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**and**

**State Plan Supplement for the State Supported Employment Services Program**

**Maine Division for the Blind & Visually Impaired**

**State Plan Fiscal Year 2015 (submitted FY 2014)**

**Attachment 4.2(c) Input of State Rehabilitation Council**

*Required annually by all agencies except those agencies that are independent consumer-controlled commissions.*

*Identify the Input provided by the state rehabilitation council, including recommendations from the council’s annual report, the review and analysis of consumer satisfaction, and other council reports. Be sure to also include:*

* *the Designated State Unit's response to the input and recommendations; and*
* *explanations for the Designated State Unit's rejection of any input or recommendation of the council.*

The State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) works closely with the Maine Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired (DBVI) leadership and staff on many aspects of our service delivery system. The primary objective of the SRC is to be a direct influence for improving the responsiveness of DBVI’s Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) services in Maine for people who are blind or visually impaired. During the past year, the SRC has been involved in many activities with DBVI.

A statewide public hearing was held on June 18, 2014 using the ‘Polycom’ system which connected Career Center sites in Portland, Bangor, Lewiston, Presque Isle and Augusta. These locations were advertised in a number of newspapers, as well as on the Blind Forum and the DOL website, and were sent directly to the various groups of the organized blind community in the state. This time was used to review, answer any questions and address concerns of the 2015 draft State Plan. The full SRC was provided a copy of the 2015 draft state plan and given an opportunity to make comments.

Comments on the needs listed within the state plan:

**SRC comment: Agency response:**

**SRC comment:**

**Agency response:**

**SRC comment:**

**Agency response:**

**SRC comment:**

**Agency response:**

**Attachment 4.7(b) (3) Request for Waiver of Statewideness**

*Identify the types of services to be provided by the program for which the waiver of statewideness is requested.*

*The waiver request should also include:*

* *a written assurance from the local public agency that it will make available to the designated state unit the non-federal share of funds;*
* *a written assurance that designated state unit approval will be obtained for each proposed service before it is put into effect;*
* *a written assurance that all state plan requirements will apply to all services approved under the waiver.*

Maine Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired has not requested a waiver of statewideness.

**Attachment 4.8(b) (1) Cooperative Agreements with Agencies Not Carrying Out Activities Under the Statewide Workforce Investment System**

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

* *Federal, state, and local agencies and programs;*
* *if applicable, Programs carried out by the Under Secretary for Rural Development of the United States Department of Agriculture; and*
* *if applicable, state use contracting programs.*

The Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired has continued the use of cooperative planning to expand and enhance the work of rehabilitation for consumers who are blind or have low vision. DBVI works in conjunction with other agencies that are not in the statewide workforce investment system.

The Division works collaboratively with the University of Southern Maine/Maine Small Business Development Centers (SBDC), and Coastal Enterprise, Inc. (CEI) a private, nonprofit Community Development Corporation in assisting and supporting VR consumers who are interested in self-employment opportunities. A work group that consists of statewide representatives from SBDC, DBVI and Client Assistance Program (CAP) meet on a quarterly basis to discuss, explore and identify areas of strengths or concerns regarding small business ownership for our consumers. This group reviews the process for continuous improvement and to ensure the success of the VR client with his/her employment goal. This work has resulted in more solid employment goals involved in self-employment. Consumers research the market for their particular goal and learn of the opportunities as well as the competition in their area.

The Division f/t Blind and Visually Impaired, in conjunction with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and the Department of Corrections (DOC) have developed a ‘Procedural Directive’ to assist those individuals who are incarcerated and anticipate applying for VR services. Employment has been identified as one of the most important factors in reducing recidivism among individuals who are exiting the criminal justice system. In Maine, there are many individuals who may be eligible for VR services who are currently incarcerated and who could potentially benefit from Vocational Rehabilitation services to obtain and maintain employment upon their release. The Department of Corrections through its prisons and probation systems are committed to working collaboratively with DBVI and DVR to promote appropriate referrals, as well as the exchange of information and needed documentation to support VR eligibility determination. If individuals who are blind or visually impaired are identified as having blindness rehabilitation needs, other than for VR services, they will be referred directly to a local DBVI office.

DBVI staff have been involved in teaming efforts with the staff at the Veterans Administration (VA) Blindness Rehabilitation Program at the Togus, VA hospital to collaborate on services for veterans who are blind or visually impaired. In addition, a Memorandum Of Understanding with the VA Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Program has been developed and signed by both parties.

DBVI continues its collaborative efforts with the University of 'southern Maine Linguistics Department, Helen Keller National Center for the Deaf-Blind, and The Iris Network to improve services for clients who are deaf-blind or dual sensory impaired from hearing and vision loss. These cooperative efforts have resulted in expanded outreach to the pertinent population and continued opportunities for experiential learning for professional Tactile Interpreters and Support Service Providers.

**Attachment 4.8(b) (2) Coordination with Education Officials**

* *Describe the designated state unit's plans, policies, and procedures for coordination with education officials to facilitate the transition of students with disabilities from school to the receipt of vocational rehabilitation services, including provisions for the development and approval of an individualized plan for employment before each student determined to be eligible for vocational rehabilitation services leaves the school setting or, if the designated state unit is operating on an order of selection, before each eligible student able to be served under the order leaves the school setting.*
* *Provide information on the formal interagency agreement with the state educational agency with respect to*
* *consultation and technical assistance to assist educational agencies in planning for the transition of students with disabilities from school to post-school activities, including VR services;*
* *transition planning by personnel of the designated state agency and educational agency that facilitates the development and completion of their individualized education programs;*
* *roles and responsibilities, including financial responsibilities, of each agency, including provisions for determining state lead agencies and qualified personnel responsible for transition services;*
* *procedures for outreach to and identification of students with disabilities who need transition services.*

The Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, along with the Department of Education (DOE) first developed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in 1999. In an effort to capture changes in resources and maximize our on-going efforts between agencies, a new MOU was developed. The updated version, completed in December 2010 and amended in September 2011, addresses topics such as youth in transition and reflects changes in federal and state legislation since the original MOU was written. The current MOU reflects coordination of staff training and development, strategies for determining financial responsibility, and dispute resolution procedures.

The purpose of this collaboration with DOE is to promote and establish a process that results in an effective working relationship between state agencies on behalf of, and with youth with disabilities, in order to gain the greatest benefit from their respective programs and services. Specific areas of collaboration include: consultation, technical assistance, transition planning, roles and responsibilities, financial responsibilities of each agency and procedures for outreach and identification in order to better coordinate and facilitate the process of student transition.

This transition agreement defines and strengthens the relationships with DOE and calls for identification of students with disabilities, both in Special Education and regular programs, in order to plan their transition before graduation from high school. The agreement focuses upon the needs of the individual student and allows for flexibility and professional judgment to be exercised by personnel. It also spells out the roles of each agency in referral, outreach, and the provision of service. The blindness-specific curriculum elements and services that are identified in the Individual Education Plan (IEP) facilitate the achievement of the employment goal, which is further developed in the Vocational Rehabilitation Individual Plan for Employment (IPE). DBVI, the student and parent(s) develop the IPE, utilizing the interests, strengths, and needs of the student.

Local transition events continue to be effective in connecting employment programs, vocational programs, skills of blindness instruction, and special education programs to employers as an aid to sorting out career options, developing successful work histories, and creating jobs for students. Due to limited resources and a loss of service providers, Maine Parent Federation has begun to provide training/information for parents to function as case managers for their children and espousing the notion of choice for students in transition. In addition, collaboration with Maine CITE provides opportunities for furthering the use of assistive technologies that bridge education and employment.

DBVI has been working cooperatively with the Maine Department of Education, the University of Maine system, The Iris Network, Catholic Charities Maine, and the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation to expand the number of blindness professionals and other special education professionals in Maine. The DBVI Director sits on the advisory committee for the Maine DOE System for Personnel Development Grant. This grant is in its third year of providing funding for individuals to get master degree training in the blindness profession that has a direct impact on transition-age youth who are blind or visually impaired.

**Attachment 4.8(b) (3) Cooperative Agreements with Private Nonprofit Organizations**

*Describe the manner in which the designated state agency establishes cooperative agreements with private non-profit vocational rehabilitation service providers.*

The Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired contracts with private non-profit providers through a Request for Proposal (RFP) process, which is facilitated by the Maine Division of Purchases, Bureau of General Services. We work closely with contracted community providers to ensure that their staff is qualified to deliver rehabilitation services for individuals who are blind or have low vision. DBVI sponsors joint events, which cover a variety of topics such as the provisions of the Rehabilitation Act, with its inclusion in the Workforce Investment Act; promotion of informed consumer choice in all services; monitoring of consumer satisfaction with these services; and blindness-specific skills training. In addition, in an effort to provide the services in the most effective manner, DBVI hosts a training event for the entire blindness system in Maine every September. Some of the topics of these recent training events have been techniques for measuring the adjustment to vision loss, new APPS for Apple products specific to blindness or low vision, and working with persons who have vision impairment and head injury.

The primary community provider for adult blindness rehabilitation services for DBVI continues to maintain its’ National Accreditation Council (NAC) accreditation for delivery of rehabilitation services for people who are blind, and has embarked on a process to create its new strategic plan.

DBVI contracts with a variety of Assistive Technology (AT) Specialists on a fee for service basis. Some of these organizations are regionally based, while others are able to provide assessment and training across the entire state.

DBVI also contracts with other community rehabilitation providers (CRP) on a fee for service basis. Some of the services are job development and coaching, assistive technology, low vision rehabilitation, adjustment to blindness counseling and transportation. The Division will continue the expansion of the number and types of service providers available to consumers who are blind or have low vision. New CRPs are established by applying for accreditation through either national or state accreditation processes.

**Attachment 4.8(b) (4) Arrangements and Cooperative Agreements for the Provision of Supported Employment Services**

*Describe the efforts of the designated state agency to identify and make arrangements, including entering into cooperative agreements, with other state agencies and other appropriate entities in order to provide the following services to individuals with the most significant disabilities:*

* *supported employment services; and*
* *extended services.*

The Division has remained committed to assuring that individuals with the most severe disabilities receive supported employment services when this is appropriate. An IPE is developed that describes the services provided, the need for extended services, if appropriate, and an assurance that the individual has been able to make an informed choice in the provision of these services and the goal itself.

DBVI staff participates in meetings with the Division of Adult Mental Health Services (DAMHS) and the Division of Adults with Cognitive and Physical Disability Services (DACPDS) to discuss how to work more effectively in assisting consumers in obtaining employment with appropriate and necessary supports. The objective of these meetings is to get people together regularly to provide the opportunity for face-to-face communication so that we can better network services, increase understanding of program and resource limitations, and refine procedures. As a result of regular meetings with Community Rehabilitation Providers, the Maine Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), and the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, the DBVI continues to advocate with the DACPDS agency for increased state financial support for extended support and supported employment services. Another outcome of these meetings has been increased collaboration at the local level in troubleshooting individual consumer circumstances, as well as learning about new service opportunities as they occur (such as new funding within DHHS for persons with acquired head injury that became available in the summer of 2014).

The Division will continue regular consultation at both state and local levels with the DHHS.

**Attachment 4.10 Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (This section is divided into six subsections):**

1. **Data System on Personnel and Personnel Development**
   1. *Describe the development and maintenance of a system for collecting and analyzing on an annual basis data on qualified personnel needs with respect to:*

* *the number of personnel who are employed by the state agency in the provision of vocational rehabilitation services in relation to the number of individuals served, broken down by personnel category;*
* *the number of personnel currently needed by the state agency to provide vocational rehabilitation services, broken down by personnel category; and*
* *projections of the number of personnel, broken down by personnel category, who will be needed by the state agency to provide vocational rehabilitation services in the state in 5 years based on projections of the number of individuals to be served, including individuals with significant disabilities, the number of personnel expected to retire or leave the field, and other relevant factors.*

DBVI has a committee that annually monitors and assesses the needs of all staff for training that falls under the CSPD. This committee is made up of staff from each region of the state, each professional discipline within DBVI, and a representative from the SRC.

Currently, the Maine Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired employs thirty-eight individuals that all play a role in the delivery of blindness and vocational rehabilitation services. In order to ensure a high level of skilled staff to deliver quality services to consumers, the Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD) plan addresses long-range college training needs for qualified rehabilitation blindness professionals and paraprofessionals. In addition, the CSPD provides short-term training needs that allow for continuous learning and the maintenance of professional certification, including Certified Rehabilitation Counselor (CRC) credentials, and Academy for Certification of Vision Rehabilitation and Education Professionals (ACVREP) for Orientation and Mobility (O&M) Specialists, Vision Rehabilitation Therapists (VRT) and Low Vision Therapists (LVT).

There are approximately 1,000 individuals that will move in and out of the Maine DBVI VR system in FFY15. Maine DBVI does not currently have a wait list for individuals seeking services. Maine DBVI has 8 (7.5 FTEs) VR Counselor II positions, and one Blindness Rehabilitation Specialist that all carry an average caseload of 70 – 75 per FTE, with an additional 20 – 30 clients at any given time that may move in or out of the system. We expect these numbers to remain fairly consistent going forward. Based on the number of personnel and the previous numbers served, the number of individuals we expect to serve over the next five years should have a range of 760-1000 per year. We predict that will include 100% of individuals with significant disabilities due to the population that DBVI serves.

