# 

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 provide updates on programs, 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:

For the purposes of the modifications of the Unified State Plan, the SRC reviewed the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment completed in 2020 and the returned consumer satisfaction surveys. As part of this review, the SRC provides the following recommendations to DBVI.

**Comments regarding Goal (1) which currently reads:**

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

Goal (1) should be modified to read as:

Goal (1) To Engage DBVI clients in Career Pathways that lead to meaningful and quality employment outcomes in a timely fashion based on the needs of the individual.

Under the second objective, the SRC recommends that DBVI provide an update to strategy d. to note that the self-employment focus group has been restarted.

**Comments regarding Goal (2) which currently reads:**

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

Goal (2) should be modified to read as:

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

The SRC wonders about strategy d within the objective for this goal. Is this something that is ongoing?

**Comments regarding Goal (3) which currently reads:**

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.

The SRC recommends that Goal 3 remain as written. The SRC also recommends that DBVI review strategy d. to determine if the scope of programs listed is accurate.

**Comments regarding Goal (4) which currently reads:**

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.

Goal (4) should be modified to read as:

Goal (4)

To increase access to DBVI services for individuals with disabilities who are unserved/underserved or have minority status.

The SRC also recommends the following modifications:

Objective 2:

1. DBVI will provide outreach and training to staff at tribal health or community centers of the four Maine tribes (Passamaquoddy Tribe, Penobscot Indian Nation, Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians, and Aroostook Band of Micmac Indians) including DBVI/DVR New Counselor Training upon request.

The SRC also recommends that strategy b from objective 4 be modified to read:

1. DBVI 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.

Further, the SRC recommends that objective 5 be expanded to include the following:

1. DBVI will continue to provide training to all staff to emphasis Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility.

**Comments regarding Goal (5) which currently reads:**

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

The SRC recommends that Goal (5) remain as written, but recommends additional strategies be added to meet this goal. The proposed additions are:

1. DBVI will finalize and publish a DBVI consumer guide. The intent for this guide is to provide an accessible resource that covers the wide range of services available through DBVI.
2. DBVI anticipates hiring an individual whose sole responsibility will be to engage with employers specifically about DBVI consumers and services. This dedicated staff person will allow DBVI to strengthen engagement with employers.

The SRC also proposes that a third objective be added, and strategies be developed to meet this objective. This objective stems from the review of the CSNA and identified gaps in consumer feedback discussed identified by the SRC. The SRC proposes:

Objective 3:

DBVI will develop strategies for stronger communication and enhance connection throughout the provision of services to reduce early exits from the program and to improve successful employment outcomes.

1. DBVI will conduct outreach with unsuccessful closures to determine areas of need and whether they may be interested in reengagement.
2. DBVI will continue to improve its comprehensive system of personnel development to decrease turnover and improve consistency among staff leading to improved outcomes.
3. In an effort to receive additional feedback from consumers, DBVI is updating their consumer satisfaction survey and the methods through which that survey can be completed. Those methods will be online, by mail, or over the phone.

**Further Comments**

From our review of the CSNA, the SRC found that despite challenges associated with Covid-19, DBVI staff was largely able to pivot and continue to provide services to clients. The majority of individuals noted that there was no impact to their services as a result of the pandemic. The increase in remote services for some served as an asset, as it allowed for increased flexibility. There were some challenges, particularly in the pace of service delivery and lack of in-person meetings.

From the SRC’s review of the current state plan and the CSNA, the SRC feels that future strategies should be more precise and focus on attainable actions. Many of the strategies are written broadly, which makes it difficult to assess how effective the outlying strategies were in meeting DBVI’s goals.

The SRC also feels that DBVI should include more space for provider feedback about services and service delivery to improve outcomes. The SRC would like to dedicate more time to discussing this need.

(2). Agency Responses to proposed modifications:

**Comments regarding Goal (1) which currently reads:**

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

Goal (1) should be modified to read as:

Goal (1) To Engage DBVI clients in Career Pathways that lead to meaningful and quality employment outcomes in a timely fashion based on the needs of the individual.

Under the second objective, the SRC recommends that DBVI provide an update to strategy d. to note that the self-employment focus group has been restarted.

**Agency Response: DBVI agrees with the language change in goal #1 as it addresses each individual’s needs. DBVI is involved with many students which may mean that they work with the consumer for a longer period of time. DBVI is also focusing on career pathways which can often take longer for some individuals to achieve their goals.**

**DBVI also agrees to provide an update to the second Objective, strategy d which reads: 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.**

**Comments regarding Goal (2) which currently reads:**

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

Goal (2) should be modified to read as:

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

The SRC wonders about strategy d within the objective for this goal. Is this something that is ongoing?

**Agency Response: DBVI agrees with the change in this language to better align with the WIOA language.**

**Strategy d refers to Workhands app, which is an online** **portal used by many apprenticeship sponsors in Maine. DBVI will update this strategy but currently DBVI does not have any apprentices within the program.**

**Comments regarding Goal (3) which currently reads:**

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.

The SRC recommends that Goal 3 remain as written. The SRC also recommends that DBVI review strategy d. to determine if the scope of programs listed is accurate.

**Agency Response: DBVI agrees with the SRC recommendation and will review and provide updates on strategy d: which addresses summer programs and sessions available to parents.**

**Comments regarding Goal (4) which currently reads:**

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.

Goal (4) should be modified to read as:

Goal (4)

To increase the number of individuals with disabilities, who may be underserved or unserved or have minority status, access DBVI services.

The SRC also recommends the following modifications:

Objective 2:

1. DBVI will provide outreach and training to staff at tribal health or community centers of the four Maine tribes (Passamaquoddy Tribe, Penobscot Indian Nation, Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians, and Aroostook Band of Micmac Indians) including DBVI/DVR New Counselor Training upon request.

The SRC also recommends that strategy b from objective 4 be modified to read:

1. DBVI 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.

Further, the SRC recommends that objective 5 be expanded to include the following:

1. DBVI will continue to provide training to all staff to emphasis Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility.

**Agency Response: DBVI agrees with the SRC’s recommendation and will modify the language in the goal.** **DBVI agrees with the other recommendations under goal #4.**

**Comments regarding Goal (5) which currently reads:**

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

The SRC recommends that Goal (5) remain as written, but recommends additional strategies be added to meet this goal. The proposed additions are:

a. DBVI will finalize and publish a DBVI consumer guide. The intent for this guide is to provide an accessible resource that covers the wide range of services available through DBVI.

1. DBVI anticipates hiring an individual whose sole responsibility will be to engage with employers specifically about DBVI consumers and services. This dedicated staff person will allow DBVI to strengthen engagement with employers.

The SRC also proposes that a third objective be added, and strategies be developed to meet this objective. This objective stems from the review of the CSNA and identified gaps in consumer feedback discussed identified by the SRC. The SRC proposes:

Objective 3:

DBVI will develop strategies for stronger communication and enhance connection throughout the provision of services to reduce early exits from the program and to improve successful employment outcomes.

* 1. DBVI will conduct outreach with unsuccessful closures to determine areas of need and whether they may be interested in reengagement.
  2. DBVI will continue to improve its comprehensive system of personnel development to decrease turnover and improve consistency among staff leading to improved outcomes.
  3. In an effort to receive additional feedback from consumers, DBVI is updating their consumer satisfaction survey and the methods through which that survey can be completed. Those methods will be online, by mail, or over the phone.

