#

Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired – VR portion of the Unified State Plan

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# Overview

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

#  (A) Input of State Rehabilitation Council

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

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

(1). The State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) meets at least bi-monthly to review and analyze reports, and activities within the division and advise the Maine Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired (DBVI). The SRC DBVI has been involved in Maine’s development of a Unified State Plan, including the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Portion, through:
- Participation in a visioning event to set the strategic vision, goals and objectives with the WIOA core partners and other stakeholders, ensuring that people with disabilities were represented;
- Review and identification of recommendations resulting from DBVI’s Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment FFY 2015-2017;

RSA recently changed the timeframe of data collection from a federal fiscal year to a Program Year.

The State Plan is due on March 2, 2020 this year. This leaves little time to read, review and provide meaningful comments on the Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired VR portion of the State Plan. The SRC would have appreciated more time in which to provide useful and succinct comments.

The SRC looks forward to a continued partnership with DBVI.

Goals in the current plan were written prior to implementation of the new employment service delivery model.  How will this process change any/all goals?

How will VR ensure consistency across Regions 4/5 where no awards in those regions were granted in the new employment services model?

How is client choice being addressed in Region I, II and III where the new service delivery model is being implemented?

How will VR address the drop in successful employment outcomes for adults with disabilities given the new WIOA requirements for serving youth?

 **(L)** State Goals and Priorities

Goal 1: To stabilize DBVI’s financial situation, ensuring the expenditures are budgeted consistently within existing and available federal and state funds.

DBVI has worked diligently to meet and sustain this goal. They have established internal controls to ensure they are on track in budgeting and committing federal and state funds. The SRC feels this no longer needs to be a Goal in DBVI’s State Plan.

 **(O)** State's Strategies

Goal 1: To stabilize DBVI’s financial situation, ensuring the expenditures are budgeted consistently within existing and available federal and state funds.

DBVI has worked diligently to meet and sustain this goal. They have established internal controls to ensure they are on track in budgeting and committing federal and state funds. The SRC feels this no longer needs to be a Goal in DBVI’s State Plan.

The Objective under Goal 1 reads:

“DBVI’s operational expenses will be equal to its federal grant and matching state funds, allowing re-allotment funds to serve as a reserve in times of budget constraints, such as federal continuing resolutions, and a resource for one-time initiatives and will benefit people who are blind and visually impaired in Maine.”

While the SRC does not feel this needs to be a goal, it will recommend that DBVI continue to operate with this philosophy in mind.

Goal 2: To increase successful competitive integrated employment outcomes for DBVI clients.

The first Objective seems a little confusing. The SRC wonders how reducing the time it takes to achieve an outcome would help in attaining a successful competitive integrated employment outcome. The SRC recommends taking this objective out of the DBVI portion of the State Plan. Strategies a. and b. do seem like positive avenues of increasing successful competitive integrated employment outcomes.

The second objective seems a little confusing. The SRC wonders how increasing the number of successful competitive integrated outcomes in a year will help attain Goal 2, but instead, should be part of Goal 2. For example, Goal 2 could read “” To achieve successful competitive integrated employment outcomes for individuals who receive services from “x” in FFY20”x” to “x” in FFY20”x””. Strategies a. through d. provide great pathways to increasing successful competitive integrated employment outcomes.

Objective 3: Under WIOA, the “homemaker” successful closure is no longer an option. DBVI has made a transition from using this closure to following WIOA regulations. DBVI has worked hard to ensure each individual client has an IPE supported by WIOA regulations, beginning with blindness rehabilitation and attaining independent living skills, both of which are necessary to be successful in attaining, regaining and retaining successful competitive integrated employment outcomes. While Strategy c. should be a part of the DBVI portion of the State Plan, the SRC feels this objective no longer needed.

Goal 3: To deliver Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) to youth who are blind and visually impaired, assisting them to successfully live and work independently in the community.

DBVI has been on target with using 15% of federal funds to serve students who are blind and visually impaired. DBVI has established programs, such as College Prep, Living On Your Own, Life 101 and Life 201, to help students transition to competitive integrated employment or to post-secondary education. This is standard operating procedure for DBVI, thus the SRC does not feel this needs to be a goal in DBVI’s portion of the State Plan.

Goal 4: To ensure that a large number of individuals, with disabilities, who may be unserved or underserved or have minority status, have access to DBVI services.

The strategy for the first objective says that DBVI staff will provide input regarding accessibility of transportation for DBVI clients. The SRC wonders to whom will they provide this input? WIOA core partners? How will this help transportation needs? The CSNA done in 2018 show that transportation continues to be the number one barrier to employment. Rural areas offer no alternative transportation methods besides family and friends and, in some areas, taxis are not an option. In areas where there is public transportation, they often stop running at 5:00pm which leaves some without transportation to their home after work. The SRC feels DBVI should continue to work with stakeholders to improve transportation options.

The second objective with strategies a. through d. should remain intact.

The third objective talks of cultivating communication for individuals who are dual sensory impaired, providing interpreters and Support Service Providers (SSP). The SRC thought the SSP program is no longer available so suggests that this be taken out of the objective, as well its strategies. DBVI can better report of the SSP program and the SRC defers to them.

The fourth objective and its strategy should remain in the DBVI portion of the State Plan.

Goal 5: To increase awareness to services and resources for individuals who are blind or have low vision.

The SRC, in partnership with DBVI, did work around making DBVI services and resources more visible to the public. The SRC suggests keeping the objectives and strategies in the DBVI portion of the State Plan. DBVI should continue to educate clients and the general public on available services and resources. The CSNA done in 2018 suggests that only 93% knew they were receiving services from DBVI; resources like AT are not well known; and the CSNA also indicates that DBVI needs to do more work on ensuring clients are aware of the Client Assistance Program. One strategy to add may be: for the SRC and DBVI to have a presence at the Maine Optometric Association conferences; for the SRC and DBVI to continue to work with “211” so that DBVI is the first hit; and to maximize the probability of DBVI being the first hit on internet searches.

Both the DVR and the DBVI Plans are well written, integrating into their Plans programs and partnerships they use/have.

(2). Goals in the current plan were written prior to implementation of the new employment service delivery model.  How will this process change any/all goals?

Agency Response: The employment service delivery continues to be the same for the Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired. The client, through informed choice throughout the rehabilitation process and with the VR counselor, will agree upon an Individual Plan for Employment (IPE) based on the employment goal. DBVI will work mainly with two contractors in regions 1, 2 and 3 for clients with IPEs that require employment services.

How is client choice being addressed in Region I, II and III where the new service delivery model is being implemented?

Agency Response: DBVI clients will have informed choice throughout their rehabilitation process. Once the client has agreed to an IPE that includes employment services to attain the employment goal, a referral is made to a provider for those services. Each of the two major providers of employment services in regions 1, 2, and 3 has a process to provide information regarding services so each consumer can make an informed choice on the provision of those services. There is also a process in place to communicate any dissatisfaction with any of the services and come to a resolution.

How will VR address the drop in successful employment outcomes for adults with disabilities given the new WIOA requirements for serving youth?

Agency Response: DBVI will continue to work with consumers 14 and older to provide blindness rehabilitation services in the VR program. Given the new performance measurements within the WIOA regulations, DBVI will have a greater focus on measurable skill gains and credential attainment as consumers work towards a “career” goal, which may take a longer period of time, causing a decline in the number of successful employment outcomes.

Agency Response to SRC input on Goal #1: DBVI is in agreement with the SRC recommendations and has removed this goal from the state plan.

Agency Response to SRC input on Goal #2: DBVI is in agreement with the SRC recommendations and has removed this goal from the current state plan. New goals have been developed that are more relevant and more in line with the requirements within the WIOA regulations.

Agency Response to SRC input on Goal #3: DBVI is in agreement with the SRC that spending 15% of the VR federal funds on Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) for students aged 14-21 has become part of the standard procedure. It is a requirement for DBVI to report on expenditures made for Pre-ETS activities and is funded based on meeting this requirement. These activities have provided students with many blindness rehabilitation skills, soft skills and better prepared them for employment. Also, parents have been able to see the growth in their children through these activities.

Agency Response to SRC input on Goal #4: The agency agrees that transportation continues to be an unmet need for individuals who are blind or visually impaired and will continue to work with stakeholders to improve transportation options. DBVI continues to work to improve services for consumers with dual sensory loss; one of those services could be an SSP. The Independence Without Fear program is no longer available but SSP services are (on a limited basis) through the University of Southern Maine.

Agency Response to SRC input on Goal #5: The agency will continue to work to increase awareness of DBVI services through various methods and will continue to work with the SRC to provide outreach to individuals who are blind or visually impaired.

(3). DBVI values the input of the SRC and will consider all the recommendations provided. Although the division may remove some of the objectives/strategies under goals 3, 4, and 5, DBVI will continue to work on the provision of Pre-ETS services, continue to provide outreach to the unserved and underserved and increase awareness of DBVI services and resources for individuals who are blind or visually impaired.

**INPUT FROM PUBLIC**:

**From:** **nobody@informe.org**

Question: How does the Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired hope to provide services to the unserved or underserved populations in rural areas in a timely manner?

Agency response: Once the division has identified an individual(s) who is unserved or underserved, a DBVI staff member will connect with the individual to gain a better understanding of the unmet need(s). Once DBVI has received the appropriate documentation, referrals are made to the appropriate organizations for services, e.g., Vision Rehabilitation Therapists services referral to the Iris Network; Orientation and Mobility referral to the O&M within the appropriate DBVI region. Although the time of service provision can vary due to scheduling or a delay in receipt of documentation, providers generally see clients within a couple weeks wherever they reside.

Question: How does the Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired hope to provide services in a timely manner in areas where there is limited staff?

Agency response: The division has experienced a number of vacancies over the last couple of years due to promotions, and retirements. In Maine, unemployment is at an all-time low impacting our ability to fill these vacancies. Many of the vacancies are specialty positions that require the employees to be certified in their field of expertise. This is not just a state dilemma but there is a national shortage of many of these professional positions. In an effort to address the workforce shortage, the division continues to recruit locally, nationally and work with colleges to offer programs that are economically and logistically (online courses) feasible for staff or new recruits to take advantage of. Simultaneously, the division reviews new referrals and strategically assigns regional areas to staff in order to provide services in a timely manner to all consumers – both new referrals and consumers who continue to work on their employment plan.

# (B) Request for Waiver of Statewideness

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

* 1. *a local public agency will provide the non-Federal share of costs associated with the services to be provided in accordance with the waiver request;*
	2. *the designated State unit will approve each proposed service before it is put into effect; and*
	3. *requirements of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan will apply to the services approved under the waiver.*

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

# (C) Cooperative Agreements with Agencies Not Carrying Out Activities Under the Statewide Workforce Development System

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

1. *Federal, State, and local agencies and programs;*
2. *State programs carried out under section 4 of the Assistive Technology Act of 1998;*
3. *Programs carried out by the Under Secretary for Rural Development of the Department of Agriculture;*
4. *Noneducational agencies serving out-of-school youth; and*
5. *State use contracting programs.*

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

**State Agencies**

DBVI, along with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR), has a long-standing relationship and works very closely with the Maine Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). DBVI/DVR and DHHS have two memorandums of understanding (MOU). One MOU is with the Office of Aging and Disability Services, which serves individuals with developmental disabilities and the other is with the Office of Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services (SAMHS) which serves individuals with mental health issues. The MOU’s address the combined efforts that DBVI/DVR and DHHS have initiated to clarify roles to implement an aligned service delivery system to improve the successful outcomes for these jointly served populations. It contains information about policies and processes that pertain to maintaining and enhancing the relationship between these entities. Through these strong partnerships with OADS and SAMHS, DBVI/DVR has been able to maximize federal and state funding to Maine by drawing down its full federal allotment for public rehabilitation services and accessing employment support services through Medicaid waivers. Additionally, DBVI/DVR, OADS and SAMHS have developed and are implementing joint approaches to the workforce development of community rehabilitation providers and business engagement throughout the state. DBVI/DVR, OADS and SAMHS are currently in work sessions to develop one MOU that will develop cost sharing plan to address current WIOA regulations.

DBVI continues to work closely with many other state partners to ensure that Maine’s benefits counseling services remain available to beneficiaries of SSI/SSDI, and specifically, DBVI applicants and eligible clients. DBVI/DVR currently administers a single contract with Maine’s approved WIPA provider, Maine Medical Center’s Department of Vocational Services, which includes funding from four sources of state and federal funds, including from DBVI, DVR, SAMHS and OADS. The contract’s scope of work includes direct service provision of benefits counseling, training of VR counselors and case managers, and service capacity building through quarterly system development network meetings, which include representatives from the Disability Rights Maine’s Protection and Advocacy for Beneficiaries of Social Security (PABSS) and the Bureau of Employment Services.

The Division f/t Blind and Visually Impaired, in conjunction with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) 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 have low vision are identified as having blindness rehabilitation needs, other than for VR services, they will be referred directly to a local DBVI office.

**Federal Agencies**

DBVI staff has been involved in teaming efforts with the staff at the **Veterans Administration (VA)** Blindness Rehabilitation Program at the Togus, VA hospital in Maine to collaborate on services for veterans who are blind or visually impaired.

A Memorandum of Understanding between the Maine Department of Labor – Bureau of Rehabilitation Services, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and Division for the Blind & Visually Impaired, and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Services was finalized and signed in November 2011.

"The purpose of this MOU is to set forth the commitments of BRS and VA–VR&E to cooperate to meet the needs of veterans with disabilities. Through the efforts outlined in this agreement, BRS and VA–VR & E will strive to minimize duplication of services, improve information sharing and referral, and coordinate activities in accordance with all applicable statutes and regulations."

The MOU is currently being updated to reflect new language from WIOA and other changes and is expected to be out early in 2020.

**Other**

DBVI continues its collaborative efforts with the University of Southern Maine Linguistics Department, Helen Keller National Center (HKNC) for the Deaf-Blind, and the Maine Deaf-Blind Project, (a project which is a member of the New England Consortium of Deaf Blind Projects, and provides technical assistance for students until the age of 21 and focuses on transition age youth) to improve services for clients who are deaf-blind or dual sensory impaired from hearing and vision loss. Although the program, *"Independence Without Fear”* has discontinued, the collaboration has expanded to include the Department of Health and Human Services, Disability Rights Maine, Division of Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and Late Deafened, and A Tri-state Collaborative with Vermont and New Hampshire. Efforts have included discussions to recruit, train and maintain a database of specially trained volunteers who can facilitate communication for people with significant vision and hearing impairments, as well as other services that are available to the dual sensory population. HKNC and OIB-TAC have provided training to staff on services to this targeted population.

(2). Assistive technology services and devices are provided to individuals who are blind or visually impaired as determined by the individual’s employment goal and appear as prescribed services on the individual’s signed Individual Plan for Employment (IPE). DBVI works closely with several assistive technology providers such as Alpha One, All-Tech, Mainely Access, Inc., and Excel Consulting, as well as Maine CITE, the Assistive Technology grantee for Maine, to ensure that the appropriate technical assistance and assistive technology devices are provided.

(3). DBVI supports staff involvement in the USDA’s AgrAbility project.  Maine AgrAbility is administered by Alpha One and the University of Maine.  The liaison to the project ensures that DBVI staff is knowledgeable about AgrAbility and related resources.  Grant funding continues but may end soon.  A separate effort in 2020 will discuss fee for service for transition age youth to access farms for work trials and prospective employment which is a service not covered by the grant.

(4). Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired (DBVI) works with other state agencies and many councils and committees, including the Governor’s Children’s Cabinet which is examining the needs of out-of-school youth.

(5). 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.

Historically, a workgroup convened quarterly and included DBVI Staff, DVR staff, SBDC staff, and representatives from the CAP program. Currently this process is being revamped in order to make it more accessible to all staff on a statewide basis and encourage more involvement. It is the hope that the group will continue to review processes for improvement and to ensure the success of clients of DBVI with better business plans and reaching their employment goals.