Current service delivery also includes two additional Blindness Rehabilitation Specialists that focus on transition students, five VR Counselor I positions that assist in facilitating clients through the process, and 11 Orientation and Mobility Specialists throughout the state that work with VR clients. All 11 of these O&M staff are currently ACVREP certified or certifiable.

As a result of the amount of new hires among our VR Counselors, more than half of them will be working towards meeting the qualified staff requirements. Two VRC positions were filled near the beginning of the fiscal year, which were the last of the vacancies in Maine either from retirements or staff changing roles.

With the turnover within Maine DBVI over the last few years, the rate of change in the next few years is expected to be lower. It can be anticipated that DBVI staffing needs could include approximately seven new staff within the next five years. The table below highlights the current vacancies within DBVI. These vacancies are within the same regional office and are currently being covered by existing staff. The chart also depicts anticipated staffing needs for the next five years due to expected vacancies from retirements.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Row** | **Job Title** | **Total positions** | **Current vacancies** | **Projected vacancies over the next 5 years** |
| **1** | **Director** | **1** | **0** | **0** |
| **2** | **Rehab Services Manager** | **2** | **0** | **1** |
| **3** | **Regional Director Rehab Services** | **2** | **0** | **0** |
| **4** | **Blindness Rehabilitation Specialist** | **3** | **0** | **0** |
| **5** | **Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor II** | **8** | **0** | **3** |
| **6** | **Paraprofessional VRC 1** | **5** | **0** | **2** |
| **7** | **Support Personnel** | **2** | **0** | **0** |
| **8** | **Rehabilitation Consultant** | **1** | **0** | **0** |
| **9** | **Business Enterprise Program Staff** | **3** | **0** | **0** |
| **10** | **Orientation & Mobility** | **11** | **2** | **0** |
| Total |  | **38** | **2** | **6** |

* 1. *Describe the development and maintenance of a system for collecting and analyzing on an annual basis data on personnel development with respect to:*
* *a list of the institutions of higher education in the state that are preparing vocational rehabilitation professionals, by type of program;*
* *the number of students enrolled at each of those institutions, broken down by type of program; and*
* *the number of students who graduated during the prior year from each of those institutions with certification or licensure, or with the credentials for certification or licensure, broken down by the personnel category for which they have received, or have the credentials to receive, certification or licensure.*

Maine has only one in-state institution of higher education, the University of Southern Maine (USM), that offers an educational program which satisfies the standards set forth by the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) for states lacking a state standard for fully qualified vocational rehabilitation counselors (i.e. qualifies to sit for the Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification exam). In addition to this in-state option, there are two other institutions of higher learning, UMass Boston and Assumption College (both in Massachusetts), that also offer such an educational program.

Unfortunately, USM does not offer RSA grant funding to rehabilitation program participants. Therefore, Maine DBVI utilizes distance educational programs that offer RSA grant funding to participants in order to leverage our training funds. The University of Virginia-Commonwealth currently has a RSA sponsored program. Maine DBVI has one VRCs enrolled in this distance education graduate program. In addition, Maine DBVI has one additional VRC enrolled in courses that will lead her towards the fully qualified standard. Also, Maine was had two VRCs graduate from UVC this past year and both passed their CRC exam.

As described in the table below, Maine DBVI has two VRC II staff working towards the fully qualified VRC standard.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Row** | **Institutions** | **Students enrolled** | **Employees sponsored by agency and/or RSA** | **Graduates sponsored by agency and/or RSA** | **Graduates from the previous year** |
| **1** | **Assumption College** | **0** | **0** | **0** | **0** |
| **2** | **University of Virginia-Commonwealth** | **1** | **1** | **2** | **2** |
| **3** | **University of Southern Maine** | **1** | **0** | **0** | **0** |
| **4** | **UMass Boston** | **0** | **0** | **0** | **0** |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |

1. **Plan for Recruitment, Preparation and Retention of Qualified Personnel**

*Describe the development (updated on an annual basis) and implementation of a plan to address the current and projected needs for qualified personnel including, the Coordination and facilitation of efforts between the designated state unit and institutions of higher education and professional associations to recruit, prepare, and retain personnel who are qualified, including personnel from minority backgrounds and personnel who are individuals with disabilities.*

Maine DBVI continues to have concern with the ability to recruit and retain qualified staff in Maine due to the low salary scales and the current instability in the state’s economy. Many of the positions within DBVI were successfully reclassified in recent years which has been helpful in the retention of staff. Recent recruiting efforts, which have included electronic vacancy postings on national and State of Maine websites, local postings with community providers, and through information sharing with universities and colleges across the country that offer a rehabilitation/blindness program, have yielded an increase in more highly credentialed candidates. Recruitment methods used continue to be extensive and include internet postings on a variety of specific and general job bank sites, ongoing contact with graduate programs throughout the country, promotion of Maine DBVI staffing opportunities at national conferences, networking with community rehabilitation providers, other state agencies, our contracted partners, offering professional internship opportunities to pre and post-graduate level students (Maine DBVI will be hosting three such internships in the summer of 2014), and job listings in Maine Career Centers.

Maine DBVI recognizes that our staff is the most valuable resource in our work supporting consumers who are blind or visually impaired in the pursuit of their vocational goals. To that end the Comprehensive System of Personnel Development project is designed to support training for Division staff. In this federal fiscal year, a variety of training opportunities for all staff were planned and approved by the CSPD committee.

The Division’s goal is to encourage staff to pursue a variety of educational choices within a supportive working environment and provides the necessary time and financial support. Certifications in all disciplines are encouraged, and the training plan supports maintaining CRC, O&M and other specific professional certifications. DBVI provided many important trainings this year in an effort to provide staff with the skills to improve employment outcomes for our clients. These initiatives took significant time and effort from DBVI staff and will have a positive impact on the knowledge, policy and practice of the VR program.

Maine state government continues its efforts to better promote state jobs to person with disabilities. The Bureau of Human Resources provides a system, referred to as ‘Special Appointment’, to facilitate the recruitment of people from minority backgrounds and individuals with disabilities in filling State government vacancies. Through this initiative, the individual must meet the qualifications for the position and then can be hired under this program in an “acting capacity” for up to one year. The worker receives the same pay and health benefits as other workers, but does not accumulate seniority time. If at any time during this year the supervisor deems the worker has performed their duties satisfactorily, he/she will be placed in the position as a new employee and the usual probationary period will begin. A unique feature of this initiative is that the Human Resources Department throughout all of state government is centrally connected to this process, which allows for people with disabilities from anywhere within the state to be contacted at the very first point the state becomes aware that there will be an open position. In this manner we can recruit from across a comprehensive network to fill vacancies within DBVI, as long as they meet the qualifications of our position. The Division currently has one employee that started state employment utilizing the special appointment process. It has proven to be a very successful job match for this individual.

1. **Personnel Standards**

*Describe the state agency's policies and procedures for the establishment and maintenance of personnel standards to ensure that designated state unit professional and paraprofessional personnel are adequately trained and prepared, including:*

1. *standards that are consistent with any national or state-approved or -recognized certification, licensing, registration, or, in the absence of these requirements, other comparable requirements (including state personnel requirements) that apply to the profession or discipline in which such personnel are providing vocational rehabilitation services; and*
2. *to the extent that existing standards are not based on the highest requirements in the state applicable to a particular profession or discipline, the steps the state is currently taking and the steps the State Plans to take in accordance with the written plan to retrain or hire personnel within the designated state unit to meet standards that are based on the highest requirements in the state, including measures to notify designated state unit personnel, institutions of higher education, and other public agencies of these steps and the timelines for taking each step.*

*Be sure to include the following:*

* *specific strategies for retraining, recruiting, and hiring personnel;*
* *the specific time period by which all state unit personnel will meet the standards;*
* *procedures for evaluating the designated state unit’s progress in hiring or retraining personnel to meet applicable personnel standards within the established time period;*
* *the identification of initial minimum qualifications that the designated state unit will require of newly hired personnel when the state unit is unable to hire new personnel who meet the established personnel standards;*
* *the identification of a plan for training newly hired personnel who do not meet the established standards to meet the applicable standards within the time period established for all state unit personnel to meet the established personnel standards.*

Maine DBVI personnel requirements and hiring practices are aligned with the Rehabilitation Act mandates and its regulations. As stated previously, Maine DBVI does not have an established state standard for fully qualified vocational rehabilitation counselors. Therefore, it defers to the Rehabilitation Services Administration standard whereby an individual must possess a Master’s Degree in Rehabilitation Counseling or CRC status, or be eligible to sit for the CRC examination, when filling Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor II vacancies. Applicants and staff who possess master’s degrees in counseling or a counseling-related degree, defined as Social Work, Psychology, Special Education, and Counseling also meet the standard if a graduate course in Theories and Techniques of Counseling course was completed as part of the degree requirements and additional graduate courses have been completed with a primary focus on Assessment, Occupational Information or Placement, Medical or Psychosocial Aspects of Disabilities, and in Community Resources or Delivery of Rehabilitation Services. In Maine, DBVI requires that new hires lacking fully qualified status enter into educational plans designed to achieve fully qualified status as a condition of employment and anticipates that some new employees may require up to five years to achieve qualified status. If there are extenuating circumstances, a new plan will be developed and the time may be extended. If the employee is still unable to achieve qualified status and it affects the performance of his/her job, disciplinary steps will be put in place through the annual performance appraisal process.

DBVI also supports educational programming for existing staff seeking to meet fully qualified status and, for those who have achieved CRC status and require on-going CRC training credits. Maine DBVI qualified personnel standards for O&M/VRT/LVT staff are to be certified or certifiable by the Academy for Certification of Vision Rehabilitation and Education Professionals. The ACVREP website explains, “The Academy for Certification of Vision Rehabilitation and Education Professionals offers professional certification for vision rehabilitation and education professionals in order to improve service delivery to persons with vision impairments. ACVREP is committed to quality certification programs that meet rigorous recognized standards. Programs are designed to offer applicants the means to demonstrate that professional knowledge and skills that promote the provision of quality service and ethical practice. ACVREP offers certification in three disciplines: Low Vision Therapy, Orientation & Mobility, and Vision Rehabilitation Therapy. Individuals who possess ACVREP certification demonstrate a level of quality and care that is unmatched in the field.” Whenever possible, Maine DBVI acquires the ACVREP endorsement to earn CEU credits for trainings provided in state.

When recruiting or hiring new staff, Maine DBVI gives preference to fully qualified individuals. If, however, it is necessary to meet a critical agency staffing need and recruitment efforts do not result in the identification and securing of suitable candidates who meet the DBVI hiring standard, individuals can be hired conditionally subject to agreement and implementation of a CSPD plan to acquire the appropriate credentials toward becoming fully qualified. CSPD plans include timeframes for completion that are responsive to the needs to the individual counselor, and agreed to by management. These plans are then incorporated into the employee’s annual performance review to ensure continuity and progress toward fully qualified status. Counselors who require a full master’s degree program to meet fully qualified status are allotted up to five years after completion of their probationary period to meet the requirements while those with related counseling master’s degrees seeking to meet CRC exam standards or are currently in a master’s in counseling program are provided accelerated timeframes dependent on remaining coursework.

Maine DBVI annually reviews the qualifications of all staff and tracks the educational plans of new hires and personnel requiring education and training to ensure that CSPD standards are achieved to the maximum extent possible. CSPD plans for rehabilitation counselors and other staff working in the DBVI VR program, who have not met the state standard are developed with supervisors upon completion of probation and reviewed as part of an annual performance review. CSPD plans reflect a balance between personnel development and operational need. The plans seek optimal training modalities and formats, as well as the most cost effective methods to utilize those institutions with RSA grants. Upon entering CSPD plans, program and coursework approval must be obtained from the DBVI Training Coordinator, who will maintain a record of all staff training activities and certifications.

1. **Staff Development**

*Describe the state agency's policies, procedures, and activities to ensure that all personnel employed by the designated state unit receive appropriate and adequate training in terms of:*

* 1. *a system of staff development for professionals and paraprofessionals within the designated state unit, particularly with respect to assessment, vocational counseling, job placement, and rehabilitation technology; and*
  2. *procedures for the acquisition and dissemination to designated state unit professionals and paraprofessionals significant knowledge from research and other sources.*

The State of Maine uses a performance management process that requires an annual performance review for all staff. Personal Development is a section within this document that outlines the agreed upon training that the employee will attend during the year to enhance his/her skills in order to perform the job better or to ensure adequate progress to maintain credentialing.

Training funds are available for all DBVI staff members throughout the state. The CSPD committee addresses current and projected needs of staff on an annual basis within a training plan. The committee surveys all staff annually, identifying both long and short-term training needs. The CSPD committee is made up of staff from each region and discipline. This provides a streamlined method of communication and involvement. A member of the DBVI State Rehabilitation Council also serves on the committee. The chair of the DBVI CSPD maintains ongoing communications with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) CSPD chair in an effort to coordinate training for the benefit of both divisions. For example, DBVI along with the DVR, hosts a two-day statewide training event every 18 months that offers training to meet needs identified and prioritized by staff and oversight bodies (i.e. State Rehabilitation Council, CSPD Advisory Committee).

