Maine PYs 2024-2027 - Vocational Rehabilitation Program (Combined or General)

Contents

[Maine PYs 2024-2027 - Vocational Rehabilitation Program (Combined or General)](#_Toc1)

[Program-Specific Requirements for State Vocational Rehabilitation (Combined or General)](#_Toc2)

[a. State Rehabilitation Council.](#_Toc3)

[b. Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA).](#_Toc9)

[c. Goals, Priorities, and Strategies](#_Toc16)

[d. Evaluation and Reports of Progress: VR and Supported Employment Goals](#_Toc23)

[e. Supported Employment Services, Distribution of Title VI Funds, and Arrangements and Cooperative Agreements for the Provision of Supported Employment Services.](#_Toc27)

[f. Annual Estimates](#_Toc32)

[g. Order of Selection](#_Toc36)

[h. Waiver of Statewideness.](#_Toc43)

[i. Comprehensive System of Personnel Development.](#_Toc44)

[j. Coordination with Education Officials.](#_Toc62)

[k. Coordination with Employers](#_Toc71)

[l. Interagency Cooperation with Other Agencies](#_Toc72)

[Assurances](#_Toc82)

[Vocational Rehabilitation (Combined or General) Certifications](#_Toc83)

[Vocational Rehabilitation Program Performance Indicators](#_Toc99)

[GEPA 427 Form Instructions for Application Package - Vocational Rehabilitation](#_Toc100)

[GEPA 427 Form Instructions for Application Package - Supported Employment](#_Toc105)

## Program-Specific Requirements for State Vocational Rehabilitation (Combined or General)

The Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Services Portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan must include the following descriptions and estimates, as required by sections 101(a) and 606 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended by title IV of WIOA.

### a. State Rehabilitation Council.

#### 1. All VR agencies, except for those that have an independent consumer-controlled commission, must have a State Rehabilitation Council (Council or SRC) that meets the criteria in Section 105 of the Rehabilitation Act. The designated State agency or designated State unit, as applicable, has:

*Select A or B:*

*(A) is an independent State commission*  
  
*(B) has established a State Rehabilitation Council*

(B) has established a State Rehabilitation Council

#### 2. In accordance with Assurance (a)(1)(B), if selected, please provide information on the current composition of the Council by representative type, including the term number of the representative, as applicable, and any vacancies, as well as the beginning dates of each representative’s term.

Select 'Edit' to edit the narrative.

Note, please do not edit the table header or formatting. Only edit the table contents.

If you accidentally edit the table headers and structure, open [this link to the blank table](file:///C:\node\578511). You can copy and paste the table into the narrative field, and start over if needed.

| Council Representative | Current Term Number/Vacant | Beginning Date of Term Mo./Yr. |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC) | V | ~~11/2017~~ |
| Parent Training and Information Center | 1 | 8/2023 |
| Client Assistance Program | V |  |
| Qualified Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Counselor (Ex Officio if Employed by the VR Agency) | 1 | 8/2023 |
| Community Rehabilitation Program Service Provider | ~~2~~1/V | 10/2020 |
| Business, Industry, and Labor | V |  |
| Business, Industry, and Labor | V |  |
| Business, Industry, and Labor | V |  |
| Business, Industry, and Labor | V |  |
| Disability Advocacy Groups | 1 | 8/2023 |
| Current or Former Applicants for, or Recipients of, VR services | V |  |
| Section 121 Project Directors in the State (as applicable) | 2 | 10/2020 |
| State Educational Agency Responsible for Students with Disabilities Eligible to Receive Services under Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) | 1 | 10/2020 |
| State Workforce Development Board | 1 | 8/2023 |
| VR Agency Director (Ex Officio) | 1 | 10/2020 |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |

#### 3. If the SRC is not meeting the composition requirements in Section 105(b) of the Rehabilitation Act and/or is not meeting quarterly as required in Section 105(f) of the Rehabilitation Act, provide the steps that the VR agency is taking to ensure it meets those requirements.

Meeting the composition requirement for SRC membership has been an ongoing challenge post-pandemic. With support, the SRC has developed a system with the Governor’s Office of Boards and Commissions that promotes timely appointments. The SRC quorum is impacted by the current membership. Voting is held off until the quorum can be met. The process includes the Bureau Director meeting with the Boards and Commissions in the months of July and November to review pending nominations to prepare to present to the Governor. There are currently no pending nominations, however, two applications to be submitted is in process. For seats that are expired and qualify for another term a new application is submitted to the Governor’s Office of Boards and Commissions. The SRC has invited interested individuals to visit SRC meetings with the goal of increasing membership. This has had some positive results. The SRC has participated in national conversations about attracting and maintaining SRC membership and has discussed different strategies to gain input from required stakeholder groups other than just attending bimonthly meetings. DVR has periodically sent messaging out via VR counselors that can be shared with clients about the benefits of SRC membership.

There are four priorities for DVR SRC.

1. Submit the 2022 and 2023 SRC reports. This will be discussed at the July 2024 SRC meeting with the outcome of an identified timeline for submission.
2. Address SRC By-laws to ensure compliance
3. Have all membership applications completed and ready to present for July 2024 meeting with the Boards and Commissions
4. Discuss at July 2024 SRC meeting next steps for election of Chair of SRC

#### In accordance with the requirements in Section 101(a)(21)(A)(ii)(III) of the Rehabilitation Act, include a summary of the Council’s input (including how it was obtained) into the State Plan and any State Plan revisions, including recommendations from the Council’s annual reports, the review and analysis of consumer satisfaction and other Council reports.

State Rehabilitation Council input has been gathered from feedback provided from members during Council meetings over the past year. The State Rehabilitation Council has had access to consumer satisfaction data and hears from the Client Assistance Program during each bimonthly meeting agenda. Additionally, SRC members were invited to provide written feedback or input via email. Members were encouraged to also attend a Public Hearing that was held both in-person and virtually on January 25, 2024.

SRC Input

SRC: Is Peer Mentoring a paid service?

SRC: Add Person-Centered Planning as language to Objective 1.3

SRC: How are case reviews tracked and used to support Apprenticeship?.

SRC: Can DVR recognize or spotlight employers who follow hiring practices that promote diversity?

SRC:  Rather than “ partner” with employer organizations, can DVR  also collaborate and educate to reduce stigma?

SRC: Under Objective 2.1, can data collection be broadened to include data on all agencies promoting employment of people with disabilities?

SRC: Under Objective 2.3, can mention of person-identified supports that may not currently exist be added?

SRC: Can Goal 3 include language on Person-Centered Planning?

SRC: Under Objective 3.3, can language be added related to job search and creation of a list of employers who are open to diversity hiring – including those reentering from correctional system?

SRC: Regarding Objective 3.6, will strategies be filtered that are no longer working?

SRC: Also, regarding Objective 3.6, can DVR staff be assigned to liaison to PNMIs and group homes for youth? There is a need for satellite offices in rural counties.

SRC: Does the wrap around supports strategy include long term supports for apprenticeship participation?

SRC: And is the free community college eligibility going to expand beyond recent high school grads for those that need to upskill to access higher wages?

Public Comment: I understand oftentimes VR works with transitioning students and continues to work with them throughout the span of their life, as needed.  I moved here from Maryland eight and a half years ago and had lost our services when we moved to Maryland and moved here to Maine and connected with voc. Rehab here in Maine.  And have not found employment. My understanding is that statewide, some offices have less turnover and more successful cases of employment, and that is speaking to the Augusta area.  In the Portland area, there’s been a lot of turnovers.  My son has had several intakes, several, several intakes and no jobs yet and that’s eight and a half years.  I know your goal is employment first.  I’m aware of that. But I’m wondering, is there a way to make that more equitable across the state, rather than one region finding more success and less turnover than another region

Public Comment: (There is a ) connection with the division of Deaf Services and VR, we have also individuals who are Deaf Blind but that was not mentioned.  And I know there are maybe not a lot identified in Maine, per se, but those individuals who are Deaf Blind are finding a lot of challenges in finding employment, and everyone wants to go the route of technology or whatever, and Zoom has been a great boon for many individuals but it’s nearly impossible as far as access for those that use tactile ASL and doing things online, essentially eliminates them as they don’t have access. So recognizing that that type of technology doesn’t work for those who are Deaf Blind.  I hope too that you are working with VR rehab folks.  I know ‑‑ I mean, I can’t say that they are in a capacity that they have no access to vision at all.  I think that they are still eligible for, you know, legally blind qualifications.  They work with the deaf services in VR, but they are on a wait list for over a year with vision services.  And I thought that, you know, here you are talking about 60 days for eligibility, 90 days is for having and wondering about the two individuals that I know as far as the services that they need in equipment technology assessment for employment for those Deaf Blind individuals. You know, because they are on the job training, they haven’t had the assessment in a year.  You know, and so I ‑‑ I come to this information from another profession, work that I do, but I think those are things that we need to consider, the Deaf Blind population and how their needs are being met, particularly when we talk about accessibility for Zoom.  They just had to wait too long to get services.  So that’s ‑‑ thank you for giving me the opportunity to mention these things.