The Division also contracts with qualified organizations to provide employment support services for DBVI clients. Services procured include: Pre-Employment Transition Services, Job Seeking Skills, Job Skills Training, Job Development and Placement Services; Job Coaching and Supported Employment; and Business Engagement.

# (D) Coordination with Education Officials

*Describe:*

1. *policies, and procedures for coordination with education officials to facilitate the transition of students with disabilities from school to the receipt of VR services, including pre-employment transition services, as well as procedures for the timely development and approval of individualized plans for employment for the students.*
2. *Information on the formal interagency agreement with the State educational agency with respect to:*
	* 1. *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;*
		2. *transition planning by personnel of the designated State agency and educational agency that facilitates the development and implementation of their individualized education programs;*
		3. *roles and responsibilities, including financial responsibilities, of each agency, including provisions for determining State lead agencies and qualified personnel responsible for transition services;*
		4. *procedures for outreach to and identification of students with disabilities who need transition services.*

(1).DBVI holds regional meetings at multiple points throughout the calendar year, and one always at the beginning of the school year, in which the entire team - VR Counselor(VRC), Blindness Rehabilitation Specialist (BLRS), Teacher of the Visually Impaired (TVI), Orientation and Mobility Specialist (O&M) - are present to discuss and review the status, strengths, barriers, and disability and educational needs of every student on the TVI’s caseload. Starting at around the age of 8 or 9, these team discussions focus around students’ pre-vocational skill level, potential eligibility, and appropriateness for vocational rehabilitation services.  These discussions move into and occur within the school system, with the BLRS and TVI present to explain VR services and make recommendations of pre-employment transition services that would best prepare the student for future vocational successes.

The BLRS’s also support and advocate for parents and guardians outside the school setting to establish rapport and connection that allows, ideally, for more open and consistent communication between team members and parents as their children move into early adolescence and begin to explore the world of work and vocational rehabilitation as possibilities.  With the development of this relationship, parents are more engaged, responsive, and more willing to help their child pursue VR.

(2)(A). DBVI, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR), along with the Department of Education (DOE) first developed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) about ten years ago, updating it throughout the years to capture changes in resources and maximize our on-going collaboration between agencies. The most recent MOU addresses both individual and shared agency responsibilities across our systems to improve employment outcomes for youth with disabilities. It functions as a guiding tool for services to transition age youth with disabilities that are based on best practices and lead to post-secondary education, training and employment upon graduation.

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 services that are identified in the Individualized Education Program (IEP) and 504 plans 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)/guardian(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 employment opportunities for students. In addition, collaboration with Maine CITE provides education and services for furthering the use of assistive technologies that bridge education and employment.

Examples of some activities relating to transition:

A 2-hour presentation was provided to staff at University of Maine, Learning Center (Bryant Pond).  DBVI worked with staff to help them better understand the needs of folks who are blind who attend their programs. DBVI walked through the “school program” that is used and made appropriate recommendations and aided them in some temporary braille signage. The Learning Center is interested in having DBVI staff consult from time/time and would be interested in having students do a field trip to use their outdoor site/staff to do some adventuresome outdoor activities (archery, low & high ropes, zip line, animal and plant exploration, along with basic outdoor education).

A VRT from the Iris Network and DBVI staff presented VRT and O&M Service information to help train the new Career Advisors at Goodwill who will potentially work with DBVI clients. DBVI services were discussed along with demonstrations of items often used with clients with vision loss at home and at worksites to support learning by the staff. Stations were set up to give Goodwill staff time to walk through as teams, one team using vision loss simulators while another team guided them through a task. After this hands-on learning was completed, there was question/answer session to provide a better understanding of when/how DBVI would support a client with vision loss at a jobsite.

A former DBVI VR client and staff person did a public outreach at the Watershed School in Camden. There were 20 high school students and two staff members in attendance. The students learned human guide technique and navigated with white canes while wearing simulator goggles. The program was 50 minutes long.

(2)(B). 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. For DBVI, direct services are provided by teams comprised of specially trained blindness professionals, such as BLRS, TVIs, and O&Ms. Specialized training includes (but not limited to) the development of visual and spatial concepts, use of adaptive aids, and instruction in reading and writing Braille (when appropriate).

(2) (C). The roles and responsibilities of each department are outlined in the MOU. This agreement does not involve any financial compensation or exchange of funds between DOE and DVR/DBVI. However, it is the expectation that in the development and implementation of services, DOE and DVR/DBVI will provide in–kind resources and will promote cost efficiency and non–duplication through collaboration. Nothing in this agreement relieves either party of the responsibility to provide or pay for any transition service that the agency would otherwise provide to a student with a visual impairment who meets the eligibility criteria of that agency. If a participating agency, meaning a state or local agency that is financially or legally responsible for providing transition services to the student (other than the educational agencies responsible for the student’s education), fails to provide the transition services to a student as outlined in the IEP, the education agency shall reconvene the IEP team to identify alternative strategies to meet the transition objectives for the student.

(2) (D). DBVI will inform DOE in writing of procedural changes that may impact the eligibility of students with disabilities for vocational rehabilitation services, so that DOE may disseminate the information to local school districts. DOE will notify DBVI concerning proposed changes in regulations, policies and procedures at the state or federal level that may impact students with whom DBVI works.

DBVI will collect de–identified information on informal/formal complaints and due process hearings that involve school–aged youth; this data will be provided on an annual basis to DOE, as well as numbers and demographics of transition–aged students served. A protocol to serve students in out–of–district placements in accordance with current policy will be developed.

#  (E) Cooperative Agreements with Private Nonprofit Organizations

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

When procuring goods and services, the Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired follows state procurement processes, which are overseen by the Maine Bureau of Business Management, Division of Procurement Services. We work closely with contracted community providers to ensure that the contracts and cooperative agreement address requirements for informed consumer choice, any licensing requirements and ensure that staff are qualified to deliver rehabilitation services and blindness-specific skills training for individuals who are blind or have low vision.

DBVI continues to require that primary community providers for adult blindness rehabilitation services maintain accreditation for delivery of rehabilitation services for people who are blind or have low vision. The accreditation program, previously managed by the National Accreditation Council Incorporated, is now under the executive management of the Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired.

#  (F) Arrangements and Cooperative Agreements for the Provision of Supported Employment Services

*Describe the designated State agency’s efforts to identify and make arrangements, including entering into cooperative agreements, with other State agencies and other appropriate entities in order to provide supported employment services and extended employment services, as applicable, to individuals with the most significant disabilities, including youth with the most significant disabilities.*The Division has remained committed to assuring that individuals with the most significant disabilities, including youth, receive supported employment services when appropriate. An IPE is written that describes the goal, the planned services, the need for extended services (if appropriate), and an assurance that the individual has been able to make an informed choice in the development of this plan. If long term supports are necessary, the VR counselor is involved in the arrangements from the transition of the VR program to the long-term support program.

DBVI has Memorandums of Understanding and staff participate in meetings with the Maine Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Office of Adult Mental Health Services (OAMHS) and the Office of Aging and Disability Services (OADS) to work more effectively in assisting consumers in obtaining employment with appropriate and necessary supports. The objective of the 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. In conjunction with Community Rehabilitation Providers, DBVI along with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation continue to advocate with DHHS 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 the various service opportunities as they occur.

# (G) Coordination with Employers

*Describe how the designated State unit will work with employers to identify competitive integrated employment and career exploration opportunities in order to facilitate the provision of:*

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

(1). Overall collaboration with WIOA requirements in regard to competitive integrated employment and career exploration continues to expand and improve. Currently the Bureau of Employment Services (BES) Apprenticeship Pilot has expanded and is being implemented statewide. In order to facilitate provision of VR services, the expectation is that apprenticeship will be an educational career pathway as the client’s Comprehensive Assessment of Rehabilitation Needs (CARNS) and Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) are developed.

DBVI’s Vocational Counselors (VRC) and Community Rehabilitation Providers (CRP) are reporting on their meaningful employer engagements and activities to a designated staff person in DBVI’s central office for tracking.

An increased emphasis of career pathways, or a shift from job attainment to career for economic success, has resulted in use of Labor Management Information (LMI) that is provided to DBVI through the Center for Workforce Research and Information, who derives direct information from their employer contacts.

(2).In facilitating transition services, Pre-Apprenticeship is in its infancy and is currently being explored within the Maine Department of Labor (MDOL). Collaboration with the Maine Apprenticeship Program in BES is leading to increased access to employers.

The Progressive employment model has continued to increase access to business through tours, informational interviews, and career exploration activities, all leading to more employer engagement. Both youth and adults have benefitted under this model.

DBVI’s Blindness Rehabilitation Specialists/Transition Consultants (BLRS/TC) are using the Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC) model and are utilizing Maine’s Business Enterprise Program to do more career exploration in the area of small business ownership, further enhancing the facilitation of opportunities of competitive integrated employment.

# (H) Interagency Cooperation

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

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

(1). Through its collaboration with DHHS and specifically the coordination of Maine’s Benefits Counseling Network, DBVI has been able to develop opportunities and overcome barriers to competitive integrated employment for individuals with disabilities who are eligible for MaineCare, the State’s Medicaid program. DBVI/DVR, OADS, and SAMHS have resumed negotiations to develop one joint MOU in accordance with WIOA regulations.  The MOU is expected to be completed by June 2020.

(2). DBVI continues to support individuals with Developmental Disabilities to obtain and retain employment and is committed to ensuring their access to employment and meaningful work. DBVI co-enrolls clients with DVR to ensure that all rehabilitation needs are identified and addressed ensuring better employment outcomes. DBVI funds Discovering Personal Genius which is a customized employment program effective with the DD population. DBVI also coordinates with DHHS regarding long term job supports through their Waiver services programs. DBVI actively coordinates DD services with area agencies providing services to the DD population including Case Management Services, Housing and Day Services.

(3). DBVI has strong partnerships with the Department of Health and Human Services, and specifically the Offices of Aging and Disability Services (OADS) and Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services (SAMHS). The MOUs address the combined efforts that DBVI and DHHS have initiated and clarify roles to improve the successful outcomes for these jointly served populations. The MOUs are used to guide these agencies through a system change planning process for the purpose of implementing an aligned service delivery system that promotes evidence-based practices. It contains information about policies and processes that pertain to maintaining and enhancing the relationship between these two entities.

Through these strong partnerships with OADS and SAMHS, DBVI has been able to maximize federal and state funding to Maine by drawing down its full federal allotment for public rehabilitation services and accessing employment support services through Medicaid waivers. Additionally, DBVI, OADS and SAMHS have developed and are implementing joint approaches to the workforce development of community rehabilitation providers and business engagement throughout the state. Currently, DBVI, OADS and SAMHS are in planning meetings to develop one MOU.

In addition to providing ongoing employment support to employed individuals who are blind or visually impaired with mental illness through contracts with CRP’s, the DHHS Office of Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services (SAMHS) has the following initiatives currently underway to promote employment among the individuals they serve.

## Community Employment Specialist Program:

SAMHS contracts with Maine Medical Center’s Vocational Services to provide Employment Specialists that are embedded in behavioral health organizations across the state to assist individuals living with serious mental illness. They assist with career exploration and securing employment, and provide other supports as needed. In keeping with best practices, these Employment Specialists work as a team with behavioral health professionals to improve outcomes. This service is supplemental and not necessarily a replacement service for vocational rehabilitation services through the DOL Bureau of Rehabilitation Services, DBVI.

## The Clubhouse Model of Psychiatric Rehabilitation:

Clubhouses help support members with overcoming barriers to employment by offering a variety of services such as in-house prevocational programs, transitional employment and competitive employment in the community with or without supported employment services. Prevocational programs give members the opportunity to contribute to the daily operation of the clubhouse on a volunteer basis while learning valuable skills. Transitional employment offers members the chance to work at temporary part-time jobs through Clubhouse partnerships with local employers, with on-the-job support from both the Clubhouse and the employer. Members also work in permanent positions in the community, at a job of their choosing, with supported employment as needed. There are five clubhouses in Maine.

## Maine’s Workplace & Disability Connection:

Maine’s *Workplace & Disability Connection,* which is housed at the Retail Association of Maine and supported by the Maine Department of Labor and the Department of Health and Human Services is focused on assisting businesses in attracting and retaining new employees and customers with disabilities, developing business leaders who value diversity and actively work to promote strong communities that include individuals with disabilities, and increasing opportunities for businesses to expand their diversity recruiting efforts, not as a social model but as a business case to recruit talent and better serve their customers.

## Promoting Employment Through Traditional Mental Health Services:

Both the primary Community Support Services (Community Integration Services, Assertive Community Treatment and Community Rehabilitation Services) and Behavioral Health Home services require the development of an Individual Support Plan (ISP).  Every 90 days, through the Individual Support Planning process, individuals receiving these services are asked about their vocational status and about unmet vocational needs. SAMHS funds specific employment services and collaborates with the Department of Labor’s DBVI/DVR to provide resources to address vocational needs. In keeping with the fidelity of the model, all Assertive Community Treatment teams are required to have an employment specialist.

##  Jointly Funded Work Incentives Planning:

Six Community Work Incentive Coordinators (CWICs) are available statewide to provide all Social Security beneficiaries with disabilities access to benefits counseling services. This initiative is a collaboration between SAMHS, OADS, and the Department of Labor’s Bureau of Rehabilitation Services.

## Jointly Funded Employment Workforce Development System And Website

Maine has an Employment Workforce Development System that is jointly funded by DHHS (SAMHS and OADS) and DOL (BRS – DBVI/DVR). This provides infrastructure for coordinating employment specialist trainings, webinars and advance topical trainings as well as maintaining a database of certified employment specialists.

DHHS and DOL also collaborate on the development and maintenance of a comprehensive website, [www.employmentforme.com](http://www.employmentforme.com), providing information on best practices and resources for employment for people with disabilities.  The website is divided into four target audience sections – job seekers, service providers, youth in transition and employers.  Another collaboration that is ongoing is the training and certification infrastructure.

DHHS (SAMHS and OADS) also made available Balancing Incentive Program funds to increase system capacity to support individuals with disabilities on the path to employment. This initiative included training for Work and Benefits Navigators, the development of an advanced Work and Benefits Navigator training for Employment Specialists, the development of a Pathways to Employment infographic, and training in Individual Placement and Support and Supported Employment.

# (I) Comprehensive System of Personnel Development; Data System on Personnel and Personnel Development

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

1. *Data System on Personnel and Personnel Development*
	* 1. *Qualified Personnel Needs. Describe the development and maintenance of a system for collecting and analyzing on an annual basis data on qualified personnel needs with respect to:*
			1. *the number of personnel who are employed by the State agency in the provision of VR services in relation to the number of individuals served, broken down by personnel category;*
			2. *the number of personnel currently needed by the State agency to provide VR services, broken down by personnel category; and*
			3. *projections of the number of personnel, broken down by personnel category, who will be needed by the State agency to provide VR services in 5 years based on projections of the number of individuals to be served, including individuals with significant disabilities, the number of personnel expected to retire or leave the field, and other relevant factors.*
2. *Personnel Development. Describe the development and maintenance of a system for collecting and analyzing on an annual basis data on personnel development with respect to:*
	* + 1. *a list of the institutions of higher education in the State that are preparing VR professionals, by type of program;*
			2. *the number of students enrolled at each of those institutions, broken down by type of program; and*
			3. *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.*
	1. *Plan for Recruitment, Preparation and Retention of Qualified Personnel. Describe the development and implementation of a plan to address the current and projected needs for qualified personnel including, the coordination and facilitation of efforts between the designated State unit and institutions of higher education and professional associations to recruit, prepare, and retain personnel who are qualified, including personnel from minority backgrounds and personnel who are individuals with disabilities.*
	2. *Personnel Standards. Describe the State agency's policies and procedures for the establishment and maintenance of personnel standards consistent with section 101(a)(7)(B) and to ensure that designated State unit professional and paraprofessional personnel are adequately trained and prepared, including:*
3. *standards that are consistent with any national or State-approved or -recognized certification, licensing, registration, or other comparable requirements that apply to the profession or discipline in which such personnel are providing VR services; and*
4. *the establishment and maintenance of education and experience requirements, to ensure that the personnel have a 21st century understanding of the evolving labor force and the needs of individuals with disabilities.*
	1. *Staff Development. Describe the State agency's policies, procedures, and activities to ensure that, consistent with section101(a)(7)(C) of the Rehabilitation Act, 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, including training implemented in coordination with entities carrying out State programs under section 4 of the Assistive Technology Act of 1998; and*
		2. *procedures for the acquisition and dissemination of significant knowledge from research and other sources to designated State unit professionals and paraprofessionals.*
	2. *Personnel to Address Individual Communication Needs. Describe how the designated State unit has personnel or obtains the services of other individuals who are able to communicate in appropriate modes of communication with or in the native language of applicants or eligible individuals who have limited English speaking ability.*
	3. *Coordination of Personnel Development Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. As appropriate, describe the procedures and activities to coordinate the designated State unit's comprehensive system of personnel development with personnel development under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.*

(1)(A). The Maine Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired has procedures and activities in place to establish and maintain a comprehensive system of personnel development designed to ensure an adequate supply of qualified State rehabilitation professional and paraprofessional personnel for the designated State unit. Staff in Central office maintain a data system on personnel and personnel development. This is outlined in the areas below.

