individual OOS determination. Individuals not immediately activated for development of an employment plan are offered Information and Referral services and the option to be placed on a waiting list until employment plan development services can be initiated. Individuals on the waiting list are contacted annually to determine if additional information is available. As resources become available, those with the most significant disabilities are selected first for vocational rehabilitation services, those with significant disabilities second, and all other eligible individuals selected last.

Order of Selection Priority Category Description

Individuals With Most Significant Disabilities (Priority Category 1)

An eligible individual with a disability which:

1. Seriously limits three or more functional capacities in terms of an employment outcome;

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2. Requires three or more primary services;
3. Requires services which must be provided over an extended period of time (at least 12 months); and
4. Requires services that are not likely to be corrected through surgical intervention and/or other treatment modes.

Individuals with Significant Disabilities (Priority Category 2)

An eligible individual with a disability which:

1. Seriously limits one or two functional capacities, in terms of an employment outcome;
2. Requires two or more primary services;
3. Requires services which must be provided over an extended period of time (at least six months); OR
4. The individual is a recipient of Social Security Disability Benefits (SSDI) or Supplemental Security Income (SSI) as a result of disability or blindness.

Other Eligible Individuals (Priority Category 3)

An eligible individual with a disability which:

1. Limits one or more major life's activities; and/or
2. Services are expected to last less than six months.

VR is considering whether or not to provide discretionary services to eligible individuals, regardless of order of selection, who require specific services or equipment to maintain employment. This is a new option created by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. This has been discussed with the state rehabilitation council, but public input has not been received and a final decision has not yet been made. If VR elects to provide these services, the plan will be amended accordingly.

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Section (n): Goals and Plans for Distribution of Title VI, Part B Funds

To meet the needs of individuals with the most significant disabilities, the Florida Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) collaborates and contracts with approximately 190 private, non-profit Community Rehabilitation Programs across the state of Florida. Contracts were recently revised to allow any qualified program to provide Supported Employment services, which is anticipated to increase the capacity for these programs to provide these services.

VR has increased its focus on youth services and has expanded several options designed to help youth achieve employment outcomes. These options allow youth to gain a variety of skills and exposure to multiple career options. VR has initiated a process to allow youth to begin receiving services at 15 years old.

VR participates as a partner in:

- High School High Tech programs in Florida's schools
- Third Party Cooperative agreements with local school districts
- Project Search
- On-the-Job Training Opportunities

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) presents VR with the opportunity to provide Extended Services to youth for up to four years, as necessary, and funds permit. VR is now authorized to provide supported employment services up to 24 months if necessary.

Goal 1: Increase the number of individuals with most significant disabilities who receive Supported Employment services.

Plans

- Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) will continue to provide supported employment services on a statewide basis through Title VI, Part B funds and Title I funds. Statewide allocation of funds allows for equal delivery of services throughout Florida. Individuals may receive supported employment services using a combination of Title I and/or Title VI, Part B funds, and revenues generated from Social Security reimbursements, community rehabilitation partners, or other state program revenues.
- Fully expend Title VI, Part B funds for the purchase of supported employment services after reserving no more than five percent for program administration.
- Provide a variety of training and awareness programs designed to increase the awareness of supported employment as a vocational service for individuals with the most significant disabilities.

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- Review pilot and innovative employment practices and assess the feasibility of replicating programs with successful strategies.

VR has initiated Discovery Services, a person-centered planning tool as a way to increase the number of individuals with significant and complex disabilities receiving supported employment services. Training opportunities were developed for providers and VR staff on this customized employment strategy.

Goal 2: Use Title VI, Part B funds to achieve the maximum number of quality employment outcomes for individuals with most significant disabilities.

Plans

- Use Title I funds, supplemented with Title VI, Part B funds, to provide supported employment services as specified in the Individualized Plan for Employment.
- Purchase supported employment services based upon established performance benchmarks. The contract for supported employment focuses on performance and reinforces the focus on successful outcomes for individuals served.
- Funds may also be used for related customized employment strategies of Discovery and supported self-employment services.

Goal 3: Increase Supported Employment training opportunities for VR Counselors, Community Rehabilitation service staff, families, and individuals.

Plans

- Increase supported employment training opportunities for VR counselors, providers, families, and individuals.
- Participate in the development of a consortium of providers designed to identify, share, and promote innovative employment practices.
- Promote awareness of social security benefits planning as a way to fund extended services.
- Continue to provide joint training opportunities for VR employees and the Agency for Persons with Disabilities (APD).
- Provide funding to support collaboration between VR and other community resources through networking and leadership activities.
- Participate as an advisory member on a variety of grants from the Florida Developmental Disabilities Council that provide training and collaborative activities for providers, counselors, and other agency employees.

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Goal 4: Leverage resources for extended ongoing support services.

Plans

- Continue to work with APD to make sure that referred customers know about the extended service resources they can get through Medicaid Waiver Funding and/or general revenue funding.
- Continue to work with a network of providers to provide technical assistance and support of innovative projects that promote employment for individuals with the most significant disabilities.
- Provide training on the availability of funding ongoing support through Ticket to Work-Employment Network partnerships, natural supports, and Social Security Work Incentives as possible resources for ongoing supports.
- Encourage the use of employer and natural supports as a resource for ongoing supports.
- Enhance relationships with businesses and employers to let them know that on-the-job supports for individuals in supported employment are available. VR will continue efforts to strengthen community partnerships to increase access to appropriate employment services.
- Use the Business Relations Team to provide training and technical assistance to employers interested in working with VR customers. They will also develop positive relationships with employers to increase employment opportunities.
- Use the AbilitiesWork Help Desk as a resource to link employers to qualified jobseekers with disabilities. VR is a partner in the development of and administers the AbilitiesWork Help Desk, a collaboration between the state's Workforce system, Division of Blind Services, and APD.