DBVI CSPD has committed in-service training grant funds to go towards a variety of training needs and have prioritized these funds across the following three areas: 1) VR personnel to meet the RSA standard, 2) Staff to maintain professional certification, and 3) Other training needs and activities that are identified through an annual CSPD survey of all staff or at regional/office/discipline levels at staff meetings, internal committee work, and at individual initiation.

In an effort to maximize training resources, staff often solicit local training resources to provide free or low cost workshops, attend trainings with a ‘train the trainer’ perspective to provide turn-around training to other staff, and share internal expertise through in-house training opportunities. In past years, DBVI has been successful at leveraging training funds through collaboration with Region I TACE center, Perkins School for the Blind training funds, and the Lovill Trust.

In the previous year, Maine DBVI has made continuous efforts to seek and identify enhanced learning opportunities, particularly through use of distance learning modalities, in providing educational forums for its staff. Videoconferencing capacity has been established on a statewide basis and has led to an extensive learning collaborative with DVR, the Career Center One Stops, the Social Security Administration, external partners such as Maine CITE, the Small Business Development Corporation, and the local workforce development boards. Maine DBVI staff also takes advantage of distance training opportunities through webinars and teleconferences such as those offered by Workforce One, Independent Living Research Utilization, Social Security Administration, Rehabilitation Services Administration, TACE center and Parent Education Advocacy Training Center.

One training that has been very successful, and has been provided by videoconferencing, is the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services new counselor training curriculum. This training entails a three-week, comprehensive overview of the VR process. It includes topic areas such as rehabilitation technology, job placement and assessment, and vocational counseling. It is available to all staff and required of new DBVI VR staff, as well as interactive training modules in casework flow and post-secondary education. In addition, DBVI utilizes a variety of internet links, on-line videos, and web resources as part of its overall training for new DBVI employees. Additionally, training opportunities and conference materials are shared through a number of statewide avenues, including the Internet and Intranet, the CSPD advisory committee, as well as counselor, managerial and supervisory networking activities and interactions.

A library of training resources, including texts, journals and videotapes addressing vocational and blindness rehabilitation topic areas, are loaned to regional offices as needed. These materials include Institute on Rehabilitation Issues publications, computer CD’s and videotapes, Consumer Choice News, professional journals, National Clearinghouse of Rehabilitation Training Materials, and other documents from the various National Rehabilitation and Research and Training Programs throughout the United States.

DBVI is in its third year of the In-Service Training Basic Award. Priorities will address recruitment and retention of qualified rehabilitation professionals; provide for succession planning, leadership development and capacity building, and training on the amendments to the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 made by the Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1998.

1. **Personnel to Address Individual Communication Needs**

*Describe how the designated state unit has personnel or obtains the services of other individuals who are able to communicate in the native language of applicants or eligible individuals who have limited English speaking ability or in appropriate modes of communication with applicants or eligible individuals.*

In addressing issues associated with diversity and cultural needs, the Division has staff who are visually impaired who utilize and are well versed in adaptive technology used by our consumers. DBVI has an agreement with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation on referral of individuals who are deaf-blind who use American Sign Language (ASL) as their native language. DBVI has also worked with the Division of the Deaf, Hard of Hearing and Late Deafened and a variety of other collaborative partners to create a training program for professional interpreters for people who are deaf-blind. This training has resulted in approximately twenty individuals being certified in this area. In addition, DBVI has worked with the University of Southern Maine Linguistics Department and other collaborative partners, to create a Support Service Provider (SSP) program to enhance communication for consumers who are deaf-blind or dual sensory impaired who may or may not use ASL.

DBVI staff utilizes interpreter services, such as Maine State Interpreters or Catholic Charities Maine, for individuals with whom they cannot communicate directly with due to language barriers. Language Line is available for telephone interpreting.

1. **Coordination of Personnel Development Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act**

*Describe the procedures and activities to coordinate the designated state unit's comprehensive system of personnel development with personnel development under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act.*

Collaboration exists on an administrative level with the Commissioners of Education and Labor working jointly in a number of capacities. There is a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the two departments to address the needs of students with disabilities, specifically with visual impairments for DBVI.

DBVI maintains reciprocal partnerships with institutions of education, recognized for their commitment to rehabilitation services. The Division participates with the Institute for Community Inclusion at UMass, Boston and Assumption College, identified as the Technical Assistance and Continuing Education Center for Maine, through its involvement in various advisory boards, planning committees, and training opportunities.

Specific efforts for training on IDEA and state of Maine special education regulations and transition planning have been offered through an outside consultant specializing in special education, as well as through another nationally known consultant that provided training in implementing transition plans containing disability specific strategies. Furthermore, DBVI staff participated with the Maine DOE in creating a special education conference specifically related to services for transition-aged students and building a more collaborative system regionally. Other efforts have involved collaboration with the Maine Parent Federation, Catholic Charities Maine’s Education Services for Blind and Visually Impaired Children’s program, Perkins School for the Blind, and the Iris Network.

**Attachment 4.11(a) Statewide Assessment (This section is divided into seven subsections):**

*Provide an assessment of the rehabilitation needs of individuals with disabilities residing within the state, particularly the vocational rehabilitation services needs of:*

* *individuals with most significant disabilities, including their need for supported employment services;*
* *individuals with disabilities who are minorities;*
* *individuals with disabilities who have been unserved or underserved by the vocational rehabilitation program; and*
* *individuals with disabilities served through other components of the statewide workforce investment system.*

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

*The Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired continues to make every effort to solicit input from consumers about their needs and the services provided by DBVI for meeting these needs.*

The Division and its SRC continue to discuss and explore strategies in an effort to reach out to as many potential consumers as possible. The SRC members represent a broad spectrum of consumer interest groups. These individuals share information on the constituent groups that they represent. Topics that are discussed are issues related to employment and other vocational rehabilitation services, skills of blindness needed for personal independence and self-sufficiency, mobility and safe travel, personal adjustment to blindness, support groups, braille, adaptive devices and assistive technology, access to the Internet, audio and digital books, recreation and leisure activities and activities within the Business Enterprise Program. These meetings are available through the polycom system to Augusta, Portland, Bangor, Lewiston, and Presque Isle.

DBVI continues to receive input from survey questionnaires that are sent to all closed cases to determine the satisfaction of the consumer for the services that he/she received. In addition, the DBVI Director attended various gatherings of the organized blindness community in Maine (American Council of the Blind of Maine, National Federation of the Blind of Maine, and Pine Tree Dog Guide Users), and various regional meetings with consumers and other stakeholders. Furthermore, DBVI continues to use information from the 2009 stakeholder group that was convened at the direction of the Maine legislature to “assess the current and future needs of people in Maine who are blind or visually impaired.” This stakeholder group consisted of representatives from the Department of Labor, the Department of Education, Catholic Charities Maine (education for blind children), the Iris Network (blindness rehabilitation), the Disability Rights Center, ALPHA One Center for Independent Living, the DBVI State Rehabilitation Council and members of Maine’s three consumer-driven blindness organizations.

Another rich source of information that identified areas of consumer need within DBVI is from our Site Monitoring Review conducted by the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) in the summer of 2011. This review identified two main areas of consumer need, which were increasing successful competitive employment outcomes (especially for transition-aged youth), and providing more clearly defined transition services.

Finally, DBVI contracted with Karen Wolffe, Ph. D., who is an internationally known authority on transition and employment for people with vision impairments, to conduct an evaluation of services provided to transition-age youth as part of the student’s Individualized Education Plan (IEP). This evaluation looked at case files and IEP’s of more than two-thirds of all transition-age students within the state’s educational system for academic years 2011 and 2012.

**A. Increased Competitive Employment Outcomes**

Although DBVI has more consistently met Standard and Indicator 1.3 (percent of competitive employment outcomes compared to all successful outcomes) in recent years, there is still a need to increase the number of employment outcomes. This is especially true in the transition-age population, where only 13% of clients served in this group obtained a competitive employment outcome during our most recent RSA Site Monitoring Review.

Consumers consistently indicate the need for more opportunities for hands-on job training through things like internships, trial work experiences that are long enough to afford the individual to fully integrate their blindness skills into the job duties, and more summer youth employment opportunities. In addition, consumers continue to stress the need to have an in-state option to be able to receive their blindness skills training in a center-based model, so they can re-enter the employment arena more quickly following a loss of vision.

**B. Clearly Defined Transition Services**

During their Site Monitoring Review, RSA found that DBVI provides numerous services related to transition, but that these services are not clearly articulated through documentation in the case record. In addition, RSA identified the need for DBVI to offer more formalized programs for this population. Past transition clients and parents supported this need, which they believe would afford them a better understanding of what type of services or programs are available for this population through DBVI.

Findings from the IEP evaluation indicate that students of transition age are receiving very little in the way of career education, and the need for significantly more time spent on blindness-specific training geared toward preparing a student who is blind or visually impaired for life following graduation (often referred to as the Expanded Core Curriculum).Although progress has been made between the first two years of this evaluation in the area of better and more consistent communication between blindness and education professionals working with this population, the results from the most recent year of this project shows more improvement in this area is still warranted.

Maine DBVI has re-established its Blindness Rehabilitation Specialist positions, and continues to expand its role as a liaison between the parents and students, the education system, and the blindness system. In addition, DBVI worked with its VR Counselors to more clearly identify in case notes the work they are doing when working with transition-age students, and has begun to use a special indicator in its case management system denoting transition cases.

**C. Center-Based Immersion Model Service Delivery**

The final report from the 2009 stakeholder group noted above indicated that there are two basic types

of service delivery models for blind rehabilitation: home-based and center-based immersion programs.

Currently Maine offers home-based services only and does not have a center-based nor any other immersion type of program for blindness rehabilitation. Therefore, Maine can’t provide the many significant advantages inherent in those types of programs that can be critical to effective, efficient rehabilitation to blindness and

re-entry into the workforce without having to send clients to these types of programs outside of the state.

The report goes on to discuss a variety of benefits related to local access to center-based, immersion model blindness rehabilitation as a key component of Maine’s overall delivery system. The most important of these advantages is the ability to provide immediate, comprehensive training and application with a wide variety of fundamental and essential blindness skills and devices. Being able to provide this comprehensive training in this fashion can increase the pace of acquisition of these basic blindness skills which then will decrease the time needed between eligibility for DBVI services to being prepared to integrate these newly learned skills into an employment setting.

Although both home-based and immersion models have their particular advantages, neither alone can provide all the elements needed for efficient, effective adjustment to vision loss and the timely acquisition of blindness skills. A truly effective blind rehabilitation program needs to have both. However, because those experiencing vision loss typically become isolated and cut-off from others and resources quickly, nearly all can benefit substantially, psychologically and practically, from at least some time spent with others in an immersion program regardless of individual goals and situations.

Since the time the above noted report was released (early in 2010), the DBVI Director has attended annual state conventions and meetings of Maine’s three organized blindness groups (noted above), and various regional meetings with consumers and other stakeholders. Of the number of issues each of these groups continued to identify that negatively impact DBVI services, two have been a constant theme. They are, 1) it takes too long to deliver the blindness skills instruction consumers need to fully return to life and employment by only using the home-based delivery model, and 2) more consumers would access a center-based immersion model if they didn’t have to leave the state to do so.

Because we understand that state resources needed to fund services at this level are unlikely to be available in the short-term, we are exploring ways to change the service delivery model to reduce the time it takes to deliver blindness rehabilitation and training that will ultimately lead to a sustained increase in successful employment outcomes. As a result of currently lacking the infrastructure needed to deliver training in a center-based, immersion model services, we send clients out of state for center-based services at a costs in excess of $3,500 per month per client. We believe we can provide comparable services for less cost within Maine by creating our own infrastructure for delivering services in this manner. This investment is critical, however, because, not only is local service delivery more cost-effective than sending clients to rehabilitation centers out of state for blindness rehabilitation, but clients newly dealing with vision loss are more receptive to receiving these services in a familiar environment closer to home. Therefore, clients are more likely to accept services as part of a more targeted training program; thus, leading to more individuals becoming employed.

Outcome data related to client participation in out of state immersion model rehabilitation programs support this contention. Since 1998, 24 clients of DBVI attended blindness rehabilitation centers outside of Maine, with two of the individuals attending two different programs at two separate centers (for a total of 26 out-of-state programs). Of the 26, six have obtained and maintained employment since their attendance in the out-of-state program. This represents a success rate of 23%. The level of success clients experienced as a result of their attendance at an out-of-state training center appears to be linked to the amount of time they spent at the center, with stays averaging 10-14 weeks being more successful compared to the ones who were not successful only staying an average of four to six weeks.

This data suggests that much of the reason for this lack of success has been the short time clients agreed to participate in such programs, which is consistent with national data on this issue. It is well established that longer periods of time spent participating in an intensive rehabilitation program more effective. Furthermore, many clients who only attend an out-of-state training center for a short time continued to receive home-based services to gain blindness skills effective enough to enable them to return to employment months and years following their participation in these center-based programs.