#### Provide the VR agency’s response to the Council’s input and recommendations, including an explanation for the rejection of any input and recommendations.

List each recommendation/input followed by the VR agency response

SRC Feedback and DVR Response:

SRC: Is Peer Mentoring a paid service?

DVR: Yes, Peer Mentoring has been added as a paid service

SRC: Add Person-Centered Planning as language to Objective 1.3

DVR: Person-Centered Planning is not explicitly a VR approach. Training on best practices for Career Pathways and Apprenticeship would include training on strategies that are individualized to meet each person’s needs.

SRC: How are case reviews tracked and used to support Apprenticeship?

DVR: The Systems Improvement and Quality Assurance Unit maintains a procedure for selecting cases to be reviewed and collects and stores case review data. Analysis of case review data is done in conjunction with DVR and findings inform development of staff training and supervision.

SRC: Can DVR recognize or spotlight employers who follow hiring practices that promote diversity?

DVR: This is an interesting suggestion that DVR will bring back to WIOA Partners’ meetings for additional discussion.

SRC:  Rather than “ partner” with employer organizations, can DVR  also collaborate and educate to reduce stigma?

DVR: Yes, DVR works individually and collectively to educate employers about the benefits of hiring people with disabilities. DVR’s new Statewide Business Relations Consultant will have a lead role in supporting employers with recruitment and retention of talent with disabilities. This includes offering the Windmills curriculum to promote disability awareness.

SRC: Under Objective 2.1, can data collection be broadened to include data on all agencies promoting employment of people with disabilities?

DVR: This specific objective is about compliance with federal timelines, so DVR-specific data will be the most important to review. DVR agrees that a cross-agency data walk is helpful and there are efforts through Maine’s Employment First law and the Pathways to Partnerships grant (as two examples)  to promote transparency of cross-agency data.

SRC: Under Objective 2.3, can mention of person-identified supports that may not currently exist be added?

DVR: Yes, DVR has added language about supports to two strategies under Objective 2.3.

SRC: Can Goal 3 include language on Person-Centered Planning?

DVR: DVR recognizes the value of Person-Centered Planning but does not choose at this time to limit individualized planning to only that approach.

SRC: Under Objective 3.3, can language be added related to job search and creation of a list of employers who are open to diversity hiring – including those reentering from correctional system?

DVR: DVR has added a strategy on training for community rehabilitation providers on supporting individuals who are reentering from the correctional system. DVR will work with other workforce system partners to explore opportunities to highlight employers who are engaged in diversity hiring.

SRC: Regarding Objective 3.6, will strategies be filtered that are no longer working?

DVR: Yes, DVR is continuously assessing strategies based on feedback and outcomes as well as environmental and programmatic factors.

SRC: Also, regarding Objective 3.6, can DVR staff be assigned to liaison to PNMIs and group homes for youth? There is a need for satellite offices in rural counties.

DVR: DVR recognizes the need for access in rural counties. In addition to its main offices in Portland, Lewiston, Augusta, Bangor, Machias and Presque Isle, DVR also maintains staffing at CareerCenters in Wilton, Brunswick and Hinckley as well as an office in the DHHS building in Houlton. While virtual services have increased access post-COVID 19, DVR staff continue to travel across the state to meet applicants and clients in locations that meet their needs. Staffing allocation does not allow for in-person staff presence everywhere that a need may exist, but with virtual access to Counselors of the Day, interested individuals can connect from anywhere.

SRC: Does the wrap around supports strategy include long term supports for apprenticeship participation?

DVR: DVR has procedural guidance that outlines how clients and employers can access needed supports and services during a Registered Apprenticeship. DVR and the BRS Apprenticeship Navigator work closely with the Maine Apprenticeship team, as well as intermediaries and employers to ensure that clients who are Apprentices are well-supported and on track for success. If individuals are likely to need long-term supports post-DVR then their VR counselor will work with them to determine if a referral is needed for MaineCare Waiver or Mental Health long-term supports.

SRC: And is the free community college eligibility going to expand beyond recent high school grads for those that need to upskill to access higher wages?

DVR: At this time, DVR is not aware of any efforts to expand free community college beyond recent graduates. There are, however, many workforce programs at the state’s community colleges that are free or low-cost and are designed for adult learners.

Public Comment: I understand oftentimes VR works with transitioning students and continues to work with them throughout the span of their life, as needed.  I moved here from Maryland eight and a half years ago and had lost our services when we moved to Maryland and moved here to Maine and connected with voc. Rehab here in Maine.  And have not found employment. My understanding is that statewide, some offices have less turnover and more successful cases of employment, and that is speaking to the Augusta area.  In the Portland area, there’s been a lot of turnovers.  My son has had several intakes, several, several intakes and no jobs yet and that’s eight and a half years.  I know your goal is employment first.  I’m aware of that. But I’m wondering, is there a way to make that more equitable across the state, rather than one region finding more success and less turnover than another region

DVR: DVR understands the potential impact of staffing turnover. We are working closely with our HR department to find ways to promote VR Counselor openings so that we can fill positions as quickly as possible with qualified applicants. We are also finding ways to use current staff more efficiently – such as through the new statewide Intake Unit that was launched in May of 2023. We also have created statewide Rehabilitation Counselor I positions that are able to work virtually with students across the state. We hope that initiatives like this will reduce lack of access for individuals who live in remote areas of Maine.

Public Comment: (There is a ) connection with the division of Deaf Services and VR, we have also individuals who are Deaf Blind but that was not mentioned.  And I know there are maybe not a lot identified in Maine, per se, but those individuals who are Deaf Blind are finding a lot of challenges in finding employment, and everyone wants to go the route of technology or whatever, and Zoom has been a great boon for many individuals but it’s nearly impossible as far as access for those that use tactile ASL and doing things online, essentially eliminates them as they don’t have access. So recognizing that that type of technology doesn’t work for those who are Deaf Blind.  I hope too that you are working with VR rehab folks.  I know ‑‑ I mean, I can’t say that they are in a capacity that they have no access to vision at all.  I think that they are still eligible for, you know, legally blind qualifications.  They work with the deaf services in VR, but they are on a wait list for over a year with vision services.  And I thought that, you know, here you are talking about 60 days for eligibility, 90 days is for having and wondering about the two individuals that I know as far as the services that they need in equipment technology assessment for employment for those Deaf Blind individuals.

You know, because they are on the job training, they haven’t had the assessment in a year.  You know, and so I ‑‑ I come to this information from another profession, work that I do, but I think those are things that we need to consider, the Deaf Blind population and how their needs are being met, particularly when we talk about accessibility for Zoom.  They just had to wait too long to get services.  So that’s ‑‑ thank you for giving me the opportunity to mention these things.

DVR: We appreciate the attention to the needs of individuals who are Deaf Blind. Our Division for the Deaf, Hard of Hearing and Late Deafened does work with the Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired  (DBVI) using resources through the Helen Keller Center and other organizations to promote opportunities for individuals with dual sensory needs and we recognize that while technology has increased access for many people – it has not eliminated barriers to employment. We have included this as a strategy under Goal 3, Objective 3.5. To clarify, there is no waitlist for services from DBVI at this time.

### b. Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA).

Information below is from the 2023 Comprehensive State Needs Assessment. The next CSNA will be jointly conducted by DVR and the State Rehabilitation Council ~~conducted~~ in ~~2027~~ 2026.