**Agency Response: DBVI agrees with all the recommendations to goal #5.**

(3). DBVI accepted all recommendations from the State Rehabilitation Council.

# (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 (OADS), which serves individuals with developmental disabilities and the other is with the Office of Behavioral Health (OBH) which serves individuals with mental health, substance abuse and co-occurring disorders. 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 OBH, 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 OBH 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 OBH have collaborated on one MOU to develop a 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, OBH 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 reviewed and updated to reflect new language from WIOA and other changes.

**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 through 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. There is a collaboration with staff from 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 loss, 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.  VRCs can connect with AgrAbility for participants interested in agriculture to see how services can be braided.

(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. Quarterly statewide meetings have begun again which have included BRS staff, CAP and SBDC staff. SBDC staff and BRS Leadership met prior to the meetings and understand each agencies process to better assist the client as they follow the self-employment “pathway,”

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.

The division takes advantage of master agreements when appropriate for temporary staffing or interpreting services.

# 

# (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.

Students in Maine begin receiving pre-employment transition services when they turn 14 and generally are in 9th grade and/or the summer prior to entering 9th grade.  Students are typically referred to VR by the DBVI Transition Consultant or the Teacher of the Visually Impaired. The Transition Consultant works collaboratively with the student, family and VR Counselor to assist completing the VR application and eligibility process. The IPE is developed within 90 days and includes appropriate Pre-ETS services. If the student with the disability, age 14 doesn’t apply to VR, Pre-ETS services are offered to the potentially eligible student by the Transition Consultant.

Funds are used for the provision of pre-employment transition services to pay for auxiliary aids and services needed by all students who are blind or visually impaired who need such aids and services to access or participate in pre-employment transition services.

(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.

The VRC may consult with the school case manager or transition specialist responsible for coordinating work experiences.  DBVI supports meaningful employment for students with disabilities and actively assists the local education unit to secure only job placements at or above minimum wage in an integrated setting.  DBVI does not support subminimum wage employment and provides consultation to students, families and schools regarding the concerns. On March 18, 2020, Maine's Governor Janet Mills signed into law LD 1874 "An Act to Amend the Laws Governing the Subminimum Wage" which disallowed the payment of subminimum wages to persons with disabilities in the state of Maine and subminimum wage is no longer a possibility for students with disabilities exiting high school. Maine has no individuals working under subminimum wage certificates at the time of this plan.

Local transition events are 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. Unfortunately, in-person events have been limited due to the pandemic.

(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).

DBVI VR participates/contributes to the transition planning in the IEP of all VR students (age 14 and generally entering 9th grade or in the 9th grade). The team (BLRS, O&M, TVI & VRC) attend IEP’s and make recommendations for the transition plan. Recommendations include appropriate areas of the Expanded Core Curriculum which align with components of the Transition Plan such as Independent Living goals and employment goals.  The VRC collaborates with the IEP team in identifying accommodations, adaptations and resources for executing the transition plan. The VRC may consult with the school case manager or transition specialist responsible for coordinating work experiences.  DBVI supports meaningful employment for students with disabilities and actively assists the local education unit to secure only job placements at or above minimum wage in an integrated setting.

(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.

DOE did notify DBVI that as of January 21, 2021, there was an administrative letter that changed the ending date for special education eligibility to the student’s 22nd birthday or completion of high school. DOE has provided technical assistance and worked with DBVI and DVR to determine how vocational rehabilitation services can be provided to these students.

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.

The primary contracted partner for adult blindness rehabilitation provides community-based services, such as assessments, direct instruction, consultation, and support to (or on behalf of) blind and visually impaired individuals who are 14 years or older to prepare them for pre-employment, employment, and independent living in their community. Services can be provided one-on-one in the consumer’s community or in groups with other consumers. These services are to provide the consumer with the skill set to obtain, retain, or advance in employment in a competitive, integrated setting.

# (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 Behavioral Health (OBH) 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.

### To provide quality employment services in a non-duplicative and seamless manner that leads to competitive integrated employment for individuals with disabilities, including youth and individuals with the most significant disabilities, the agencies will work together to:

### identify and pursue opportunities for interagency coordination, and create a more closely aligned employment service system, to better serve youth and adults with disabilities.

### Inform consumers of the differences between the services provided by the parties to this agreement so that those individuals are better able to access necessary services.

* pursue system development and coordination opportunities with the Department of Education and other service systems involved in assisting people with disabilities to gain employment.
* Continue to work together to maintain an accessible, comprehensive system of benefits counseling services across the State of Maine for all individuals with disabilities interested in pursuing employment.
* Implement procedures that provide a smooth path from referral to transition from the short term (DVR/DBVI funded) supports to natural supports or extended support services (funded by MaineCare/OBH or DVR/DBVI);
* Share relevant information for the purposes of integrated service delivery regarding mutual clients, with appropriate signed releases; and
* Make full use of the services available through the workforce development system, including Career Centers, as appropriate.

# (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. DBVI continues to participate on the Maine Bureau of Rehabilitation Services Apprenticeship Planning Committee which also includes members from the Maine Apprenticeship Program, Title 1 local workforce partners, and Safal Partners. During 2021, this planning committee worked with 2 employers recognized for inclusive hiring practices to develop remotely offered Employer Spotlight webinars featuring apprenticeship opportunities and hiring practices of these employers. The committee also offered 2 remote “Town Hall” webinars in which employers, Department of Labor Staff and Maine job seekers could expand on current understanding of what apprenticeship is and how it works in VR, what registered apprenticeships are available in Maine and how to find them, and who employers and job seeker could contact for more information. Further, during the past year the Maine Apprenticeship Program was awarded a State Apprenticeship Equity, Expansion and Innovation (SAEEI) grant allowing for the hiring of 5 Apprenticeship Navigators including one Navigator dedicated full-time to work with the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services in the development and placement of VR clients into registered apprenticeships. This grant will also allow for increased partnerships with CTEs in the state, seeking to coordinate apprenticeship sponsors with high school students in pre-apprenticeship opportunities.

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 OBH have resumed negotiations to develop one joint MOU in accordance with WIOA regulations.  The goal is to have the MOU completed by the end of the first quarter of PY22.

(2). DBVI continues to support individuals (who are blind or visually impaired) 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 Office of Behavioral Health (OBH). The MOU addresses the combined efforts that DBVI and DHHS have initiated and clarify roles to improve the successful outcomes for these jointly served populations. The MOU is 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 OBH, 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 OBH 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 OBH are in planning meetings and started 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 Behavioral Health (OBH) has the following initiatives currently underway to promote employment among the individuals they serve.

## 

## Community Employment Specialist Program:

OBH 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.

## 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. OBH 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 OBH, 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 (OBH 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 (OBH 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, 2 regional directors, 1 rehabilitation services manager, 1 consultant, 7 VRC II, 3 Blindness Rehabilitation Specialists, 5 Paraprofessionals/VRC I, 1 support personnel, 2 BEP staff, and 10 O&M (one vacancy).