Qualified Personnel needs – The system for collecting and analyzing annual data on qualified personnel needs is supported within the Department of Labor’s Human Resources and DBVI staff in the central office. The system includes keeping track of the number of personnel within DBVI who serve VR in relation to the number of individuals served by personnel category. In addition, DBVI keeps track of the number of personnel currently needed by the State agency to provide VR services by personnel category and the projections of the number of personnel, by personnel category, who will be needed by the state agency to provide VR services in 5 years. This number is 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.

*i) number of personnel within DBVI who serve VR in relation to the number of individuals served broken down by personnel category:*

(1)(A)(i). Over the past performance period, 35 staff positions in DBVI served 300-400 individuals with visual impairments in the VR program. Personnel categories included: 1 director, 1 assistant director, 3 regional directors, 1 consultant, 7 VRC II, 3 Blindness Rehabilitation Specialists, 5 Paraprofessionals/VRC I, 1 support personnel, 2 BEP staff, and 11 O&M.

*ii) number of personnel currently needed by the State agency to provide VR services broken down by personnel category:*

(1)(A)(ii). Currently, a number of DBVI’s VRC I and II staff are new to the position and working with DBVI consumers. Of the 7 designated VRC II staff, 3 are new to DBVI within the past year and there is currently 1 vacancy. Although 2 of these have VRC experience, the blindness rehabilitation specialty is a steep learning curve. Therefore, DBVI has experienced personnel shortage in order to work with VR consumers and get staff up to speed. The new staff have demonstrated ability to learn quickly and it is anticipated that DBVI VR consumers will be well represented over the next performance period.

*iii) the projections of the number of personnel, broken down by personnel category, who will be needed by the state agency to provide VR services in 5 years based on projections of the number of individuals to be served, including individuals with significant disabilities, the number of personnel expected to retire or leave the field and other relevant factors:*

(1)(A)(iii). It is anticipated that DBVI staffing needs could include approximately 7 new staff within the next five years. The table below highlights the current vacancies within DBVI. These vacancies are currently being covered by existing staff and contracted staff. The chart also depicts anticipated staffing needs for the next five years due to expected vacancies from retirements.

 **Projected**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Row** | **Job Title** | **Total positions** | **Current vacancies** | **Vacancies over the next 5 years** |
| **1** | **Director** | **1** | **0** | **1** |
| **2** | **Assistant Director**  | **1** | **0** | **0** |
| **3** | **Regional Directors** | **3** | **0** | **2** |
| **4** | **Blindness Rehabilitation Specialist** | **3** | **1** | **0** |
| **5** | **Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor II** | **7** | **1** | **1** |
| **6** | **Paraprofessional VRC 1** | **5** | **0** | **0** |
| **7** | **Support Personnel** | **1** | **1** | **0** |
| **8** | **Rehabilitation Consultant** | **1** | **0** | **0** |
| **9** | **Business Enterprise Program Staff** | **2** | **1** | **0** |
| **10** | **Orientation & Mobility** | **11** | **2** | **3** |
| Total  |  | **35** | **6** | **7** |

One of the ways that DBVI has been a leader in the field regarding retention of qualified staff is our reimbursement program for certifications. Although DBVI does not pay for initial certifications, we recognize the financial strain to maintain these certifications, especially having multiple certifications. Therefore, we allow staff to request for reimbursement for ACVREP and CRC certification costs on a yearly basis if they provide those services as part of their DBVI employment during the course of the year.

*B.) Personnel Development. Describe the development and maintenance of a system for collecting and analyzing on an annual basis data on personnel development with respect to:*

* + - 1. *a list of the institutions of higher education in the State that are preparing VR professionals, by type of program;*
			2. *the number of students enrolled at each of those institutions, broken down by type of program; and*
			3. *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.*

(1)(B)(i). 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. 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.

The University of Maine at Farmington (UMF) in partnership with the University of Southern Maine has an accelerated program that allows counseling students to graduate with a master’s degree in 5 academic years. Graduates of this program will be able to quality for both State licensing for counseling and national certification for rehabilitation counseling. The Program is accredited by the Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Programs and the Council on Rehabilitation Education and meets the standards set forth by RSA for qualified vocational rehabilitation counselors. UMF typically graduates 25 to 30 students per year with a B.S. in Rehabilitation Services. UMF also now offers a certificate in Assistive Technology, which prepares a broad range of professionals to be able to assess, design, research, and implement Assistive Technology (AT). Those completing the certificate will be equipped to support the inclusion of individuals with disabilities in both school and community settings by utilizing assistive technology to increase independence and eliminate or mitigate barriers.

(1)(B)(ii). DBVI currently has zero staff enrolled in any of these programs.

(1)(B)(iii). DBVI did not have any staff enrolled in the previous year.

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

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

(2). DBVI continues to have concerns about the ability to recruit and retain qualified staff in Maine due to the low salary scales. Recent recruiting efforts have included electronic vacancy postings on national and State of Maine websites, local postings with community providers, and information sharing with universities and colleges across the country that offer a rehabilitation/blindness program. 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 DBVI staffing opportunities at national conferences, networking with community rehabilitation providers, other state agencies, our contracted partners and job listings in Maine Career Centers. Additionally, DBVI offers professional internship opportunities to pre and post-graduate level students.

Maine DBVI Leadership Team has recently entered ongoing communications with UMass Boston regarding our current 2 O&M vacancies in order to provide for internships that would potentially lead to increased recruitment efforts for current vacant and anticipated vacant positions in the future. The UMass Vision Studies program is holding recruitment informational meetings for both the TVI and O&M programs. This program also has a newly developed AT certification. A webinar provided by UMass Boston Vision Studies program Northeast Resource Center for vision education is available to discuss graduate career opportunities in vision education and rehabilitation. These types of webinars assist DBVI to encourage undergraduates in Maine to take advantage of the current grants offered that lead to certifications in the Blindness rehabilitation fields and will assist with our recruitment efforts to obtain qualified staff. Viewing these webinars is also an opportunity for staff to encourage clients that we work with to go into the blindness rehabilitation field.

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 as other workers in this classification and earns sick and vacation time after 90 days 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 subject to the usual probationary period of new State employees. 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, providing the applicant meets the minimum qualifications of the State position.

*(3)Personnel Standards. Describe the State agency's policies and procedures for the establishment and maintenance of personnel standards consistent with section 101(a)(7)(B) and to ensure that designated State unit professional and paraprofessional personnel are adequately trained and prepared, including:*

*(A)standards that are consistent with any national or State-approved or -recognized certification, licensing, registration, or other comparable requirements that apply to the profession or discipline in which such personnel are providing VR services*

(3)(A). After the WIOA standards for qualifications of an RC II changed the definition of qualified staff, Maine DBVI has accepted the following qualifications of an RC II: a baccalaureate degree in Rehabilitation Counseling or related field, such as Special Education, Counseling, Psychology, Occupational Therapy or Social Work, and two years of experience directly working with individuals with disabilities; OR a master’s degree in Rehabilitation Counseling or related field, such as Special Education, Counseling, Psychology, Occupational Therapy or Social Work.

DBVI will also take advantage of the Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification (CRCC) Amnesty Program. Beginning January 1, 2020, the CRCC will offer a one-time CRC Amnesty Program to formerly certified professionals still active in the field who would like to reinstate certification. It is CRCC’s intent to bring expired CRCs back to the rehabilitation counseling profession.

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

(3)(B). DBVI utilizes our close relationship with our CareerCenter partners in order to ensure that we all have a 21st century understanding of the evolving labor force and the needs of individuals with disabilities. DBVI is housed with our CareerCenter partners statewide. We attend joint meetings and provide training to, and get training from, CareerCenter staff on an ongoing basis. Staff participate in One stop Partner quarterly meetings where members of the transition board, Career Center staff and DBVI participate in ongoing core team meetings.

Additionally, DBVI staff are members of the workforce investment boards statewide and participate in ongoing training provided to the boards. Often DBVI staff are invited to attend relevant training. One recent example was a training provided by the regional board for our staff working with consumers in recovery. The training shared important information about the recovery resources and services available for businesses and job seekers to support employees and strengthen the community at large. The training provided staff with information to assist job seekers to maximize their career development opportunities and included our local resource Bangor Area Recovery Network (BARN) which strengthened that partnership. Another training included the Maine Human Rights Commission and addressed strategies for businesses and job seekers to protect themselves and to maximize their career development opportunities.

DBVI works with OUT Maine.OUT Maine provides training for educators and providers who work with LGBTQ+ youth and their families. This training has been provided across the state and works with our staff in order to have the most up to date information working with consumers in the State. Staff have attended trainings in their regions, in the Career Centers and in BRS specific training events.

*(4)Staff Development. Describe the State agency's policies, procedures, and activities to ensure that, consistent with section101(a)(7)(C) of the Rehabilitation Act, 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, including training implemented in coordination with entities carrying out State programs under section 4 of the Assistive Technology Act of 1998*

(4)(A). DBVI utilizes current staff with specific interests and skills as subject matter experts in the area of technology. These technology specialists work with the DBVI leadership to recommend devices and equipment for purchase as demos for the various offices; devices include items such as Sunu Band, Talking Compass, Victor Reader Trek, iPad, and Aftershokz headphones. Consultation with the Buzz clip company occurred to obtain demo devices that are housed in the regional offices. Multiple presentations on Aira app to individual clients and the Maine Low Vision group are/were offered. Consultation is provided to DBVI staff in regard to apps and other technology as requested as well as the provision of AT training/overview for new DBVI staff. Staff attended trainings offered by Maine CITE Adaptive Equipment Financing Program, OIB-TAC, International O&M Online Symposium and Helen Keller Deafblindness Equipment to stay current on new apps and technologies.

* + 1. *procedures for the acquisition and dissemination of significant knowledge from research and other sources to designated State unit professionals and paraprofessionals.*

(4)(B). Training opportunities and conference materials are shared through a number of statewide means, including the BRSNet. A library of training resources, including texts, journals and videotapes addressing vocational rehabilitation and blindness/low visiontopic areas are available to be loaned to regional offices as needed. Materials include Institute on Rehabilitation Issues publications, videotapes addressing learning disabilities, Consumer Choice News, National Clearinghouse of Rehabilitation Training Materials, and other documents from the various National Rehabilitation and Research and Training Programs throughout the United States. DBVI also makes full use of many valuable web-based resources such as American Foundation for the Blind, National Federation of the Blind, American Council of the Blind, Texas School for the Blind, ACVREP, CRCC and Hadley. Examples of these materials can be seen in the “Comprehensive onboarding and staff development program” provided at the end of this CSPD reporting section.

DBVI recognizes that staff are 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 was designed to support the training needs of Division staff. Staff development is delivered through formal and informal modalities and are derived from internal and external sources.

In the past performance period, 339 individuals were served by the Maine DBVI VR system. Maine DBVI currently has 6 occupied VR Counselor II positions (1 vacant this PY) that carry an average caseload of 40-60 individuals, and 3 Blindness Rehabilitation Specialist (1 vacant this PY), in addition to carrying a small caseload, assist the families with children who are blind and visually impaired in accessing needed supports and resources, assisting in advocacy and providing technical assistance to community stakeholders. We expect these staffing numbers to remain consistent going forward. Based on previous reporting of individuals served, we expect to serve between 300-400 individuals over the next five years and anticipate that 100% will be individuals with significant disabilities due to the nature of the population that DBVI serves.

Current service delivery positions include 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 O&M staff are currently ACVREP certified.

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. Upon entering CSPD plans, program and coursework approval must be obtained from the DBVI management team.

Additionally, an annual survey is sent out to staff to determine future training needs. As trainings happen, surveys are sent out to track and monitor staff attendance and achieve credential attainment. Training sponsored by the division is determined by operational need as well as by employee needs to maintain or retain qualified status. DBVI employees participate in annual performance reviews, a portion of which specifically addresses personnel development. At these reviews, staff and supervisors jointly identify specific training required to address individual performance enhancement and operational need. The Regional Managers meet with their staff on an annual basis to review performance and to plan the professional development for the upcoming year. That plan would outline what coursework or credits were beneficial to the agency and/or are required for the employee to continue to be qualified staff. DBVI central office tracks all the courses that employees attend and the credits they earn while supervisors monitor the progress regarding professional development. Employees submit requests for trainings and are evaluated and approved as they relate to the professional development/operational need. Often staff will request to go to a conference such as the New England Association of Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired (AER) that allow them to attain many of their required credits.

In an effort to ensure a high level of skilled staff to deliver quality services to consumers, the 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) and newly developed certification program for Assistive Technology (AT) Specialists. The Division’s goal is to encourage staff to pursue a variety of educational choices in a supportive working environment and with the necessary time and financial support. Certifications in all disciplines are encouraged, as well as training plans that support maintaining CRC, O&M and other specific professional certifications.

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. 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.” Often staff will request to go to a conference such as the New England Association of Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired (AER) that would allow them to attain many of their required credits. Whenever possible, DBVI acquires the ACVREP endorsement to earn CEU credits for trainings provided in state.

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.

DBVI 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 CareerCenter One Stops, the Social Security Administration, external partners such as Maine CITE, the Small Business Development Corporation, and the local workforce development boards. DBVI staff also takes advantage of distance training opportunities through webinars and teleconferences.

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 10-day, comprehensive overview of the VR process. It includes topic areas such as rehabilitation technology, job placement and assessment, and vocational counseling, such as casework flow and post-secondary education. It is available to all staff and required of new DBVI VR staff. 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. Training opportunities and conference materials are shared through a number of statewide avenues, including the Internet and Intranet, as well as counselor, managerial and supervisory networking activities and interactions.

DBVI is committed to providing an annualDBVI Day training for all staff. We utilize this opportunity to provide training to assure that all staff are up to date. We are also committed to providing a yearly All Agency/Blindness Systems training for all State of Maine professionals and our contracted partners who are working in the field of blindness rehabilitation. This training has been instrumental in maintaining a positive working relationship with our blindness team and to focus on training specific to blindness rehabilitation.

DBVI worked this past performance period with Mississippi state to develop a comprehensive onboarding and staff development program that has is designed to be a yearlong developmental program for DBVI staff. This four tier course outlines areas in supervision, mentoring, reading, viewing, job shadowing and experiential practice. (An overview of this program is included at the end of the CSPD section)

DBVI takes advantage of the National Research & Training Center free short courses. They are approved for ACVREP, CRC and National Blindness Professional Certification Board (NBPCB) credits. These include an Introduction of the Basics of Blindness and Low Vision, Cultural diversity and competence; Fundamental courses on eye conditions; Essentials for working with Individuals with Visual impairments; Visual Impairment and additional health conditions, Courses on Program Effectiveness; Special Topics for VR; Research based short courses related to employment; and the Business Enterprise Program.