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Section (o): State’s Strategies

Council Support

The Florida Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) continues to provide support for the Florida Rehabilitation Council (FRC) and Florida Independent Living Council (FILC). VR allocates funds for the operation of FRC to achieve the goals and objectives in their strategic plan. FRC participates as an active strategic partner with VR in carrying out the requirements of the Rehabilitation Act. VR and FILC operate under a three-year contract, which aligns with the three-year state plan for Independent Living.

Use of Innovation and Expansion Funds

VR currently has one innovation and expansion project, described below. VR will consider procurement of new innovation and expansion contracts during FFY 2016, complimentary to the Workforce Investment and Opportunity Act (WIOA) implementations.

1. **University of South Florida, Center for Rehabilitation Engineering and Technology** - Use virtual reality, simulators, robotics, and feedback interfaces to allow the vocational rehabilitation population to try various jobs, tasks, virtual environments, and assistive technologies prior to entering the actual employment setting.

VR recognizes Innovation and Expansion grants as an opportunity that could be beneficial and complementary to WIOA-related initiatives. In the upcoming year, VR will be looking for innovative opportunities that could improve employment services to and successful closures for individuals with “unique abilities,” defined in Florida legislation as including individuals who have intellectual disabilities or Autism Spectrum Disorders. These opportunities, when identified, will be offered through formal procurement processes.

Rehabilitation Technology

Rehabilitation Technology is provided through a contractual agreement with the Center for Engineering and Technology Program at the University of South Florida. The program provides rehabilitation technology assessment and evaluation services for VR customers across all stages of the VR process. Rehabilitation technology includes a range of services and devices that supplement and enhance individual functions. It includes services like job redesign or worksite modifications that improve the work environment.

Assistive Technology Services and Devices

VR sponsors the Alliance for Assistive Services and Technology Project that is directed by the Assistive Technology Advisory Council in accordance with Section 413.407, Florida Statutes. The project provides for the coordination and delivery of appropriate, cost-effective, state-of-the-art assistive technology services and devices on a statewide basis. The Florida Alliance for Assistive Services and Technology, Inc. (FAAST), is a

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not-for-profit corporation for which the Assistive Technology Advisory Council acts as the board of directors, manages the project, and provides administrative and technical support to the council.

FAAST is responsible for administering a low interest loan authority that provides funding to individuals with disabilities who may be unable to qualify for traditional loans and bank financing to purchase assistive technology devices.

Assistive technology includes both devices and services. A device is any item or piece of equipment used to maintain or improve the functional capabilities of a person with a disability. Many high-tech and low-tech devices are available to help people with disabilities in daily living tasks, communication, education, work, and recreation.

Expansion and Improvement of Services

Results gained through the continued Innovation and Expansion contract will contribute to improved employment opportunities for VR customers. In addition to the innovation and expansion project, VR's SFY 2014-16 Strategic Plan includes a number of strategies that are anticipated to expand and improve services to individuals with disabilities:

- 1.1.1. Develop and implement all components of the VR Business Relations Program.
- 1.1.2. Redesign and implement pre-employment services for transition-age customers.
- 1.1.3. Design and implement a program about service alternatives for customers to use in making an informed choice prior to entering subminimum wage employment.
- 1.1.4. Design and implement enhancements to the Vendor Profile document for customer use in making informed choices regarding employment providers.

Outreach to Individuals with Disabilities who are Minorities and/or who have been Unserved or Underserved

VR continues to assess its services to individuals with the most significant disabilities and individuals who may be unserved or underserved, as well as those with the most significant disabilities who may be from minority populations. Strategic projects and local-level outreach activities include the following:

- 1.1.1. Develop and implement all components of the VR Business Relationship Program.
- 1.1.2. Redesign and implement pre-employment services for transition-age customers.

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- 1.1.3. Design and implement a program about service alternatives for customers to use in making an informed choice prior to entering subminimum wage employment.
- 1.1.4. Design and implement enhancements to the Vendor Profile document for customer use in making informed choices regarding employment providers.
- Continue to explore partnership opportunities with community/faith-based organizations. Develop contact lists of faith-based and other diverse programs as resources for partnership opportunities.
- Continue to identify outreach activities conducted by VR area offices for underrepresented populations. Conduct outreach in local communities to promote VR as an agency, and help individuals with disabilities who are minorities or who may be unserved or underserved to return or remain in the workplace.
- Continue to conduct outreach to migrant and seasonal farmworkers and their families through contracts with community-based organizations and other partners.
- Continue to implement activities outlined in the Memorandum of Understanding with the Lower Muscogee Creek Tribe.

Improving and Expanding VR Services for Students with Disabilities

WIOA provides great opportunities for VR to increase transition services and opportunities to youth with disabilities. Increased information and referral to transition age youth is built into WIOA, and VR has already begun providing more transition service-related information to youth. Strategies noted below are anticipated to increase opportunities for students with disabilities.

- Continue to offer Third-Party Cooperative Arrangements (TPCA) to all school districts annually. Although VR approaches and offers TPCA partnerships to all school districts in Florida, the partnership is dependent on the individual district's decision to participate. VR has recently hired another transition administrator to ensure that information is provided consistently to all school districts, and to coordinate and monitor active and potential TPCA partnerships.
- Two peer mentoring initiatives are planned at this time. A peer mentoring/IPS project with a youth element is being developed in Broward County, and a youth-specific peer mentoring project is being developed in partnership with Florida Atlantic University.
- Additional initiatives are under way to increase provider capacity and offer more opportunities to youth. These include approval of CareerSource Florida to provide pre-placement services, revision of Certified Business and Technical Assistance Consultants (CBTAC) recertification procedures, and increase in

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CBTAC and Discovery providers. VR is also partnering with Volunteer Florida, Centers for Independent Living, Florida ARC, and High School High Tech to offer more OJT and community work experiences.