*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 6 designated VRC II staff, 3 are new to DBVI within the past year. Although 2 of the new staff have VRC experience, the blindness rehabilitation specialty is a steep learning curve. Two of these new staff have already completed a 3-week New Counselor Training program that provides a breadth of information across the VR program. 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** | **1** |
| **3** | **Regional Directors** | **3** | **0** | **2** |
| **4** | **Blindness Rehabilitation Specialist** | **3** | **0** | **0** |
| **5** | **Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor II** | **6** | **0** | **1** |
| **6** | **Paraprofessional VRC 1** | **5** | **0** | **1** |
| **7** | **Support Personnel** | **1** | **0** | **0** |
| **8** | **Rehabilitation Consultant** | **2** | **1** | **0** |
| **9** | **Business Enterprise Program Staff** | **2** | **0** | **0** |
| **10** | **Orientation & Mobility** | **11** | **2** | **3** |
| Total |  | **35** | **3** | **9** |

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.

DBVI has also provided a session on succession planning for those who want to advance into leadership positions as we see that as an area that will have a large turnover in the next 5 years. This session included the tasks of each of the various roles along with the required qualifications. Staff were allowed to ask questions. This gave them an opportunity to determine if leadership might be of interest to them and allows them some time to attain the appropriate qualifications. Many current staff have identified that they would like to promote within the agency. They will work with their supervisors to determine what they may need for personal development and any training that would better prepare them for the role.

*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). The University of Maine in Farmington (UMF) works in partnership with USM.

In addition to this in-state option, UMass Boston also offers programming for Orientation and Mobility (O&M) Specialists, Teachers of the Visually Impaired (TVI) and Vision Rehabilitation Therapists (VRT). Many DBVI services are provided through these specialty positions, either through staff or contracted partners.

(1)(B)(ii). The University of Southern Maine (USM) is the only in–state institution of higher education offering a graduate program which satisfies the standards set forth by the Rehabilitation Act. In the last academic year, 34 students were enrolled full–time or part–time in its Master of Science in Rehabilitation Counseling Program. USM classes are offered on campus and via distance education. USM did not pursue the recent competition for RSA’s Long-term Training Grant. The University of Massachusetts Boston is now the nearest university which received funding under this program.

The University of Maine at Farmington (UMF), in partnership with the University of Southern Maine, began offering an accelerated program in the Fall of 2015 that allows counseling students to graduate with a master’s degree a year sooner. Graduates of the five–year 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.

UMF typically graduates 16-20 students per year with a B.S. in Rehabilitation Services. When combined with experience, this new program will meet the standards set forth under WIOA.

2022 UMass Boston - O&M – Anticipating 12 O&M students will graduate. Looking back over the past several years, most students seek employment in O&M where they currently live; have not had one from Maine since 2017. Contracted positions: TVIs – 18 and VRTs 12.

(1)(B)(iii).

University of Southern Maine (USM) graduated less than 8 individuals who were eligible to sit for the CRC (MS in Counseling - Rehab Concentration). These individuals would meet minimum qualifications for DBVI's Rehabilitation Counselor II positions. DBVI does not have any staff enrolled in the Master's program at USM at this time.

University of Maine at Farmington graduated 16- 20 individuals who had an undergraduate preparation in Rehabilitation Services but were not eligible to sit for the CRC. Unless these individuals had at least two years of prior work experience in a related field, they would not be able to meet minimum qualification for DBVI's Rehabilitation Counselor II positions - however they may be considered for Rehabilitation Counselor I positions.

UMass Boston graduated approximately 15 O&Ms, 15 TVIs and 10 VRTs but often the individuals return to their home state.

* 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). 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, as well as presented at a job fair for O&M students and staff from 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 has implemented and continues to implement the Maine law regarding preference in hiring persons with disabilities and providing increased access to classified service through a program called Special Appointment. 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, they will be placed in the position as a new employee subject to the usual probationary period of new State employees. Through the Special Appointment program, a person with a disability may also participate in a situational assessment for a State position in order to determine if the requisite skills are present and whether the job is a good match. 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.

Staff have participated in meetings in the Zoom Area by Kate Carnes, AT for Independent Living by John Brandt, Self-Care by NAMI, Motivational Interviewing and continued trainings throughout the year in LGBTQ, Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility (DEI-A).

The DEI-A trainings included staff participation in LGBTQ + Q&A sessions presented by the George Washington University, Center for Rehabilitation Counseling, Research and Education. Discussions focused on the importance of identity, pronouns, and relationships, particularly related to working with youth. Staff also participated in MDOL’s goals which were formulated from stakeholder meetings. They focus on accessibility of MDOL resources, staff recruitment and retention, training, and creating space to engage in DEI-A topics and outreach to priority communities.

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). New VR employees must also attend a 3 week, comprehensive New Counselor Training.  This training is provided by supervisory and management staff and covers such topics as intake and eligibility, guidance and counseling, career exploration, comprehensive assessment, IPE development, post-secondary training, self-employment, casework management, transition counseling, post-employment and the appeals process.

All DBVI staff operate under an annual Performance Management Form (PMF) which has a section titled “Employee Development Plan”.  Supervisors work closely with each staff member to identify areas of needed training based on interest, leadership development and performance observations.  Identified trainings are outlined in the annual PMF and can be achieved in several outlets including attending part/all of new counselor training, attending annual training events such as All Agency Day or DBVI Day, or through trainings offered virtually such as Hadley, The Job Accommodation Network, the Center for Rehabilitation Counseling Research & Education and the Institute for Community Inclusion.

Other opportunities for staff training are afforded through training at national conferences such the AFB, AER and NSCAB conferences as well as contracted trainings from organizations such as Sky’s the Limit and Maine CITE.  Staff are encouraged to read from extensive online and physical library of publications specific to blindness rehabilitation throughout their career with DBVI.

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 Deaf blindness 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, approximately 300 individuals were served by the Maine DBVI VR system. Maine DBVI currently has 6 occupied VR Counselor II positions that carry an average caseload of approximately 30 individuals, and 3 Blindness Rehabilitation Specialist, 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. Although DBVI’s numbers decreased due to homemakers, we expect to serve about 300 individuals annually 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 1 positions that assist in facilitating clients through the process, and 10 Orientation and Mobility Specialists (excluding the vacancies) 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.

This past year, a separate survey was not sent out, but information was gathered through some evaluations that came after trainings. This was in part because this was used as a tool to help plan for staff wanting to travel in person to trainings. Due to COVID, staff had the opportunity to join conferences, like OIB-TAC CON and AFB Leadership Conference that they may not have been approved to travel to attend. As trainings happen, evaluations 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 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. This year with the pandemic, there were numerous trainings that were offered virtually and often for free.

The Research and Training Center (RTC): Rural which is part of the Rural Institute for Inclusive Communities (RIIC) at the University of Montana provided a training on self-employment that two BRS staff (one DVR and one DBVI) attended. It was designed to be a train the trainer model and these individuals will bring that information back to other BRS staff.

Many attended an Ability to Execute (A2E) Essentials training that taught 9 essential skills to drive change within an organization. This training was used as a model for BRS staff to join other trainers and provide the training to more of MDOL staff.

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 has been able to take advantage of many free virtual training opportunities through webinars and teleconferences during this pandemic.