Section 101(a)(15), (17), and (23) of the Rehabilitation Act require VR agencies to provide an assessment of:

#### 1. The VR services needs of individuals with disabilities residing within the State, including:

##### A. Individuals with the most significant disabilities and their need for Supported Employment;

* The percentage individuals with SSI/DI benefits who are open DVR cases in each region is proportional to the distribution of SSI and SSDI recipients across the state.
* Increased strategies are needed to assist individuals with mental health disabilities to reach rehabilitation. DVR is increasing training on Motivational Interviewing and is partnering with the Office of Behavioral Health on the evidence-based Individualized Placement and Support (IPS) training and awareness for VR counselors – as two possible strategies.
* The rehabilitation rate has remained relatively flat for individuals with cognitive disabilities. With increasing numbers of individuals with Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities (IDD) seeking employment, DVR has added four (4) new Targeted Caseload VR counselors who will have special training and will work closely with the Office of Aging and Disability Services to focus efforts increasing Competitive Integrated Employment for this population.
* The decrease in the rehabilitation rate for individuals with sensory disabilities is concerning. Individuals with hearing loss are overrepresented on the waitlist for services (Order of Selection categories 3 and 4), and this is one of the factors in DVR’s goal of opening all categories by July 1, 2024. DVR and DBVI are also revisiting current guidance on shared cases to ensure this process is well understood by VR counselors in both Divisions.

[**https://www.maine.gov/rehab/docs/2023/dvr/SRCNeedsAssessmentUpdatedChartsandTablesFFY2023.docx**](https://www.maine.gov/rehab/docs/2023/dvr/SRCNeedsAssessmentUpdatedChartsandTablesFFY2023.docx)

##### B. Individuals with disabilities who are minorities and individuals with disabilities who have been unserved or underserved by the VR program;

**Maine DVR Minorities Served**

Distribution by minority group for all cases closed between Federal Fiscal Year 2021 and 2023

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Maine DVR** | | | | | |
|  | **FFY 2021** | | **FFY 2022** | | **FFY 2023** | |
|  | **Count** | **Percent** | **Count** | **Percent** | **Count** | **Percent** |
| All | 2,599 | -- | 3,064 | -- | 3,007 | -- |
| White | 2,367 | 91.1% | 2,807 | 91.6% | 2,724 | 90.6% |
| Black/African American | 90 | 3.5% | 97 | 3.2% | 109 | 3.6% |
| Native American/Alaska Native | 59 | 2.3% | 70 | 2.3% | 74 | 2.5% |
| Asian | 25 | 1.0% | 34 | 1.1% | 28 | 0.9% |
| Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander | 10 | 0.4% | 6 | 0.2% | 7 | 0.2% |
| Hispanic/Latino | 47 | 1.8% | 50 | 1.6% | 65 | 2.2% |
| Total Number of Minorities | 231 | 8.9% | 257 | 8.4% | 283 | 9.4% |

Note: The total exceeds the number of clients because individuals may list multiple race/ethnicity groups

* Maine DVR continues to serve a population that is slightly more diverse than the general population of Maine residents with disabilities.
* While it appears that the numbers of individuals who are minority groups has increased over the last few years, the small sample size may artificially amplify actual change.
* DVR will engage in DEIA strategies – including the addition of a Rehabilitation Assistant in each region – to learn more about why individuals from minority populations exit DVR services.

[**https://www.maine.gov/rehab/docs/2023/dvr/SRCNeedsAssessmentUpdatedChartsandTablesFFY2023.docx**](https://www.maine.gov/rehab/docs/2023/dvr/SRCNeedsAssessmentUpdatedChartsandTablesFFY2023.docx)

##### C. Individuals with disabilities served through other components of the workforce development system; and

DVR continues to see the benefits of partnership with other core programs under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. In PY 2022, these programs served significant percentages of individuals with disabilities. This indicates that individuals with disabilities are having access to a wide range of programs and services in addition to Vocational Rehabilitation. It also indicates that there are opportunities for co-enrollment to increase outcomes through additional resource availability.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| PY22 | SERVED | IND w/DIS | % |
| ADULT | 712 | 133 | 18.67 |
| DISLOCATED WORKER | 138 | 18 | 13.04 |
| YOUTH | 367 | 211 | 57.49 |
| WAGNER PEYSER | 6779 | 627 | 9.25 |

(Table A: WIOA Core programs and percentage of individuals with disabilities served in PY 22)

[**https://www.maine.gov/rehab/docs/2023/dvr/SRCNeedsAssessmentUpdatedChartsandTablesFFY2023.docx**](https://www.maine.gov/rehab/docs/2023/dvr/SRCNeedsAssessmentUpdatedChartsandTablesFFY2023.docx)

##### D. Youth with disabilities, including students with disabilities and their need for pre-employment transition services. 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 IDEA.

Approximately 40% of DVR clients are transition-age youth. Despite this high percentage, DVR still is only reaching a small percentage of students with disabilities with Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS). While this number may be artificially deflated by limitations in historical reporting of no-cost services delivered by DVR Transition VR counselors, it indicates that there remains a need to better deliver (and capture) how schools and VR are working together to coordinate Pre-ETS delivery.

DVR now uses a team approach to serve transition-age youth. This includes employing regional and statewide Rehabilitation Counselor Is, business relations staff, and partners to work across regions both for virtual and in-person services.

2023 CSNA demonstrated that 2020-2023 percentages of students across disabilities remain similar with an increase of students served with Intellectual Disability, Autism and physical Impairment. The largest percentage is 34.3% of students serviced with mental health disability.

DVR has implemented two Statewide Rehabilitation Counselor I’s whose primary role is providing Pre-Employment Transition Services Statewide. Activities include group facilitation of career exploration, post-secondary opportunities, and first job workshops, The Rehabilitation Counselor I work collaboratively with the Rehabilitation Counselor II’s, school systems and staff and employers.

[**https://www.maine.gov/rehab/docs/2023/dvr/SRCNeedsAssessmentUpdatedChartsandTablesFFY2023.docx**](https://www.maine.gov/rehab/docs/2023/dvr/SRCNeedsAssessmentUpdatedChartsandTablesFFY2023.docx)

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

Maine DVR has contracts with community rehabilitation providers across the state and has not identified any current unmet needs

### c. Goals, Priorities, and Strategies

Section 101(a)(15) and (23) of the Rehabilitation Act require VR agencies to describe the goals and priorities of the State in carrying out the VR and Supported Employment programs. The goals and priorities are based on (1) the most recent CSNA, 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 SRC and findings and recommendations from monitoring activities conducted under Section 107 of the Rehabilitation Act. VR agencies must—

#### Describe how the SRC and the VR agency jointly developed and agreed to the goals and priorities and any revisions; and

Throughout the year – in addition to a public hearing – the State Rehabilitation Council offers feedback and input on current goals and recommendations for future goals and strategic approaches to DVR. This process results in a set of goals and objectives that reflect the priorities of both the SRC and Maine DVR.

#### 2. Identify measurable goals and priorities in carrying out the VR and Supported Employment programs and the basis for selecting the goals and priorities (e.g., CSNA, performance accountability measures, SRC recommendations, monitoring, other information). As required in Section 101(a)(15)(D), (18), and (23), describe under each goal or priority, the strategies or methods used to achieve the goal or priority, including as applicable, description of strategies or methods that—

##### A. Support innovation and expansion activities;

##### B. Overcome barriers to accessing VR and supported employment services;

##### C. 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, post-secondary education, employment, and pre-employment transition services); and

##### D. Improve the performance of the VR and Supported Employment programs in assisting individuals with disabilities to achieve quality employment outcomes.

List and number each goal/priority, noting the basis, and under each goal/priority, list and number the strategies to achieve the goal/priority

Goal 1

Maine DVR clients will reach their employment goals and be valued members of Maine’s workforce as measured by a. measurable skill gains, b. credential attainment and c. successful employment closures in competitive integrated employment

 Objective 1.1: To continue to reduce early exit from DVR services from 2509 in PY22 to 2400 in PY 23 to 2300 in PY 24 and further reducing to 2000 by PY 27.

Strategies: a. Provide staff training on techniques that promote engagement – such as Motivational Interviewing and Progressive Employment b. Explore technological options to promote regular communication between clients and VR counselors c. C. Through analysis of case review data, identify variables related to early exit at various stages of the VR process and develop strategies for mitigation.

 Objective 1.2: To promote increased access to and delivery of Pre–Employment Transition Services to all students with disabilities from 15% of  Maine students with disabilities in PY 22 to 17 % in PY 23 to 18% in PY 24 to reaching 25% by PY27 leading to improved post-secondary education and employment readiness.