Improving Community Rehabilitation Programs

VR assesses its business processes and organizational capacity on an ongoing basis to make consistent improvements. Results of the FFY 2014 Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment did not indicate a need to establish or develop community rehabilitation programs, although it was indicated that employment providers have a need to better promote and raise awareness of their services. Strategies to improve business relationships with community rehabilitation programs include:

- 1.1.1. Develop and implement all components of the VR Business Relationship Program.
- 1.1.2. Redesign and implement pre-employment services for transition-age customers.
- 1.1.3. Design and implement a program about service alternatives for customers to use in making an informed choice prior to entering subminimum wage employment.
- 1.1.4. Design and implement enhancements to the Vendor Profile document for customer use in making informed choices regarding employment providers.

Strategies to Improve the Performance Related to Goals, Priorities, and Performance Indicators

Federal Performance Indicators and Targets	Actual Performance (FFY 15)	Previous Year (FFY 14)
Indicator 1.1: Change in Employment Outcomes (RSA Target: Increase over prior year)	-2,177	+437
Indicator 1.2: Percent of Employment Outcomes (RSA Target: 55.8%)	37.4%	29.82%
Indicator 1.3: Competitive Employment Outcome (Primary) (RSA Target: 72.6%)	99%	99.67%
Indicator 1.4: Significance of Disability (Primary) (RSA Target: 62.4%)	99.1%	97.53%
Indicator 1.5: Earnings Ratio (Primary) (RSA Target: 52%)	54%	51.67%
Indicator 1.6: Self-Support (RSA Target: 53%)	65.3%	66.2%
Indicator 2.1: Ratio of Minority to Non-Minority Service Rate (RSA Target: 80%)	98%	98%

VR continues to experience a rehabilitation rate below target. This is due to a focused effort to identify and close inactive cases, after diligent efforts to locate and/or reengage

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customers. Although these efforts temporarily caused the rehabilitation rate to drop, VR is beginning to see the anticipated shift in the ratio of successful closures to unsuccessful closures. This will result in an increased number and percentage of employment outcomes, as previously measured by Federal Performance Indicator 1.1 and 1.2.

VR will continue to collaborate with partners at the state and local levels to maximize employment services for people with disabilities. Florida VR anticipates that all projects within its Strategic Plan will have a positive impact on program performance. Specific activities include the following.

- 1.1.1. Develop and implement all components of the VR Business Relationship Program.
- 1.1.2. Redesign and implement pre-employment services for transition-age customers.
- 1.1.3. Design and implement a program about service alternatives for customers to use in making an informed choice prior to entering subminimum wage employment.
- 1.1.4. Design and implement enhancements to the Vendor Profile document for customer use in making informed choices regarding employment providers.
- Implement additional mental health training for counselors, and develop transitional employment, Individual Placement and Support, and peer specialist models to improve success with individuals with severe and persistent mental illness.
- Expand the capacity for providing Discovery and Customized Employment services.
- Establish additional casework quality assurance review practices to validate data entry.
- Continue data validation practices to detect errors prior to reporting.
- Expand use of Benefits Planning services for Social Security recipients that will promote self-support. Purchase these services when not available from SSA.

Strategies for the Statewide Workforce Investment System to Assist Individuals with Disabilities

WIOA presents requirements and opportunities for VR to strengthen its partnership with entities of the Statewide Workforce Development System. In addition to requirements outlined in WIOA, the following strategies will increase partnerships with the statewide workforce development system to further help jobseekers with disabilities.

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- Continue implementation of WIOA with other core programs, including design of one-stop system and integrated performance accountability system.
- Collaborate with and offer training to CareerSource and Employment Networks to provide services.
- Continue area directors' and representatives' participation on the local Workforce Investment Boards.
- Continue to promote VR's presence in CareerSource through co-location of VR units in One-Stop Centers, employees being out-stationed, and/or through regular visits by VR employees to One-Stop Centers.
- Develop a network of qualified benefits planners to augment the SSA contracts for Work Incentives Planning and Assistance (WIPA) program services. SSA contracted networks are insufficient in quantity, and they have reprioritized their service population so that VR customers are in last place. VR believes benefits planning must be provided early to families and youth, and will purchase these services when not available through SSA capacity.

Equitable Access

Since 2013, VR has made great progress in accommodation and access to services for individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing. Specific accomplishments include completion of revised best practices guides for services and communication, as well as hiring a specialized consultant in the field of deaf-blindness to develop best practices, provide consultation, training, and advocacy with stakeholders involved in these cases.

VR also repurposed a vacated FTE into a Deaf-Blind Interpreter position, which was filled during FFY 2014. Key administrators from VR-General and VR-Blind Services held monthly meetings to revise and update the Memorandum of Agreement, develop strategies, discuss training needs, create informational guides needed by both agencies for this population, and provide case consultation. Additional VR strategies and activities to increase equal access to individuals requesting services are as follows:

- 2.2.1. Develop a comprehensive safety plan for monitoring VR facilities statewide. Specific components include a process for reporting defective/unsafe working conditions, safety and facilities management training for area staff, a move manual, a statewide safety manual, statewide first aid information, furniture inspection instructions, and a facility security/building access policy at HQ.
- Continue to use interpreters and translators and VR's online resources as well as the websites of other partners and stakeholders (where permitted) to reach underserved populations and increase communication with customers.
- Offer reasonable accommodations to give equal access to services, and make sure materials and other program information are available in English, Spanish,

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and Haitian-Creole for various agencies, employers, churches, community leaders, health clinics, and other settings.