In addition, DBVI is committed to work with our partner, DVR, in offering a biennial, two-day statewide training event for all Bureau of Rehabilitation Services staff at which multiple trainings - identified and prioritized by staff surveys, case reviews and oversight bodies (i.e. State Rehabilitation Council) are offered. Training needs and activities are often identified and offered at the regional/office levels through free or low-cost workshops.

Over the past performance period DBVI has worked with our DVR partners to participate in many Bureau wide training. Training surveys are used, via survey monkey, for staff to complete to receive certificates of attendance and CRC credits. Recent trainings included: 2-day communication/ethics training, Syntiro webinars, World of Work Inventory training, Personality Disorders, Motivational Interviewing, Brain Injury, WIOA Cross-Training Webinars and, specifically for supervisors, a 3-day BRS Leadership training in which the focus was on providing skill training for leaders utilizing challenging supervisory scenarios.

One program that has been recently developed for BRS is a 6-part series with a WIOA overview and partner cross training. There are 13 brief webinar links beginning with “WIOA 101: An introduction to the New Law” and ending with the “Youth Program”. Included in the zoom trainings were common performance measures, career pathways, youth programming, Center for Workforce Research and Information, Apprenticeship and working with corrections and Veterans.

Another BRS training included the presentation of the newly developed AWARE QA tool for all management/supervisory staff. It addresses the case review process, types of case reviews, statewide review template, assigning cases, practice cases, how to monitor progress on case reviews and QA reports. For many years, DBVI had been conducting case reviews using survey monkey to collect data. This new QA tool is designed to replace survey monkey and contain the entire date collection process within our case management system, AWARE.

Some regional DBVI staff attended training for WORK Services: Workforce Opportunities, Referrals and Knowledge Services, a common registration and case management portal across the multiple core programs that integrates the disparate case management systems and incorporates a public facing portal. It is being piloted in one region with anticipation of it going live sometime in 2020.

Lastly, the State of Maine is currently working with all employees regarding Workday Maine, an online Human Resource portal where employees can record and code their timesheets, request time off and track accrued earned time. All staff are being provided with Employee Self-Service Town Hall Materials, job aids, quick reference guides, and instructional videos, in order to navigate this new system.

Below is a list of training over the past performance period:

DBVI Day (annual)

DBVI Day Part 2

All Blindness Agency Day

Motivational Interviewing

New Counselor Training

Communication

Personality Disorders

OIB TAC-trainings (dementia, DB, adjustment)

BRS Leadership Training

Brain injury

Peer Mentoring

CRP project training

Syntiro Training

BRS Statewide (2018)

AFB Leadership conference

BLAST Conference (BEP)

AER (NE)

AER Orlando

Helen Keller (fall 2018)

Apprenticeship

WOWI

**Comprehensive onboarding and staff development program**

Maine Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired (DBVI) - An Introduction to New Employee Training

This training is to be utilized and customized for all DBVI employees for their first year of employment.

**Tier One Module (to be completed during the first quarter of employment)**

* Arrange for HR orientation for all state employees (DOL policies)
* Get a State ID picture and badge
* Tour of regional and central office
* Central fleet orientation (for state vehicle use before use)
* BRS website & resources <http://inet.state.me.us/rehab/index.shtml>

Note: Sign up for BRS new counselor training for VRC II and customized for others

* Maine AWARE case management
* Safety/Emergency Evacuation Plan (for the pertinent office)
* Utube video run hide fight https//www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/active\_shooter\_booklet.pdf
* Link to Lt. Elliot’s active shooter training:  <http://inet.state.me.us/labor/safety/index.shtml>

***Base Reading & Viewing:***

DBVI Rules, Guidance memos, policy, and protocol

<http://inet.state.me.us/rehab/casework_resources/dbvi_policies_procedures/index.shtml>

* at least: 1 of the publications, 1 of the books, and 1 of the videos identified below
* Older Individuals who are Blind Technical Assistance Center (OIB TAC) website and courses <https://www.oib-tac.org/>

Under resources at least the 3 items listed below:

* Quick Overview of Commonly used Acronyms, Abbreviations and Jargon in the Field of Blindness and Low Vision Older Blind Version
* Information for Working with a Person Who is Visually Impaired or Blind
* Information on specific eye diseases
* Vision Impairment 101 curriculum (book available in each regional office and training if needed by DBVI staff Kim Stumph)
* Maine Senior Guide is a free, on-line resource for older Mainers and their families. Besides the [**Maine Senior Guide**](https://na01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=http%3A%2F%2Fr20.rs6.net%2Ftn.jsp%3Ff%3D001BMbOmvxOsTCpTXwIvcDMbEo_-jHaeTYIiUa3NAisneOWYtek7KonMdFOcLtj95papSHvIj58HDsUVdVS4b0USt3lXaN3r6YMJ-tLKoz9bAYPt23IZU0sVpYeOe9D_JBIHghoj7MX9TA-wYeOT6UcuUkY-VYcLihVv_2PvCO6Z2zLi4GLdZxtUpqTKxnnY7ZgrgfS1wHwitwhkGrdVwYZsfSfdULWfR2xn_i5okrtVEiNRIxGVdyLZHNaHPkuTLRayRDSU5wBV00PyOsWZRXP5kXNpI61ANhOQHl7_tzNJ8uMFyIfjSv7RA%3D%3D%26c%3DUUtqS5ld8xAZlv0DjIH9BU9zmXaOJwQ54JEmDQ5-xV9YSgwyUMlZdQ%3D%3D%26ch%3Drfze3l2f57wKwhNe6g85N9IDsPGdGbqL0zXghe9Z5WvDfl9O0IfMMg%3D%3D&data=02%7C01%7Csamantha.j.fenderson%40maine.gov%7C601573b98a954a2df1de08d687eb5387%7C413fa8ab207d4b629bcdea1a8f2f864e%7C0%7C0%7C636845842128432711&sdata=2IAcVjyb%2FBeTVFmZZa70nhdY0uLjL5MlUfJmKZMrY0E%3D&reserved=0) website with hundreds of resources, we publish this newsletter, have an active [**Facebook page**](https://na01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=http%3A%2F%2Fr20.rs6.net%2Ftn.jsp%3Ff%3D001BMbOmvxOsTCpTXwIvcDMbEo_-jHaeTYIiUa3NAisneOWYtek7KonMYzt-FN3At6jtP_GvBGgO9WiWj3G00CwgixYT9WFyQJTBluMU5o9w1_53WnbPtvj4mjZOQNTfI_YkgxTHORMofe0EJ1hRlZGCz-5B1rENuwEVylFeXhyfbNycdM_l00WYuvi7t9Nknp_FQVcnERuWko%3D%26c%3DUUtqS5ld8xAZlv0DjIH9BU9zmXaOJwQ54JEmDQ5-xV9YSgwyUMlZdQ%3D%3D%26ch%3Drfze3l2f57wKwhNe6g85N9IDsPGdGbqL0zXghe9Z5WvDfl9O0IfMMg%3D%3D&data=02%7C01%7Csamantha.j.fenderson%40maine.gov%7C601573b98a954a2df1de08d687eb5387%7C413fa8ab207d4b629bcdea1a8f2f864e%7C0%7C0%7C636845842128432711&sdata=TxB6j7kTOfciikypJFzJb9ab5CGJfsnOTWKk4uQZhAc%3D&reserved=0), and also host and produce senior expos around the state.
* The Iris Network <https://www.theiris.org>
* Catholic Charities Maine<https://www.ccmaine.org>
* Maxi Aids Products for independent living [www.maxiaids.com](http://www.maxiaids.com)

**Job Shadow**

* At least oncewith each of the various types of Blindness Professionals within your Region: \*VRC\*VRT \*O&M \*TVI \*AT
* Client assistance program (CAP) - view the website and meet with the representative

**Experiential:**

* Human guide by local O&M staff (needs to be in the first week of employment before see clients)
* Work under occlusion to include: Orientation, interpreting surrounding environment, independent travel w/ O&M
* Numerous blindness-specific IL activities geared toward “can do,” with VRT

**Mentoring:**

* Weekly meetings with DBVI mentor, (face-to-face or zoom or phone)
* Monthly face to face meeting with DBVI mentor to include at least one shadow.

*\*the shadowing needs to occur in two forms, initially with the new staff observing mentor, and then mentor observing new staff once they begin working with clients.*

**Supervision:**

* Performance evaluation
* Weekly meetings with supervisor to include regular/weekly observation/shadows; organizational system review; TAMS; Maine Aware, etc.
* Updated “Who’s Who” in DBVI statewide and our partners; include brief bio, certifications and current information.
* Orientation to Career Center staff and resources
* Acronym list review
* Orientation to Business Enterprise Program – (BEP) by DBVI representative
* BRS new counselor training (sign up for VRC II & customized as needed for others)

**Tier Two Module (to be completed during second quarter of employment)**:

***Base Reading & Viewing:***

* at least: 1 of the publications, 1 of the books, and 1 of the videos identified below
* The American Council of the Blind (ACB.org) strives to increase the independence, security, equality of opportunity, and quality of life for all blind and visually impaired people
* American Foundation for the Blind *AFB.org*
* American Foundation for the Blind Senior Site afbinfo@afb.org
* ADA Guidelines for Visual Impairment – Eric.Dibner@maine.gov
* Hadley Institute for the Blind and Visually Impaired [www.hadley.edu](http://www.hadley.edu)
* Helen Keller – DeafBlind Services [www.helenkeller.org/hknc](http://www.helenkeller.org/hknc)
* <https://youtu.be/JtC4ZfMVknU>
* National Federation of the Blind <https://www.nfb.org>
* Pine Tree Guide dog user ellsworthme.org/**pinetree**
* *MOBALE website*  [www.MOBALE.org](http://www.MOBALE.org)  [www.Facebook.com/MOBALEMaine](http://www.Facebook.com/MOBALEMaine)
* Information about Winter and Summer Sports Education Camps
* [All](https://www.bing.com/search?q=alpha+one+maine&qs=n&sp=-1&ghc=1&pq=alpha+one+maine&sc=8-15&cvid=97624829AEC147469F6E0F9F3EA801F5&sid=24A1C82BF7906FEE06C4C5E4F6406E3F&format=snrjson&jsoncbid=0&qpvt=alpha+one+maine)[Past 24 hours](https://www.bing.com/search?q=alpha+one+maine&filters=ex1%3a%22ez1%22&qs=n&sp=-1&ghc=1&pq=alpha+one+maine&sc=8-15&cvid=97624829AEC147469F6E0F9F3EA801F5&sid=24A1C82BF7906FEE06C4C5E4F6406E3F&format=snrjson&jsoncbid=0&qpvt=alpha+one+maine)[Past week](https://www.bing.com/search?q=alpha+one+maine&filters=ex1%3a%22ez2%22&qs=n&sp=-1&ghc=1&pq=alpha+one+maine&sc=8-15&cvid=97624829AEC147469F6E0F9F3EA801F5&sid=24A1C82BF7906FEE06C4C5E4F6406E3F&format=snrjson&jsoncbid=0&qpvt=alpha+one+maine)[Past month](https://www.bing.com/search?q=alpha+one+maine&filters=ex1%3a%22ez3%22&qs=n&sp=-1&ghc=1&pq=alpha+one+maine&sc=8-15&cvid=97624829AEC147469F6E0F9F3EA801F5&sid=24A1C82BF7906FEE06C4C5E4F6406E3F&format=snrjson&jsoncbid=0&qpvt=alpha+one+maine)[Past year](https://www.bing.com/search?q=alpha+one+maine&filters=ex1%3a%22ez5_17780_18145%22&qs=n&sp=-1&ghc=1&pq=alpha+one+maine&sc=8-15&cvid=97624829AEC147469F6E0F9F3EA801F5&sid=24A1C82BF7906FEE06C4C5E4F6406E3F&format=snrjson&jsoncbid=0)Alpha 1 [www.alphaonenow.org](http://www.alphaonenow.org)
* *Maine Parent federation* **mpf**.org

**Job Shadow**

* At least oncewith each member of your job classification/discipline in DBVI outside your Region
* Meet with VIST and/or BROS from the V.A. to discuss the program requirements and role with DBVI
* Attend a Low Vision Exam
* Iris network – website and tour the center & Iris Park Apts.

**Experiential:**

* Participation in at least one “blindness community” and consumer group activity:

(for example) ACB, NFB, *Pine Tree Dog Guide Users*, Support groups, Recreation activities, BVA, MOBALE winter or summer sports education camps

* Cortical Visual Impairment (CVI) Training with state representative (Esther Butler)
* State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) training on-line through Regional Services Administration (RSA)
* Low Vision Training – including orientation to low vision kits/devices i.e. magnifiers, CCTV’s, \*scopes, glare filters, etc.

**Mentoring:**

* Bi-Weekly check-ins with DBVI mentor, (face to face or via telephone or polycom).

Monthly face to face meeting with DBVI mentor to include at least two shadow opportunities over the course of the quarter.

**Supervision:**

* Bi-Weekly meetings with supervisor to include regular observation/shadows

**Tier Three Module: (to be completed during third quarter of employment)**:

***Base reading & Base viewing***

* at least: 1 of the publications, 1 of the books, and 1 of the videos identified below
* AERBVI.org Association for the Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired
* American Printing House for the Blind web site [www.APH.org](http://www.APH.org)
* Perkins School for the Blind web site [www.perkins.org](http://www.perkins.org)
* VISION Aware web site [www.visionaware.org](http://www.visionaware.org)
* TSBVI (Texas School for the Blind) <https://www.tsbvi.edu>
* [www.carroll.org](http://www.carroll.org) Carroll Center for the Blind
* **napvi**.org NAPVI.
* RRTC on VR Practices for Youth and Young Adults and click on “Trainings” to find these online seminars, as well as other webinars: <http://vrpracticesandyouth.org/>
	+ The Family Role in Career Planning and Preparation for Youth with Disabilities
	+ Integrated Employment: Expectation AND Choice
	+ Introduction to Seamless Transition
	+ Inclusive Higher Education and VR Common Performance Measures
	+ 10 Tips for Effective Collaboration Between VR and Higher Education
	+ Introduction to Inclusive Higher Education and Its Impact on VR Services
	+ Family and VR Roles in Supporting Higher Education for Students with Intellectual Disabilities

***Job Shadows:***

* At least one job shadow in another discipline outside your region

**Mentoring:**

* Monthly check-ins with DBVI mentor, (face-to-face or via telephone or polycom).

Regular face-to-face meeting with DBVI mentor to occur at least every six weeks and should include at least two shadow opportunities over the course of the quarter.