Strategies: a. Through use of Progressive Employment, Summer Work Experience, and other work- based learning opportunities,  at least 250 students with a disability annually will have paid work experiences  during PY 2024 -PY 2027. C. In partnership with the Maine Department of Education and Local Education Agencies, Maine DVR will deliver virtual and in-person Pre-Employment Transition Services to Potentially Eligible and Eligible students with disabilities across Maine. This will include joint activities such as job tours, job clubs, Transition Career Exploration Workshop, and delivery of information on labor markets and career pathways. D. Maine DVR will partner with the Maine Department of Education’s Offices of Special Services and Inclusive Education  and Career and Technical Education offices to develop opportunities to increase the delivery of Pre-Employment Transition Services to students in Career and Technical Education programs. E. Maine DVR will partner with the Maine Department of Health and Human Services’ Office of Child and Family Services to ensure access to and participation in Pre-Employment Transition Services of youth served through child welfare and children’s behavioral health services. F. Maine DVR will expand delivery of strategies to address the needs of rural youth including through online resources and Virtual Job Shadow. G. Maine DVR will work with Maine’s Parent Training and Information Center to increase family awareness of Pre-Employment Transition Services and the value of early career exploration and planning for students with disabilities h. Through its Division for the Deaf, Hard of Hearing and Late Deafened, DVR will pilot an ASL-based Pre-ETS curriculum . i. Maine DVR will work with Maine DBVI to develop and deliver inclusive Pre-ETS activities that meet the needs of all Maine students with disabilities. J. Maine DVR will expand summer college and career exploration opportunities (e.g. College Bus Tours, Step Up, Career Pathways-themed events). K. In keeping with current research, Employment First, and the State of Maine’s Economic Development plan – collect and record data to track progress towards ensuring that all Maine youth have a paid work experience before high school graduation. L. DVR will partner with workforce partners, DECD and MDOE to support access for students with disabilities to DECD’s Career Exploration and MDOE’s Extended Learning Opportunities.

Objective 1.3: To promote careers in high wage-high growth, STEM, and other promising industry sectors through the exploration and inclusion of career pathways in DVR clients’ Individualized Plans for Employment. Data Source: Training Calendar, Progressive Employment referrals, Aware case management reports- IPE goals, IPE services, quarterly open and closed case reviews.

Strategies: a. Deliver joint training opportunities for DVR staff and Community Rehabilitation Providers on best practices in the use of Career Pathways. Target date: 2024, 4th quarter. B. In conjunction with the BRS Apprenticeship Navigator, provide training to DVR staff on best practices in pre-apprenticeship and Registered Apprenticeship. Target date: 2025, 1st quarter d. DVR will work with DBVI, the BRS Apprenticeship Navigator, I, and the Maine Department of Labor’s Apprenticeship Program to ensure that clients who Deaf/Hard of Hearing – or who have significant disabilities – are included in the growth and expansion of apprenticeships in Maine. Target dates (Apprenticeship Navigator hosts monthly VRC meeting. Open and closed case reviews will monitor for inclusion of career pathway strategies. F. DVR will apply sector-based strategies within Progressive Employment to promote access to career pathways for individuals.

G. DVR will participate in RSA-funded Technical Assistance Centers’ training and assistance  on utilization of Career Pathways strategies

Objective 1.4: Through lessons learned from the use of Progressive Employment, expand the number of Maine employers by 20% who implement diversity hiring activities through engagement with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and workforce system partners. Data Source: Progressive Employment referrals and outcomes, employer tracking database (JobLink), Aware closures.

Strategies: a. Partner with local Chambers of Commerce, the Society of Human Resource Managers (SHRM), and others to expand business outreach/network. B. With workforce system partners, actively participate in statewide business engagement efforts to grow and diversify Maine’s workforce through targeted outreach to employers. C.  support and maintain a team of DVR staff across the state to function as a Business Relations Team – including in partnership with Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired business relations staff. D. Partner with the Bureau of Employment Services’ pilot of Progressive Employment to create integrated delivery as appropriate.

Objective 1.5 To attract and retain highly qualified VR Counselors and Casework Supervisors to support delivery of high-quality services and improved employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities served by DVR. Data Source: Increase retention rate by 10%.

Strategies: a. Conduct outreach to undergraduate and graduate programs in rehabilitation counseling to share information on careers in Vocational Rehabilitation b. Continue to provide paid internships to undergraduate and graduate students in rehabilitation counseling programs. C. Pilot Registered Apprenticeship for Rehabilitation Counselor positions. D. DVR will provide core courses in vocational rehabilitation counseling to increase numbers of staff eligible to sit for the CRC. E. DVR will regularly offer leadership training opportunities to promote succession planning and preparation.

Goal 2 All individuals, including those with the most significant disabilities, will be served in a timely manner -which means determining eligibility within 60 days and developing Individualized Plans for Employment for all eligible clients within the 90-day time frame. DVR will continue to maintain no wait list for those individuals in categories 1 and 2 and will monitor the ability to again serve those in categories 3 and 4 in the future.

Objective 2.1: To maintain  substantial compliance (90%) in determining eligibility within 60 days of receiving an application for DVR services. DVR will progress from 79.7% in PY2018 to substantial compliance in PY 2021 and maintain substantial compliance or better through PY27.

Strategies: a. Collect data – including through the use of RSA dashboards – on eligibility determination and disseminate quarterly to DVR supervisors and managers to support best practices in the field. B. Deliver staff training and supervision on best practices in eligibility determination – including use of strategies provided through technical assistance provided by RSA c.  C. Continue implementation of the DVR Intake Unit, including expanding service to include processing of all applications for DVR services. D, Increase awareness of VR services through education and outreach which includes  strategies to expedite eligibility determination.

Objective 2.2: To maintain  substantial compliance (90%) in timely plan development by increasing the percentage of clients who  have an Individualized Plan for Employment developed within 90 days from 78.9% in PY 2018 to substantial compliance in PY 2022 and maintain substantial compliance or better through PY 27.

Strategies: a. Collect data- including through the use of RSA dashboards – on timely plan development and disseminate quarterly to DVR supervisors and managers to support best staff practices in the field. B. Deliver staff training and supervision on best practices in IPE plan development and Order of Selection (F) determination. C Continue implementation of the DVR Intake Unit, d. Increase use of the Career Exploration Workshop, which has been shown to decrease case length time. E. Work closely with the Maine Department of Education to ensure implementation of the joint Cooperative Agreement and best practice guidelines on referral and timely application for transition age students.

Objective 2.3: Maine DVR will address the underemployment of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities by assisting them to prepare for, reach, maintain and advance in careers of their choice in keeping with Maine’s Employment First law and as documented by measurable skills gains, credential attainment and successful closures in employment. Data source: Aware data points- OOS category, IPE goals and services, case outcome to include wage and hour data. Target: Increase measurable skills gains and credential attainment by 10%.

Strategies: a. DVR will partner with Maine DHHS’ Office of Aging and Disability Services and the Maine Department of Education to develop joint strategies and staff training to strengthen career preparation and competitive integrated employment outcomes of people with significant disabilities . B, DVR will launch the use of targeted caseload Rehabilitation Counselor to serve individuals with Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities c. DVR will work with DHHS’s Office of Aging and Disability Services to provide joint education and outreach to individuals, families, case managers and other providers, on the benefits of employment and the process to access DVR services and supports .d. In collaboration with Office of Aging and Disability Services Transition Specialists and other stakeholders, increase post-secondary education participation and supports for high school students with Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities and Autism through DVR support of college preparatory (Step Up, College Bus Tour) and Inclusive Education participation. E. Continue to provide access to and training on the BRIDGE – Career Exploration Workshop including virtual modules developed with input from self-advocates.

Objective 2.4: Maine DVR clients will have timely access to appropriate Community Employment Services and supports. Data Source: Bi-monthly CRP contract meetings, Aware data reports. Target: 100% of referrals will have timely access to appropriate Community Employment Services.

Strategies: a. DVR will maintain and review data quarterly on the use and effectiveness of contracted employment support service providers and related outcomes. B. DVR will partner with other state agencies to grow and maintain professional development for employment support providers through Maine Working Together Workforce Development System leading to increased employment support availability across systems.

Objective 2.5 Maine DVR will ensure client services reflect access to and best practices in the use of Assistive Technology. Data Source: Aware data reports, consumer feedback Target: DVR staff will receive AT training by 4th quarter 2024. Quarterly case review analysis and Aware data will demonstrate that AT was appropriately addressed in the IPE and case notes.