- Continue to assign counselors and consultants to serve specialized populations, such as the deaf and hard-of-hearing, transition students, mental health customers, and brain and spinal cord injury customers.
- Collaborate with CareerSource Florida and other One-Stop partners to implement universal design principles into the workforce development system's facilities and operations, with the intent to include universal design as a separate component of the One-Stop certification process.

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Section (p): Evaluation and Reports of Progress

The Florida Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR), in collaboration with the Florida Rehabilitation Council (FRC), established three strategic goals for FFY 2015. These goals and priorities were developed based on an analysis of VR’s performance on the federal standards and indicators, the preliminary result of the statewide needs assessment, and input from customers, providers, and other stakeholders.

The following section provides VR’s evaluation and report of progress towards achieving its strategic goals.

Review of VR Program Goals for Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2015

Goal 1: Improve Customer Success and Satisfaction

Objective 1.1: Improve the assessment of customer satisfaction

Strategy: 1. Negotiate a new contract for multiple, innovative means of assessing customer satisfaction.

Performance Measure: Ensure successful execution of the new contract and monitor for contractual compliance.

Actual Performance: The contract was successfully negotiated and was awarded to Market Decisions in June 2014. The strategy was then revised to focus on implementation of new tools and process for assessing customer satisfaction. The new customer satisfaction survey and reports were finalized and implemented, and a pilot was completed in October 2014, with great feedback from customers and vendor. Monthly extract and survey documents have been finalized. Tools to market the new survey in local VR offices were developed by FRC and VR Communications staff.

In addition to data collected through the customer satisfaction survey, VR uses data collected by the Ombudsman Unit to analyze customer success and satisfaction. Below is a comparative summary of customer inquiry and mediation requests fielded by the Ombudsman Unit during FFYs 2014-15 and 2013-14.

Request Type	Number of Requests	
	FFY 2013-14	FFY 2014-15
Information & Referral	773	728
Clarification of VR Process	278	310
Complaints	1,272	1,299
TOTAL	2,323	2,337

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Complaint Type	Number of Complaints	
	FFY 2013-14	FFY 2014-15
Applicant/Eligibility	31	27
Nature and Content of IPE	117	111
Quality of VR Counseling Services	427	344
Delivery/Quality of Other Services	243	259
Cost of Services	11	8
Termination of Services/Closure	103	108
All Other Complaints	340	442
TOTAL	1,272	1,299

Mediation Type	Number of Mediation Requests	
	FFY 2013-14	FFY 2014-15
Resolved in area through Administrative Review or informal mediation	38	24
Mediations (Formal)	0	0
Referred to Fair Hearing	18	26
Pending	4	4
Request denied (Untimely)	0	2
TOTAL	60	56

Objective 1.2: Improve vendor and contracted services processes

Strategy: 1. Develop background screening process for specific providers.

Performance Measure: Implement background screening program.

Actual Performance: The Agency for Healthcare Administration Care Provider Background Screening Clearinghouse is now operational. Providers subject to background screening requirements are now being processed through the system. Continue operationally.

Strategy: 2. Review and revise vendor management process.

Performance Measure: A plan and routine progress reports will be submitted to VR Senior Management Team for review.

Actual Performance: The registration process for Employment Services providers has been revised to require qualifications review and approval at the time of application. The Care Provider Background Screening Clearinghouse is now in use. The next steps operationally are to re-evaluate current experiential requirements for employment specialists, review the Qualifications Manual and all current applications for areas of improvement, and continue to evaluate/monitor current processes for areas of improvement.

Strategy: 3. Design and implement contract monitoring and fraud detection processes.

Performance Measure: Finalize risk assessment of all contracts and establish a baseline of current performance. Develop standardized tools for routine monitoring and

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train appropriate employees on their use. Develop schedule of routine contract monitoring.

Actual Performance: Monitoring tools have been developed and all appropriate staff have been trained on their use. A risk assessment of all current employment services contracts has been completed. Thirty-four (34) providers determined to be either high or medium risk are currently being monitored. Continue operationally.

Strategy: 4. Conduct vendor outreach to increase available services for customers.

Performance Measure: Specific outreach activities to find new vendors.

Recommendation to add referral identification question(s) to document to track referral source.

Actual Performance: This strategy will continue operationally as needed. Vendor outreach efforts include a vendor newsletter, updates to vendor pages on Rehabworks.org, and targeted social media posts for specific vendor types.

Strategy: 5. Expand vendor pool for employment and supported employment services.

Performance Measure: Increase in number of employment and supported employment vendors available where needed.

Actual Performance: Strategy was removed, but work continues operationally.

Objective 1.3: Increase employment opportunities for VR customers

Strategy: 1. Facilitate communication between job seekers with disabilities and employers through enhanced technology.

Performance Measure: Review and revise FL Job Connections website and connect it to the national Talent Acquisition Portal and the FL Dept. of Economic Opportunity disability web portal.

Actual Performance: Website has been revised and is now the AbilitiesWork Help desk portal. This will continue as an operational VR process.

Strategy: 2. Design and implement enhancements to the Vendor Profile document for customer use in making informed choices regarding employment providers.

Performance Measure: Baseline use of vendor profile and measure increase in use.

Actual Performance: This strategy is still active. Much work has been done to design the layout and information that will be provided in the vendor profile. Wireframes have been developed, and programming is on hold through the IT Governance process.

Strategy: 3. Increase transition services for students with significant disabilities.

Performance Measure: Revise TPCA requirements, offer to all school districts, and implement new contracts.