**Supervision:**

* at least monthly meetings with supervisor to include regular observation/shadows

**Tier Four Module (to be completed during fourth quarter of employment)**:

**Base reading & Base Viewing:**

* at least: 1 of the publications, 1 of the books, and 1 of the videos identified below
* LEAP, check out the video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pVrG1ESEsjM>
* LEAP's website: [https://resourcevt.org/training-programs/leap/](https://na01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fresourcevt.org%2Ftraining-programs%2Fleap%2F&data=02%7C01%7CBrenda.G.Drummond%40Maine.gov%7C463ca434aaf24d1e1a9308d69118df54%7C413fa8ab207d4b629bcdea1a8f2f864e%7C0%7C1%7C636855933344691359&sdata=iqLNW2C7N%2FZMCxByA%2BFHDczbXHWBadoKCemQcrmQEZI%3D&reserved=0)
* Flying blind from Larry Lewis – flying blind.org every Thursday (they are achieved & technology driven)
* HR guide for employers under our products – employment products – how to make a PDF accessible – blind.msu.state.edu
* access world by AFB – reviews assistive technology devices
* <https://corporate.comcast.com/values/accessibility>
* RespectAbility feature about Janet LaBreck as part of their honoring Women’s History Month: <https://www.respectability.org/2019/03/women-disabilities-janet-labreck/>

**Job Shadow:**

* Section 121 – read about it and meet with the regional rep

**Experiential:**

* Listen to a book in audio format
* Listen to a movie with audio description

**Mentor: TBD as needed**

**Supervision: TBD as needed**

BOOKS

* [Making Life More Livable: Simple Adaptations For Living At Home After Vision Loss](https://www.afb.org/aw/16/12/15492). Duffy, M. (2015).
* [O&M for Independent Living: Strategies for Teaching Orientation and Mobility to Older Adults](https://www.amazon.com/dp/B017BYD1T4/ref%3Ddp-kindle-redirect?_encoding=UTF8&btkr=1). Griffin-Shirley, N & Bozman, L. (2016).
* [*Pathway to Independence: A guide for people with vision loss*](https://www.amazon.com/Pathway-Independence-people-vision-2011-11-30/dp/B01K3QDH5K). Kersh, Rita (2015).
* No Barriers: A Blind Man's Journey to Kayak the Grand Canyon by [Erik Weihenmayer](https://www.amazon.com/Erik-Weihenmayer/e/B001ILHHJW/ref%3Ddp_byline_cont_book_1)
* The Adversity Advantage: Turning Everyday Struggles Into Everyday Greatness by [Paul G. Stoltz](https://www.goodreads.com/author/show/564411.Paul_G_Stoltz), [Erik Weihenmayer](https://www.goodreads.com/author/show/81006.Erik_Weihenmayer)
* Micheal Nye “my heart is not blind”
* David Feeling your way through life – on Kindle in September
* Tom Sullivan book – seeing lessons – one that is a kid at Perkins and escape Adventures in Darkness –
* Mike May book crashing through

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* VIDEOS
* “What Do You Do When You See A Blind Person?”
* “Going Blind”
* “When Blindness Occurs” by the Seeing Eye
* **“**Walking in My Shoes” <http://www.themtsc.org/safety-resources/video.php> select visually impaired resources, then cross the street in my shoes.
* Lives Worth Living video

*(5)Personnel to Address Individual Communication Needs. Describe how the designated State unit has personnel or obtains the services of other individuals who are able to communicate in appropriate modes of communication with or in the native language of applicants or eligible individuals who have limited English speaking ability.*

(5). 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 also has staff with a background specialty in working with individuals who are Deaf Blind; specialty areas of these staff are low vision, orientation and mobility, and vocational rehabilitation. One individual serves as a subject matter expert and consultant for other staff working with consumers who are Deaf Blind and is supported to attend ongoing training in order to maintain her expertise. Recent training included the Helen Keller National Center on-line training group to include the Helen Keller Confident Living Course and the Haptics course. In addition, they serve on the Helen Keller Deaf Blind Steering Committee, and participate in the Helen Keller Tri-State Collaboration meetings, and Dual Sensory Loss chapter meetings.

DBVI staff utilizes certified interpreter services, such as Maine State Interpreters or Catholic Charities Maine, for individuals with language barriers.

DBVI staff participate in webinars that address communication barriers. One such webinar, Assistive Technology for Effective Distance Communications, was provided to staff by the Disability Rights Maine Deaf Services where staff learned about the Maine Relay system, Telecommunication Equipment program and the National Deaf-Blind Equipment Program.

As a partner in the CareerCenters, DBVI clients who come to the centers and need language interpretation will have access to telephonic interpretation through Certified Languages International.

*(6)Coordination of Personnel Development Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. As appropriate, describe the procedures and activities to coordinate the designated State unit's comprehensive system of personnel development with personnel development under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act*

(6). DBVI staff have received training from the Department of Education to learn more about the educational system and the local schools, including those carrying out activities under section 614 (d) of the IDEA, to learn best practices to coordinate and ensure the provision of pre-employment transition services and/or transition services to potentially eligible or eligible VR students.

# (J) Statewide Assessment

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

(1) (A). 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 pertaining to 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. Attendance is open to the public and available statewide through conference calls.

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 routinely attends various gatherings of the organized blindness community in Maine (American Council of the Blind of Maine, and National Federation of the Blind of Maine), and various regional meetings with consumers and other stakeholders. DBVI has scheduled meetings throughout the year with a number of partners/stakeholders including Catholic Charities Maine (education for blind children), the Iris Network (blindness rehabilitation), Disability Rights Maine, ALPHA One Center for Independent Living, the DBVI State Rehabilitation Council and members of Maine’s three consumer-driven blindness organizations.

DBVI assists eligible individuals with disabilities to prepare for, achieve, and retain employment in competitive integrated employment. DBVI administers the Vocational Rehabilitation program in Maine for the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) specifically for Maine citizens that are blind or visually impaired. A comprehensive needs assessment is required every three years and focuses on the Vocational Rehabilitation program for those that are blind and visually impaired and on the needs of individuals eligible for those services. The assessment is designed to answer important questions about the population eligible for DBVI services living in Maine and their vocational rehabilitation needs. Information gathered for the assessment will guide DBVI in its strategic plan and goal development for the years 2018 - 2020. Specifically, the report responds to federal regulations (34 CFR 361.29) requiring Maine’s Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired (DBVI) to jointly conduct a “comprehensive statewide assessment” with the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) every three years that describes the rehabilitation needs of individuals with disabilities residing within the State, particularly the vocational rehabilitation needs of individuals with the most significant disabilities, including their need for supported employment.

Survey data showed that it is taking longer to close a case and fewer cases are being closed successfully. Since the average wage at closure is increasing each year from the average wage at application, a conclusion could be made that VRCs are working with consumers longer to better prepare them for quality employment outcomes. Further, an emphasis on Career Pathways and economic self-sufficiency has resulted in additional time spent in achieving successful outcomes.

DBVI’s most recent Comprehensive Statement Needs Assessment was completed in March 2018. The entire report is available as a separate document at: <http://www.maine.gov/rehab/dbvi/state_plan/index.shtml>

DBVI works with the Department of Health and Human Services in supporting clients who in addition to having visual impairment have developmental disabilities, brain injuries, other related conditions and physical disabilities through five Centers for Medicaid and Medicare Services 1915c Waivers. Individuals receiving waiver services have significant disabilities and require supports and services to obtain and maintain employment.

(1)(B). DBVI assists eligible individuals with disabilities to prepare for, achieve, and retain employment in competitive integrated employment. DBVI administers the Vocational Rehabilitation program in Maine for the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) specifically for Maine citizens that are blind or visually impaired. A comprehensive needs assessment is required every three years and focuses on the Vocational Rehabilitation program for those that are blind and visually impaired and on the needs of individuals eligible for those services. The assessment is designed to answer important questions about the population eligible for DBVI services living in Maine and their vocational rehabilitation needs. Information gathered for the assessment will guide DBVI in its strategic plan and goal development for the years 2018 - 2020. Specifically, the report responds to federal regulations (34 CFR 361.29) requiring Maine’s Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired (DBVI) to jointly conduct a “comprehensive statewide assessment” with the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) every three years that describes the rehabilitation needs of individuals with disabilities residing within the State, particularly the vocational rehabilitation needs of minorities.

Vocational rehabilitation services to minorities with disabilities in Maine have always been a challenge to DBVI because of the state’s relatively homogeneous population and low ethnic diversity.  According to the US Census, residents are primarily White (94.6%) with small representations of Black (1.6%), Asian (1.2%), and Native American (0.7%) individuals in certain geographical areas of the state. Native Americans represent a historically recognizable group and Maine has nearly 18,500 tribal members who are located both on reservations and defined land, as well as scattered across the state. Tribal members are primarily located in Penobscot, Washington and Aroostook counties. Unemployment figures among Micmac and Maliseet tribes range from 55% to 76%. DBVI continues to work collaboratively with the Houlton Band of Maliseet’s, who were recently awarded a five-year Section 121 grant through 2025.

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 have identified the need to explore culturally specific service delivery models that respond to issues as they related to blindness and visual impairment.

(1)(C). DBVI assists eligible individuals with disabilities to prepare for, achieve, and retain employment in competitive integrated employment. DBVI administers the Vocational Rehabilitation program in Maine for the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) specifically for Maine citizens that are blind or visually impaired. A comprehensive needs assessment is required every three years and focuses on the Vocational Rehabilitation program for those that are blind and visually impaired and on the needs of individuals eligible for those services. The assessment is designed to answer important questions about the population eligible for DBVI services living in Maine and their vocational rehabilitation needs. Information gathered for the assessment will guide DBVI in its strategic plan and goal development for the years 2018 - 2020. Specifically, the report responds to federal regulations (34 CFR 361.29) requiring Maine’s Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired (DBVI) to jointly conduct a “comprehensive statewide assessment” with the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) every three years that describes the rehabilitation needs of individuals with disabilities residing within the State, particularly the vocational rehabilitation needs of iindividuals with disabilities who are minorities and individuals with disabilities who have been unserved or underserved by the vocational rehabilitation program.

Due to the rural demographics of Maine, transportation presents a significant unmet need in most areas of the state. Specific issues include the lack of 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 further identified that even in communities where public transportation existed it didn’t run during evening hours/weekends and paratransit is not available to those who do not qualify for Mainecare.

(1)(D). DBVI assists eligible individuals with disabilities to prepare for, achieve, and retain employment in competitive integrated employment. DBVI administers the Vocational Rehabilitation program in Maine for the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) specifically for Maine citizens that are blind or visually impaired. A comprehensive needs assessment is required every three years and focuses on the Vocational Rehabilitation program for those that are blind and visually impaired and on the needs of individuals eligible for those services. The assessment is designed to answer important questions about the population eligible for DBVI services living in Maine and their vocational rehabilitation needs. Information gathered for the assessment will guide DBVI in its strategic plan and goal development for the years 2018 - 2020. Specifically, the report responds to federal regulations (34 CFR 361.29) requiring Maine’s Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired (DBVI) to jointly conduct a “comprehensive statewide assessment” with the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) every three years that describes the rehabilitation needs of individuals with disabilities residing within the State, particularly the vocational rehabilitation needs of iindividuals with disabilities served through other components of the statewide workforce development system.

The CSNA survey identified the need to do more outreach to employers about individuals who are blind and visually impaired. Employers will benefit from increased education about consumer’s unique strengths and capabilities and the services provided by DBVI.

Co–location in Maine’s network of Department of Labor (MDOL) One–Stop CareerCenters has provided DBVI the opportunity to work in partnership with several other programs that are components of the statewide workforce development system and can support the employment of people with disabilities. The CareerCenters provide several employment programs that serve people with disabilities. The Maine Job Link is an online accessible CareerCenter tool to allow job seekers from around the state to be matched with real-time available open (currently over 11,862) positions.  Currently, the Job Link shows 3,298 job seekers.

While the Bureau of Employment Services (BES) collects data on self-reported disability, it does not require that individuals disclose having a disability.  As a result of past work through collaborative efforts including two rounds of the Disability Employment Initiative grant funding, there is increased awareness and attention in the CareerCenter to increasing access to expanded services for customers with visual impairments.  There are concerns about the accuracy of the Maine Job Link’s data collection system. The system is designed to support employers and job seekers without focusing on disabling conditions.

The numbers of individuals with disabilities enrolled in WIOA title IB and III programs during PY18 (PY18 Annual Report data):

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Program | Enrolled | Disclosed Disability | % |
| LEX Self-Service | 42,700 | Not reported |  |
| LEX Employment Srvs  | 4819 | 505 | 10.48% |
| ADULT | 540 | 68 | 12.59% |
| DISLOCATED WORKER | 264 | 22 | 8.33% |
| YOUTH | 402 | 186 | 46.27% |

(1)(E). DBVI assists eligible individuals with disabilities to prepare for, achieve, and retain employment in competitive integrated employment. DBVI administers the Vocational Rehabilitation program in Maine for the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) specifically for Maine citizens that are blind or visually impaired. A comprehensive needs assessment is required every three years and focuses on the Vocational Rehabilitation program for those that are blind and visually impaired and on the needs of individuals eligible for those services. The assessment is designed to answer important questions about the population eligible for DBVI services living in Maine and their vocational rehabilitation needs. Information gathered for the assessment will guide DBVI in its strategic plan and goal development for the years 2018 - 2020. Specifically, the report responds to federal regulations (34 CFR 361.29) requiring Maine’s Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired (DBVI) to jointly conduct a “comprehensive statewide assessment” with the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) every three years that describes the rehabilitation needs of individuals with disabilities residing within the State, particularly the vocational rehabilitation needs of youth with disabilities, and students with disabilities, including their need for pre-employment transition services or other transition services.

DBVI is experiencing an increase in transition-aged and working aged consumers according to the CSNA data. This could be the result of the loss of the homemaker closure coupled with the recent requirement to spend 15% of Title I funds on students with a disability. It could also be that the inverse is true and the increase in the transition-aged consumers is the direct result of the increased focus on activities for pre-employment transition services for students with a disability.

Under WIOA an emphasis on Career Pathways and economic self-sufficiency has resulted in additional time spent in achieving successful outcomes. RSA guidance suggested that DBVI staff present students and youth with a career development approach that views minimum wage employment as a work experience and that promotes continuation of vocational rehabilitation guidance and counseling and other services that assist youth in obtaining higher paying careers.

(2). While DBVI has not had the need to establish, develop, or improve community rehabilitation programs within the State, the agency has pursued a new payment structure that is designed to better support contractual agreements with community rehabilitation providers while reinforcing the importance to client outcomes of timely and available services.

(3). DBVI continues to look at the needs of each individual who is blind or has low vision taking into consideration his/her strengths, preferences, and interests. DBVI will work with schools, including those carrying out activities under section 614 (d) of the IDEA, to coordinate and ensure the provision of pre-employment transition services to potentially eligible or eligible VR students. Other services may include: community experiences, the development of employment in a competitive, integrated setting and other post-school adult living objectives.

# (K) Annual Estimates

 *Describe:*

1. *The number of individuals in the State who are eligible for services.*
2. *The number of eligible individuals who will receive services under:*
	* 1. *The VR Program;*
		2. *The Supported Employment Program; and*
		3. *each priority category, if under an order of selection.*
3. *The number of individuals who are eligible for VR services, but are not receiving such services due to an order of selection; and*
4. *The cost of services for the number of individuals estimated to be eligible for services. If under an order of selection, identify the cost of services for each priority category.*

(1) .DBVI looked at the total state population of individuals identified as having a ‘disability with vision difficulty’ according to the most recently published American Community Survey (31,650) when estimating the number of individuals who potentially could be eligible for services. 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 actually receive services with funds provided under Title I and Part B of Title VI.

(2)(A). DBVI estimates that for FFY20 approximately 300-400 individuals who are blind or visually impaired will be served in Title I by the Division. This number is estimated using the number of individuals served in FFY19 in the VR program.

(2)(B). The Title VI – Supported Employment regulations were affected with the passing of WIOA, allowing states a longer period of time to provide services to youth with a significant disability who required supported employment services. Another change was that costs were not captured as supported employment until the individual was placed in employment status. The funds were also specifically earmarked for certain populations, restricting spending to adults if the equivalent expenditures were not made within the youth budget. Therefore, there may not be a direct correlation between the number of eligible individuals to the amount spent in each respective budget. In FFY2019, there were 31 individuals that were identified as needing supported employment services. The costs of these services fell within the Title VI as well as the Title I program as many of the identified individuals were not placed into employment status. Currently, there are approximately 10 DBVI consumers identified as “Youth with a Significant Disability.” DBVI has determined that many consumers are able to work in the competitive labor market without supports.

(2)(C). DBVI is not currently under an Order of Selection.

(3). DBVI is not currently under an Order of Selection.

(4). DBVI looked at FFY19 expenditures for the VR program (including state VR match and all Pre-ETS expenses) in addition to Supported Employment expenses for both youth and adults to determine what the potential costs of services for the number of estimated individuals for services. In FFY19, the cost of these services was approximately $3,513,668.11 so DBVI anticipates spending this amount or slightly higher for FFY20.