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 comprehensive overview of the VR process and it takes places generally over a 3-week period. The most recent one was Dec 7, 2021 to January 6, 2022 with some time off for the holidays. Continuing education credits have been made available for new and current staff that want to refresh procedures and/or obtain credits, mainly CEU’s and CRC’s. The training includes topic areas such as rehabilitation technology, job placement and assessment, and guidance and 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. During the pandemic, this training has been offered remotely and in multiple sessions to reduce the screen time and fatigue for staff. We utilize this opportunity to provide training to assure that all staff are up to date. We are also committed to providing an annual 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. During this past performance period, this training was offered virtually due to the pandemic. It was an opportunity to celebrate 100 years of VR.

Over the past performance period DBVI has worked with our DVR partners to participate in many Bureau wide training. Training surveys are used, via Microsoft forms, for staff to complete to receive certificates of attendance and CRC credits. Recent trainings included: 2-day communication/ethics training, World of Work Inventory training, Personality Disorders, Motivational Interviewing, Brain Injury, WIOA Cross-Training Webinars, Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility 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. Some additional trainings include: Maine Medical Center CWIC Benefits Navigator training (3 part) Digital Badging Training, Adult Education Hi Set Training, and Celebrating Employment First Training, McKinsey Academy training – Ability to Execute Essentials, LGBTQ training by George Washington University and Motivational Interviewing. These trainings were available to all Bureau of Rehabilitation staff – DBVI and Division of Vocational Rehabilitation.

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 (more recently Microsoft forms) 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.

Lastly, the State of Maine was 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 were being provided with Employee Self-Service Town Hall Materials, job aids, quick reference guides, and instructional videos, in order to navigate this new system. This work with this new portal is currently on hold.

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

DBVI Day (annual)

DBVI Day Part 2

All Blindness Agency Day

Motivational Interviewing

Supervisor/manager MI training with an experienced clinician. (These individuals then became a member of the BRS MI team. The focus of the team is to support all BRS staff in developing and/or improving MI strategies in order to improve client outcomes.)

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 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)

Additional resources:

* 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)
* Consumer Groups:

1. ACB of Maine: acbmaine.org
2. Pine Tree Guide Dog Users: pinetreeguidedogusers.org
3. National Federation of the Blind of Maine: nfb-me.org

**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*
* A[merican Foundation for the Blind Senior Site](mailto:merican%20Foundation%20for%20the%20Blind%20Senior%20Site) [afbinfo@afb.org](mailto:afbinfo@afb.org)
* ADA Guidelines for Visual Impairment – [Eric.Dibner@maine.gov](mailto: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=dp-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=dp_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 (DOE) 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.

DOE did notify DBVI that as of January 21, 2021, there was an administrative letter that changed the ending date for special education eligibility to the student’s 22nd birthday or completion of high school. DOE has provided technical assistance and worked with DBVI and DVR to determine how vocational rehabilitation services can be provided to these 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:*
2. *with the most significant disabilities, including their need for supported employment services;*
3. *who are minorities;*
4. *who have been unserved or underserved by the VR program;*
5. *who have been served through other components of the statewide workforce development system; and*
6. *who are youth with disabilities and students with disabilities, including, as appropriate, their need for pre-employment transition services or other transition services.*
7. *Identify the need to establish, develop, or improve community rehabilitation programs within the State; and*
8. *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 video-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 they received. This method has been updated so that the individual can get the survey electronically, through the mail, or receive a phone call. In addition, the DBVI Director (or designee) 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, retain and advance in employment in competitive integrated employment. DBVI administers the Vocational Rehabilitation program in Maine for the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) specifically for Maine citizens who are blind or visually impaired. A comprehensive needs assessment is required every three years and focuses on the Vocational Rehabilitation program for those who 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 –2021-2023. 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 – 2020- was completed during the pandemic. The executive summary report is available and here are a few highlights:

Overall Satisfaction and Expectations

* 89% of consumers are satisfied with the DBVI’s program.
* 89% of consumers are satisfied with the services provided by DBVI.
* 85% of consumers feel that DBVI services met their expectations.

Experience with Services Provided by DBVI

* 94% **of consumers are satisfied with the choice of services offered.**
* 91% **of consumers are satisfied with the choice of service providers.**

Experience with DBVI Staff and Counselors

* 97% **of consumers feel the staff of DBVI is helping them achieve their VR goal.**
* **Nearly all consumers (**99%) **feel the DBVI staff treats them with dignity and respect.**



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). 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 2020 US Census, residents are primarily White (90.8%) with small representations of Black (1.9%), Asian (1.2%), and Native American (0.6%) individuals in certain geographical areas of the state. According to the most recent American Community Survey, the Native American population represents approximately 8,017 individuals. Tribal members are primarily located in Penobscot, Washington and Aroostook counties. DBVI continues to work collaboratively with the Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians, through its Wabanaki Vocational Rehabilitation Program. They were 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). 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. However, through this pandemic, DBVI staff have learned how to provide many of the services virtually which has allowed more consumers to participate without dealing with transportation needs.

(1)(D). 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. DBVI has a new position that it is currently recruiting for. This position will work with employers to learn of their employment needs and educate them on how those needs can be met with DBVI consumers. The position will advocate for DBVI consumers and explain what/how accommodations to the business can take place.

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 25,712) positions.  Currently, the Job Link shows 1959 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 who have a visual impairment.  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 PY20 (PY20 Annual Report data):

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Program | Enrolled | Disclosed Disability | % |
| LEX Self-Service | 135,733 | Not reported |  |
| LEX Employment Srvs | 2,494 | 267 | 10.71% |
| ADULT | 580 | 75 | 12.93% |
| DISLOCATED WORKER | 358 | 31 | 8.66% |
| YOUTH | 365 | 195 | 53.42% |

(1)(E). DBVI has been working extensively with transition-aged youth. 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.

When looking at the responses in the PY2020 CSNA from those individuals under 25:

89% were satisfied/very satisfied with the services

93% were satisfied /very satisfied with the choice of services available

88% were satisfied/very satisfied with the choice of service providers

92% were satisfied/very satisfied with the information provided about choices

These percentages were from a small number of participants.

(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.

Some concerns that were identified in the PY2020 CSNA were those of accessibility, transportation and Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor (VRC) turnover. With work experience, students will begin to identify areas within a workplace that are not accessible. With self-advocacy skills, they will be able to communicate this information and educate employers. DBVI continues to work with students on various modes of transportation but in many rural areas, there are few or no choices. DBVI has now filled all the VRC vacancies and is providing training on Pre-ETS and transition services so they will be well equipped to assist consumers with their employment goal.

# 

# (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). Due to the pandemic, the Census Bureau did not release its standard 2020 ACS 1-year estimates. However, based on 2019 American Community Survey (ACS) data, the 2020 Annual Disability Statistics Compendium estimates approximately 2% of Maine's population has a visual impairment which is approximately 26,610. The ACS considers individuals with a visual impairment as those who identified as having a ‘disability with vision difficulty.’

(2)(A). When comparing application data from PY20 and PY21 (July through March), the number of applicants has increased but is down from the same period in PY19. Taking into consideration that there was a pandemic during this timeframe, DBVI estimates that for FFY23 the number of eligible individuals being served in Title I by the Division will remain steady and within the 300-400 range.