Strategies: a. DVR staff will participate in training opportunities provided by Maine CITE, Maine’s federally- funded Assistive Technology program. B. Individualized Plans for Employment will address the need for Assistive Technology as appropriate. C. DVR will develop regional in-house capacity around the use of Assistive Technology to support vocational rehabilitation services and outcomes Goal 3 All Individuals served by DVR receive high quality vocational rehabilitation services in an accessible and culturally competent manner that reflects the principles of universal design,  informed choice, and Diversity, Equity,  Inclusion, and Accessibility as measured by consumer feedback and case review.

Objective 3.1: Maine DVR will work closely with Maine’s Section 121 VR Grant – Wabanaki Vocational Rehabilitation, to promote strengthened services  through co-enrollment of at least three tribal members annually from across the Wabanaki service region (Aroostook, Penobscot, Washington Counties) . Target: Three co-enrollments. Data Source: Aware data report, Wabanaki data report.

Strategies: a. Maine DVR will include Wabanaki Vocational Rehabilitation in training and technical assistance opportunities – including New Counselor Training. B. Wabanaki VR will provide training and technical assistance to Maine DVR (and contracted employment services vendors as appropriate) on issues related to cultural competency and best practices in Native employment supports. C. Wabanaki VR will provide training to the new DVR Intake Unit on opportunities for co-enrollment d. DVR will work with Wabanaki VR to increase opportunities for collaboration on delivery of Pre-Employment Transition Services to Native American students with disabilities attending Maine high schools. E. According to the joint Memorandum of Understanding, Maine DVR and Wabanaki VR will meet at least annually to review the agreement.

Objective 3.2: To address the growing numbers of Maine residents who are “New Mainers” and who may be eligible for DVR services, Maine DVR will strengthen its services to this population through the lens of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility and following these strategies: Target: Observe trends or changes over time in the number of “New Mainers” and their eligibility for DVR services, Data source: Aware application and eligibility data.

A. Within the Maine Department of Labor DEIA framework, provide staff training and Development to DVR staff to increase cultural competence as measured through pre- and post- training evaluation. B. Deploy two time-limited Rehabilitation Assistants (Portland and Lewiston) to conduct educational and outreach activities to community organizations to increase awareness of availability of DVR services. C. Join with other workforce system partners to address common barriers to employment – such as transcript analysis, English language skills, and need for support services. D. Ensure language access in all DVR-produced and delivered materials. E. Include best practices in hiring and retaining New Mainers in employer engagement activities.

Objective 3.3: To support the successful reentry of individuals with disabilities exiting the correctional systems and reentering employment, Maine DVR will strengthen its services to this population through the following strategies: Target: Increase the employment rate of individuals with disabilities exiting correctional systems by 10% within 1 year of release. Data Source: Aware data

1. DVR will support the expansion of Apprenticeship opportunities within correctional facilities and seamless transition with employer/education upon release. B. DVR will partner with the Bureau of Employment Services, and other workforce system partners to pilot a coordinated service effort to ensure continuation of services following release. C. DVR will increase knowledge and awareness of Apprenticeship opportunities for residents with disabilities that are near to release through staff and resident orientation. D. DVR will continue to provide correction liaisons to all County and State facilities including Long Creek Youth Development Center. E. DVR will continue to have representation on Re-Entry Network weekly resource meetings. F. DVR staff will represent MDOL on all Regional Care Teams to support health, safety and wellbeing of justice-involved youth. G. The DVR Assistant Director will represent MDOL  on the Juvenile Justice Advisory Group. H. In partnership with BES,  DVR will expand the Career Exploration Workshop to residents across all Department of Correction regions. I.DVR will ensure that contracted community rehabilitation providers have access to training that supports job development and placement of individuals reentering from the correctional system.

Objective 3.4: To support successful employment of individuals who are Veterans, DVR will strengthen its services to this population through the following strategies: Target: Aim to increase Veteran employment rates by 15% within the next four years through targeted partnerships.

A, DVR will develop new approaches to serve Veterans who are incarcerated and address their unique needs post release. B, DVR Veteran liaisons will serve as part of regional teams with BES Veterans Services and local community Veteran resources to provide comprehensive information about employment and community supports through all members. C.  DVR will assist regional teams to develop a printed/online State of Maine resource list of Veteran services to ensure that all resources are discussed at initial and ongoing meetings with Veterans. D. Veteran liaisons under the leadership of the DVR Assistant Director will participate in quarterly meetings with federal Veteran Readiness and Employment staff  to share resources and information and awareness of each program’s services. E. DVR Veteran liaisons and  the DVR Assistant Director attend Jobs for Veterans State Grant quarterly meetings to gather information and resources to support DVR clients who are Veterans. F. DVR staff attend and present at the annual Maine Hire-A Vet campaign.

Objective 3.5: To support successful employment and community inclusion of individuals with dual sensory impairments (Deaf/Blind), DVR will strengthen its services to this population through the following: Target: To increase capacity of Support Service Providers by 10%.

Strategies: a. Through its Division for the Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and Late Deafened, DVR will work in partnership with DBVI and other community organizations to explore opportunities to build capacity of Support Service Providers (also known as Co-Navigators) across the state.

Objective 3.6: Maine DVR will develop new strategies to increase the employment of people with mental health disabilities: Target: Increase employment rate of people with mental health disabilities by 10% over the next four years. Data Source: 2023 CSNA data compared to 2026 CSNA data.

Strategies: a. DVR will partner with the Department of Health and Human Services’ Office of Behavioral Health and MaineCare Services to explore opportunities for collaboration to strengthen and expand employment services to individuals with mental health disabilities including through staff training. B, DVR will provide training to VRCs on the evidence-based Individual Placement and Support (IPS)supported employment model . c. DVR will partner with Clubhouses (that are certified or pursuing certification) to provide employment services that meet Clubhouse International standards. D. DVR will maintain a liaison to the local Clubhouse in each office and work with them on joint training and outreach needs. E. DVR will provide staff training at least annually on best practices in vocational rehabilitation for individuals with mental health disabilities.

Objective 3.7: Maine DVR will work with state agencies, treatment providers, and other partners to promote and support employment for individuals impacted by or in recovery from substance use. Target: DVR will provide information, resources, and training to 50% of employers connected with Maine Recovery Workplaces.

Strategies: a. DVR will provide training to staff, at least annually, on best practices in supporting the employment of individuals impacted by substance use. B. DVR will participate in grant advisory and other work groups as requested. C. DVR will participate with WIOA and other partners in targeted efforts to promote employment of individuals impacted by substance use including through the use of Progressive Employment.

Objective 3.8: Applying a Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility  lens, Maine DVR will provide equitable vocational rehabilitation services to potentially eligible students and eligible youth and adults who are members of underserved and marginalized groups. Target: DVR will see a 10% increase in serving underserved and marginalized groups. Data Source: 2023 CSNA and 2026CSNA Data, Aware Case Management Data, RSA-911.

Strategies: a. DVR will identify a manager to serve as a DEIA liaison to MDOL, State of Maine and CSAVR efforts. B. DVR will continue an internal workgroup to apply best practices in DEIA to VR policies and practices. C. DVR will develop and provide staff training to increase capacity to  meet the employment needs of individuals from marginalized  populations. C. DVR will review policies, forms, and other materials at least annually to ensure inclusive practices. . d. DVR will develop or adopt resources to meet employer needs – particularly around best practices in inclusion of transgender, non-binary and other gender minority individuals. E. DVR will pilot the use of Rehabilitation Assistants to conduct outreach and education on VR services to individuals from underserved and marginalized communities.

Objective 3.9 Maine DVR will work with Maine’s TANF/ASPIRE programs and contracted providers to increase collaboration – leading to improved employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities. Target: Training to be incorporated into New Counselor Training by 2nd quarter 2025. Data Source: New Counselor Training Agenda and learning management system, completion of training outlined in employee’s performance management form.

Strategies: a. Partnering with the Bureau of Employment Services, the Department of Health and Human Services and FEDCAP, pilot activities in two locations that build interagency collaboration and braid services on behalf of program recipients. B. Enhance New Counselor Training with a poverty-informed module targeted to meeting the needs of individuals who receive these benefits.

Goal 4. Maine DVR services will be provided in partnership with Maine’s workforce development system as measured annually by documented collaborative activities, co-enrollment, technical assistance, and training – leading to increased employment and credential attainment opportunities for jobseekers with disabilities.