# (L) State Goals and Priorities

*The designated State unit must:*

1. *Identify if the goals and priorities were jointly developed and agreed to by the State VR agency and the State Rehabilitation Council, if the State has a Council, and jointly agreed to any revisions.*
2. *Identify the goals and priorities in carrying out the VR and Supported Employment programs.*
3. *Ensure that the goals and priorities are based on an analysis of the following areas:*
	1. *the most recent comprehensive statewide assessment, including any updates;*
	2. *the State’s performance under the performance accountability measures of section 116 of WIOA; and*
	3. *other available information on the operation and effectiveness of the VR program, including any reports received from the State Rehabilitation Council and findings and recommendations from monitoring activities conducted under section 107.*

(1). Based upon DBVI’s comprehensive statewide assessment, WIOA requirements and reauthorization of the Rehabilitation Act, the goals and priorities for the 2020 State Plan were developed and agreed upon by the DBVI and its State Rehabilitation Council.

(2). The following are goals and priorities were developed through the needs identified in the most recent DBVI CSNA, Title I of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) of 2014 (including the common performance measures of section 116 of WIOA), and input from the State Rehabilitation Council:

Goal (1)

To Engage DBVI clients in Career Pathways that lead to meaningful and quality employment outcomes.

Goal (2)

To increase measurable skill gains and credential attainment of DBVI clients in alignment with WIOA deliverables.

Goal (3)

To deliver Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) to youth who are blind and visually impaired, assisting them to successfully live and work independently in the community.

Goal (4)

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 (5)

To increase awareness of services and resources for individuals who are blind or have low vision.

(3). Based on the needs identified in the most recent DBVI CSNA, Title I of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) of 2014 (including the common performance measures of section 116 of WIOA), and input from the State Rehabilitation Council, the goals and priorities from the previous DBVI VR state plan were modified and updated to reflect new areas of focus for DBVI.

# (M) Order of Selection

*Describe:*

1. *The order to be followed in selecting eligible individuals to be provided VR services.*
2. *The justification for the order.*
3. *The service and outcome goals.*
4. *The time within which these goals may be achieved for individuals in each priority category within the order.*
5. *How individuals with the most significant disabilities are selected for services before all other individuals with disabilities; and*
6. *If the designated State unit has elected to serve eligible individuals, regardless of any established order of selection, who require specific services or equipment to maintain employment.*

DBVI is not implementing an Order of Selection.

# (N) Goals and Plans for Distribution of title VI Funds

1. *Specify the State's goals and priorities for funds received under section 603 of the Rehabilitation Act for the provision of supported employment services.*
2. *Describe the activities to be conducted, with funds reserved pursuant to section 603(d), for youth with the most significant disabilities, including :*
	* 1. *the provision of extended services for a period not to exceed 4 years; and*
		2. *how the State will leverage other public and private funds to increase resources for extended services and expanded supported employment opportunities for youth with the most significant disabilities.*

(1).The Division has remained committed to assuring that individuals with the most significant 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.

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, consumers, with a most significant disability, may also have a secondary disability such as mental illness, traumatic brain injury, cognitive deficits or a physical disability.

(2)(A). DBVI uses Title VI – Supported Employment funds primarily for job coaching, and job development for individuals with vision impairment and mental illness. DBVI will 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.

(2)(B). Based on criteria defined in our VR rules for eligibility for supported employment, and utilizing our case management system, DBVI staff will be able to continue to identify those youth with the most significant disabilities who would qualify for supported employment funds. Maine DBVI receives approximately $48,000 in Supported Employment funds annually. VR agencies are expected to reserve and expend 50% of these funds for youth with the most significant disability as well as provide a non-Federal contribution in an amount not less than 10%. Once those funds are expended, DBVI can use VR Title I funds in support of activities for youth with the most significant disabilities. Also, staff have received trainings on long term supports and the eligibility criteria for consumers for the various state waivers. DBVI continues to have state funds to use for extended services after the VR case is closed.

# (O) State's Strategies

*Describe the required strategies and how the agency will use these strategies to achieve its goals and priorities, support innovation and expansion activities, and overcome any barriers to accessing the VR and the Supported Employment programs (See sections 101(a)(15)(D) and (18)(B) of the Rehabilitation Act and section 427 of the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA)):*

1. *The methods to be used to expand and improve services to individuals with disabilities.*
2. *How a broad range of assistive technology services and devices will be provided to individuals with disabilities at each stage of the rehabilitation process and on a statewide basis.*
3. *The outreach procedures that will be used to identify and serve individuals with disabilities who are minorities, including those with the most significant disabilities, as well as those who have been unserved or underserved by the VR program.*
4. *The methods to be used to improve and expand VR services for students with disabilities, including the coordination of services designed to facilitate the transition of such students from school to postsecondary life (including the receipt of VR services, postsecondary education, employment, and pre-employment transition services).*
5. *If applicable, plans for establishing, developing, or improving community rehabilitation programs within the State.*
6. *Strategies to improve the performance of the State with respect to the performance accountability measures under section 116 of WIOA.*
7. *Strategies for assisting other components of the statewide workforce development system in assisting individuals with disabilities.*
8. *How the agency's strategies will be used to:*
	* + 1. *achieve goals and priorities by the State, consistent with the comprehensive needs assessment;*
			2. *support innovation and expansion activities; and*
			3. *overcome identified barriers relating to equitable access to and participation of individuals with disabilities in the State VR Services Program and the State Supported Employment Services Program.*

(1).DBVI has developed goals and priorities based on identified needs from the most recent DBVI CSNA, Title I of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) of 2014 (including the common performance measures of section 116 of WIOA), and input from the State Rehabilitation Council. For each goal, objectives and strategies to achieve those objectives were established to expand and improve services to individuals with disabilities.

To engage Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired (DBVI) clients in Career Pathways that lead to meaningful and quality employment outcomes.

Objective: Increase employment outcomes that lead to self-sufficiency and/or decreased public benefits of DBVI clients through promotion of Career Pathway planning representing a shift in focus of job attainment to one of a career for economic success.

Strategies:

* 1. Continue to promote Career Pathway models through staff trainings and use of technical assistance.
	2. Prepare DBVI Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) clients to be successful in a full range of secondary or post-secondary education options, including apprenticeships.
	3. Improve the Comprehensive Assessment of Rehabilitation Needs (CARNS) of clients by providing training to VR counselors on various assessment tools/databases to include use of Labor Market Information (LMI) and workforce trends, Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) arenas, use of O\*NET and other occupational databases, as well as accessing Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) partner resources.
	4. Increase emphasis in matching skills and abilities of DBVI VR clients with vocational planning that aligns with the skill needs in the economy of the state or regional economy to achieve potential for family sustaining wage growth.

Objective: Increase exposure and use of apprenticeship and self-employment strategies for DBVI VR clients.

Strategies:

* 1. As part of CARNS training, promote use of Apprenticeship and Self-Employment as a viable/preferred approach to Career Pathways.
	2. Work with MDOL Apprenticeship Program and DBVI/DVR partners to ensure that job seekers with visual impairments are included in the growth and expansion of apprenticeships in Maine.
	3. Introduce use of Apprenticeship models to the Rehabilitation Center located at the Iris Network and the Business Enterprise Program (BEP) program in an effort to develop additional career pathways for persons who are blind and visually impaired.
	4. Reestablish DBVI/DVR Self-Employment Focus Group(s), comprised of VR counselors, Small Business Development Center business consultants, and Client Assistance Program staff, and provide training and technical assistance to DBVI staff and consumers engaged in Self-Employment.

Goal 2: To increase measurable skill gains and credential attainment of DBVI clients in alignment with WIOA deliverables.

Objective: To become more proficient in identifying and capturing Measurable Skills Gain (MSG) and credential attainment.

Strategies:

1. DBVI will continue working with WINTAC for technical assistance and in educating staff regarding understanding of MSG and credential obtainment.
2. CARNS and New Counselor training will have focused components on MSG and credential obtainment.
3. DBVI will increase staff competence in use of AwareVR in tracking and recording of MSG and credential obtainment.
4. DBVI will work with HospitalityMaine in use of the Workhands App to track and record MSG and credential obtainment.

Goal 3: To deliver Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) to youth who are blind and visually impaired, assisting them to successfully live and work independently in the community.

Objective: Increase and expand services to blind and visually impaired youth and students.

Strategies:

1. Continue to work with the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) members such as representatives from Catholic Charities Maine, Iris Network, and the Department of Education, to identify Pre-ETS activities/programs that can be provided to potentially eligible or eligible students.
2. Increase the number of students who are referred to the VR program as part of their individualized educational plan (IEP). This will be done in part through consultation with Blindness Rehabilitation Specialists (BLRS) who connect families with transitional and community resources. DBVI staff will be members of the IEP team.
3. Hold regional meetings with DBVI staff, and contracted partners including Catholic Charities Teachers of the Visually Impaired (TVI) toward the beginning of each school year to determine VR eligibility on all students 14 years of age and older.
4. Continue to make optimal use and expansion of Maine-based immersion centers to offer summer programs, including blindness rehabilitation, independent living, work experiences and college preparation. Current programs include College Prep, Living On Your Own (LOYO), Learning, Independence, Fun, Employment (LIFE) 101 and 102, all of which include use of Assistive Technology (AT), Vision Rehabilitation Therapy (VRT), Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors (VRC), Teachers of the Visually Impaired (TVI) and Orientation and Mobility Instructors (O&M). Sessions for parents to educate them on resources, encourage independence with their kids, and a question and answer (Q&A) sessions are also to be offered.
5. Continued and increased implementation of Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC) and Pre-Employment Skills Groups where students are encouraged to engage in community, develop Activities of Daily Living (ADL’s) and Interdisciplinary Learning (IDL’s,) explore area businesses and event centers, and attend information workshops/seminars. School personnel associated with Blind and Visually Impaired students are contacted early each school year and made aware of these planned events and are invited to attend/provide input. Creation a summer youth employment, job shadow, Community Based Situational Assessment (CBSA), job club and/or work internship experience for all students by age 16.

Goal 4: 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 WIOA core and other Government partners to address the transportation needs regionally.

Strategies:

1. DBVI staff will provide input to DOT, providers of public transportation and to core partners regarding accessibility needs of our consumers. Input shall include for example accessible route maps, large print bus schedules/routes, audible street crossings, tactile pads and lighting/contrast consultation.
2. DBVI has designated staff to consult with transportation departments regarding transit studies, bicycle access, bus programming and staff meetings.
3. DBVI attends Transportation For All and Public Notice meetings issued by DOT.

Objective: DBVI will work with Maine’s Section 121 VR Grant – Wabanaki Vocational Rehabilitation to identify and 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 American 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) including DBVI/DVR New Counselor Training upon request.

Objective: DBVI will continue its efforts to cultivate a statewide communication network for consumers who are deaf-blind or dual sensory impaired (hearing and vision) to assist in their endeavors for employment and independent living.

Strategies:

1. Work with collaborative partners to increase training opportunities for Deaf-Blind Interpreters and Support Service Providers (SSP’s).
2. Collaborate with Helen Keller National Center on resources, outreach, hearing aid access, and availability of funds.
3. Provide feedback and information on new legislation regarding insurance cost for hearing aids to the Division.
4. Designate DBVI staff to attend regional deaf-blind or dual sensory forums (for example 2019 Tri-State Meeting) and identify funding for Support Service Professionals (SSP).
5. DBVI staff will provide training to Community Rehabilitation Providers (CRPs), with an emphasis around learning basic, introductory Orientation and Mobility techniques for supporting deaf-blind or dual sensory clients in the workplace.
6. Collaborate on the creation of on-line webinars on Independent Living (IL) equipment and devices to enhance independence for deaf-blind or dual sensory loss clients and increase access to equipment available through ICANCONNECT.org.

Objective: DBVI will work to expand the number of New Mainers, who are receiving services from the agency.

Strategies:

1. DBVI will communicate with advocacy organizations, such as American Council for the Blind, National Federation for the Blind, Pine Tree Guide Dog Users, to identify New Mainers who would benefit from DBVI VR services.
2. DBVI, upon request, provide informational sessions and trainings to service agencies who provide case management and other services to New Mainers. DBVI provides in-person and online orientations describing our eligibility requirements, service delivery and program requirements to job seekers.

Objective: DBVI will continue its efforts to identify minorities with the most significant disabilities who are blind or visually impaired to assist in their endeavors for employment and independent living.

Strategies:

1. DBVI will provide outreach to clinics/medical professionals in communities known to serve immigrant communities, such as Lewiston and Portland.
2. DBVI will provide outreach to community support programs known to work with immigrant populations (i.e. Maine Immigrant and Refugee Services and Catholic Charities)

Goal 5: To increase awareness of services and resources for individuals who are blind or have low vision.

Objective: DBVI will become more publicly visible and recognized as a primary source of information and services for individuals with visual impairments, as well as their families and employers.

Strategies:

1. With input from the SRC, DBVI’s website will be updated and made more helpful to end users. DBVI will continue to focus on accessibility as updates are made.
2. DBVI contractors will be required to include acknowledgement of Rehabilitation Services Administration DBVI grant funding on program materials and public documents.
3. DBVI and contracted partners will provide uniform services across the state.

Objective: DBVI will work with the Maine blindness community to promote the services and resources available to individuals who are blind or have low vision.

Strategies:

1. Maine DBVI staff will provide in-service trainings to other service providers, such as Community Rehabilitation Providers, within their region.
2. Maine DBVI Staff will provide service awareness and assistive technology/adaptive device activities for consumers and organizations within their regions.
3. DBVI will coordinate cooperative training with Maine Department of Transportation (DOT).
4. DBVI will work with its contracted partners to create a more organized and centralized public education effort.
5. DBVI will continue to explore collaboration with the Veteran’s Administration Blind Rehabilitation program to streamline the referral process between the two agencies.
6. Encourage all staff to regularly attend local Lions Club meetings in an effort to promote DBVI services and resources.
7. Maine DBVI staff and contracted partners will provide service awareness to doctors within their region.

*How a broad range of assistive technology services and devices will be provided to individuals with disabilities at each stage of the rehabilitation process and on a statewide basis.*

(2).DBVI and its contracted partners continue to seek access and training in assistive technology through its collaboration with training and equipment loan programs such as Maine CITE, AllTech and Alpha One, and through equipment demonstrations offered at conferences, seminars and through on-line videos and product dissemination so staff are knowledgeable regarding technology and able to keep up with the ever evolving changes. This allows each team member to provide assistance with technology to DBVI consumers throughout their rehabilitation process, from the VR counselor to the O&M specialist, as well as the contracted Vision Rehabilitation Specialist. This approach is used for all consumers of all ages and across the state.

*The outreach procedures that will be used to identify and serve individuals with disabilities who are minorities, including those with the most significant disabilities, as well as those who have been unserved or underserved by the VR program.*

(3). Goal #4 identifies outreach procedures used to identify and serve individuals with disabilities, such as minorities with the most significant disabilities as well as those unserved or underserved:

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 WIOA core and other Government partners to address the transportation needs regionally.

Strategies:

* 1. DBVI staff will provide input to DOT, providers of public transportation and to core partners regarding accessibility needs of our consumers. Input shall include for example accessible route maps, large print bus schedules/routes, audible street crossings, tactile pads and lighting/contrast consultation.
	2. DBVI has designated staff to consult with transportation departments regarding transit studies, bicycle access, bus programming and staff meetings.
	3. DBVI attends Transportation For All and Public Notice meetings issued by DOT.

Objective: DBVI will work with Maine’s Section 121 VR Grant – Wabanaki Vocational Rehabilitation to identify and 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 American 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) including DBVI/DVR New Counselor Training upon request.

Objective: DBVI will continue its efforts to cultivate a statewide communication network for consumers who are deaf-blind or dual sensory impaired (hearing and vision) to assist in their endeavors for employment and independent living.