Actual Performance: TPCA requirements were revised and the new contract was offered to all school districts. New contracts are being implemented. This strategy will continue operationally, as these contracts are updated and re-offered annually.

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Goal 2: Improve Employee Development and Workplace Environment

Objective 2.1: Improve the system for developing VR employees

Strategy: 1. Institute a process for on-boarding, mentoring, training, succession planning, and leadership development for all VR employees, including the implementation of an LMS.

Performance Measure: Improvement in climate survey items Q8 (Opportunities to learn and grow) and Q11 (Satisfaction with training provided by VR)

Actual Performance: This strategy was revised and is still active on the current strategic plan. TED, the VR learning management system, has been successfully implemented statewide and provides an efficient and far-reaching method to provide training and information to all VR staff. Revisions to the mentoring program are in the final stages of completion, with rollout of the new program anticipated for spring 2016. Revisions to the Onboarding program are complete and implemented. Additional information about TED and VR's Onboarding and Mentoring Program initiatives is included in Section (i) of this plan.

Objective 2.2: Provide a safe, accessible, and adequately equipped work environment

Strategy: 1. Develop a process to report defective/unsafe working conditions, and provide safety and facilities management training to area employees.

Performance Measure: Improvement in Climate survey item Q17 (Physically safe work environment)

Actual Performance: Much progress has been made toward ensuring staff and customer safety. All VR offices were queried and upgrades were made to furniture and equipment. This strategy was combined with the strategy below and is still active on the current strategic plan. New policies have been developed for building security and access, facility keys, and chair inspections. First aid kits and automated external defibrillator devices have been installed at VR offices, and safety training has been provided to appropriate personnel.

Strategy: 2. Strengthen facilities processes and provide appropriate field staff additional supports.

Performance Measure: Resources include creating a move manual, statewide safety manual, statewide first aid information, safety furniture inspection instructions.

Actual Performance: This strategy was combined with the above strategy and is still active on the current strategic plan. Progress continues towards ensuring personnel and customer safety. The VR headquarters office moved during this timeframe, and before the move, building modifications were successfully completed that improved accessibility for all tenants in the building. The facilities team has developed a standard leasing process and a move manual to aid those responsible for these tasks.

Strategy: 3. Improve the accessibility of VR facilities, based on the results of a comprehensive evaluation with VR customer participation.

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Performance Measure: Improvement in climate survey item Q4 (Accessible work environment); percent of ADA compliant work units.

Actual Performance: FDOE leasing staff conducts ADA inspections of all new or renewed VR office leases. VR customers are included in this process when possible. Six VR employees have completed ADA Coordinator training. Continue operationally.

Goal 3: Improve VR Support Processes

Objective 3.1: Improve information technology applications

Strategy: 1. Use SharePoint to improve information sharing, collaboration and team projects.

Performance Measure: Increase in team sites

Actual Performance: Team sites continue to be requested and developed. This is now an operational, ongoing task.

Strategy: 2. Complete RIMS modules for Field Services Processes to better align the tools with business processes.

Performance Measure: Percent of RIMS modules completed

Actual Performance: This strategy was removed, as it is an operational business process. Improvements are still in progress on RIMS modules that require WIOA changes, and will continue operationally to incorporate all WIOA changes.

Objective 3.2: Improve VR business intelligence

Strategy: 1. Integrate key elements of VR management reports (financial, human resource, operational performance, and customer satisfaction) for use by all management teams and employees, including the development of a live performance dashboard.

Performance Measure: Number of management reports revised and implemented.

Actual Performance: Data management functions have been streamlined, starting with creating a team to fulfill data generation, analysis, and reporting. The team has further standardized the collection, planning, and delivery of data requests by creating templates for each task, and has improved data communication methods through the use of dedicated email and intranet locations. Progress continues on data validation and reporting improvements.

Explanation of Performance:

Strategies that contributed to achievement of goals and priorities

VR senior leaders continue to participate in quarterly planning meetings following the team approach established in 2012. VR senior leaders review progress made toward strategies, prioritize strategies still in progress, and agree on the strategies that will continue in the updated plan. Senior leaders consider employee feedback from the climate survey, customer, stakeholder and public input, needs assessment findings, customer satisfaction data, general process performance, and data collection and reporting requirements when updating goals, objectives, and strategic projects.

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Smooth operation of the strategic planning process is in part due to VR senior leaders' commitment to provide all supports necessary for project teams to be successful. Senior leaders also realize the value of feedback received from VR customers, personnel, stakeholders, and concerned citizens. Arrangements are in place so that anyone can provide feedback on the state plan, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, using a dedicated email address on the Florida VR website, www.rehabworks.org/plans.shtml. The email address is vrplan@vr.fldoe.org. Concerted effort has also been made to standardize and streamline VR operational processes and procedures, such as staff development, planning, IT governance and development schedules, and business intelligence functions.

Barriers that impeded achievement of goals and priorities

Despite obstacles such as changes to waitlist management, fiscal strains, preparing for and implementing Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), staff turnover and rising caseload sizes, VR made great progress towards achieving its strategic projects and agency priorities. When waitlist categories were closed due to fiscal and human resource deficits, field staff used this time to reconnect and engage customers, as well as close cases for customers no longer interested in services. Budget and caseload projection models were also developed during this time, and have allowed VR to better manage and plan.

Preparing for WIOA implementation forced VR to reexamine its business processes and organizational structure, which has resulted in more efficient and standardized operations. It has also allowed VR to develop true partnerships and connections with other employment-focused entities. These improvements, borne out of necessity, have increased VR's ability to plan for the future, as well as to be flexible when barriers are encountered.