**D. Lack of Availability to Public Transportation**

Due to a small population spread throughout a large geographic area in Maine, transportation presents a significant unmet need in most areas of the state. Specific issues included information on existing transportation that is available, and concerns regarding the timeliness and safety of some publicly funded transportation programs. In many areas of the state, public transportation is non-existent for medical appointments, transportation to work, and travel options for routine daily activities.

Consumers also identified the need to access additional training in the techniques for building one’s own personal transportation system when public transportation does not exist or is inadequate or unreliable. Many identified the need to have additional training time with an Orientation and Mobility Instructor, as well as access to peers, to work on these strategies.

DBVI O&M staff continue to work with the Maine Department of Transportation (DOT) to assess the need for safer pedestrian traffic at intersections and traffic circles. A collaborative training between DBVI and Maine DOT was held in the beginning of this federal fiscal year that brought together traffic engineers from across the state, as well as some consumers, to learn about pedestrian travel needs of blind consumers. This led some O&M staff to work with traffic engineers in at least three communities to assess intersections for pedestrian safety.

**E. Assistive Technology**

Consumers acknowledged that they need continual learning/training in assistive technology (AT) as a result of rapid changes in available AT, as well as changes in needs for technology in the lives of consumers. Consumers at every gathering noted earlier emphatically stated the need for DBVI to expand the delivery of AT services as it is something that cannot be yet obtained in the mainstream commercial business that can easily meet the needs of sighted peers. Some of the specific areas of unmet needs included: low vision devices/services, video magnifiers (CCTV), computers, assistive technology devices and software programs specific to blindness, mainstream AT software and devices useable for people who are blind or visually impaired (Apple products, for example), and information technology training on emerging technologies such as social media. In addition, consumers indicated the need for being able to access training specific to using blindness and low vision AT with upgraded software (such as when upgrading from Windows XP to Windows 2007 or 2008, or MS Office 20003 to 2010 or 2013).

Consumers also identified the need for DBVI to facilitate the formation/operation of consumer led groups to work with each other on mainstream access technology pertinent to Apple products. They cited numerous instances where consumers have gone into retailers to receive instruction in the operation of their mainstream device, only to discover the staff at these retailers did not know the accessible portions of these products.

**F. Awareness of DBVI Services**

Consumers also identified a need for a greater awareness of the services and programs available from DBVI. Some barriers include: difficulty in finding services as a new resident of Maine, difficulty in identifying resources for adjustment to blindness counseling, not enough information identifying the Business Enterprise Program as a vocational option, and not enough information / awareness of vocational services for children, families and schools when the student is blind or has low vision.

To accomplish the above, consumers suggested conducting more public outreach activities. There were numerous recommendations made to hold public forums/informational meetings in different areas of the state on a regular basis. Consumers also noted that having various staff from DBVI present at these types of activities was effective, and very important to the consumers.

DBVI also uses its case management system to track the number of clients of the VR program over time. This longitudinal view demonstrated a decline in the number of referrals and active clients in the DBVI VR program over the past five years.

DBVI also added a Public Education component to its contract for Community Based Blindness Rehabilitation Services for Adults and Students 14 and Older who are blind or visually impaired. One individual acts as the coordinator for these services and is trained in marketing communications. This individual has been doing some innovative activities such as Public Service Announcements.

**G. Current and Future Trends**

The number of people with severe visual impairments in Maine is projected to double (to approximately 80,000) over the next 15 years. In addition to the need for more people needing to access DBVI services, there have been dramatic increases in the intensity of rehabilitation needs among Mainers with visual impairments. This is evidenced by the numbers of children of transition-age with visual impairments who have complex secondary disabilities such as autism or brain injury, as well as the increased numbers of persons living with dual sensory impairments of vision and hearing. Consumers identified the need to deliver services in a way that specifically addresses such issues as they relate to blindness and visual impairment.

There continues to be an increase of non-English speaking immigrants and refugees in Maine, especially in the southern part of the state. Those who are dealing with vision loss need costly interpreter services to benefit from available blindness rehabilitation services so that they can better access vocational rehabilitation for gaining employment in their new country. Consumers identified the need to explore service delivery models that specifically addresses such issues as they relate to blindness and visual impairment.

**Attachment 4.11(b) Annual Estimates**

* *Identify the number of individuals in the state who are eligible for services.*
* *Identify the number of eligible individuals who will receive services provided with funds under:*
* *Part B of Title I;*
* *Part B of Title VI;*
* *each priority category, if under an order of selection.*
* *Identify the cost of services for the number of individuals estimated to be eligible for services. If under an order of selection, identify the cost of services for each priority category.*

DBVI looked at the total state population of individuals identified as visually impaired and eligible for services (31,300) when estimating these numbers. DBVI then took into consideration the number of referrals, expenditures, and average case costs from prior years to estimate the number of individuals who will receive services with funds provided under Title I and Part B of Title VI. DBVI estimates for FFY 2015, approximately 1,000 individuals who are blind or visually impaired will be served in Title 1 and Title VI by the Division at a cost of $3,612,773.00. Supported employment services are provided to approximately 20 consumers between the Title VI and Title I programs. DBVI has determined that many consumers are able to work in the competitive labor market without supports.

**Attachment 4.11(c) (1) State Goals and Priorities**

*The goals and priorities are based on the comprehensive statewide assessment, on requirements related to the performance standards and indicators, and on other information about the state agency.*

*(See section 101(a) (15) (C) of the Act.) This attachment should be updated when there are material changes in the information that require the description to be amended.*

* *Identify if the goals and priorities were jointly developed and agreed to by the state VR agency and the State Rehabilitation Council, if the state has a council.*
* *Identify if the state VR agency and the State Rehabilitation Council, if the state has such a council, jointly reviewed the goals and priorities and jointly agreed to any revisions.*
* *Identify the goals and priorities in carrying out the vocational rehabilitation and supported employment programs.*
* *Ensure that the goals and priorities are based on an analysis of the following areas:*
* *the most recent comprehensive statewide assessment, including any updates;*
* *the performance of the state on standards and indicators; and*
* *other available information on the operation and effectiveness of the VR program, including any reports received from the State Rehabilitation Council and findings and recommendations from monitoring activities conducted under section 107.*

The following goals for the 2014 State Plan were reviewed and agreed upon by the DBVI and its State Rehabilitation Council:

Goal (1)

To increase successful competitive employment closures for DBVI clients in each of the next three federal fiscal years.

Goal (2)

To provide more focused activities to transition-age youth that will yield an increase in successful outcomes in each of the next three federal fiscal years.

Goal (3)

To ensure that a larger number of individuals, with disabilities who may be underserved or unserved or have minority status, have access to DBVI services.

Goal (4)

To increase the number of activities for public outreach, education and awareness of existing services and resources for the community and consumers who are blind or have low vision.

Goal (5)

To improve opportunities and access for DBVI consumers within the larger workforce development system.

**Attachment 4.11(c) (3) Order of Selection**

* *Identify the order to be followed in selecting eligible individuals to be provided vocational rehabilitation services.*
* *Identify the justification for the order.*
* *Identify the service and outcome goals.*
* *Identify the time within which these goals may be achieved for individuals in each priority category within the order.*
* *Describe how individuals with the most significant disabilities are selected for services before all other individuals with disabilities.*

This agency is not implementing an Order of Selection.

**Attachment 4.11(c) (4) Goals and Plans for Distribution of Title VI, Part B Funds**

*Specify the state's goals and priorities with respect to the distribution of funds received under section 622 of the Act for the provision of supported employment services.*

The Division continues to use Title VI-B money to provide services for individuals with the most severe disabilities as an integral part of our VR program. Securing long-term employment resources continues to be a primary challenge for the Division. DBVI continues to collaborate with Department of Health and Human Services – MH and MR services to explore long-term support mechanisms for those individuals completing their VR plan and who have been utilizing Title VI, Part B funds.

Based on level funding, the division’s goal will be to continue to use the Title VI-B funding on a fee-for-service arrangement, providing services to a minimum of 19 consumers with the most significant disabilities for whom supported employment is an appropriate vocational alternative. Priorities for supported employment are services to individuals who need intensive supported employment services because of the nature and severity of their disabilities. In addition to being blind or having low vision, these may be consumers with a most significant disability due to mental illness, traumatic brain injury, cognitive deficits or other severe physical disabilities.

DBVI encourages Community Rehabilitation Providers (CRPs) to use training resources such as the Technical Assistance and Continuing Education (TACE) Center, an RSA resource currently a part of UMass Boston. We have an in-state accreditation process for CRPs and anticipate that it will improve services to all our consumers.

The plan is to continue to purchase services for designated Title VI-B clients. Purchased services will continue to be primarily job coaching, job development, and transitional employment services for individuals with vision impairment and mental illness. We will also continue to work with relevant stakeholders, i.e., consumers and CRP's, to expand the availability of supported employment services.

DBVI continues to identify more diversified employment opportunities in the supported employment Title VI program. The Division places a small number of blind and visually impaired consumers in supported employment settings. We are finding that many clients are able to work in the competitive labor market without supports, due to the increased availability of technology, technology adaptations and both technological and natural supports available in today’s market.

**Attachment 4.11(d) State's Strategies**

*This attachment should include required strategies and how the agency will use these strategies to achieve its goals and priorities, support innovation and expansion activities, and overcome any barriers to accessing the vocational rehabilitation and the supported employment programs. See sections 101(a) (15) (D) and (18) (B) of the Act and Section 427 of the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA.)*

* *Describe the methods to be used to expand and improve services to individuals with disabilities.*
* *Identify how a broad range of assistive technology services and assistive technology devices will be provided to individuals with disabilities at each stage of the rehabilitation process.*
* *Describe how assistive technology services and devices will be provided to individuals with disabilities on a statewide basis.*
* *Identify what outreach procedures will be used to identify and serve individuals with disabilities who are minorities, including those with the most significant disabilities.*
* *Identify what outreach procedures will be used to identify and serve individuals with disabilities who have been unserved or underserved by the VR program.*
* *Identify plans for establishing, developing, or improving community rehabilitation programs, if applicable.*
* *Describe strategies to improve the performance with respect to the evaluation standards and performance indicators.*
* *Describe strategies for assisting other components of the statewide workforce investment system in assisting individuals with disabilities.*
* *Describe how the agency's strategies will be used to:*
* *achieve the goals and priorities identified in Attachment 4.11(c)(1);*
* *support innovation and expansion activities; and*
* *overcome identified barriers relating to equitable access to and participation of individuals with disabilities in the state Vocational Rehabilitation Services Program and the state Supported Employment Services Program.*

The Division continues to identify and develop strategies to use Title I funds for innovation and expansion activities moving forward into 2015. These activities will be measured to provide more definitive evidence of the Return on Investment (ROI).

Goal 1: To increase successful competitive employment closures for DBVI clients in each of the next three federal fiscal years.

Objective: Reduction of the amount of time it takes to achieve a competitive employment outcome for DBVI clients from 54 months in FFY 2010 to 42 months in FFY 2013, to 36 months in FFY 2015.

Strategies:

* 1. Continue efforts to re-establish a center-based blindness rehabilitation facility in Maine that utilizes an immersion model to teach blindness skills in a manner that can be easily integrated into work activities and transferred to an employment setting.
  2. Provide staff training on customer service techniques that promote engagement of and with clients.
  3. Rebuild the statewide collaboration between the Maine Diabetes Control Project and Maine’s blindness system to more quickly identify consumers experiencing vision loss.

Objective: To increase the numbers of successful competitive employment closures for individuals who receive services from DBVI from 33 in FFY 2011 to 40 in FFY 2012, 46 in FFY 2013, and 50 in 2014 and 2015.

Strategies:

* 1. Deliver at least one session of the DBVI Employability Skills Program each year to clients who are long-term unemployed/underemployed or otherwise are stuck in job seeking.
  2. Utilize the DBVI Employability Skills Program to provide training to staff on the nuances between “work ready” and “placement ready,” and how to recognize them.
  3. Collect and analyze evaluation data from clients and staff involved in the Employability Skills Program.
  4. Expand the network of work experience/training opportunities whereby clients can learn to integrate blindness skills into work activities and employment sites.
  5. Hold conversations with new clients that are going to be in the homemaker program about enhanced employment or working part-time.
  6. Promote and make available a blindness-specific assessment at the work site for every client in an employment setting.
  7. Create an instrument to use for looking at blindness-specific issues when conducting a work

site assessment, and train staff how to conduct such an assessment.

Objective: To expand the number of Maine employers who implement diversity hiring activities through engagement with the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services’ Business Services Hiring Initiative Team from two in FFY 2012, to three in FFY 2013, four in FFY 2014 and five in 2015.

Strategies:

* 1. Continue to support the re-established Maine Chapter of the US Business Leadership Network
  2. Partner with the Maine State Chamber of Commerce and the Society of Human Resource Managers (SHRM) to expand business outreach/network
  3. Identify and train local DBVI VR and CRP personnel to coordinate referrals and start up activities for new business partners in each region of the state.
  4. Continue to support the BRS single point of contact Business Network personnel in their efforts to refine the referral process to the various employers connected to this project.
  5. Support various DBVI VR staff to join a local Chamber of Commerce and/or service organization, and attend meetings regularly.