Objective 4.1: Maine DVR will refer clients to workforce system programs and services to meet their needs and increase access to comparable benefits. Target: DVR will increase the referral rate of client to workforce system programs and services by 10% in the 2025 fiscal year. Data Source: Aware Case Management.

Strategies: a. DVR staff will participate in cross-training on WIOA programs and partners to increase knowledge of available resources for clients and employers. B. DVR will work with WIOA core partners to increase use of a common referral form. C. DVR will work with partners at the local, regional and state level to deliver job fairs, targeted training, and other activities to meet the needs of jobseekers with disabilities. D. DVR will work with WIOA partners to promote accessibility of CareerCenter programs and services.

Objective 4.2: Maine DVR will work with Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act partners to share data and information leading to increased alignment of program and services and expanded opportunities for DVR clients. Target: MOU’s with core WIOA partners will be completed by 4th quarter 2025.

Strategies: a. DVR will complete Memoranda of Understanding with all required partners. B. DVR, in conjunction with DBVI, will provide representation on Local Workforce Boards. C. DVR will engage MDOL’s Center for Workforce Research and Information to produce updated disability data on the employment status of Maine people with disabilities. D. DVR will develop strategies with WIOA core partners to provide referrals to workforce services for individuals found eligible for DVR under Categories 3 and 4  but unable to be served by DVR due to waitlist.

### d. Evaluation and Reports of Progress: VR and Supported Employment Goals

For the most recently completed program year, provide an evaluation and report of progress for the goals or priorities, including progress on the strategies under each goal or priority, applicable to that program year. Sections 101(a)(15) and 101(a)(23) of the Rehabilitation Act require VR agencies to describe—

#### Progress in achieving the goals and priorities identified for the VR and Supported Employment Programs;

List the goals/priorities and discuss the progress or completion of each goal/priority and related strategies

**Goal 1**

**Maine DVR clients will reach their employment goals and be valued members of Maine’s workforce as measured by a. measurable skill gains, b. credential attainment and c. successful employment closures in competitive integrated employment.**

Maine DVR has made significant progress with its measurable skill gain performance measure attainment but was able to exceed projected credential attainment rates. During PY22, Maine DVR recorded 532 successful employment closures – a number that reflects an upturn over the COVID-19 pandemic years. DVR leadership receive quarterly reports documenting early exit trends. These reports have shown that early exiter progress has been impacted by the pandemic. While many staff have been trained on Motivational Interviewing (MI) strategies, there is a concern that clinical coaching of MI implementation as well as ongoing training for new hires needs to be part of a coordinated plan. DVR has repurposed a position to serve as the  statewide training coordinator. This person is already at work developing a plan for MI training and ongoing coaching and support. DVR continues to implement Progressive Employment and has found the dual customer approach extremely effective. This past year Maine contracted with the Institute for Community Inclusion to provide some technical assistance and training on advanced topics within Progressive Employment. The ICI team supported DVR to conduct fidelity reviews with four Jobsville sites. As a result of these reviews, business engagement was identified as a need. ICI has provided in-person “Business engagement for non-business facing staff” training across the state. In an ARPA-funded initiative, The Bureau of Employment Services has been implementing Progressive Employment in two pilot sites with a focus on supporting those impacted by substance use or  corrections involvement. DVR staff are working collaboratively with BES to share their knowledge on the model and clients are benefiting from the increased labor market information and  sharing of creative leads.

Following the pandemic, DVR staff are continuing to use Zoom and Teams for client meetings as appropriate. There has been anecdotal information supporting that no-show appointments have significantly reduced and clients have expressed appreciation for not needing to find transportation to get to meetings with their VR counselor. Brief texts are also much more in use over the last couple years as a method to have quick check-ins with clients. Applications that can be used via mobile device are desired but have not yet come to pass.

In the last PY, DVR served approximately 2639 students and youth with disabilities  - including in Pre-Employment Transition Services. DVR continues to explore new strategies to expand effective deliver of Pre-ETS. New programming efforts like College Bus Tours, Goodwill’s Pre-ETS Bootcamps and virtual job club have joined ongoing efforts like PEERS, Step Up, summer work experience and Pathful Explore (formerly Virtual Job Shadow) as Pre-ETS activities that are increasing engagement of students with disabilities. DVR has committed to ensuring that all students with a disability have an opportunity for paid work experience before high school exit – whether through DVR or other means. DVR has made operational adjustments to create two statewide RCI positions that primarily conduct their work virtually to support groups (for example: Transition Career Exploration Workshop, Virtual Job Club) that can be offered for individual school districts or across districts and VR regions. The Statewide RCIs also provide individualized support to register work experience youth with staffing agencies and have recently begun to be engaged in virtual activities to introduce career sectors and apprenticeship to students with disabilities. DVR has continued to do outreach to schools, state agency partners and other stakeholders to encourage referrals of students with disabilities and new collaborations. Buy in from other partners was evidenced in letters of support that were submitted with Maine’s application for Disability Innovation Fund Grant funds. Maine was awarded a “Pathways to Partnerships” Grant that began October 1, 2023 and will leverage Pre-ETS services already available as well as add and development new services.

 Funding through a MDOL Apprenticeship grant has supported the implementation of a BRS Apprenticeship Navigator who has worked closely with VR staff and the Maine Apprenticeship Program. Updated procedural guidance to promote the effective use of Registered Apprenticeship as a Career Pathways strategy. As Pre-Apprenticeship opportunities – new to Maine – are continuing to grow – the Apprenticeship Navigator has effectively worked with VR counselors to share program information through weekly updates, drop-in office hours, and monthly webinars.

During the last year, DVR has added a new position of Statewide Business Relations Consultant. This individual is working with workforce system partners at the state level as a statewide business-facing team is being redeveloped. This position also is able to enter employer contacts and data into the Maine Job Link – promoting better sharing of information. Business-facing staff from both DVR and the Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired meet together on a biweekly basis to discuss business engagement across the state. DVR business staff have been active in local Chamber events as well as statewide SHRM and Inclusion conferences. This past year the Maine Department of Labor launched an Employer Summit. DVR staff participated and sessions highlighted VR youth and young adult clients – as well as employers who had found success partnering with DVR.

**Goal 2**

**All individuals, including those with the most significant disabilities, will be served in a timely manner -which means determining eligibility within 60 days and developing Individualized Plans for Employment for all eligible clients within the 90-day time frame. DVR will continue to maintain no wait list for those individuals in categories 1 and 2 and will monitor the ability to again serve those in categories 3 and 4 in the future.**

DVR has made significant progress in reaching federally mandated timelines for eligibility and initial employment plan development. In accordance with information from the RSA Data Dashboards, DVR has now been in compliance for both eligibility determination and initial plan development over the last three quarters. This progress has been due to a A) increase in staff awareness and training on effective strategies and B) development and launch in May of 2023 of an internal Intake Unit. The Intake Unit is made up of qualified Rehabilitation Counselor IIs and other staff and is supervised by a recently hired dedicated manager. The Intake Unit accepts and process all online applications and conducts intakes, gathers assessment data and completes eligibility determination. Following eligibility, the team continues to work with the individual to complete an initial Individualized Plan for Employment. The Intake Unit then works with the client and the field office nearest the individual’s home to do a warm hand-off to the local VR counselor in a seamless manner.

DVR continues to implement strategies which have been shown to be effective in selection of employment goals and services - such as the Career Exploration Workshop (CEW)  series which is available virtually and in person across the state.

DVR joins the DHHS Office of Aging and Disability Services (OADS) staff and Department of Education in supporting joint training ventures for staff and stakeholders – including through the employment services workforce development system “Maine Working Together “ <https://www.maineworkingtogether.org/>  . One example over the last year was a six-month series on promoting employment for individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities that was widely attended by DVR staff from across the state along with OADS. DVR meets with OADS management monthly and discusses strategies to promote improved interagency collaboration and client outcomes. Throughout the year regular data analysis assists with ensuring that individuals with I/DD are well-served by DVR. Annually, a rolling five-year trend report details how individuals with cognitive disabilities and I/DD are applying for and moving through the DVR system towards employment. This report includes geographic and demographic information on client distribution. With a Life Span waiver planned to start OADS services at age 14, DVR is working closely with OADS staff to offer joint messaging to highlight how DVR’s Pre-ETS services can work together with OADS’ efforts.