Federal Standards and Indicators

Federal Performance Indicators and Targets	Actual Performance (FFY 15)	Previous Year (FFY 14)
Indicator 1.1: Change in Employment Outcomes (RSA Target: Increase over prior year)	-2,177	+437
Indicator 1.2: Percent of Employment Outcomes (RSA Target: 55.8%)	37.4%	29.82%
Indicator 1.3: Competitive Employment Outcome (Primary) (RSA Target: 72.6%)	99%	99.67%
Indicator 1.4: Significance of Disability (Primary) (RSA Target: 62.4%)	99.1%	97.53%
Indicator 1.5: Earnings Ratio (Primary) (RSA Target: 52%)	54%	51.67%
Indicator 1.6: Self-Support (RSA Target: 53%)	65.3%	66.2%
Indicator 2.1: Ratio of Minority to Non-Minority Service Rate (RSA Target: 80%)	98%	98%

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Explanation of Performance:

VR continues to experience a rehabilitation rate below target. This is due to a focused effort to identify and close inactive cases, after diligent efforts to locate and/or reengage customers. Although these efforts temporarily caused the rehabilitation rate to drop, VR is beginning to see the anticipated shift in the ratio of successful to unsuccessful closures. This will result in an increased number and percentage of employment outcomes, previously measured by Federal Performance Indicators 1.1 and 1.2.

Use of Title I Funds for Innovation and Expansion Activities

In FFY 2013-14, with the agreement of the FRC, VR continued to use funds designated under this section to support the functions of the FRC and Florida Independent Living Council (FILC), and to support opportunities for improving the efficiency of service delivery.

Actual Performance:

VR continues to support and collaborate with the FRC and FILC as required in the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended. In FFY 2014, a total of 16,699 independent living plans were developed, and 28,244 independent living goals were set through the network of 16 Centers for Independent Living.

In FFY 2011, VR completed a competitive procurement and awarded four contracts to providers for Innovation and Expansion projects. The innovative services included virtual reality simulators for customers with severe disabilities, vocational services and assistance for transitioning youth with most significant disabilities, and assistance and support for individuals with moderate to severe traumatic brain injury or significant mental illnesses. Of the initial contracts awarded, one for virtual reality simulators for customers with severe disabilities is still current. The provider is the Center for Rehabilitation Engineering and Technology at the University of South Florida. VR anticipates that these services will continue to contribute to greater employment opportunities for customers.

Explanation of Performance:

These collaborative efforts helped strengthen leadership and improve services, which led to increased employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities. It is anticipated that the continuing Innovation and Expansion project will contribute positively to VR's rehabilitation rate and provide more informed customer choice and options.

VR recognizes Innovation and Expansion grants as an opportunity that could be beneficial and complementary to WIOA-related initiatives. In the upcoming year, VR will be looking for innovative opportunities that could improve employment services to and successful closures for individuals with "unique abilities," defined in Florida legislation as including individuals who have intellectual disabilities or Autism Spectrum Disorders. These opportunities, when identified, will be offered through formal procurement processes.

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Evaluation of Supported Employment Program

Review of Attachment 4.11 (c) (4)

Goal 1: Increase service capacity for individuals with the most significant disabilities

Actual Performance:

VR allocated Title VI, Part B funds among its six areas on the same basis as Title I funds to ensure individuals with most significant disabilities have equal access statewide to VR services. VR spent its Title VI, Part B funds early in the fiscal year but continued to provide supported employment services as needed using Title I funds.

VR increased training opportunities for counselors, providers and other stakeholders with a focus on innovative ways to increase employment opportunities for individuals with significant disabilities. VR has made it a priority to increase the existing provider base so more individuals can be served in a timely manner. VR has also worked with existing providers to expand their services.

VR is a partner in the Employment First Initiative in Florida, created by Executive Order Number 13-284 issued by Governor Rick Scott. A Strategic Action Plan and agreement was developed with all of the mandated agencies and organizations. The plan included ways the agencies could work together to promote competitive integrated employment as the first and primary employment option. The Interagency agreement was approved and implementation has begun on the objectives listed below.

- Establish a commitment among the agencies' leadership to maximize resources and coordinate with each other to improve employment outcomes for persons with disabilities seeking publically funded services.
- Develop strategic goals and reasonable benchmarks to assist the agencies in implementing this agreement.
- Identify financing and contracting methods that will prioritize employment among the array of services paid for or provided by agencies.
- Identify ways training opportunities can be better utilized by agency employees and contracted providers to ensure effectiveness of employment services.
- Ensure collaboration occurs during the development of service plans, including the Individualized Plan for Employment, when individuals are served by multiple agencies to achieve their employment goals.
- Promote service innovation.
- Identify accountability measures to ensure sustainability.

In addition, VR added Discovery as a service option and provided training options to providers and staff to increase the use of Discovery. Last year approximately, 30 providers added Discovery as one of their services. Training is ongoing and available

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for providers. This helped increase the number of individuals who are now seamlessly moving into Supported Employment. It is also expanding VR Counselor's view of who is employable.

Goal 2: Use Title VI, Part B funds to achieve the maximum number of quality employment outcomes for individuals with the most significant disabilities

Actual Performance:

VR provided supported employment services to individuals with most significant disabilities who benefitted from these services. Data below represents VR's performance in serving supported employment customers.