Goal 2: To provide more focused activities to transition-age youth that will yield an increase in successful outcomes in each of the next three federal fiscal years.

Objective: To reduce the percentage of students we “lose” from our VR Program just before or after graduation from the 40% noted by RSA during the 2011 Site Monitoring Review, to less than 10% by the end of FFY 2015.

Strategies:

* 1. Continue to operate the DBVI college preparation Program consisting of taking a college course in the summer between junior and senior year, living in the dorms, utilizing services available on-campus, skills of blindness instruction, and a work experience.
  2. Create a summer youth employment and/or work internship experience for all students by age 16.
  3. Set up a program at a local school similar to a “Junior Achievement” model to potentially operate vending machines at the students’ school. This could be a good introduction to the business world and the world of work. The students’ would need to stock equipment, control inventory, set pricing, develop procedures for cash control and profitability.
  4. Maine DBVI will activate the Visually Impaired Community Action Team (VICAT) to provide support for transition-aged students.
  5. Increase communication between the school and parents and DBVI.
  6. Stressing the importance of attending summer immersion programs at centers like the Carroll Center or Perkins for skills of blindness advancement and socialization (or building such a program of our own in Maine).
  7. Utilize the Transition Competencies Checklist with each VR eligible school-age student.
  8. Re-establish DBVI positions that specifically serve this population. This would allow more early intervention and resource development, especially in the areas of career education and vocational exploration
  9. Having Transition teams in each region. The teams could coordinate and/or be points of contact for exchange of info.
  10. Collect and analyze the evaluation data from clients that go through these programs.
  11. Hold regional meetings toward the beginning of each school year to determine VR eligibility on all students 14 years of age and older.
  12. Use special indicators in the DBVI case management system to identify when a client becomes

a transition client or when beginning post-secondary education so that longitudinal progress

and outcomes can be more easily tracked and analyzed.

* 1. Have a Vision Rehabilitation Therapy assessment done on all transition-age students, emphasizing the nine content areas of the expanded core curriculum.

Goal 3: To ensure that a larger number of individuals, with disabilities who may be unserved or underserved or have minority status, have access to DBVI services.

Objective: DBVI will work with Maine’s Section 121 VR Grant – Wabanaki Vocational Rehabilitation to identify an increased number of individuals eligible to be served by both programs.

Strategies:

* 1. Maine DBVI will include Wabanaki Vocational Rehabilitation in training and technical assistance opportunities offered or funded by DBVI.
  2. A representative from the Wabanaki Vocational Rehabilitation will participate on DBVI’s State Rehabilitation Council (SRC)
  3. The Wabanaki VR Program will provide technical assistance to Maine DBVI on issues related to cultural competency and best practices in Native employment supports.
  4. DBVI will provide in-service training to staff at tribal health or community centers of the four Maine tribes (Passamaquoddy Tribe, Penobscot Indian Nation, Houlton Band of Maliseets, and Aroostook Band of Micmac Indians) on an annual basis.

Objective: Maine DBVI will collect data on the numbers of individuals served – in various minority, unserved or underserved categories in FFY12 to establish a baseline and develop future goals.

Strategies:

* 1. Maine DBVI will develop and utilize a special indicator in its case

management system to track individuals who belong in these groups:

* consumers associated with the correctional system
* veterans who are blind or have low vision
* consumers who are older
* consumers from other countries who are new to Maine
* consumers who are deaf-blind or with a dual sensory impairment of hearing and vision

Objective: Maine DBVI will reach out to non-English speaking immigrants and refugees experiencing vision loss and provide at least two different options for providing service to this population.

Strategies:

* 1. Maine DBVI will work with interpreter services so consumers can benefit

from available blindness rehabilitative services and better their chances for

employment in a new country.

* 1. Creating two classes to provide instruction in English as a second language in a manner adapted for blindness or visual impairment.

Objective: DBVI will continue its efforts to grow a communication network for consumers who are deaf-blind or dual sensory impaired (hearing and vision) so that there are professional Deaf-Blind Interpreters and Support Service Providers (SSP) available in each of DBVI’s five state regions.

Strategies:

* 1. Secure funding for coordinated operation of the Maine SSP program.
  2. Work with collaborative partners to increase training opportunities for Deaf-Blind Interpreters and SSP’s.
  3. Encourage more deaf-blind/dual sensory impaired consumers to take an active role on the steering committee working on the interpreting and SSP project.
  4. Work with collaborative partners to identify funding for SSP’s.
  5. Expand the number of trained SSP’s in the northern half of the state (Waterville and north).
  6. Provide outreach activities in three areas across the state to introduce the SSP project to persons with dual sensory impairment.

Goal 4: To provide increased activities for public outreach, education and awareness of existing services and resources for the community and consumers who are blind or have low vision.

Objective: Maine DBVI will work with providers to create a better awareness of the resources available to individuals who are blind or have low vision by providing at least monthly public education activities in each of the five DBVI Regions.

Strategies:

* 1. Maine DBVI staff will provide in-service trainings to other service providers within their region.
  2. Maine DBVI Staff will provide service awareness and assistive technology/adaptive device activities for consumers and the general public within their regions.
  3. DBVI will coordinate cooperative training with Maine Department of Transportation.
  4. DBVI will work with its main contractors to create a more organized and more centralized public education effort.
  5. DBVI will redesign the Registry of Blindness cards, including an on-line version.
  6. DBVI will make face-to-face visits to eye doctor’s offices following distribution of Registry of Blindness cards.
  7. DBVI will explore collaboration with the Veteran’s Administration Blind Rehabilitation program to streamline the referral process between the two agencies.
  8. Encourage all staff to regularly attend local Lions Club meetings.

Goal 5: To improve opportunities and access for DBVI consumers within the larger workforce development system.

Objective: Maine DBVI will partner with Maine’s Disability Employment Initiative (DEI) Grant to identify non-VR CareerCenter customers who are blind or have low vision who may require DBVI services.

Strategies:

* 1. Maine DBVI will work with a designated point of contact with the Bureau of Employment Services.

Objective: To increase the number of DBVI clients achieving an employment outcome at one of the BRS Single Point of Contact businesses from one to three in the next year.

Strategies:

1. DBVI will have direct representation on the business liaison teams utilizing the single point of entry approach and the Walgreen’s universal design model.
2. DBVI representation on the BRS CRP project which is working very closely with the BRS Business Relations Specialist throughout the State of Maine.

**Attachment 4.11(e) (2) Evaluation and Reports of Progress (This section is divided into four main subsections, with each of these subsection being even further divided)**

*1. Clearly identify all VR program goals consistent with the goals described in the FY \*2013\* Attachment 4.11(c)(1), including an evaluation of the extent to which the VR program goals were achieved.*

* *Identify the strategies that contributed to the achievement of the goals.*
* *Provide a description of the factors that impeded the achievement of the goals and priorities.*

**Below are the goals described in the FY 2015 State Plan (Attachment 4.11(c) (1)),** along with activities that took place and progress made on the goals, and strategies used to help DBVI towards achieving those goals.

Goal 1: To increase successful competitive employment closures for DBVI clients in each of the next three federal fiscal years.

Objective 1: Reduction of the amount of time it takes to achieve a competitive employment outcome for DBVI clients from 54 months in FFY 2010 to 42 months in FFY 2013, to 36 months in FFY 2014.

Strategies:

a. Continue efforts to re-establish a center-based blindness rehabilitation facility in Maine that utilizes an immersion model to teach blindness skills in a manner that can be easily integrated into work activities and transferred to an employment site.

Progress to date: DBVI continues to hold conversations with the SRC on the need for such a rehabilitation and training center in Maine. We have made a cost analysis comparison between what it has been costing to send clients to centers out of state versus what it will cost to have such a program in-state. In addition, we have worked with RSA to utilize the establishment project for improving a community rehabilitation provider. This project will focus on using an existing building that can be renovated to create the physical center, and who

can also use existing personnel in the administration of a blindness rehabilitation and training program. Finally, DBVI has been working with the Commissioner's office of the Maine Department of Labor to address issues they have with the project, and to refine the proposal for such a center in Maine. The effort is tied to the availability of Title 1 VR monies through the Rehabilitation Services Administration reallotment process, and via their Establishment Grant process.

b. Provide staff training on customer service techniques that promote engagement of, and with clients.

Progress to date: DBVI continued to reinforce the customer service techniques received during a training with Shawn Riley, owner of Maine Hospitality Group, during a training he provided to all DBVI staff in March of 2012. This training was augmented by having Joe Strechay from the American Foundation for the Blind present to all DBVI staff in 2013, and from Dr. Paul Ponchillia of Western Michigan University in September of 2013. We continue to discuss the need for all staff to engage with clients more broadly, in a true partnership while providing their rehabilitation and training program, in all of our various discipline meetings. In addition, many of the activities in our New Staff Orientation and Training protocol are geared toward more staff integration into the larger blindness community.

c. Rebuild the statewide collaboration between the Maine Diabetes Control Project and Maine’s blindness system to more quickly identify consumers experiencing vision loss.

Progress to date: Re-establishing a connection between the blindness rehabilitation system and diabetes education and care system in Maine was facilitated by dedicating specific staff time to these activities within our Community-based Adult Rehab. contract with the Iris Network. Initial contacts to discuss collaboration were made with Community colleagues including: hospital based Diabetes Nurse Educator at Maine Medical Center; DNE at Southern Maine Visiting Nurse Services; and Portland Public Health nurse. In addition, an In-Service training regarding diabetes, its causes, symptoms, complications and treatment/management was prepared and presented to the staff of the Iris Park Apartments to meet their need for ongoing-training. Also continued contact with the Diabetes Action Alliance of Maine. Finally, a new tracking tool for Pre-Diabetic patients to record their food and activity was received and converted to Large Print for use by visually impaired individuals as needed.

For FFY12, the average number of months from application to closure for the 48 competitive closures was 37 months. \*This number increased/decreased to x months for the 37 competitive closures in FFY 2013.\* It has taken XX months from application to closure for the 16 competitive closures during the first two quarters of FFY14.

Objective 2: To increase the numbers of successful competitive employment closures for individuals who receive services from DBVI from 33 in FFY 2011 to 40 in FFY 2012, 46 in FFY 2013, and 50 in 2014 and 2015.

Overall progress on Objective 2: DBVI achieved 48 competitive closures in 2012, but decreased in FFY13 to 37. So far in this federal fiscal year (as of March 31, 2014) DBVI has 16 competitive closures, which is five more than this same time a year ago and is about one-third of our goal for this year.

Strategies:

a. Deliver at least one session of the DBVI Employability Skills Program each year to clients who are long-term unemployed/underemployed or otherwise are stuck in job seeking.

Progress to date: The Employability Skills Program (ESP) program has been offered in 2011, 2012 and the 2013 program was scheduled to take place in late May. It was set up for juniors and seniors in college who are getting ready to begin their job search. DBVI staff were ready to run this program in May of 2013, but the number of participants that committed to attend the program was not enough for the program to be cost effective. Our target for the ESP is at least six participants, and we only had four for this college student version. We did not offer this program in FFY14, but are scheduled to offer the ESP early in FFY15 (in November of 2014). We are considering running the college student version of the ESP in May of 2015.

b. Utilize the DBVI Employability Skills Program to provide training to staff on the nuances between “work ready” and “placement ready,” and how to recognize them.

Progress to date: Although many staff participated in the ESP conducted in 2011 and 2012, we have had significant staff turn-over since that time. Our more experienced staff are being utilized to begin the training process for our newer staff. The newer staff will be able to learn through observing many of the various sessions within the program when it is next offered. We will continue to use this train-the-trainer model so more staff can become proficient in their level of understanding what it really takes for clients to enter or re-enter the workforce.

c. Collect and analyze evaluation data from clients and staff involved in the Employability Skills Program.

Progress to date: Participants and VR Counselors do follow-up surveys related to this program. Participants complete a survey at the completion of the ESP and six months following completion of the program. VR Counselors complete their survey six months after the completion of the program. In addition, DBVI looks at participants outcomes every six months. Data indicated that six out of the seven participants from the 2011 ESP

were working at the 18 and 24 month checkpoint. For the 2012 ESP, four participants were working at the 18 month mark. Therefore, 10 out of the 14 clients that participated in the two cohorts of the ESP were employed at the last check point. RSA continues to hold this program as an emerging best practice.

d. Expand the network of work experience/training opportunities whereby clients can learn to integrate blindness skills into work activities and employment sites.

Progress to date: We have not measured this area in the first six months of this federal fiscal year. However, we intend to expand the number and/or variety of sites used in this year’s Summer Youth Internship program beyond the work sites we used last summer.

e. Hold conversations with new clients that are going to be in the homemaker program about enhanced employment or working part-time.

Progress to date: Since not everyone is ready to go to work when they come to DBVI, staff from all disciplines holds the conversation about employment with the new client. This way the client has the opportunity to hear about employment at various stages during his/her services. We have not measured this in the first six months of this federal fiscal year, but will do so by the end of the third quarter. We will accomplish this by using a special indicator in our case management system that will allow us to track this more effectively. Currently, VR Counselors maintain a quarterly projected employment closure list to continually review the status of consumers. This allows VRC to evaluate those individuals who may not be able to be closed and perhaps provide intervention to remediate the issue to enable the person to be closed as initially projected.