(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 FFY2020, there were 25 individuals that were identified as needing supported employment services. The costs of some of these services were not covered in the Title VI but fell into the Title I program as many of the identified individuals were not placed into employment status. Eight of those individuals were youth and seventeen were adults. In FFY21, there were 27 individuals identified as needing supported employment services. Seven of those individuals were youth and twenty were adults. DBVI has determined that many consumers are able to work in the competitive labor market without supports.

Based on the numbers for FFY20 and FFY21, DBVI anticipates serving approximately 25 individuals identified as needing support employment services in both FFY22 and FFY23.

(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 FFY20 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 FFY21, the cost of these services was approximately $2,857,548.31

DBVI anticipates spending this amount or slightly higher for FFY22. DBVI anticipates the cost of services for FFY23 to be around $3M, considering the increase in costs for goods and services.

# (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 needs 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 that were developed through the needs identified in the 2020 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 Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired (DBVI) clients in Career Pathways that lead to meaningful and quality employment outcomes in a timely fashion based on the needs of the individual.

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

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 increase access to DBVI services for individuals with disabilities who are unserved/underserved or have minority status.

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

(3) A. 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.

(3) B. The goals and priorities from the previous DBVI VR state plan were modified and updated to reflect new areas of focus for DBVI

A good example is Goal #2:

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 and/or providers of technical assistance in educating staff to promote understanding of MSG and credential obtainment.
2. CARNs and New Counselor training will have focused components on MSG and credential obtainment.  Such training will emphasis career pathways, stackable and stand-alone credentials, as well as how and when these credentials are captured and recorded.
3. DBVI will increase staff competence in use of ME Aware in tracking and recording of MSG and credential obtainment.  Training will be offered routinely at VRC Quarterly meetings.  Staff competence will be monitored by Regional Managers and CO staff during quarterly case reviews.
4. DBVI will work with HospitalityMaine and other apprenticeship sponsors, including the use of the Workhands App, to track and record MSG and credential obtainment when apprenticeship/OJT is implemented.

(3) C. New procedures were implemented as a result of two program findings from the 2017 monitoring review.  The findings included time to eligibility and time to plan.  There are various levels of checks and balances to review how much time has passed prior to eligibility and then from eligibility to plan.  In Aware, the VRCs can review their caseloads to see which cases are getting close to the 60 day requirement to eligibility and the 90 day requirement to plan from eligibility.  The regional director also reviews the caseload as well as the Assistant Director (AD).  If the AD discovers cases that are getting close to the required time, he seeks information to determine the reason that the client has not been found eligible or that an IPE has not been signed.  If it is determined that there is an appropriate reason to extend the time, the proper documentation is completed.  If the client is not responding to the VRC, the recommendation is (after the required protocol to reach out to the client is followed) to close the case.  The process has proven to be effective in meeting both of these requirements.

# (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, intellectual disabilities or a physical disability.

(2)(A). DBVI uses Title VI – Supported Employment funds primarily for job coaching 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. 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.

DBVI may provide extended services to a youth with a most significant disability for a period not

to exceed four (4) years for youth not older than age 24. Extended services are defined as ongoing

support services and other appropriate services that are needed to support a youth with a most

significant disability in supported employment which is competitive and integrated.

(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 $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%.

DBVI continues to have access to state funds to use for extended services after the VR case is closed. The purpose of the Basic Extended Support (BES) funds is to provide ongoing support needs to VR consumers with the most significant disabilities once training has been completed. The program provides financial assistance to providers of ongoing support and/or employers to help defray the additional cost incurred providing job coaching, training and supervision on a supported work site. "Extended Support" (for BES funds) is defined as on-going support services provided to a worker in supported employment/work once he has been closed "successfully employed" by the vocational rehabilitation counselor. Other allowable ongoing support services include transportation, personal care services and counseling to family members, employers and co-workers.

BRS guidance states: “If the youth does not currently have access to extended support services through a comparable benefit, and DVR or DBVI-funded Basic Extended Support (BES) or Brain Injury Support (BIS) is not available or will not meet the client’s support needs, the VRC should follow this process:

1. Come to agreement with the client (and guardian if applicable) on an employment goal that is a good fit and accessible to the client, better ensuring development of natural supports; and
2. Ensure that a funding source for long term extended support services (including natural supports, if appropriate for the participant) will be available after VR funded extended services end; and
3. Ensure that one of the following two circumstances is true for this client:
4. The VRC and Regional Manager agree that the youth is likely eligible for DHHS funded extended support services; and the youth and guardian (if one exists) must agree to apply for DHHS extended support services.

**OR**

1. Based on the youth’s employment and/or assessment experiences, the VRC and youth expect that the extended services provided for the time specified in the plan, with or without assistive technology and job accommodations, will enable the youth to develop adequate natural supports so that extended supports would no longer be needed **or** will reducethe youth’s support needs so that they can be met by DVR or DBVI funded Basic Employment Support (BES) or Brain Injury Support (BIS).”

Further guidance states:

“Extended support services can only be funded by DVR or DBVI with written approval by the Casework Supervisor and notification of the Regional Manager.

1. When DVR or DBVI funds cover extended support services, the IPE shall not include more than one year of extended services.
2. In limited individualized circumstances, the plan might be updated for an additional time period, up to one year at a time; but only with written approval by the Casework Supervisor and notification of the Regional Manager. The Comprehensive Assessment of Rehabilitation Needs (CARNS) must also be kept up to date.

DVR OR DBVI cannot extend the plan for more than a total of 4 years of extended services for any youth. DVR OR DBVI cannot provide extended services after the youth turns 25 years old. There are no exceptions; providing DVR or DBVI funded extended services for more than 4 years, or beyond age 24, would constitute expenditures that are not allowed by the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA).”

# (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 2020 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.

Goal 1: To engage Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired (DBVI) clients in Career Pathways that lead to meaningful and quality employment outcomes in a timely fashion based on the needs of the individual.

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 common performance measures.

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

Strategies:

1. DBVI will continue working through Registered Technical Assistance Centers of Excellence, of which SafalPartners is one, for technical assistance and in educating staff regarding understanding of MSG and credential attainment.
2. CARNS and New Counselor training will have focused components on MSG and credential attainment.
3. DBVI will increase staff competence in use of Aware – VR’s case management system, in tracking and recording of MSG and credential attainment.
4. DBVI will work with Maine Registered Apprenticeship Sponsors such as HospitalityMaine in use of the Workhands App.

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 the Maine-based immersion center and offer summer programs, including blindness rehabilitation, independent living, work experiences and college preparation. Summer programs such as College Prep, some version of Learning, Independence, Fun, Employment (LIFE) Program (101, 102, Living on your Own (LOYO) or LIFE Camp) all 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). Mission Fit and No Barriers are two new programs run by outside providers with support from our staff (including contracted staff.) 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 increase access to DBVI services for individuals with disabilities who are unserved/underserved or have minority status.

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. DBVI will provide outreach and training to staff at tribal health or community centers of the four Maine tribes (Passamaquoddy Tribe, Penobscot Indian Nation, Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians, and Aroostook Band of Micmac Indians) including DBVI/DVR New Counselor Training upon request.
2. Maine DBVI will include Wabanaki Vocational Rehabilitation in training and technical assistance opportunities offered or funded by DBVI.
3. A representative from the Wabanaki Vocational Rehabilitation will participate on DBVI’s State Rehabilitation Council (SRC)
4. 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.