FFY 2015 Supported Employment Performance Data

- Number of active cases: 5,127
- Number of Individualized Plans for Employment: 2,555
- Number of Employment Outcomes: 697

Goal 3: Use the five percent permitted for administration to fund development and delivery of training and technical assistance

Actual Performance:

1. The supported employment administrator continues to provide training on service delivery for individuals with the most significant disabilities to new counselors, as well as follow-up trainings and technical assistance to seasoned counselors and supervisors at conferences, meetings, workshops, and upon request.
2. VR administrators provided training to families and members in the community as requested. These sessions are designed to provide information and a vision that supported employment services are designed for individuals with the most significant disabilities. They provide families and customers with the information they need to become successfully employed. The sessions were provided to the groups and organizations listed below. Additional presentations are made throughout the year to local stakeholder groups.
 - Florida Developmental Disability Council
 - Family Care Council
 - Waiver Support Coordinators
 - Florida Rehabilitation Council
 - Florida Project Search
 - Certified Business and Technical Assistance Consultant Area Trainings
 - Transition Committees
 - Individualized Trainings
 - Family Disability Network
 - Florida Department of Education Employees
 - Family Café
 - Visions

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- AmeriCorps
 - Florida ARC
3. VR administrators provide technical assistance and consultations on individual cases as requested by supervisors, family members, VR staff, and individual customers.
 4. A number of strategies were used to support collaboration between VR and other community resources through networking and leadership activities listed below.
 - a. Representation on the Florida Developmental Disabilities Council and Employment Task Force. This included helping develop pilot projects on a wide array of employment topics. Administrators were involved as task force members, on advisory committees, and as monitors of projects. The projects complimented and supported VR's mission of helping individuals get or keep a job.
 - b. Presentations on supported employment at conferences around the state. Audiences included professionals, families, and students regarding employment options.
 - c. Participation as a board member for the Florida Association of People Supporting Employment First (APSE).
 - d. Representation on the Statewide Employment First Initiative by VR's supported employment and transition administrators. This included helping develop the Cooperative Agreement and the Collaborative Strategic Action Implementation Plan supporting employment as mandated by the Governor's Executive Order Number 13-284.
 - e. The VR Administrator coordinated and developed training for providers and staff on Discovery Services.

GOAL 4: Leverage resources for extended ongoing support services

Actual Performance:

1. VR has expanded its services to include Discovery to help individuals with most significant disabilities become employed. Discovery improves the quality of the placements, increases the success of the job placements, and reduces the need for intense follow up supports. This service is now available on a limited basis in all VR Areas. Concentrated efforts are in place to continue to increase capacity across the state.
2. VR employees continue to serve as resource members on Business Leadership Networks to educate businesses and employers about on-the-job supports for individuals in supported employment.

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3. VR and Agency for Persons with Disabilities (APD) administrators work together to provide training for VR counselors, waiver support coordinators, and for APD field staff on best practices in supported employment and the roles and responsibilities of all partners. Training included a focus on all of the possible extended service options.
4. VR employees participate as requested in APD hosted conference calls, as well as quarterly meetings designed to make the supported employment service delivery system for mutual customers an effective and efficient one.
5. The supported employment administrator provides training to field staff on the multiple options available for extended services. Of particular focus has been the development of natural and employer supports available on the jobsite.

Explanation of Performance:

The strategies reported above helped VR continue progress in providing successful services and employment outcomes for individuals with most significant disabilities.

Review of Attachment 6.3

Actual Performance:

1. VR, in collaboration with the Department of Education, Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services, increased contracts from 17-20 school districts to help provide community-based work experiences to students with disabilities.
2. VR administrators presented at the Family Care Council, Family Café, Employment, Business Leadership Network, Florida Developmental Disability Council, VISIONS and other conferences in an effort to increase awareness about using natural supports and emphasized its use as a realistic option for successful job maintenance.
3. The VR supported employment administrator partners with APD to provide joint skills-development training on supported employment to counselors and waiver support coordinators, and provides technical assistance, as needed. VR and APD have worked together to provide information about the funds available from the Employment Enhancement Funds that APD has received for individuals on their waiting list interested in employment-related services.
4. The VR supported employment administrator provides training to certified business and technical assistance consultants and VR employees to encourage the use of supported self-employment as an employment option for individuals with the most significant disabilities.
5. VR works closely with the Employment First Partnership and Coalition, which includes nine organizations and agencies with related employment services. Promoting employment of people with disabilities was initial focus of the group.

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Explanation of Performance:

The strategies reported above helped VR improve services and increase employment options for individuals with the most significant disabilities.

Barriers:

VR's desire to provide supported employment services was complicated by the lack of sufficient partner resources for commitment of long-term supports. As budgets are reduced at state and local levels, creative resource sharing and options are being explored with stakeholders.

In response to these challenges, VR increased its collaboration with the Florida Developmental Disabilities Council and other stakeholders to develop pilot projects designed to increase employment opportunities for individuals with most significant disabilities.

VR's focus on expanding current supported employment service options with Discovery and other related customized services is an important step in reducing the reliance on paid Follow Along/Extended services.

VR was also contending with waiting lists for part of the reporting year which caused cases to be on hold for supported employment services. The wait list caused hardships for some of the providers and they reduced their staff during this time. Providers will now have the opportunity to serve increased numbers of individuals. The Category 1 waiting list was eliminated and referrals and services are progressing.

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

Quality

The Florida Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) is committed to providing quality supported employment services to individuals with the most significant disabilities. VR supports the individual in making employment choices consistent with their strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities, and interests. The scope of services varies based on the amount, intensity, and support needed by each individual.

The quality of supported employment outcomes is assessed individually. Each individual receives services that are individually determined based on the needs of the individual. A key component of evaluating the service is the individual satisfaction with the services and supports, as well as the successful employment outcome. VR makes every effort to provide opportunities for individuals to share their feedback on the services they received from VR. This feedback is useful information in adjusting and improving VR services. There are informal attempts to determine satisfaction as well as formal surveys, public hearings and satisfaction surveys. The VR counselor has regular communications with the individual and the supported employment provider to monitor, provide counseling, and assist the individual, as needed.