Region III has implemented a Group Class which has 9 participants and will continue for five full days. This will provide each of the participants with an accelerated and supplemental VRT, O&M and functional vision program and in addition provide for the much needed networking and support component of Blindness Rehabilitation.

Objective 3: To expand the number of Maine employers who implement diversity hiring activities through engagement with the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services’ Business Relations Specialists from two in FFY 2011 to four in FFY 2012 to six in FY 2013

Strategies:

f. Support the re-establishment of a Maine Chapter of the US Business Leadership Network

g. Partner with the Maine State Chamber of Commerce and the Society of Human Resource Managers (SHRM) to expand business outreach/network

h. Identify and train local VR and CRP personnel to coordinate referrals and start up activities for new business partners, in each region of the state

The Bureau of Rehabilitation Services has expanded its Business Employment Team from one full-time position in 2012, to two full-time Business Relations Specialists in 2013. They are dividing the state into a northern and southern region, and are focusing their network building efforts on businesses that have 100 or more employees. This model uses the single point of contact, and supports the business-to-business model begun by Walgreen’s. This team has a seat on the Maine Business Leadership Network and is connected to the Chamber of Commerce personnel through this involvement. DBVI has regional contact with our BRS business Relations Specialists, as well as regular attendance at its weekly meetings. To date, two DBVI clients have been hired through this groups efforts with Tambrands in Auburn, but numerous other opportunities are on the horizon through this model. Some of the other businesses that are close to signing on to this model are LL Bean and Lowes, while many others are in preliminary conversations with our business Relations Specialists (New Balance, IDEX, Oxford Casino, for example).

There is currently one vacancy in this Business Employment Team. The one Business Relations Specialist is redesigning the strategies being used and is conducting regional focus groups to get information from local VR staff and providers in order to build “Regional Business Relations Plans.” This will hopefully increase the buy-in and hopefully result in more hires through partnerships.

Another new strategy is to emphasize the options of the levels of engagement in which the business can engage. Although employment remains the ultimate goal of any partnership, we are encouraging a commitment to other activities such as informational interviewing, tours of the business, mentoring, interview practice sessions, etc. This new focus is also being adopted by the Maine Business Leadership Network in order to engage new business members.

Goal 2: To provide more focused activities to transition-age youth that will yield an increase in successful outcomes in each of the next three federal fiscal years.

Objective: To reduce the percentage of students we “lose” from our VR Program just before or after graduation from the 40% noted by RSA during the 2011 Site Monitoring Review, to less than 10% by FFY 2015.

Strategies:

a. Create a college preparation Program consisting of taking a college course in the summer between junior and senior year, living in the dorms, utilizing services available on-campus, skills of blindness instruction, and a work experience.

Progress to date: Progress to date: A five week college prep program is scheduled to run in the summer of 2014, from July 6 until August 8. To date, we have 8 students confirmed to attend. In addition, we have 4 RA’s with visual impairments participating as a summer youth employment experience. The students will be taking an entry level English course for credit, and will be living in the dorms. DBVI staff, Iris Network staff, and UMaine staff are secured to teach or facilitate the various seminars and learning labs.

b. Create a summer youth employment and/or work experience for all students by

age 16.

Progress to date: Approximately 4-6 participants will be involved in the 2014 Summer Youth Internship. Four of these students will be hired as Resident Assistants for the College Prep. Program, and potentially two others will work in BEP sites or sites in the private sector.

The Division for the Blind & Visually Impaired organized a field trip for students who are blind & visually impaired to learn about the importance of first jobs. The event was part of a field trip program focused on addressing disability specific skills acquisition (Expanded Core Curriculum). The students were from southern and western Maine. Our goal was to help the students understand the need for early work experiences and where/how teens get their first jobs. Many students who are blind and visually impaired do not have the same opportunities to learn about work because much of what most of us know comes from "incidental learning" which is the casual observations (visual) that people with vision do all the time- they notice that the bagger is placing objects in a bag a certain way, they notice that someone has put the product on a shelf so that the labels are facing a particular way, etc.

Our student group volunteered at 2 different food banks, then took the city bus to USM to meet with a guidance counselor to discuss various careers, then from there experienced cafeteria food, and then took the city bus back to the Portland CareerCenter. This type of “hands on” learning is critical for students with vision impairments. Several students remarked that they didn’t realize they could perform some of the job tasks. Others noted the specific job tasks they liked and those they didn’t like.

c. Set up a program at local schools similar to a “Junior Achievement” model to potentially operate vending machines at the students’ school. This could be a good introduction to the business world and the world of work. The students’ would need to stock equipment, control inventory, set pricing, develop procedures for cash control and profitability.

Progress to date: None.

d. Maine DBVI will activate the Visually Impaired Community Action Team (VICAT) to provide support for transition-aged students.

Progress to date: DBVI will use the Family Services Coordinator at Iris Network to begin this process. Only preliminary talks between this person and our Lewiston office have been done to date.

e. Increase communication between the school and parents and DBVI.

Progress to date: DBVI has been moving its three Blindness Rehabilitation Specialist positions across the state from working with all type of VR cases to working more with parents, schools, and the blindness system. This process has been completed in the Augusta and Rockland offices, and will be completed in the Bangor and Presque Isle offices by the end of the summer. This process will begin in Portland during this upcoming summer. To date the Portland position has been running a VR transition caseload and not doing the educational components this position requires. We are not quite sure how we will cover the number of transition VR cases once we make this transfer in Portland. Also, we have no plan as yet for how to expand this work in our

Lewiston office as we only have the three positions targeted to do this work.

f. Stressing the importance of attending summer immersion programs at centers like the Carroll Center or Perkins School for the Blind for skills of blindness advancement and socialization (or building such a program of our own in Maine).

Progress to date: DBVI contracted with the Iris Network to build a program for addressing these issues for the transition-aged population. A curriculum has been put together and we are just beginning to look at how to implement it as both a summer program (for 2014) as well as a number of weekends throughout the year. In addition, we have a number of clients participating in summer programs at the Carroll Center and the Perkins School for the Blind.

* 1. Utilize the Transition Competencies Checklist with each VR eligible school-age student.

Progress to date: The Transition Competencies Checklist was begun to be used with students 10 and older in academic year 2011-2012. Dr. Wolffe was contracted last year to build this data collection instrument, which measures what the students are doing, not just what they have been taught, electronically via Survey Monkey. This will make it easier for staff to complete the instrument, as well as for DBVI to compile the results. This electronic version will be ready for TVI’s, O&Ms, parents, and students to start using by early in May. For this academic year we have raised the starting age from 10 to 12.

h. Re-establish DBVI positions that specifically serve this population. This would allow more early intervention and resource development, especially in the areas of career education and vocational exploration

Progress to date: As of July, 2013, DBVI has three positions that will serve this population statewide. Also, the Transition Tote materials were purchased from American Printing House for the Blind to facilitate early intervention and resource development, especially in the areas of career education and vocational exploration. See item e above for additional information.

i. Having Transition teams in each region. The teams could coordinate and/or be points of contact for exchange of info.

Progress to date: A functioning transition team has been formed in each of the DBVI manager regions.

j. Collect and analyze the evaluation data from clients that go through these programs.

Progress to data: Although data collection has begun across a number of these activities, it is too soon to do any analysis of the data.

Goal 3: To ensure that a larger number of individuals, with disabilities who may be unserved or underserved or have minority status, have access to DBVI services.

Objective: DBVI will work with Maine’s Section 121 VR Grant – Wabanaki Vocational Rehabilitation to identify an increased number of individuals eligible to be served by both programs.

Strategies:

a. Maine DBVI will include Wabanaki Vocational Rehabilitation in training and technical assistance opportunities offered or funded by DBVI.

Progress to date: The Director of the Wabanaki Vocational Rehabilitation has participated in numerous training activities with DBVI staff. Some of these included our SRC Annual Training last October and a transition workshop with all of BRS transition VR Counselors in April.

b. A representative from the Wabanaki Vocational Rehabilitation will participate on DBVI’s State Rehabilitation Council (SRC)

Progress to date: The Director of the Wabanaki VR Program continues to actively participate on DBVI’s SRC.

c. The Wabanaki VR Program will provide technical assistance to Maine DBVI on issues related to cultural competency and best practices in Native employment supports.

Progress to date: None.

d. DBVI will provide in-service training to staff at tribal health or community centers of the four Maine tribes (Passamaquoddy Tribe, Penobscot Indian Nation, Houlton Band of Maliseets, and Aroostook Band of Micmac Indians) on an annual basis.

Progress to date: The VRC from Wabanaki VR Program attended one of DBVI’s regional meetings.

Other progress to date: The Pleasant Point Health Center is the medical services point of contact for the Passamaquoddy tribe at Pleasant Point in Perry ME. The Health Center offers general medical care and behavioral health are on site 5 days a week and hosts numerous medical specialty clinic periodically. In April 2014, there was an in-service provided to the Health Center to present information about DBVI and services for blind and visually impaired individuals. Staff discussed the referral process, IL and VR programs, eligibility, IPE, and goal oriented services towards employment and independence.

Two staff members will provide an in-service to staff at the Penobscot Nation Housing on Thursday, June 26th.

Objective: Maine DBVI will collect data on the numbers of individuals served – in various minority, unserved or underserved categories in FFY12 to establish a baseline and develop future goals.

Strategies:

a. Maine DBVI will develop and utilize a special indicator in its case management system to track individuals who belong in these groups:

* consumers associated with the correctional system
* veterans who are blind or have low vision
* consumers who are older
* consumers from other countries who are new to Maine
* consumers who are deaf-blind or with a dual sensory impairment of hearing and vision.

Progress to date: Most of these indicators have been implemented into our case management system, ME Aware, which will enable us to track the individuals within these various groups. This new case management system went live in the very beginning of federal fiscal year 2012.

Objective: Maine DBVI will reach out to non-English speaking immigrants and refugees experiencing vision loss and provide at least two different options for providing service to this population.

Strategies:

a. Maine DBVI will work with interpreter services so consumers can benefit from available blindness rehabilitative services and better their chances for employment in a new country.

Progress to date: DBVI has paid for interpreter services in southern & central Maine so consumers can learn more about the blindness rehabilitative services that are available and how they can benefit from these services.

b. Creating two classes to provide instruction in English as a second language in a manner adapted for blindness or visual impairment.

Progress to date: DBVI had planned to work with an individual to provide instruction in English as a second language adapted for blindness and/or visual impairment. However, there is no progress todate.

Objective: DBVI will continue its efforts to grow a communication network for consumers who are deaf-blind or dual sensory impaired (hearing and vision) so that there are professional Deaf-Blind Interpreters and Support Service Providers (SSP) available in each of DBVI’s five state regions.

Strategies:

a. Secure funding for coordinated operation of the Maine SSP program.

Progress to date: DBVI worked with Iris Network to have their Community Connections position have dedicated time to spend on the Support Service Project.

b. Work with collaborative partners to increase training opportunities for Deaf-Blind Interpreters and SSP’s.

Progress to date: DBVI Director continues to work with the Independence Without Fear program to support additional deaf-blind interpreter and SSP training opportunities. Out of this came an SSP course at USM.

c. Encourage more deaf-blind/dual sensory impaired consumers to take an active role on the steering committee working on the interpreting and SSP project.

Progress to date: We had up to three persons who are deaf-blind or dual sensory impaired (hearing and vision) participate on the steering committee so far this year. Unfortunately, two of them are moving out of state soon.

d. Work with collaborative partners to identify funding for SSP’s.

Progress to data: The Independence Without Fear steering committee has evaluated current funding possibilities through targeted funding for personal care assistants funded by DHHS and administered by ALPHA One. SSP services do not fit under this funding, so additional resources are being explored.

Goal 4: To provide increased activities for public outreach, education and awareness of existing services and resources for the community and consumers who are blind or have low vision.

Objective: Maine DBVI will work with providers to create a better awareness of the resources available to individuals who are blind or have low vision by providing at least three public education activities in each of the five DBVI Regions.

Strategies:

a. Maine DBVI staff will provide in-service trainings to other service providers within their region.

Progress to date: On March 4th, two staff members presented to a class at Central Maine Community College on blindness services.

On April 7, staff spoke to staff at Mano en Mano in Milbridge about services for blind or visually impaired individuals.

In April, services for individuals who are blind or have low vision were discuss with staff at EAAA in Bangor.

On May 1st, an in-service was provided to the Penquis Resource Exchange. The in-service was to talk about the programs within DBVI to the staff. This same day, DBVI staff had a table at a Job and Resource Fair at Foxcroft Academy that was sponsored by Penquis and Maine Stream Finance.

On May 2nd, DBVI staff met with blind and visually impaired consumers from the Dover-Foxcroft area at the Thompson Free Library. Staff presented on DBVI programs and services. Brochures were handed out.

On May 7th, there was O&M training provided by DBVI staff to the staff at the Friendship House in Bucksport.