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 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.

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 continue to provide training to all staff to emphasize Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility.
2. DBVI will provide outreach to clinics/medical professionals in communities known to serve immigrant communities, such as Lewiston and Portland.
3. 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. DBVI will finalize and publish a DBVI consumer guide. The intent for this guide is to

provide an accessible resource that covers the wide range of services available through DBVI.

* 1. DBVI anticipates hiring an individual whose sole responsibility will be to engage with employers specifically about DBVI consumers and services. This dedicated staff person will allow DBVI to strengthen engagement with employers. 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.

* 1. 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.

Objective: DBVI will develop strategies for stronger communication and enhance connection throughout the provision of services to reduce early exits from the program and to improve successful employment outcomes.

Strategies:

1. DBVI will conduct outreach with unsuccessful closures to determine areas of need and whether they may be interested in reengagement.
2. DBVI will continue to improve its comprehensive system of personnel development to decrease turnover and improve consistency among staff leading to improved outcomes.
3. In an effort to receive additional feedback from consumers, DBVI is updating their consumer satisfaction survey and the methods through which that survey can be completed. Those methods will be online, by mail, or over the phone.

*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.

Assistive technology (AT) may be used to achieve each of the goals outlined as ways to expand and improve services to DBVI consumers. Many consumers will require assistive technology along their career pathway, for measurable skills gains or credential attainment or to gain other pre-employment transition skills or blindness rehabilitation skills. AT skills can increase the employment opportunities for DBVI clients.

*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:

Goal 4: To increase access to DBVI services for individuals with disabilities who are unserved/underserved or have minority status.

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. DBVI will provide outreach and training to staff at tribal health or community centers of the four Maine tribes (Passamaquoddy Tribe, Penobscot Indian Nation, Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians, and Aroostook Band of Micmac Indians) including DBVI/DVR New Counselor Training upon request.
2. Maine DBVI will include Wabanaki Vocational Rehabilitation in training and technical assistance opportunities offered or funded by DBVI.
3. A representative from the Wabanaki Vocational Rehabilitation will participate on DBVI’s State Rehabilitation Council (SRC)
4. 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.

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 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.

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:

DBVI will continue to provide training to all staff to emphasize Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility.

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)

*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). The summer programs will provide students with Pre-ETS – job exploration counseling; work-based learning; counseling on opportunities for enrollment in comprehensive transition or post-secondary education programs at institutions of higher education; workplace readiness training to develop social skills and independent living; and self-advocacy skills. Work-based learning experiences have been incorporated into many of the programs but there is also an opportunity for summer work experience. The programs provide training in social skills and self-advocacy. Students participant in job shadows, mock interviews, job exploration and even write and practice their elevator speeches. They travel to CareerCenters to learn about various job opportunities and visit some local businesses. The College Prep attendees have the opportunity to take a three credit college course and live on a campus for a number of weeks, getting to experience the campus life.

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 the Maine-based immersion center and offer summer programs, including blindness rehabilitation, independent living, work experiences and college preparation. Summer programs such as College Prep, some version of Learning, Independence, Fun, Employment (LIFE) Program (101, 102, Living on your Own (LOYO) or LIFE Camp), all 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). Mission Fit and No Barriers are two new programs run by outside providers with support from our staff (including contracted staff.) 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 also has representation on the Local Workforce Boards (LWIB).

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 was 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. Disruptions to staffing and unprecedented demands presented by the COVID 19 pandemic delayed progress in accessing the SWIS and also finalizing a data sharing agreement but remain as part of our plan.

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 continues to be 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 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.

DBVI contributes funding to its State Rehabilitation Council which includes representation from both the consumer and employers as well as consumer organizations, the state workforce board, Department of Education, Maine Parent Federation and the Maine Client Assistance Program. The council works together to generate innovative ideas to provide more employment opportunities for Maine individuals who are blind or visually impaired. The SRC funding also covers the costs for participants to attend national conferences where they can gain a better understanding of VR regulations and network with other states to learn about their best practices.

(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. Other examples include providing Business Enterprise Program (BEP) candidates and managers with technology necessary to operate their facilities/businesses.

# (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 2020 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 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 from job attainment to one of a career pathway for economic success.

Strategies:

* 1. Continue to promote Career Pathway models through staff trainings and use of

technical assistance.

UPDATE: DBVI has continued to promote the career pathway model over the past performance period. This topic is often discussed at the monthly VRC meeting.

* 1. Prepare DBVI Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) clients to be successful in a full range of secondary or post-secondary education options, including apprenticeships.

UPDATE: VRCs meet monthly with the DBVI leadership and trainings on various topics are presented at each meeting. During the last performance period, there has been training on secondary or post-secondary education options as well as on apprenticeships.

* 1. 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.

UPDATE: VRCs meet monthly with DBVI leadership and various trainings are provided at each meeting. Also, most of these topics are covered under the New Counselor Training so new counselors can attend or counselors that would just like to refresh their knowledge can attend individual sessions.

* 1. 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.

UPDATE: DBVI anticipates hiring an individual whose sole responsibility will be to engage with employers specifically about DBVI consumers and services. This dedicated staff person will allow DBVI to strengthen engagement with employers by matching skills and abilities of DBVI consumers with employer needs.

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.

UPDATE: Apprenticeship training/updates were/are offered during New Counselor Training, at staff meetings and during remote webinars such as the employer spotlights and Town Halls offered by the BRS Apprenticeship Planning Committee.

* + - * 1. 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.

UPDATE: Apprenticeship opportunities with the State of Maine Agencies are currently being explored. As these opportunities become realized, so too should programs such as the BEP benefit from this educational pathway approach to workforce development.

* + - * 1. 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.

UPDATE: The Maine Apprenticeship Program received a SAEEI grant, allowing for the hiring of a full-time Apprenticeship Navigator dedicated to work specifically with the Bureau of Rehabilitation Staff and its clients. Additionally, Maine DBVI was able to receive approval to add a new staff member, modeled after Business Engagement Managers in DVR, to work specifically with Maine Employers in educating them in the benefits of working with folks who are blind and visually impaired, educating employers in technology advances that allow persons who are B/VI to perform the essential functions of employment and to engage DBVI staff and its clients with those employers.

* + - * 1. 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.

UPDATE: Quarterly Statewide Meetings did begin in 2020 which included staff and SBDC staff. A meeting was held between SBDC staff and BRS Leadership prior to to help frame the meetings and understand each agencies process to better assist the client as they follow the self-employment “pathway,”

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 attainment.

UPDATE: DBVI staff received training throughout the year on capturing MSGs and credential attainment through our Systems Improvement and Quality Assurance (SIQA) unit.

1. CARNS and New Counselor training will have focused components on MSG and credential attainment.

UPDATE: The New Counselor Training was recently held December 2021 and had components on MSG and credential attainment.

1. DBVI will increase staff competence in use of AwareVR in tracking and recording of MSG and credential attainment.

UPDATE: The SIQA unit began a weekly Aware question and answer period for all BRS staff in 2021. The tracking and recording of MSG and credential were also provided to new staff through the New Counselor Training.