The number of youth and young adults with Autism receiving special education services continues to climb. DVR’s summer college prep program “Step Up” for high school students with autism completed its fifth year last summer. Additionally, the PEERS evidence-based social skills curriculum has been regularly available for students with Autism as a Pre-ETS activity through DVR.

DVR has seen success with CRP contracts in Regions 1-3. In 2023, DVR undertook a competitive bidding process in order to increase access to comprehensive CRP services in all regions. As a result of this RFP, successful bidders were selected, and contracts developed across all five regions. Selected CRPs provide required monthly and quarterly data as required and this information is reviewed and analyzed across multiple settings, including in monthly contract meetings.

Following a separate RFP process, the Institute for Community Inclusion (ICI) was awarded the contract for the employment services workforce development system funded by DVR, along with partners in the Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired, Department of Health and Human Services Office of Aging and Disability Services, Office of Child and Family Services, Office of Behavioral Health and Maine Department of Education. ICI has stood up a website, [www.maineworkingtogether.org](http://www.maineworkingtogether.org)  and offers targeted topic training in employment supports and services as well as the ACRE certified employment specialist curriculum. DVR staff are encouraged to select and attend sessions of interest. Rehabilitation Counselor I staff who have not previously achieved ACRE certification are regularly registered for the course.

Access to Assistive Technology is central to successful employment for many DVR clients. During the last PY 1.4% of the case service budget  was spent by Maine DVR on client AT needs. Maine CITE is the state’s federally funded AT program. Maine CITE regularly participates in a session of New Counselor Training and also offers regular in-service trainings on topics related to the application of AT in employment settings. During the DVR case review process, client employment plans are checked to determine if necessary AT was included in the plan.

Due to faculty changes at the University of Maine at Farmington, DVR was unable to send staff for AT certification training. Recently, DVR has issued a letter of support to Maine CITE as they seek funding to launch a digital badge credential in AT. If awarded, DVR will seek staff to participate in the badge credential in order to continue to build staff capacity to meet client AT needs.

Goal 3

All Individuals served by DVR receive high quality vocational rehabilitation services in an accessible and culturally competent manner that reflects the principles of universal design,  informed choice  and Diversity, Equity and Inclusion as measured by consumer feedback and case review.

Maine DVR has renewed its Memorandum of Understanding annually with Wabanaki VR. The most current MOU was signed in January 2024 and may be found at <https://www.maine.gov/rehab/docs/2023/mou/20240104110935299.pdf>

Wabanaki VR participates in New Counselor Training for DVR staff and provides technical assistance to Maine DVR on issues related to serving individuals who are tribal members.

The Maine Department of Labor has actively developed outreach strategies to connect “New Mainers” to state programs and services. Maine DVR’s DEIA workgroup has also been proactive in creation of staff training to support staff to increase their competency with working with clients who are coming to Maine through refugee resettlement and asylum status. In the last year’s budget, Maine DVR was able to secure two time-limited staff (Rehabilitation Assistants) who will conduct outreach to communities – including New Mainers – that have had limited access to DVR services. These new positions will also assist in developing new connections within targeted communities.

The SRC has previously encouraged and supported the translation of the DVR Consumer Handbook and application for services into Spanish. The Consumer Handbook Spanish Version may be found at <https://www.maine.gov/rehab/docs/2022/dvr/ConsumerHandbook10-5-2022_Spanish_Final.docx>

DVR provided correction liaisons to all County and State facilities including Long Creek Youth Development Center .DVR continued to have representation on Re-Entry Network weekly resource meetings. DVR staff represented MDOL on all regional care teams. The goal of these regional care teams is to facilitate shared accountability to the health, safety and wellbeing of justice involved youth so that all youth are thriving in their communities into adulthood. Regional Care Teams work to strengthen cross-system, provider and community involvement to inform local resource development and increase supports, resources and opportunities for youth through a local community-based continuum of care to decrease detention. The DVR Assistant Director represents Maine Department of Labor on Juvenile Justice Advisory Group. The mission of the Maine Juvenile Justice Advisory Group is to advise and make recommendations to state policy makers and to promote effective system level responses that further the goals of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act.

Maine DVR has not updated its Memorandum of Understanding with Veterans’ Affairs during this time period. Despite this, DVR Veteran liaisons and  the DVR Assistant Director attend quarterly meetings with Veteran Readiness and Employment staff  to share resources and information and awareness of each programs’ activities. Focus on Veterans who are incarcerated and their unique needs post release. DVR Veteran liaisons are part of regional teams with Bureau of Employment Services Veterans Services and local community Veteran resources to provide comprehensive information about employment and community supports through all members. DVR Veteran liaisons and Assistant Director attend Jobs for Veteran State Grant quarterly meetings. Quarterly meetings are attended by all State and local funded Veteran services to share information, data, training and resources on upcoming activities. DVR Veteran liaisons share this information through local staff meetings and are available to other counselors as a resource. DVR staff attend and present at the annual Maine Hire-A Vet campaign.

The Division for the Deaf, Hard of Hearing and Late Deafened, has continued – in coordination with the Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired to promote access and opportunities for individuals with dual sensory needs. Specifically, the agencies have worked with the Helen Keller Center to identify resources

Maine has a network of programs implementing the Clubhouse model and its work-ordered day approach across the state. Selected Maine VR counselors are assigned to work with local Clubhouses and have a regular presence in each. VR Counselors are introduced to the Clubhouse model – and other Mental Health services at New Counselor Training. Over the last year, Maine DVR has explored how training on the  IPS (Individualized Placement and Support) model could better support improved employment outcomes for individuals with mental health diagnoses. Current employment outcome rates for this population is among the lowest across the system with less than 25% reaching successful attainment of their employment goals. Current plans are to launch training for all DVR counselors in 2024 in conjunction with Maine’s Office of Behavioral Health.

At this time, Maine DVR is not actively accepting assignment of cases through the public Workers’ Compensation system. Injured workers seeking services through DVR are welcome to use the standard systems to apply, be found eligible and receive services.

DVR recognizes the significant impact on the Maine workforce due to opioid use. Staff training has included strategies for disclosure for those in recovery as well as awareness of local resources for treatment. MDOL’s Bureau of Employment Services is currently piloting an effort – in conjunction with Maine DVR – to implement the Progressive Employment dual approach with jobseekers who are exiting corrections or in recovery. Joint Jobsville meetings are now held regularly in two pilot locations and DVR’s business facing staff – along with VRCs – are working together to refer or co-enroll clients and engage with businesses. The DVR Director has been selected to serve on the Advisory Committee of Maine’s nascent Recovery Friendly Workplace efforts.

Since the time of the last plan’s approval, targeted efforts to support delivery of VR services to individuals who identify as LGBTQ+ have largely been included in DEIA workgroups and training. Maine DVR is aware of the intersectional impact of disability and multiple identity characteristics and makes use of training – particularly that through technical assistance partners at George Washington University to support staff with current vocabulary and best practices . The DEIA group is at work currently on policy and procedural guidance recommendations. Recent successes in inclusive language have included modifications to the case management system that allow individuals to use their preferred name in case records.

Over the last two years, Maine DVR has provided outreach and informational orientation sessions to FedCap clients across the state. Additionally, FedCap has joined Progressive Employment Jobsville meetings in at least one pilot location. Awareness of two gen approaches and the impact of multi-generational poverty is a part of standard New Counselor Training curriculum.

Maine DVR services will be provided in partnership with Maine’s workforce development system as measured annually by documented collaborative activities, co-enrollment, technical assistance, and training – leading to increased employment and credential attainment opportunities for jobseekers with disabilities.

New Counselor Training includes information on WIOA programs and partner services. DVR is part of each CareerCenter’s Core Team and works closely with partners to align and strengthen services across systems. Representation on the State Workforce Board and Local Workforce Boards assists in keeping partners apprised of DVR programs and services. DVR participates in a monthly virtual WIOA partners meeting. MOUs with each Local Workforce Board are updated annually and Infrastructure Funding Agreement (IFA) are regularly reviewed for ongoing accuracy.

#### 2. Performance on the performance accountability indicators under Section 116 of WIOA for the most recently completed program year, reflecting actual and negotiated levels of performance. Explain any discrepancies in the actual and negotiated levels; and

accountability indicators during PY 2022.