On May 29th, DBVI met with the Clinton Lions’ Club to go over the programs within DBVI and what services are available to those individuals who are blind or have low vision.

b. Maine DBVI Staff will provide service awareness and assistive technology/adaptive device activities for consumers and the general public within their regions.

Progress to date: Each region is working on setting up a training area with assistive technology/adaptive equipment for consumers to demo when they come into the DBVI offices. The CareerCenters will offer JAWS and Zoomtext for consumers to use when they utilize the services within the CareerCenters.

c. DBVI will coordinate cooperative training with Maine Department of Transportation.

The Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired from DOL, in collaboration with DOT, hosted a nationally developed, grant funded workshop in Augusta to learn about Accessible Pedestrian Signals (APS). The November 7th training, provided by two national presenters on the topic: Daniel Carter and Janet Barlow, was aimed at Orientation and Mobility Specialists, Traffic Engineers and Signal Technicians at the State and local levels. Over 50 state and municipal employees attended the training which addressed the legalities and features of APS, along with the why, how, when, and where of installation. DOT/traffic engineers are charged with the design and implementation of safe pedestrian (and traffic) flow, while O&M Specialists teach blind and visually impaired persons travel skills and how to negotiate at those intersections/street crossings. In addition to providing valuable information about accessible intersections, the training opened the door to a dynamic collaboration between these two disciplines. To date, DBVI staff have been involved with pedestrian traffic planning in Portland, Lewiston, and Augusta.

i. DBVI will work with its main contractors to create a more organized and more centralized public education effort.

Progress to date: The public education efforts by one of our main contractors are captured and provided in written report to DBVI.

j. DBVI will redesign the Registry of Blindness cards, including an on-line version.

Progress to date: None.

f. DBVI will make face-to-face visits to eye doctor’s offices following distribution of Registry of Blindness cards.

Progress to date: No progress was made on this objective in FFY14.

g. DBVI will explore collaboration with the Veteran’s Administration Blind Rehabilitation program to streamline the referral process between the two agencies.

Progress to date: Staff from the VA Blind Rehab. program came to a DBVI training to present on their program so staff would gain a better understanding of how the two agencies can best serve consumers who are blind or have low vision. In addition, DBVI Director met with the Blindness Rehabilitation Outreach Specialist and the Vision Impairment Services Team Coordinator to refine a more streamlined referral process.

Goal 5: To improve opportunities and access for DBVI consumers within the larger workforce development system.

Objective: Maine DBVI will partner with Maine’s Disability Employment Initiative (DEI) Grant to identify non-VR CareerCenter customers who are blind or have low vision who may require DBVI services.

Strategies:

a. Maine DBVI will work with a designated point of contact with the Bureau of Employment Services.

Progress to date: There has been a small but impactful interaction with DBVI customers, primarily around something referred to under the DEI grant objectives as Accelerated Resource Coordination (ARC). During an ARC customers will meet with a team within a CareerCenter made up of DEI coordinators, members of BES, or NMDC, or DVR, or DBVI to find a solution to a customer’s immediate, pressing need. In most cases DEI’s involvement has been to use its Flexible Employment Fund (FEF) to financially assist the customers to overcome a barrier in order to continue going to their job or finding employment.

Objective: To increase the number of DBVI clients achieving an employment outcome at one of the BRS Single Point of Contact businesses from one to three in the next year.

Strategies:

a. DBVI will have direct representation on the business liaison teams utilizing the single point of entry approach and the Walgreen’s universal design model.

Progress to date: DBVI has successfully placed two clients at TAMBRANDS which is one of the businesses identified through this model. TAMBRANDS is currently employing 29 VR consumers. The DBVI Regional Manager in Lewiston is our representative on this, and the LL Bean project. DBVI has also worked with Bates College to talk about DBVI consumers who may benefit from a work relationship with the college in the future.

*2. Identify all supported employment program goals consistent with the goals described in Attachment 4.11(c) (4), including an evaluation of the extent to which the supported employment program goals were achieved.*

* *Identify the strategies that contributed to the achievement of the goals.*
* *Provide a description of the factors that impeded the achievement of the goals and priorities.*

The Division has remained committed to assuring that individuals with the most severe disabilities receive supported employment services when this is appropriate. An Individual Plan of Employment (IPE) is developed that describes the services provided, the need for extended services, if appropriate, and an assurance that the individual has been able to make an informed choice in the provision of these services and the goal itself.

Our goal in FFY14 was to work with 19 consumers in the supported employment program. There were 20 consumers in the supported employment program six months into the FFY15.

The lack of adequate long term funding as well as the lack of a variety of natural supports, has limited the number of consumers within DBVI achieving supported employment.

*3. Provide an Assessment of the performance of the VR program on the standards and indicators for FY 2013.*

DBVI Vocational Rehabilitation Program

Performance Standards

*Federal fiscal year 2013*

Evaluation Standard and Performance Indicators for the Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired’s VR program

GOAL: To achieve successful performance on Evaluation Standard 1 (Employment outcomes) by meeting or exceeding the performance levels established for four of the six performance indicators in the evaluation standard, including meeting or exceeding the performance level for two of the three primary indicators (Performance Indicators 1.3, 1.4, 1.5). However, agencies serving blind or visually impaired individuals use a two year aggregate for reporting purposes. The chart below shows the two year aggregate number for three years.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **S&I** | **RSA11** | **RSA12** | **RSA13** | **Required Performance Level** |
| **1** | **261** | **228** | **225** | **(same or +1)** |
| **2** | **69.05%** | **64.59%** | **66.18%** | **68.9** |
| **3** | **33.72%** | **35.53%** | **37.78%** | **35.4** |
| **4** | **100.00%** | **100.00%** | **100.00%** | **89** |
| **5** | **0.826** | **0.877** | **0.791** | **59** |
| **6** | **34.09%** | **39.51%** | **47.06%** | **30.4** |

Standard 1: Employment Outcomes

Performance 1.1 Change in Employment Outcomes

DBVI is showing 109 closures at the end of the fourth quarter for FFY13. This is seven less than the total for FFY12. However, agencies serving blind or visually impaired individuals use a two year aggregate for reporting purposes. For FFY13, the aggregate number is 225 and the aggregate number for FFY12 was 228. Therefore, DBVI will not meet this standard for FFY13.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Quarter/Year | # of closures | Diff s/b =/same as previous period (112 total for 2011) | Standard |
| Oct 1 2012 – Sept 30 2013 | 109 | -7 | Not met |
| Oct 1 2011 – Sept 30 2012 | 116 | +4 | Not met |
| Oct 1 2010 – Sept 30 2011 | 112 |  |  |

Performance 1.2 Percent of Employment Outcomes

This indicator seeks to compare successful closures against all closures after receiving services. The prescribed indicator for DBVI is 68.9%. When combining the raw data for a two year period, DBVI has a performance level of 66.18% and therefore has not met this standard.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Quarter/Year | # of 26’s | # of 26 & 28’s | Perf. Level  s/b+/>68.9% | Standard |
| Oct 1 2012 – Sept 30 2013 | 109 | 163 | 66.87% | Not met |
| Oct 1 2011 – Sept 30 2012 | 116 | 177 | 65.54% | Not met |

Performance 1.3 Competitive Employment Outcomes

This indicator is the first of three primary indicators. This indicator is to measure what % of all successful closures represent closures in competitive, self-, or BEP with hourly rate of earnings equivalent to at least the federal or state minimum wage. The prescribed % for DBVI is 35.4%. For the final quarter of FFY13, DBVI had 37 closures that represent competitive, self-, or BEP with the hourly rate of earnings equivalent to at least the federal or state minimum wage. This gives DBVI a performance level of 33.94% . Using the raw data for a two year aggregate, DBVI has a performance level of 37.78% which is above the required level. Therefore, DBVI has met this primary indicator for FFY13.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Quarter/Year | # of 26’s | # of 26’s  in specified category | Perf. Level  S/b =/> 35.4% | Standard |
| Oct 1 2012 – Sept 30 2013 | 109 | 37 | 33.94% | Not Met |
| Oct 1 2011 – Sept 30 2012 | 116 | 48 | 41.4% | Met |

Performance indicator 1.4 Significance of Disability

This is the 2nd primary indicator, which measures the % of closures in competitive, self-, or BEP with the hourly rate of earnings equivalent to at least the federal or state minimum wage that were individuals with significant disabilities. The prescribed indicator for DBVI is 89%. For the fourth quarter of FFY13, DBVI met this standard with 100% of the performance level. DBVI was at 100% of the performance level at this same time period a year ago. Therefore, using the two year aggregate, DBVI is at 100% and has met this primary indicator.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Quarter/Year | # of 26’s  in specified category | # of 26’s  in specified category w/ sign. dis. | Perf. Level  S/b =/> 89% | Standard |
| Oct 1 2012 – Sept 30 2013 | 37 | 37 | 100% | Met |
| Oct 1 2011 – Sept 30 2012 | 48 | 48 | 100% | Met |

Performance indicator 1.5 Earnings Ratio

This is the 3rd primary indicator and is used to measure the average earnings of exiting VR clients (in competitive, self-, or BEP with the hourly rate of earnings equivalent to at least the federal or state minimum wage) to the State of Maine average earnings (as derived from the Bureau of Labor Statistics report “State Average Annual Pay” for the most recent available year).

In order to meet this indicator, DBVI must meet a performance level of 59%. For the fourth quarter of FFY13, DBVI has exceeded the required performance level with 83%. When using the two year aggregate, DBVI exceeds the prescribed level for this indicator. Therefore, DBVI has met this 3rd primary indicator.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Quarter/Year | # of 26’s  in specified category | # of 26’s  in specified category – ave hourly earn | ME’s  Ave hrly | Perf. Level  S/b =/> 59% | Standard |
| Oct 1 2012 – Sept 30 2013 | 37 | $15.95 | $19.32 | 83% | Met |
| Oct 1 2011 – Sept 30 2012 | 48 | $13.32 | $18.98 | 70% | Met |

Performance indicator 1.6 Self-Support

This indicator measures the difference between the percentage of individuals identified in PI 1.3, who report their own income as the largest single source of economic support at the time they exit the program and the percentage who report their own income as the largest single source of support (SOS) at the time they apply for VR services.

DBVI must have a performance level of 30.4 in order to meet this indicator. DBVI reached a performance level of 48.65 at the end of the fourth quarter of the FFY13. DBVI was at a performance level of 45.83for this same time period a year ago. The two year aggregate is above the prescribed level for this indicator. Therefore, DBVI has met this indicator for FFY13.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Quarter/Year | # of 26’s  in specified category | Primary SOS  At application | Primary SOS  At closure | Perf. Level  S/b 30.4 (math diff) | Standard |
| Oct 1 2012 – Sept 30 2013 | 37 | 9 | 27 | 48.65 | Met |
| Oct 1 2011 – Sept 30 2012 | 48 | 13 | 35 | 45.83 | Met |

(The performance level is calculated by taking the number at application divided by the number of 26’s;

then subtract the number at closure divided by the number of 26’s. For example: 9/37 -27/37 = 48.65)

Standard 2: Assess Equal Access Opportunity for Individuals of all Groups and Backgrounds

GOAL: To achieve successful performance on Evaluation Standard 2 (Equal access), by meeting or exceeding the performance level established for Performance Indicator 2.1 or meet the performance requirement in paragraph (2) (iii).

(iii) If a DSU’s performance does not meet or exceed the performance level required for Performance Indicator 2.1, or if fewer than 100 individuals from a minority population have exited the VR program during the reporting period, the DSU must describe the policies it has adopted or will adopt and the steps it has taken or will take to ensure that individuals with disabilities from minority backgrounds have equal access to VR services.

Performance 2.1

DBVI must meet or exceed a ratio level of .80.

At this time, DBVI is serving significantly less than 100 individuals.

RSA is looking at the proportion of minorities who receive services compared to the ratio of non-minorities served to calculate the service rate. At the end of the fourth quarter, DBVI has a service rate of 0.822. For this same period of time a year ago, DBVI had a service rate of 0.751.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 2.1 (minorities served) | 10/01/2012 – 9/30/2013 | | 10/1/2011 – 9/30/2012 | |
|  | All | 26&28 | All | 26&28 |
| Total # Non-minority | **196** | **159** | **217** | **171** |
| Total # Minorities | **6** | **4** | **10** | **6** |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| % Minorities in VR | **3%** | **2.5%** | **4.4%** | **3.4%** |
| % Minorities Srvd |  | **66.7%** |  | **60%** |
| % Non-Minority Srvd |  | **81.1%** |  | **78.8%** |
| Serv. Rate for Min |  | 0.822 |  | 0.751 |
| s/b .80 or> |  |  |  |  |

Three year comparison of Performance Standards

The chart below designates the standards and indicators for three federal fiscal years. This data allowed us to look at the numbers and determine if we were in line with other years or there was some sort of anomaly. The numbers listed in the chart are for a single FFY. RSA measures us on a two year aggregate. Therefore, we must use the two year combined data to determine if we met each of these standards.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **October – September**  FFY13 | | |
| S&I | **2011** | **2012** | **2013** |
| **1.1 ~ # of 26 closures** | **112** | **116** | **109** |
| **1.2 ~ Rehab Rate 68.9%** | **63.6%** | **65.5%** | **66.87%** |
| **1.3 ~ Competitive Rate 35.4%** | **29.5%** | **41.4%** | **33.94%** |
| **1.4 ~ Sig. of disability 89%** | **100%** | **100%** | **100%** |
| **1.5 ~ Earnings Ratio 59%** | **106%** | **70%** | **83%** |
| **1.6 ~ Self-support 30.4** | **27.27** | **45.83** | **48.65** |

*4. Provide a report on how the funds reserved for innovation and expansion (I&E) activities were utilized in FY 2013.*

Title I resources continue to be used for development and expansion of assistive technology and low vision rehabilitation services for DBVI consumers in collaboration with all of our blindness rehabilitation services partners throughout the state.