Strategies:

* 1. Work with collaborative partners to increase training opportunities for Deaf-Blind Interpreters and Support Service Providers (SSP’s).
	2. Collaborate with Helen Keller National Center on hearing aid access and funding sources.
	3. Provide feedback and information on new legislation regarding insurance cost for hearing aids to the Division.
	4. Designate DBVI staff to attend regional deaf-blind or dual sensory forums (for example 2019 Tri-State Meeting) and identify funding for Support Service Professionals (SSP).
	5. DBVI staff will provide outreach to Community Rehabilitation Providers (CRPs), with an emphasis around learning basic, introductory Orientation and Mobility techniques for supporting deaf-blind or dual sensory clients in the workplace.
	6. Collaborate on the creation of on-line webinars on Independent Living (IL) equipment and devices to enhance independence for deaf-blind or dual sensory loss clients and increase access to equipment available through ICANCONNECT.org.

Objective: DBVI attempt to expand the number of New Mainers who are receiving services from the agency.

Strategies:

* 1. DBVI will communicate with advocacy organizations to identify New Mainers who would benefit from DBVI VR services.
	2. DBVI, upon request, provide informational sessions and trainings to service agencies who provide case management and other services to New Mainers. DBVI provides in-person and online orientations describing our eligibility requirements, service delivery and program requirements to job seekers.

*The methods to be used to improve and expand VR services for students with disabilities, including the coordination of services designed to facilitate the transition of such students from school to postsecondary life (including the receipt of VR services, postsecondary education, employment, and pre-employment transition services).*

(4). DBVI will focus on Goal 3: To deliver Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) to youth who are blind and visually impaired, assisting them to successfully live and work independently in the community as a method to improve and expand VR services for students with disabilities, including the coordination of services designed to facilitate the transition of such students from school to postsecondary life (including the receipt of VR services, postsecondary education, employment, and pre-employment transition services).

Objective: Increase and expand services to blind and visually impaired youth and students.

Strategies:

1. Continue to work with the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) to identify Pre-ETS activities/programs that can be provided to potentially eligible or eligible students.
2. Increase the number of students who are referred to the VR program as part of their educational plan. This will be done in part through the case management by the Blindness Rehabilitation Specialists (BLRS) who connect families with transitional and community resources.
3. Hold regional meetings with DBVI staff, and contracted partners including Catholic Charities Teachers of the Visually Impaired (TVI) toward the beginning of each school year to determine VR eligibility on all students 14 years of age and older.
4. Continue to make optimal use and expansion of Maine-based immersion centers to offer summer programs, including blindness rehabilitation, independent living, work experiences and college preparation. Current programs include College Prep, Living On Your Own (LOYO), Learning, Independence, Fun, Employment (LIFE) 101 and 102, all of which include use of Assistive Technology (AT), Vision Rehabilitation Therapy (VRT), Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors (VRC), Teachers of the Visually Impaired (TVI) and Orientation and Mobility Instructors (O&M). Sessions for parents to educate them on resources, independence with their kids, and a question and answer (Q&A) sessions are also to be offered.
5. Continued and increased implementation of Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC) and Pre-Employment Skills Groups where students are encouraged to engage in community, develop Activities of Daily Living (ADL’s) and Interdisciplinary Learning (IDL’s,) explore area businesses and event centers, and attend information workshops/seminars. School personnel associated with Blind and Visually Impaired students are contacted early each school year and made aware of these planned events and are invited to attend/provide input. Creation a summer youth employment, job shadow, Community Based Situational Assessment (CBSA), job club and/or work internship experience for all students by age 16.

(5). While DBVI has not had the need to establish, develop, or improve community rehabilitation programs within the State, the agency has pursued a new payment structure that is designed to better support contractual agreements with community rehabilitation providers while reinforcing the importance to client outcomes of timely and available services.

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

(6). DBVI is a partner with Adult Education, the SWIB, and the larger workforce development system to incorporate and apply the new rules related to the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), including drafting a unified state plan adopting new performance measures and further collaboration with the One-Stop system. DBVI is a member of the Maine WIOA steering committee, which is guiding the Act’s implementation, and also has staff participating on multiple related sub-committees**.**

DBVI will be using wage data from the Maine Department of Labor’s Unemployment Insurance to establish baseline and initial WIOA performance targets for employment outcomes. In addition to Maine UI wage data, Maine will access State Wage Interchange System (SWIS) data by submitting regularly scheduled data requests. BRS has contracted with the National Student Clearinghouse and will access data from that source on a regular basis to document credential attainment, both academic and occupational. BRS is also developing a data sharing agreement with Maine’s Department of Education, to assist with documenting adult, secondary and career and technical credentials and measurable skill gains. The agreement is expected to be in place within PY 2019.

DBVI presented a is providing ongoing training to all staff so that they have a solid working knowledge of WIOA and how it impacts the work they do. Training topics have included: an overview of WIOA partners; common performance measures, career pathways and best practices in serving the needs of employers. BRS has an intensive technical assistance agreement in place with WINTAC to assist with this effort and to further their expertise on Common Performance Measures, Internal Controls, Career Pathways, Apprenticeships and Peer Mentoring.

BRS and its core partners are using the Maine Job Link as a common data collection tool for performance data regarding Effectiveness in Serving Employers.

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

(7). DBVI participated in the development of a 6-part series with a WIOA overview and partner cross training. There are 13 brief webinar links beginning with “WIOA 101: An introduction to the New Law” and ending with the “Youth Program”. Included in the zoom trainings were common performance measures, career pathways, youth programming, Center for Workforce Research and Information, Apprenticeship and working with corrections and Veterans. This cross training provided partners with information about working with individuals who are blind or visually impaired.

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

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

*support innovation and expansion activities; and*

*overcome identified barriers relating to equitable access to and participation of individuals with disabilities in the State VR Services Program and the State Supported Employment Services Program.*

(8)(A). DBVI developed strategies that will help them attain their goals/objectives. DBVI will continue to educate partners, other state agencies, and private organizations about working with blind or visually impaired consumers. DBVI will communicate with advocacy organizations to identify New Mainers who would benefit from DBVI VR services. DBVI, upon request, will provide informational sessions and trainings to service agencies who provide case management and other services to New Mainers. DBVI provides in-person and online orientations describing our eligibility requirements, service delivery and program requirements to job seekers.

Transportation was identified in the CSNA as on on-going unmet need. DBVI staff will provide input to DOT, providers of public transportation and to core partners regarding accessibility needs of our consumers. Input shall include for example accessible route maps, large print bus schedules/routes, audible street crossings, tactile pads and lighting/contrast consultation. DBVI has designated staff to consult with transportation departments regarding transit studies, bicycle access, bus programming and staff meetings. DBVI attends Transportation For All and Public Notice meetings issued by DOT.

There was a need for increased awareness of the DBVI services identified in the CSNA. Maine DBVI staff will provide in-service trainings to other service providers within their region. DBVI Staff will provide service awareness and assistive technology/adaptive device activities for consumers and the general public within their regions. DBVI will coordinate cooperative training with Maine Department of Transportation (DOT). DBVI will work with its main contractors to create a more organized and centralized public education effort. DBVI will continue to explore collaboration with the Veteran’s Administration Blind Rehabilitation program to streamline the referral process between the two agencies. DBVI will encourage all staff to regularly attend local Lions Club meetings. DBVI staff and contracted partners will provide service awareness to doctors within their region.

(8)(B). 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.

DBVI continues to seek access and training in assistive technology through its collaboration with training and equipment loan programs such as Maine CITE, AllTech and Alpha One, and through equipment demonstrations offered at conferences, seminars and through on-line videos and product dissemination. DBVI O&M instructors seek and disseminate feedback regarding service and equipment needs, available resources and emerging technologies though quarterly meetings and on-line discussion portals. DBVI recently purchased a number of O & M requested technologies to allow for decreased dependence on loan programs, improved access to technologies for our clients and greater flexibility in providing that access.

(8)(C). Many DBVI consumers need assistive technology to overcome barriers to have equitable access to services and employment. One example where DBVI assisted a consumer with overcoming a barrier was a reception position within a state facility. Assistive technology (JAWS) was purchased for the individual to provide equitable access to this position. Training was provided to other partners/employees within the building to give them a better understanding of working with an individual who is blind or visually impaired.

# (P) Evaluation and Reports of Progress: VR and Supported Employment Goals.

 *Describe:*

1. *An evaluation of the extent to which the VR program goals described in the approved VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan for the most recently completed program year were achieved. The evaluation must:*
2. *Identify the strategies that contributed to the achievement of the goals.*
3. *Describe the factors that impeded the achievement of the goals and priorities.*
4. *An evaluation of the extent to which the Supported Employment program goals described in the Supported Employment Supplement for the most recent program year were achieved. The evaluation must:*
	* 1. *Identify the strategies that contributed to the achievement of the goals.*
		2. *Describe the factors that impeded the achievement of the goals and priorities.*
5. *The VR program’s performance on the performance accountability indicators under section 116 of WIOA.*
6. *How the funds reserved for innovation and expansion (I&E) activities were utilized.*

(1)(A). Below are the goals described in the FY 2016 approved VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan for the most recently completed program year, 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 stabilize DBVI’s financial situation, ensuring that expenditures are budgeted consistently within existing and available federal and state funds.

Objective: DBVI’s operational expenses will be equal to its federal grant award and matching state funds, allowing re-allotment funds to serve as a reserve in times of budget constraints, such as federal continuing resolutions, and a resource for one-time initiatives that will benefit people who are blind and visually impaired in Maine.

Strategies:

1. Further develop budget reports with the Department of Administrative and Financial Services (DAFS) to better monitor and manage expenditures in real time. In accordance with State of Maine procurement policies and procedures, ensure that the required and necessary services for the education of blind children are available July 1, 2016 after the current contract expires.

UPDATE: DBVI and DAFS have worked collaboratively over the last couple of years to improve budget reports to better monitor and manage expenditures for each reporting period. DBVI staff meet with DAFS on a monthly basis (and frequently in between) to review the reports and to ensure that the budgets are accurate and that DBVI is meeting all the federal and state budget requirements.

1. In accordance with State of Maine procurement policies and procedures, ensure that the required and necessary services for community-based vision rehabilitation services are available July 1, 2016 after the current contract expires.

UPDATE: DBVI has continued to secure an annual contract since this one expired. Negotiations took place each year with the Iris Network staff and DBVI staff to ensure that the required and necessary services were available at a reasonable, cost effective price.

Goal 2: To increase successful competitive employment outcomes for DBVI clients.

Objective: Reduce the amount of time it takes to achieve a competitive employment outcome for DBVI clients from 54 months in FFY 2010 to 31 months in FFY 2013, to 27 months in FFY 2015 and to 26 months for FFY2017.

Strategies:

1. Continue re-establishment of 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.

Update (2018): The Rehabilitation Center opened in September 2015. Often it takes some time with new programs to determine what is working and what is not working. A group comprised of Iris Network staff, and DBVI staff, both direct service and administrative, meet quarterly to review the progress/program at the center. Modifications are made to improve services to consumers. Since the opening of the Rehabilitation Center, at least 33 individuals were involved in some programming at the center. Some received only assessments while others completed the entire program. Eleven of the twenty-seven graduates have worked since completing the program, which is a 41% success rate. For FFY19, there were many individuals that either went through a full program at the Center or a truncated, less comprehensive program to achieve employment targets. DBVI has continued to work with the Iris Network to tailor the program to increase exposure.

1. Expand the use of assistive technology to increase the rate of competitive closures.

UPDATE: Maine DBVI has been successful in using assistive technology in the placement of successful closures. One example is the use of JAWS for two receptionist positions has allowed them to be very successful at their jobs.

Objective: Contribute to Maine’s WIOA Performance Accountability and Unified Plan measures by increasing the number of successful competitive employment outcomes for individuals who receive services from DBVI from 30 in FFY 2015 to 36 in FFY 2017.

Strategies:

1. Work with WIOA core partners at MDOL and Adult Education to ensure that job seekers with visual impairments are included in the growth and diversification of Maine’s workforce.
2. b. Increase DBVI’s relevance to employers through technical assistance and support regarding vision loss, rehabilitation technology and employment.
3. Refer and support participation of six DBVI clients at the Iris Rehabilitation Center at any given time through Individualized Plans for Employment.
4. Deliver at least one session of the DBVI Employability Skills Program every other year to clients who are long-term unemployed/underemployed or otherwise are stuck in job seeking.

UPDATE: Maine DBVI has been successful in working with core partners at MDOL and Adult Education to participate in cross-training for staff. This allowed other MDOL staff to gain a better understanding of the services that DBVI provides as well as provided DBVI staff with a greater knowledge of other programs that might benefit DBVI consumers. There was also training on blindness skills/knowledge at the regional levels. DBVI staff provided blindness etiquette and other trainings to many of the core partners.

Objective: Implement new WIOA regulations that affect individuals who have been historically served through DBVI’s VR program with the goal of “homemaker.”

Strategies:

1. Assist current DBVI clients to achieve the goals outlined in their IPE.
2. Assess newly referred clients to determine if they can be served under the VR program through IPE’s that identify competitive employment goals but start with blindness rehabilitation and independent living skill development services. Provide staff training and supervisory support in the development of these types of plans.
3. For new referrals that cannot be served under the VR program, provide IL case management and track needs that are unmet due to absence of resources.
4. Seek advice and advocacy from the SRC’s homemaker workgroup for individuals with visual impairments who may be negatively affected by these changes.

UPDATE: DBVI VR counselors continued to assist clients to achieve their goals. With the implementation of WIOA, DSUs could continue to provide services to individuals with uncompensated employment goals on their IPEs that were approved prior to the effective date of the final regulations through June 30, 2017, unless a longer period of time was required based on the needs of the individual as documented in the individual’s service record. After this date, any new applicants who were not interested in work but needed some blindness rehabilitation skills, entered the IL program. Maine DBVI was successful during this period to attain some additional general fund appropriation to either match the federal OIB grant or use for those individuals under the age of 55 that needed independent living services. DBVI worked very closely with the SRC homemaker group through this process. The group was then disbanded.

Goal 3: To deliver Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) to youth who are blind and visually impaired, assisting them to successfully live and work independently in the community.

Objective: Use the equivalent of 15% of DBVI’s federal allotment to serve students who are blind and visually impaired.

Strategies:

1. Receive assistance from the SRC’s workgroup in identifying ways that Pre-ETS can be provided that will make the best use of the funds that must be set aside.
2. Increase the number of students who are referred to the VR program as part of their educational plan. This will be done in part through the case management by the Blindness Rehabilitation Specialists (BLRS) who connect families with transitional and community resources.
3. Hold regional meetings with DBVI staff, and contracted partners toward the beginning of each school year to determine VR eligibility on all students 14 years of age and older.
4. Make optimal use of the existence of a Maine-based immersion center to offer summer programs, including blindness rehabilitation, independent living, work experiences and college preparation. College preparation will include AT, VRT, VRC- vocational, volunteer, O&M. Another planned program is for those 8th – 12th graders not planning on pursuing a college program. Another anticipated program at the immersion center will focus on volunteer, CBSA’s, work experiences, job club, VRT, AT, and O&M skills. There is a planned session for parents to educate them on resources, independence with their kids, and a Q&A session.
5. Create a summer youth employment, job shadow, CBSA, job club and/or work internship experience for all students by age 16.

UPDATE: DBVI continues to expand its understanding and engagement of Pre-ETS related activities and services.

The 4th iteration (every other year) of the college prep program was conducted in 2018. The program ran for 5 weeks from July 8 – August 10 for 8 students who are visually impaired. The mission is to identify students who may or may not be ready for college and provide opportunities to help prepare them for secondary education. Students live at the UMaine Orono in Somerset Hall and eat at the Memorial Union and Hilltop commons cafeteria. They are enrolled in a 3 credit English course (Eng. 129) which meets every weekday. They also participate in a 5x per week seminar and 6x per week learning labs. They also participate some evenings and Saturdays in recreational activities in which they can gain and practice their skills in the area of blindness rehabilitation. New in 2018, students participated in a paid work experience for the 5 weeks.