VR also recognizes that to determine the quality of the services, it is important to get feedback from the employer's perspective, as well as the provider. Their input is solicited as well, and they are encouraged to let VR know at any point if they are having issues and need some support.

VR counselors work in partnership with the individual when developing the Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE). This plan guides the services and supports that are needed for that individual. The IPE is evaluated throughout the process and updated as needed.

Scope

The scope of supported employment services varies based on the amount, intensity, and type of support each person may need to obtain and maintain a job. Phase 1 of supported employment services includes intense services needed to help an individual with a most significant disability obtain and maintain a job of his/her choice.

Supported employment makes possible competitive integrated employment for individuals with the most significant disabilities and for whom competitive employment has not traditionally occurred, and because of the severity of their disability, need ongoing support services in order to maintain their job.

Service limits have been increased from 18 months to 24 months per WIOA regulations. Under special circumstances, the customer and VR counselor may jointly agree in writing to extend the time to achieve the employment outcome identified in the IPE.

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Services are individually designed around the needs and desires of the individual and may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Initial placement and stabilization in the workplace
- Job Coaching
- Assistive Technology
- Specialized Job Training
- Social Skill Training
- Discovery
- Formal and informal worksite-related expectations (e.g., time and attendance, dress, communication)
- Supported Self-Employment
- Customized Job Placement

VR has added Discovery as a service option to its array of supported employment services. It offers a more intensive person-centered planning approach for those individuals with the most significant and complex disabilities who may need a more customized approach to employment.

VR is in the process of adding a customized job placement option for individuals in supported employment who may need a more individualized job development process. Individuals in supported employment services will have access to this service as appropriate.

Post-employment services may also be provided when supports and services are needed which exceed the responsibility of the extended ongoing support service provider.

Extent

VR will continue to expand supported employment services by educating community members, providers, and relevant stakeholders on the need and advantages that supported employment provides for individuals and employers.

Supported employment services are available for individuals with most significant needs who meet the criteria for VR services and supports.

VR has increased its focus on youth and has increased several initiatives designed for youth with most significant disabilities. The following experiences are anticipated to help youth in their desire to have a successful career.

- High School High Tech
- Project Search
- Post-Secondary Education programs
- Third Party Cooperative Agreements

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The VR Transition Youth program collaborates with education officials and partners to offer youth with the most significant disabilities opportunities to gain work experiences that help them prepare for successful employment. These evidence-based applications of learning, which include internships and On-the-Job Training (OJT), often lead to successful employment.

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) also provides the opportunity for youth to receive up to four years of extended services funded through VR, if necessary, and with the availability of funding. This is the only situation that VR is permitted to provide extended services.

VR will:

- Develop a new cooperative agreement with the Agency for Persons with Disabilities (APD) specific to supported employment and removing barriers for employment for individuals with significant disabilities.
- Implement the Interagency Employment First Agreement between the eight signatory parties. Continue to implement the agreements at the local level with appropriate stakeholders.
- Maximize the quality of service delivery ensuring an efficient and effective referral process, individual program planning, and coordination of intensive vocational services with extended services available for youth and adults.
- Implement an interagency planning process between VR and APD that defines and projects the number of people in need of intensive and extended services each fiscal year and facilitates program and fiscal planning.
- Expand available services through youth-related initiatives.
- Seek additional resources for Phase 2 services through collaborations with agency partners, including APD, Agency for Healthcare Administration, Florida Developmental Disabilities Council, Department of Education, and other stakeholders
- Collaborate with community organizations, employers, families, and support groups to develop natural supports for supported employment extended services.
- Distribute information and train counselors about Social Security Work Incentives. Increase awareness of using a Plan for Achieving Self-Sufficiency or other work incentives as an option for funding extended services. Include training on the new Able Act as a potential way for individuals to fund their own services.
- Provide training on how to use natural supports, including self-pay, family/friends, and employers.
- Provide opportunities for counselors, providers, and support coordinators to

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receive training on innovative employment strategies designed to promote employment success for individuals.

Extended Services /PHASE 2

VR's approach for supported employment uses the nationally accepted "best practices" models of supported employment services and has added new customized strategies as well. The key to the approach is an emphasis on person-centered planning and facilitation of natural supports. Individualized job development is conducted and based on job-matching assessment information, informed choice, strengths, interests, skills. Individuals are assisted with employment planning and placement by selected providers, and job skills training is provided at the job site either by job coaches or through natural supports of existing resources.

Transition to Extended Services occurs after a minimum of 90 days of stabilized employment. At the time of transition, the counselor, providers, individual, and others, as applicable, will have agreed that the individual is stable in their employment and expected to succeed. VR counselors confirm this information with the individual, provider, and individual. They will continue to monitor the case until the person reaches a successful employment outcome.

VR continues to:

- Emphasize providing services to all racial/ethnic minorities
- Seek additional resources for Phase 2 services in collaboration with VR partners
- Collaborate with community organizations, families, and support groups to develop natural supports as an option for assisting customers on the job site
- Participate on interagency committees to expand initiatives and increase employment outcomes
- Distribute and provide technical assistance to counselors on the use of Social Security Work Incentives to help with funding Phase 2 services.

Extended services are provided and/or funded by sources other than VR. VR works collaboratively with other state agencies and organizations to ensure that extended ongoing support services, identified on the individualized plan as needed for employment, are available for as long as the customer needs them.

VR has a statewide coordinator who monitors supported employment-related issues that develop in the field and serves as a resource person to field staff. The coordinator also serves as an advisor to administrative employees in implementing programmatic policies in accordance with federal dictates, developing effective programmatic procedures, recommending training for supported employment staff, and other typical functions of a coordinating and liaison nature.