**A. Redesign of DBVI’s Low Vision Delivery System**

The Division supported the development of low vision rehabilitation services in communities throughout Maine in order to make these vital services more accessible for consumers. The division worked with community providers to assure that quality low vision services were provided in all settings to include Ophthalmologists and Optometrists offices as well as public or private low vision clinics.

Approximately 90% of DBVI consumers within VR have some degree of usable vision. There are a lot of efforts made to maximize the individual’s remaining vision. This work is connected to employment in that many consumers use their residual vision at the worksite. DBVI works with the consumer to help them effectively use the remaining vision to be the most efficient he/she can be in their job performance and stay competitive within the workforce. It is not only important to identify the need for low vision devices techniques to increase productivity, it is also important to determine the need to switch from using one’s vision to a non-visual method to become more effective. To be able to more effectively serve the needs of these consumers, DBVI began a project to totally redesign its entire low vision delivery system. A small work group was established in 2011 to begin this redesign work. A training curriculum was developed to provide staff the ability to do a functional vision evaluation and gave staff more expertise to identify when a job site evaluation is needed or when additional training in low vision is warranted. This redesigned training process and curriculum were completed, and were conducted by DBVI staff and contracted staff. Training of existing staff was completed in November of 2012, with an additional training session for new staff being completed in March of 2013. With the recent turnover of staff, another training was provided to new staff in April 2014.

**B. Piloting the use of Apple Products**

The Apple company has created access to its products for people who are blind or have low vision by including a “voice over” option as a standard component of all its mainstream products. With this “out-of-the-box” accessibility also came the introduction of numerous applications (APPS) that enhanced independence and self-sufficiency for consumers who are blind or visually impaired.

DBVI created a pilot program that began with the iPod touch that would provide some staff the opportunity to learn and teach APPS pertinent to blindness or visual impairment, as well as to look at ways to increase staff productivity by increasing efficiency for data collection and storage.

The pilot program with the iPod Touch was completed in 2011. The next phase of this project was to conduct the same exercises with iPads, and was completed early in FY2012. The ability to use iPads with consumers has been expanded to all O&M and Blindness Rehabilitation Specialist staff in FFY13.

**C. Deaf-Blind and Dual Sensory Communication**

DBVI continued with its efforts to address a critical need for highly qualified professional interpreters and other well-trained staff with skills to work with our consumers of the VR program who are deaf-blind or have the dual sensory impairment of vision and hearing. Due to the limited access in Maine to anyone with this specialty training, both from within DBVI and elsewhere, the Division continued its work with a group of collaborative partners (University of Southern Maine, Helen Keller National Center, Maine Department of Health and Human Services, Maine Division of the Deaf, Late Deafened and Hard of Hearing, and The Iris Network) that began in 2011 to provide specialized training to a number of individuals who will serve as professional Deaf-Blind Interpreters, as well as volunteers within the Support Service Provider (SSP) program. The program was designed to connect these professional Deaf-Blind Interpreters and volunteer SSP’s with adults with dual sensory impairments who are in need of these types of communication access services.

To date, approximately 25 individuals have been trained and are available to provide these volunteer SSP services, while approximately 20 professional ASL interpreters have been trained as interpreters for people who are deaf-blind. This first cohort of trained Deaf-Blind Interpreters and SSP’s received opportunities for additional “hands-on” training working directly with consumers during FY2012. In addition, a process for matching consumers to the needed service providers was developed and implemented, and avenues for additional training were identified. In addition, the participation of deaf-blind consumers as part of the steering committee of collaborative partners was increased in FFY 2013, and the role of the Community Connections position at The Iris Network was expanded to administer the SSP program, as well.

**D. Employability Skills Program**

The Employability Skills Program (ESP) was developed to assist clients who are long-term un/underemployed, or who are somehow stuck in job seeking. Although the curriculum development and initial staff training were begun in FY2010, the curriculum and staff training were completed in FY2011. To accomplish this task, DBVI contracted with Karen Wolffe, Ph. D., who is internationally known for her work on employment for people who are blind or visually impaired.

The first cohort of clients participated in the initial ESP in June of 2011. Seven clients participated in the week-long training that used an immersion model to conduct this program. This was followed by participation in an on-going job club via telecommuting. Of the seven participants in this first cohort, six entered employment and two entered additional training subsequent to their completing the ESP experience (measured at 18 months post-ESP participation).

The second cohort participated in the ESP in March of 2012. Two participants entered employment, with the other five entering program to obtain additional training by the 12 month mark following completion of this second ESP.

A third offering of the ESP adapted to college students in their junior or senior year, was planned for May of FY13, but was cancelled due to low enrollment. We need at least six participants to make the program cost and time-effective, and only four participants had signed up for this program. We have already begun talking with our clients who are in college to market this type of program for FY14. Another offering of the ESP is scheduled for November 2014.

As part of the work with Dr. Wolffe, various evaluation processes were planned and developed. The first evaluation, which focused on ESP participants, was completed shortly after completion of the immersion portion of the program. Additional work with Dr. Wolffe was done in FY 12 and 13 to enhance our evaluation of this program. We are now at the point where we measure client progress immediately following completion of the program, and then again six months after their completion. In addition, we also measure VR Counselors at the six month mark following completion of their client’s participation, and track the progress of clients at six month intervals.

**E. Center-based, Immersion Model Blindness Rehabilitation**

Throughout fiscal years 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, and into 2013, DBVI consistently heard from consumers about the need to have a center-based, immersion model for receiving blindness rehabilitation and training within Maine. The message received from consumers was very clear in that many clients of DBVI who could benefit from this model choose not to avail themselves of it because their only option to do so at present is to leave the state.

DBVI management began discussing this need, and potential avenues for creating such a program in Maine throughout FY2011, 2012, and into 2013. Through these discussions it was realized that we could use our existing staff to provide the needed services, but that creating the needed physical facility was to foremost barrier to our moving forward, as this would need substantial funding.

As the difficult budgetary times continued in Maine, it was evident that we would need to look elsewhere for the funding needed to establish a facility that could meet this need. The use of the establishment grant process through the use of federal reallotment funds were looked at as a distinct possibility and preliminary conversations to learn more about this process began with RSA staff late in FY 2011, 2012 and continued into FY13. In addition, this concept was discussed at SRC meetings throughout that time span, as well.

**F. Summer Youth Employment Internships**

DBVI began to look for more formalized programming for transition-age youth that will increase the number of successful employment outcomes for this population. A number of DBVI management staff who attended national conferences and meetings learned about an emerging best practice being utilized by the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind (MCB). DBVI invited Janet LeBreck, the MCB Commissioner, to Maine to introduce this model to management and VR Counselors within DBVI.

This training session with Commissioner LeBreck consisted of a review of the history and origin of this program, discussion of how they initially began this program, the various barriers and pit-falls they encountered and how they were addressed, and how they have grown the program into the success model it is today. They culminated with a descriptive analysis of their client demographics and other statistical information.

DBVI management and VR counselors agreed that this is the type of program we were looking for, and plans to begin organizing our effort were slated to begin early in FY2012. Four transition-aged students participated in this program in the summer of 2012. Internship sites at various DBVI Business Enterprise Program locations in northern and southern Maine were used for these students. Plans are underway to expand this program in FY13, again utilizing BEP sites as well as expanding to non BEP sites.

**G. Transition Students**

Although many of these activities were funded with state dollars, the activities were integral for the students to practice new and emerging skills in the following areas of the Expanded Core Curriculum: recreation and leisure skills, orientation and mobility skills, social interaction skills, independent living skills and self-determination skills.

* Scavenger hunt at the Maine Mall

This is an annual activity that has been happening for many years. The idea is that students are teamed up (2 to a team). Teams are put in 1 of 3 groups (labeled A, B or C – according to experience and skill level). Teams compete against each other in their level to be the one to find the most items on a list. The lists (made in Braille or Large print) consist of items that can be found at the mall and a list of questions to answer. Students are given $5. for items that have to be purchased (many items are free and student would not be able to purchase everything on the list with only $5, so there is a fair amount of planning, strategizing etc.). Students are given a deadline to meet and must be returned to a named location by that time, or they are docked points.

Overall the activity is great for practicing and reinforcing ADLs, O&M, self-advocacy, teamwork, social skills and even Braille skills.

Afternoon activity involves Gift shopping for family members which also involves some of these same ECC skills.

* Students volunteered at two different food banks.
* Students took a field trip to the Office for Students with Disabilities at USM. They utilized public transportation to and from and experienced dining in the cafeteria.
* Students were involved in cross country ski/snow shoe activities.
* Students were also involved in adaptive games.

Each of these activities challenges the students to use/practice the ECC skills by learning to navigate safely in the designated area and follow the instructions that are provided to them.

**Attachment 6.3 Quality, Scope, and Extent of Supported Employment Services (This section is divided into four subsections)**

* *Describe quality, scope, and extent of supported employment services to be provided to individuals with the most significant disabilities*
* *Describe the timing of the transition to extended services*

The Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired continues to provide and expand supported employment services for individuals who are blind or have low vision living in Maine. We are committed to assuring that the individuals with the most severe disabilities for whom a supported employment setting is most appropriate will have an IPE that describes the services to be provided, documents the need for post-employment services and how they will be provided, and gives assurance that extended employment services will be in an integrated setting. The applicant will receive information concerning the availability of employment options and vocational rehabilitation services to supported employment in an integrated setting. If the individual chooses not to pursue employment in an integrated setting, he/she will be referred to other systems for services.

(1) Quality of Supported Employment Services:

The Division made the commitment to participate in the development of an electronic information system – ME Aware, the case management system that monitors these services and streamlines the case management process in the VR Program. The staff now have access to up-to-date information on weekly wages, hours worked, public assistance at the time of application and closure, the cost per case, and the average cost by counselor, region, and state. We are now able to track the individuals who are eligible for VR but for whom the lack of long-term support prevents the development of a plan. The system will enable us to evaluate who is being served, costs related to supported employment, its benefit to the client, and other systemic issues.

The Division gets technical assistance in supported employment that is available through the Rehabilitation Research and Training Center at Virginia Commonwealth University.

The agency remains committed to continuous quality improvement in order to provide better services to our customers. There is an ongoing self-evaluation process that will positively impact the quality of all service areas, including supported employment.

(2) Scope of Supported Employment:

The primary service provided to clients in supported employment continues to be job skills training. This service is performed by a job coach who also provides intervention with supervisors and peers towards integrating into the company's social environment. Other services which are provided when a need has been identified include: supplemental assessments, job development and placement, social skills training, specific skills of blindness training, transportation, support services to parents, spouse and children, and/or facilitation of natural supports. Trial work settings should be available to assess the consumer’s ability to work in an integrated, competitive setting. The agency provides whatever is required to achieve and maintain integrated competitive employment.

The majority of supported employment services are being provided to individuals who are blind or have low vision along with developmental disabilities or with severe and prolonged mental illness. There still is some restriction in getting long-term support commitment through DHHS (formerly the Bureau of Mental Health and Mental Retardation and Substance Abuse Services) due to funding limitations, and the limitation of other sources.

Due to these current restrictions and the fact that the success of the supported employment model, as a whole, will ultimately hinge on the ability of the system to continue to develop options for extended/long-term support, the Division focuses on greater utilization of natural supports and the various SSI/SSDI work incentives as well as trying to explore new ideas for extended support. The Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Act (TWWIA) offers additional support to persons in Supported Employment.

The Division participates in the state-funded Long-term Support Program, which allows us to purchase extended support for individuals who are blind or have low vision. In addition, DBVI receives state funds for extended support for individuals with brain injuries, who are also blind or visually impaired. Both of these appropriations are very limited in the number of people who can be supported.

(3) Extent of Supported Employment Services:

The Division served twenty supported employment clients in FFY 2013 with at least two individuals getting closed successfully in an integrated setting.

(4) Timing of Transition from Extended Employment to Integrated Employment:

In day-to-day practice, a team approach is used to determine when an individual has stabilized and reached an acceptable level for transitioning to integrated employment.

This process calls for continual communication between the DBVI Rehabilitation Counselor, a representative of the state agency providing extended support and the job coach. The team determines each agency's responsibility, estimates of costs, time in training and the criteria for extended support. Once the agreement to provide extended support is signed, the team meets a minimum of every three months to evaluate progress, and, if needed, amend the agreement. The Division will pay the cost of the rehabilitation services only when the extended support will lead to integrated employment.

Each individual, including those with the most significant disabilities, should get the services and support that he/she needs to work in an integrated, competitive setting.