1. DBVI will work with Maine Registered Apprenticeship Sponsors such as HospitalityMaine in use of the Workhands App.

UPDATE: At this time, DBVI does not have any clients enrolled in the Apprenticeship program so the Workhands App has not been utilized.

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.

UPDATE: Many of the SRC groups (or their representatives) were involved in the planning of some Pre-ETS programs that were held over the summer of both 2020 and 2021. The programming for the 2020 summer was essentially virtual and covered self-advocacy, and work readiness skills. The 2021 summer programs covered all 5 categories of Pre-ETS – Mission Fit, College Prep, LIFE Camp and No Barriers. There were also Expanded Core Curriculum activities that took place throughout the year. This year they were held virtually which allowed more students to attend. The SRC was kept apprised of all these programs.

1. 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.

UPDATE: The BLRSs (transition consultants) held a number of parent sessions during 2020 and 2021. This gave parents an opportunity to share and network with other partners of students who are blind or visually impaired. There was a Family Day outing for the parents, students and siblings that was held during the summer of 2021.

1. 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.

UPDATE: Since the start of the pandemic, Region 1 meetings were held monthly, bimonthly and now quarterly with the Iris Community services staff, Director of ESBVIC and Portland DBVI.  Meetings are an opportunity to share information and review/improve service delivery.  There is a separate scheduled time for individual client team meetings.

Region 2 meetings are monthly as part of the DBVI staff meeting and include the VRT.  Time is set aside for client team meetings for those working with the client.  Region 2 has quarterly meeting with TVI’s present as well as the VRT and DBVI staff. Time is also set aside for individual student team meetings.

Region 3 discusses any students age 14+ with the regional team but the TVIs do not attend the meeting. The transition consultant in that area maintains contact with the local TVIs and keeps us informed.

Region 4 holds two meetings per year in order to discuss specifically the students 14+. This regional meeting includes all of the TVIs in the region.  We hold one meeting at the beginning of the school year in September and one meeting at the end of the school year in May.

Region 5 discusses the students with the TVI and BLRS at every team meeting which occurs on the first Wednesday of every month. It is an ongoing discussion.

1. Continue to make optimal use and expansion of the Maine-based immersion center and offer summer programs, including blindness rehabilitation, independent living, work experiences and college preparation. Summer programs such as College Prep, some version of Learning, Independence, Fun, Employment (LIFE) Program (101, 102, Living on your Own (LOYO) or LIFE Camp), all 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). Mission Fit and No Barriers are two new programs run by outside providers with support from our staff (including contracted staff.) 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.

UPDATE: Unfortunately, the Maine-based immersion center had to close temporarily during the pandemic. Since it reopened for in-person services, Maine has sent 5 consumers to participate in the program. One was only there for an initial assessment, but the rest participated for approximately 12 weeks depending on their individual needs.

**DBVI College Prep Program** in the past was a program that lasted five weeks, but due to COVID and the desire to have a residential program, the 2021 program was held for three weeks. Seven students completed the program where they were involved in an intensive three-credit college course while they lived on the University of Maine campus and participated in blindness rehabilitation instruction, such as Orientation and Mobility and Vision Rehabilitation Therapy. The students were able to experience new things, such as what it was like to live away from home, to have a roommate, and to learn the expectations of a college level course. Students also participated in a paid work experience.

**Life Camp** is the 6th iteration of DBVI’s original Life101.  Students (five) participated in the two-week residential program based at the Iris Network during July. The primary focus of the program was on the five required Pre-ETS activities. Students participated in job shadows, interviewing prep, job exploration and even practiced their elevator speeches.  For most of the participants this was their first experience being away from home. This program included DBVI staff, VRTs, O&Ms and TVIs.

**NEW! Mission Fit**, a new fitness program, included 12 students who participated in the program from March through mid-June 2021 to learn about nutrition and healthy eating habits. A fitness trainer, who also has a visual impairment, taught program students to look beyond their fears, to take ownership, and to develop good habits. TVIs and DBVI staff supported the students as they established and embraced their fitness goals. Guest speakers spoke with the students about being active and the many activities and sports that can be adapted for individuals with visual impairments. These speakers were individuals with a visual impairment who participate in adaptive sports, such as skiing, ice hockey, hiking and rowing.

**No Barriers:** DBVI contracted with a company to conduct a No Barriers Summit at the UMaine 4-H Camp and Learning Center at Bryant Pond.  Nine transition aged blind and visually impaired students participated in the residential program focused on Erik Weihenmayer’s No Barriers curriculum.  Erik was the first blind climber in history to reach the summit of Mt. Everest and his motto is “What’s within you is stronger than what’s in your way”.  The curriculum addresses 7 “Life Elements” **designed to empower students to overcome their own personal barriers and included completing a ropes course, using a zip line, rock wall climbing, hiking and other team building activities.**

**DBVI has a YouTube video of a consumer who attended many of these summer programs and how it helped him in his skill development.**

**DBVI Family Field Day 2021**, DBVI brought families together who have children ages birth to 24 with visual impairments. The goal of the event was to help students and their families make connections with other families experiencing vision loss and to participate in a variety of accessible indoor and outdoor activities adapted for individuals with visual impairments. The event also addressed areas of the Expanded Core Curriculum and Pre-Employment Transition Services, including Independent Living Skills; Orientation and Mobility; Recreation and Leisure; Self-Determination; Social Interaction Skills; Self-Advocacy; and Work Readiness Training. These areas are critical for successful employment outcomes for people with visual impairments.

1. 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.

UPDATE: Multiple programs focusing on ECC and Pre-ETS have been offered both in person and in a virtual environment.  Group programs statewide offering have included: Virtual After School Group, College Prep, Life Camp, Portfolio Making, Mission Fit, No Barriers.  There have been regional programs targeting specific students and their needs as well as ongoing individualized programming.

In the northern part of the state, DBVI offered Expanded Core Curriculum programming for students that incorporated orientation and mobility and travel skill development along with career exploration in their local communities.

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.

UPDATE: DBVI O&M instructors work with local municipalities, advocacy groups, DOT staff and public transportation providers to continually advocate for the needs of people with visual impairments in our communities. Recent projects included Union Street pedestrian signal upgrades in Bangor as well as a pilot study in Central and Southern Maine as well as high contrast crosswalk signs in Fairfield at several crossings.

* + - * 1. DBVI has designated staff to consult with transportation departments regarding transit studies, bicycle access, bus programming and staff meetings.

UPDATE: DBVI O&M instructors are available to meet and consult on a regular basis. A DBVI O&M instructor is a member of the Bangor Area Comprehensive Transportation System (BACTS) Bus Stop Designation Plan Advisory Workgroup and regularly attends BACTS Policy Committee Meetings. O&M Instructors in the Greater Portland area continue to serve on various public transit committees through Greater Portland Council of Government (also referred to as GPCOG) to increase accessibility and transit needs in general for those with visual impairment.

* + - * 1. DBVI attends Transportation For All and Public Notice meetings issued by DOT.

UPDATE: DBVI has a representative on the Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC) where transportation and other employment and independent living challenges for persons with disabilities are part of the State Plan for Independent Living (SPIL) goals and priorities.