 DBVI in collaboration with our contracted partners, CCME and the Iris Network, developed a modified versions of previous summer youth programs (Life 101 & 201). Our Transition Consultants and Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors noted a shift in needs for the transition aged youth. Many of these high school students have not had the opportunity to practice skills independently. In fact, many had never been away from home overnight without their families. Most of these students have multiple disabilities and/or protective families who have been reluctant to allow them to participate in typical activities of their peers- overnight sleepovers, staying home alone, grocery shopping, household chores etc. LOYO (Living on Your Own) was developed to address some of these needs and, at minimum, provide an opportunity to “try out” some of these typical adolescent experiences in a safe environment with support.

The first LOYO program was held in the summer of 2018. Five students and staff lived on the Bowdoin College campus. They were required to utilize problem solving skills that could be transferred to home, school and work environments. The teens worked on socialization, group dynamics, self-awareness, personal strengths, peer relationships, decision making, personal safety, home safety and home management. Some of the activities included: grocery shopping, preparing meals, cleaning, changed light bulbs, using a toilet plunger and even climbing out of a window in the Brunswick Fire Dept. smoke house! The program also encouraged parent participation. Prior to the start of the program, parents completed a survey to identify their son/daughter’s level of independence within their home, school and community. Parents participated in facilitated discussion around independence and future goals for their son/daughter. Parents had the opportunity to observe their child’s progress through a closed group Facebook page.

LOYO on the Go 2019 was modeled after the 2018 program but with more focus on travel skills. Students still practiced independent living skills but spent a good portion of the day being introduced and/or practicing the orientation & mobility skills needed to live and work in the community. The development of these “work readiness” skills is an especially important component of the Pre-Employment Transition Services for students who are blind and visually Impaired. Nine students participated in the program.

Students were housed at a Portland hotel and classes and training took place at the Iris Network Rehabilitation Center. A majority of the time was spent out in the community where students worked with Orientation & Mobility Specialists to learn to plan and walk routes, how to use public transportation, introduced to ride share programs (Uber/Lift), safely crossed streets, problem solved travel issues and so much more! Students participated in planning, shopping and preparing meals; using assistive technology to access and process common consumer tasks such as making (secure) online purchases, billing paying and banking. Throughout the program students will be encouraged to practice self -advocacy and to develop their social skills. They will travel to the Portland Career Center where they will meet with a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor to discuss interests, goals, strengths and needs relevant to employment. They will also meet with several successfully employed people who are blind and visually impaired.

Pre-Employment Transition Services were an important focus for the LOYO participants in both the 2018 and 2019 programs. There were many opportunities for participants to develop and practice skills that transfer to the work place and community including self-advocacy, work readiness training, independent living skills, “soft” skills and peer mentoring. Creation of a Youth Advisory Committee has been initiated to promote opportunities for youth to influence how DBVI VR approaches and delivers youth and Pre-ETS services.

Maine DBVI has provided Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC) for high school students who are blind or visually impaired. The activities were derived from the transition competencies checklist and many students received community service activity credits when they participated. They learned many of the competencies necessary to become a productive member of the workforce as well as to advocate for themselves. These activities have continued to take place over the last few years and have expanded to the northern part of the state.

Goal 4: 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 WIOA core partners to address the transportation needs regionally.

Strategies:

1. DBVI staff will provide input regarding accessibility needs of their consumers.

UPDATE: DBVI staff have continued to advocate for their consumers with the WIOA core partners.

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.

UPDATE: The Director of the Wabanaki Vocational Rehabilitation program provided training at the 2017 SRC Annual Training.

In 2017, the Acting Director of DBVI and the Director of DVR met with the Director of the Wabanaki Vocational Rehabilitation to review and revise the MOU. In 2019, the Director of DBVI and the Director of DVR met with the Director of the Wabanaki VR to review and update the MOU.

Maine DBVI and DVR are planning a state diversity training with the Wabanaki Vocational Rehabilitation program.

Currently the Director of the Wabanaki Vocational Rehabilitation (WVR) program holds a seat and actively participates on the DBVI SRC. The WVR received another 5-year grant award through 2025.

The Commissioner of Labor, Deputy Commissioner, along with the DVR and DBVI directors met with the Tribal Chief of the Tribal Council, as well as the staff of the Wabanaki Vocational Rehabilitation program over the summer to discuss collaboration between the two VR programs. Currently DBVI does not have any dual enrolled clients.

Objective: DBVI will continue its efforts to cultivate a communication network for consumers who are deaf-blind or dual sensory impaired (hearing and vision) so there are professional Deaf-Blind Interpreters and Support Service Providers (SSP) available statewide to assist them in their endeavor for employment.

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.

UPDATE: In Maine, there continues to be limited SSPs on a volunteer basis through the University of Southern Maine’s (USM) programming. There continues to be gaps in the services due to the lack of providers during summer and school breaks. DBVI has continued to meet and have discussions about these services with multiple organizations, e.g., Division of Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and Late Deafened, USM, Helen Keller National Center, Department of Human Services, and Disability Rights Maine. Maine DBVI staff attended the initial tri-state collaboration meeting to identify needs of deaf-blind/dual sensory impaired consumers and has plans to continue to attend future meetings.

Objective: DBVI attempt to expand the number of New Mainers who are receiving services from the agency.

Strategies:

1. DBVI will communicate with advocacy organizations to identify New Mainers who would benefit from DBVI VR services.

UPDATE: DBVI discusses VR services to all individuals including New Mainers at the DBVI SRC bi-monthly meetings. This is an opportunity to identify New Mainers or ways to increase referrals for New Mainers.

DBVI, upon request, provide informational sessions and trainings to service agencies who provide case management and other services to New Mainers. DBVI provides in-person and online orientations describing our eligibility requirements, service delivery and program requirements to job seekers.

Goal 5: To increase awareness of services and resources for individuals who are blind or have low vision.

Objective: DBVI will become more publicly visible and recognized as a primary source of information and services for individuals with visual impairments, as well as their families and employers.

Strategies:

1. With input from the SRC, DBVI’s website will be updated and made more helpful to end users.
2. DBVI contractors will be required to include acknowledgement of Rehabilitation Services DBVI grant funding on program materials and public documents.
3. DBVI and contracted partners will provide congruent services across the state.

UPDATE: Although DBVI’s website has had some minor updates, there are plans to completely redo the current website. DBVI is working with the Communications office of the DOL toward the development of a Facebook page where program information can she shared in an accessible platform.

DBVI contracted partners are acknowledging RSA’s grant funding that they receive from DBVI in all public documents. DBVI staff and contracted partners meet regularly to discuss the provision of services for consistency across the state.

Objective: DBVI will work with the Maine blindness community to promote the services and resources available to individuals who are blind or have low visions.

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 continue to explore collaboration with the Veteran’s Administration Blind Rehabilitation program to streamline the referral process between the two agencies.
6. Encourage all staff to regularly attend local Lions Club meetings.
7. Maine DBVI staff and contracted partners will provide service awareness to doctors within their region.

UPDATE: DBVI staff continue to work with the Maine blindness community to promote services and resources to individuals who are blind or have low vision. Some examples are:

10/9/2018 – DBVI staff provided a 2-hour presentation to staff at University of Maine, Learning Center (Bryant Pond).  Staff worked to help them better understand the needs of folks who are blind who attend their programs. They walked through the “school program” that is used and made appropriate recommendations and aided them in some temporary braille signage. The Leaning Center is interested in having DBVI consult from time/time and would definitely be interested in having our students do a field trip to use their outdoor site/staff to do some adventuresome outdoor activities (archery, low & high ropes, zip line, animal and plant exploration, along with basic outdoor education).

10/30/18 – DBVI staff met for 1.5 hours on the streets of Saco with 3 DOT (one of which is DOT ADA coordinator) and 1 local traffic engineer to look at a recent project on Rte. 1 (downtown Saco) where attempts to be ADA accessible have failed. DOT was looking for expertise and information regarding blind and visually impaired travelers in this area and how best to remedy the accessibility issues.

10-3-18 – DBVI presented at the University of Maine, Farmington’s Rehabilitation 102 class. The topic:  What is blindness rehabilitation and what careers exist in that field? There was one instructor and 12 undergraduate students majoring in various fields – rehabilitation, special education, psychology, data and statistics – in attendance. The format was lecture and demonstration. Introductory vocabulary was explored. Multiple aids and devices were demonstrated and circulated as well as some of the techniques taught to persons who are blind and visually impaired.  There was audience participation.  The attendees did various tasks with the aids and devices. A discussion of the various professions in blind rehab were discussed – COMS, CLVT, CVRT, CATIS, TVI, VRC, and Adjustment Counselor.

10/29/19 – A former DBVI VR client and DBVI staff did a 50-minute public outreach at the Watershed School in Camden. There were 20 high school students and two staff members in attendance. The students learned human guide technique and navigated with white canes while wearing simulator goggles.

10/9/19 – DBVI and contracted staff completed an in-service with four 4th-grade classes at SeDoMoCha Elementary School. This training focused on general information about what it is like to work with individuals who are blind or visually impaired, what does it actually mean to be blind or visually impaired, the student’s experiences with this population, as well as answering any questions. All the students in the 4 different classes were very engaged and had very thoughtful, appropriate questions and input. The training also focused on White Cane Awareness Day (October 15), and discussed what the white cane is, rules around the white cane (Maine’s White Cane Law), and how it is used by someone who is visually impaired.

8/25/19 – DBVI staff completed an in-service training to 3 faculty and 20 University of Maine at Farmington First-Year students. The group participated in a simulation activity, the purpose of which was to expose these students to some of the work in the blindness rehabilitation field as they are contemplating declaring their major.

1/18/19 – DBVI O&M staff provided Sensitivity training and O&M presentation to UMaine Residential Advisors (RA) on the Orono campus. There were approximately 80 RAs and UMaine staff present. Discussed was Orientation and Mobility, White Canes, Human Guide, Types of Visual Impairments and Supportive Strategies, as well as completion of a blindfold sensitivity training. Supportive Strategies Handouts were provided to all in attendance. The blindfold experience was discussed with questions answered. Later, a meeting with the RA staff from Oak Hall occurred to discuss specific issues for incoming student.

7/17/19 – DBVI staff presented with a contracted partner at the YWCA in Bar Harbor. Approximately 14 people were in attendance for the presentation. Discussed was Vision Rehabilitation Services, including DBVI, Iris Network, eye conditions, referral process, VRT, and O&M. For O&M specifically, the group reviewed definitions, white canes, various marking tapes, human guide, guide dogs, ways to assist/describe and safe walking practices.

(1)(B). Some of the factors that impeded DBVI attaining these goals were resources, both human resources and time. The division experienced a large turnover in VRCs during this past performance period, as well as over 50% turnover in the administrative support to the VRCs. The learning curve for all of these roles has slowed down the process as far as moving cases through the statuses and being able to provide outreach to the unserved and underserved and their families.

Outreach has also focused on the transition-aged students (14 -21) and their families. There has been a larger emphasis on working with families to better under the abilities of their student, which takes more time and resources.

Geographical challenges have also impeded the attainment of these goals. Transportation in the rural state of Maine is not always readily available making it difficult for consumers to get to the outreach opportunities and therefore lack the knowledge of DBVI services. Transportation also makes it difficult for some consumers to get to their place of employment.

(2)(A). Supported Employment Program - The Division has remained committed to assuring that individuals with the most significant 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.

The Division identified thirty-one individuals who would benefit from supported employment services in FFY19. Twenty of these were adults and eleven were identified as youth with a significant disability. Six individuals were closed during this time period without reaching their goals; one was closed successfully. Three of the adults are currently employed and eleven are in “service” status. Ten youth with a significant disability are in “service” status.

(2)(B). Supported Employment (SE) regulations were affected with the passing of WIOA, allowing states a longer period of time to provide services to youth with a significant disability who required supported employment services. However, a change that made the spending of SE funds challenging was that costs were not allowed to be captured as SE until the individual was placed in employment status. This meant that many costs building up to that SE placement were no longer allowed as SE, placing a larger burden on Title I funds. The changes were meant to strengthen the SE program but there was an inverse effect in many ways.

Also, the funds were specifically earmarked for certain populations, restricting spending to adults if the equivalent expenditures were not made within the youth budget. This change also put a greater fiscal burden on the Title I funds.

(3). DBVI is a partner with Adult Education, the SWIB, and the larger workforce development system to incorporate and apply the new rules related to the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), including drafting a unified state plan adopting new performance measures and further collaboration with the One-Stop system. DBVI is a member of the Maine WIOA steering committee, which is guiding the Act’s implementation, and also has participants on multiple related sub-committees.

In accordance with Section 116(b) of WIOA, as well as the Rehabilitation Services Administration’s TAC 19-01, BRS is updating its internal controls and quality assurance processes to assure the accuracy, validity and reliability of its performance data. As part of this effort, BRS is working with its core partners to develop additional data sources that will provide a more complete report of the outcomes achieved by people with disabilities served by DVR and DBVI. In addition to Maine Unemployment Insurance wage data, Maine will access State Wage Interchange System (SWIS) data by submitting regularly scheduled data requests. BRS has contracted with the National Student Clearinghouse and will access data from that source on a regular basis to document credential attainment, both academic and occupational. BRS is also developing a data sharing agreement with Maine’s Department of Education, to assist with documenting adult, secondary and career and technical credentials and measurable skill gains. The agreement is expected to be in place within PY 2019.

BRS is providing ongoing training to all staff so that they have a solid working knowledge of WIOA and how it impacts the work they do. Training topics have included: an overview of WIOA partners; common performance measures, career pathways and best practices in serving the needs of employers. BRS has an intensive technical assistance agreement in place with WINTAC to assist with this effort and to further their expertise on Common Performance Measures, Internal Controls, Career Pathways, Apprenticeships and Peer Mentoring.

BRS and its core partners are using the Maine Job Link as a common data collection tool for performance data regarding Effectiveness in Serving Employers.

(4). 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.

DBVI continues to seek access and training in assistive technology through its collaboration with training and equipment loan programs such as Maine CITE, AllTech and Alpha One, and through equipment demonstrations offered at conferences, seminars and through on-line videos and product dissemination. DBVI O&M instructors seek and disseminate feedback regarding service and equipment needs, available resources and emerging technologies though quarterly meetings and on-line discussion portals. DBVI recently purchased a number of O & M requested technologies to allow for decreased dependence on loan programs, improved access to technologies for our clients and greater flexibility in providing that access.

# (Q) Quality, Scope, and Extent of Supported Employment Services.

 *Include the following:*

1. *The quality, scope, and extent of supported employment services to be provided to individuals with the most significant disabilities, including youth with the most significant disabilities.*
2. *The timing of transition to extended services*.

(1). 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 in Maine. The Division has remained committed to assuring that individuals with the most significant 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 made an informed choice in the provision of these services as well as the employment goal and that extended employment services will be in a competitive, integrated setting. If the individual chooses not to pursue employment in a competitive, integrated setting, he/she will be referred to other systems for services.

Quality of Supported Employment Services:

The Division made the commitment to participate in the further development of its electronic information system – AwareVR, the case management system that captures 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. DBVI is 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 enables 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 to provide better services to our customers.

Scope of Supported Employment:

The primary service provided to clients in a supported employment plan continues to be job support. This service is provided by a job coach who also engages with supervisors and peers towards helping the individual integrate 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 are 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.

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 to best utilize the limited resources available.

The Division has access to a state-funded Long-term Support Program, which allows funding for extended support services for individuals who are blind or have low vision after the VR case is closed. In addition, DBVI receives state funds for extended support for individuals with brain injuries, who are also blind or visually impaired. Both appropriations are very limited in the number of people who can be supported.

Extent of Supported Employment Services:

The Division identified thirty-one individuals who would benefit from supported employment services in FFY19. Twenty of these were adults and eleven were identified as youth with a significant disability. Six individuals were closed during this time period without reaching their goals; one was closed successfully. Three of the adults are currently employed and eleven are in “service” status. Ten youth with a significant disability are in “service” status.

(2). 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 competitive, integrated employment.

This process calls for continual communication between the DBVI VR 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 competitive, integrated employment.