A DBVI O&M instructor attends Transportation For All (TFA) meetings monthly in Bangor and advocates for consumer needs in regard to bus transportation. DOT public notices are emailed regularly to all O&M instructors across the state so that they can attend the meetings in their area and advocate for consumer needs in regard to pedestrian safety

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.

UPDATE: There have been few opportunities with the pandemic but Wabanaki VR was included or invited to attend training opportunities.

* + - * 1. A representative from the Wabanaki Vocational Rehabilitation will participate on DBVI’s State Rehabilitation Council (SRC)

UPDATE: The Director of the Wabanaki VR program is a DBVI SRC member.

* + - * 1. 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.

UPDATE: There were few opportunities to provide TA or trainings this year due to the pandemic but there was one offered on Cultural Diversity on August 19, 2021 by John Dennis.

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).

UPDATE: Due to the pandemic, there was no progress made on this strategy.

1. Collaborate with Helen Keller National Center on resources, outreach, hearing aid access, and availability of funds.

UPDATE: A list was created with contact information regarding support for hearing aids.

1. Provide feedback and information on new legislation regarding insurance cost for hearing aids to the Division.

UPDATE: There was new legislation passed in Maine in January 2020 that provides some funding for hearing aids through private health insurance. DBVI staff was made aware of this new legislation and shared it with consumers requesting information on hearing aids.

1. 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).

UPDATE: DBVI O&M staff have attended Dual Sensory Meetings and Tri-State Meetings with HKNC. Maine hosted one of the meetings. No funding has been secured, however, training via HKNC (via Maricar and cost) and possible support ideas from VRT/O&M from DBVI (trainings and webinars to volunteers).

1. 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.

UPDATE: Virtual training from VRT and O&M to CRPs have taken place as well as ppt available for review. No in- person training has taken place due to COVID or need at this time.

1. 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.

UPDATE: A VRT and an O&M collaborated on the development of a ppt to be used for both the IL program and CRPs. Information on ICANCONNECT is part of the ppt.

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.

UPDATE: Due to the pandemic, some of the annual conferences were held virtually or not at all. DBVI staff did present at the NFB conference, sharing information about services from DBVI and contact information for New Mainers who may have connected with these organizations.

1. 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.

UPDATE: The in-person informational sessions were very limited over the past period due to COVID.

8/2/21 A virtual presentation to Alpha One employees in regard to DBVI services. Discussed vision services in Maine, including our partners, referral and qualification for services, eye conditions, O&M, white canes, human guide and supportive strategies. Provided DBVI website information. No questions fielded.

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.

UPDATE: Due to the pandemic, there was not much outreach that took place.

1. DBVI will provide outreach to community support programs known to work with immigrant populations (i.e. Maine Immigrant and Refugee Services and Catholic Charities)

UPDATE: DBVI staff reached out to community liaison (also an interpreter from CCME) who referred several people who are refugees/asylum seekers from Rwanda.

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.

UPDATE: There was no progress over the last period with this strategy.

1. DBVI contractors will be required to include acknowledgement of Rehabilitation Services Administration DBVI grant funding on program materials and public documents.

UPDATE: Providers for DBVI have worked collaboratively to develop language to include on program materials and public documents that provides written acknowledgement of RSA grant funding.

1. DBVI and contracted partners will provide uniform services across the state.

UPDATE: DBVI has worked closely with contracted partners to ensure that services are consistent throughout 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.

UPDATE: DBVI has provided in-service trainings (mostly virtual) to CRP within their region so staff are more familiar with how to provide services for individuals who are blind or visually impaired.

1. Maine DBVI Staff will provide service awareness and assistive technology/adaptive device activities for consumers and organizations within their regions.

UPDATE: There has been little progress on this due to the pandemic.

10/26/21 – An O&M instructor provided awareness about DBVI services to a local Boy Scout troop. Special googles, hand-on demonstrations and sensory challenges gave the participants a better understanding of individuals with visual impairments.

1. DBVI will coordinate cooperative training with Maine Department of Transportation (DOT).

UPDATE: Trainings were limited due to the pandemic.

1. DBVI will work with its contracted partners to create a more organized and centralized public education effort.

UPDATE: There were a few presentations with the O&M & VRT to group homes and assisted living facilities.  We also had O&M and TVI presentations to CDS and a specialized school.

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

UPDATE: Maine DBVI participated in an annual meeting with the Veterans’ Administration Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Services on April 14th, 2021. In addition, quarterly meetings occur with MDOL Bureau of Employment Services Veteran team, BRS Veteran Liaisons and members from Veterans’ Administration Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Services. These meetings are to expand collaboration, share resources and facilitate training opportunities.

1. Encourage all staff to regularly attend local Lions Club meetings in an effort to promote DBVI services and resources.

UPDATE: There was limited progress on this strategy due to the pandemic.

1. Maine DBVI staff and contracted partners will provide service awareness to doctors within their region.

UPDATE: DBVI sent a letter to all known eye doctors in Maine with a brochure of DBVI’s comprehensive services. Staff would then follow up with each doctor’s office manager to provide more information and awareness of our services. The list of doctors was divided by region based on city/town. Unfortunately, due to the pandemic, there was not a lot of progress on this strategy.

DBVI staff developed a targeted You Tube video explaining services that is posted on the DOL site. It was also sent to some eye docs. This was a DBVI initiative, but we had some input from the VRT’s.

(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.

UPDATE: The division experienced a 50% turnover in VRCs over the past year due to retirements or resignations. At this time, all VRC positions are filled but the learning curve has had an impact on the progression of services.

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 understand 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.

UPDATE: While transportation remains a barrier for many of the DBVI consumers, DBVI staff have learned how to provide many services virtually due to the pandemic. For many consumers, it was easier to participate in services virtually than if they were in-person and the consumer had to deal with the challenge of transportation.

(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 twenty-four individuals who would benefit from supported employment services in PY19 and twenty-four in PY20.  For PY19, there were six youth with a significant disability; one was closed unsuccessfully, and the others were still receiving services. Of the eighteen adults, three were closed unsuccessfully, one was closed successfully, and the others were still receiving services. For PY20, DBVI continues to work with five youth and fourteen adults. One adult was closed successfully while four were closed unsuccessfully.

(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 was 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. Disruptions to staffing and unprecedented demands presented by the COVID 19 pandemic delayed progress in accessing the SWIS and also finalizing a data sharing agreement but remain as part of our plan.

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

For PY2020, Maine DBVI exceeded the negotiated level for MSGs (33.8%) which was mostly due to secondary or post-secondary education completion.

(4). Title I resource continues 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 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.

In PY20, DBVI spent just over $4000 for I&E for its State Rehabilitation Council on meetings, including administrative tasks and web design.

# (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 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 twenty-four individuals who would benefit from supported employment services in PY19 and twenty-four in PY20.  For PY19, there were six youth with a significant disability; one was closed unsuccessfully, and the others were still receiving services. Of the eighteen adults, three were closed unsuccessfully, one was closed successfully, and the others were still receiving services. For PY20, DBVI continues to work with five youth and fourteen adults. However, one adult was closed successfully and four were closed unsuccessfully.

(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.

The transition to extended services begins after all supported employment services are complete. Extended services may be provided for a period of up to four years or until such time that a youth reached the age of 25, and thus, no longer meets the definition of a "youth with a disability" under 34 C.F.R. §361.5 (c) (58), whichever occurs first.