Employment Rate Q2 – negotiated: 44 %      Actual – 46 %

Employment Rate Q4 – negotiated: 43 %      Actual – 43.8%

Median Earnings – negotiated: $4325      Actual - $ 4433

Credential Rate – negotiated: 34 %          Actual – 51.9%

Measurable Skill Gains – negotiated: 48 %   Actual – 38.2 %

Maine DVR believes that the discrepancy in Measurable Skill Gains between negotiated and actual performance levels is likely due to a staff training need. Short staffing and staff turnover created a situation where staff lacked awareness and attention to how and why to enter the needed information to correctly calculate Measurable Skill Gains. Training is planned for all staff on all Performance Measures to address this need.

#### 3. The use of funds reserved for innovation and expansion activities (Sections 101(a)(18) and 101(a)(23) of the Rehabilitation Act) (e.g., SRC, SILC).

DVR has committed funds to the State Rehabilitation Council for innovation and expansion activities. These funds have been used to support Council activities – including training for members – that have increased the capacity of the SRC to carry out its required functions.

### e. Supported Employment Services, Distribution of Title VI Funds, and Arrangements and Cooperative Agreements for the Provision of Supported Employment Services.

#### 1. Acceptance of title VI funds:

(A) VR agency requests to receive title VI funds.

#### 2. If the VR agency has elected to receive title VI funds, Section 606(b)(3) of the Rehabilitation Act requires VR agencies to include specific goals and priorities with respect to the distribution of Title VI funds received under Section 603 of the Rehabilitation Act for the provision of supported employment services. Describe the use of Title VI funds and how they will be used in meeting the goals and priorities of the Supported Employment program.

DVR includes supported employment initiatives within its Goal 2, Objective 2.3 and strategies. DVR uses Title VI funds, after job placement, to promote the successful competitive integrated employment of VR clients who meet the requirements for Supported Employment.

**Goal 2**

**All individuals, including those with the most significant disabilities, will be served in a timely manner -which means determining eligibility within 60 days and developing Individualized Plans for Employment for all eligible clients within the 90-day time frame. DVR will continue to maintain no wait list for those individuals in categories 1 and 2 and will monitor the ability to again serve those in categories 3 and 4 in the future**

Objective 2.3: Maine DVR will address the underemployment of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities by assisting them to prepare for, reach, maintain and advance in careers of their choice in keeping with Maine’s Employment First law and as documented by measurable skills gains, credential attainment and successful closures in employment. Data source: Aware data points- OOS category, IPE goals and services, case outcome to include wage and hour data. Target: Increase measurable skills gains and credential attainment by 10%.

Strategies: a. DVR will partner with Maine DHHS’ Office of Aging and Disability Services and the Maine Department of Education to develop joint strategies and staff training to strengthen career preparation and competitive integrated employment outcomes of people with significant disabilities . B, DVR will launch the use of targeted caseload Rehabilitation Counselor IIs to serve individuals with Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities c. DVR will work with DHHS’s Office of Aging and Disability Services to provide joint education and outreach to individuals, families, case managers and other providers, on the benefits of employment and the process to access DVR services and supports .d. In collaboration with Office of Aging and Disability Services Transition Specialists and other stakeholders, increase post-secondary education participation and supports for high school students with Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities and Autism through DVR support of college preparatory (Step Up, College Bus Tour) and Inclusive Education participation. e. Continue to provide access to and training on the BRIDGE – Career Exploration Workshop including virtual modules developed with input from self-advocates.

#### 3. Supported employment services may be provided with Title 1 or Title VI funds following placement of individuals with the most significant disabilities in employment. In accordance with Section 101(a)(22) and Section 606(b)(3) of the Rehabilitation Act, describe 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; and the timing of transition to extended services.

Supported Employment is a consumer-oriented, integrated, and non-segregated employment, which is based on the individual’s informed choice and provides appropriate ongoing services to individuals with the most significant disabilities in order for the individual to work productively in the community.

During the comprehensive assessment of rehabilitation needs, it may be determined that the client will need ongoing supports to maintain employment. Further assessment in a real work situation may be required in order to project how much support may be needed in order for an individual to be successfully employed.   Before an individual employment plan is written, the counselor must first identify a source of funding for extended supports. If the client is receiving services from the DHHS, Office of Aging and Developmental Services or DHHS, Office of Behavioral Health, funding may be available and it is recommended that the counselor follow those specific agencies’ established procedures for determining if funding is available.

The Division’s rules state the maximum time period for DVR time–limited services is 24 months, unless the IPE indicates that more than 24 months of services are necessary in order for the individual to achieve job stability prior to transition to extended services. In day–to–day practice, a team approach is used to determine when an individual is ready to transition to extended support.

The Rehab Act, as amended by WIOA, mandates that VR agencies make available extended (support) services for **youth with the most significant disabilities** in supported employment for a period not to exceed four years, or until such time that a youth reaches the age of 25 and no longer meets the definition of a “youth with a disability”. Youth with a disability is defined as an individual with a disability who is 14-24 years of age. [WIOA Sec 604(b)and 34 CFR sec 363.4(a)(2))] Extended services are defined as ongoing support services and other appropriate services that are needed to support an individual with a most significant disability in supported employment.

In accordance with Section 603 of the Rehabilitation Act, the State must reserve and expend 50 percent of its Supported Employment (SE) allotment for the provision of supported employment services to youth with the most significant disabilities. DVR has in place security measures through the Financial Analyst to ensure that SE-A funds are appropriately matched to funds spent on SE-B. Monthly reports include monitoring spending on both SE-A and SE-B funds and ensure that match is met on SE-B grant.

During the comprehensive assessment of rehabilitation needs, and participation in Pre-Employment Transition Services, it may be determined that a youth with a most significant disability will benefit from extended support services. The vocational rehabilitation counselor (VRC) may arrange for a work experience, which can be included in an individualized plan for employment, to help determine the support the youth may need to be successfully employed.

In addition, the VRC and youth must agree that the employment goal includes the facilitation of natural supports; and the need to develop natural supports must be noted in the job development referral packet provided to the Community Rehabilitation Provider (CRP).

**Planning for Extended Support Services for Youth with the Most Significant Disabilities**

Comparable Benefits

 If the individual is receiving services (or is eligible to receive services) from the DHHS Office of Aging and Disability Services or Office of Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services, funding for extended supports may be available.  It is recommended that the VRC follow those specific agencies’ procedures for determining if funding is available. In summary, the VR counselor and. Case Manager complete a Long-Term Supports- Work Supports form. Information includes amount of support needed, what supports are needed and possible reduction of supports with a timeline of transition to long term supports after stable employment with VR.

See October 2014 *Joint Procedural Directive with DHHS Office of Aging and Disability Services Concerning Employment Services and Long Term Supports* at <http://www.maine.gov/rehab/mou/index.shtml>

for OADS procedures.  See Adult Mental Health Long Term Vocational Support Policy Manual at <https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/samhs/mentalhealth/mh-system/vocational-resources/LTS_Policy_Manual_June%202017.pdf> for SAMHS procedures.

**VR Funded Extended Support Services for Youth with the Most Significant Disabilities**

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 reduce the youth’s support needs so that they can be met by DVR or DBVI funded Basic Employment Support (BES) or Brain Injury Support (BIS).

The Division will continue to work together with its state agency partners and service providers to ensure that supported employment services are provided in a quality manner that supports the outcome of integrated, community-based employment.

#### 4. Sections 101(a)(22) and 606(b)(4) of the Rehabilitation Act require the VR agency to describe efforts to identify and arrange, including entering into cooperative agreements, with other State agencies and other appropriate entities in order to provide supported employment services. The description must include extended services, as applicable, to individuals with the most significant disabilities, including the provision of extended services to youth with the most significant disabilities in accordance with 34 C.F.R. § 363.4(a) and 34 C.F.R. § 361.5(c)(19)(v).

A total of five contracts for two providers, Living Innovations and Goodwill Industries of Northern New England which include a requirement that they serve individuals who have supported employment needs – including extended services to youth with the most significant needs

### f. Annual Estimates

Sections 101(a)(15) and 101(a)(23) of the Rehabilitation Act require all VR agencies to annually conduct a full assessment of their resources and ability to serve all eligible individuals before the start of the Federal fiscal year. In accordance with 34 C.F.R. § 361.29(b), annual estimates must include the following projections:

#### 1. Estimates for next Federal fiscal year—

A. VR Program; and Select 'Edit' to edit the narrative.

Note, please do not edit the table header or formatting. Only edit the table contents.

If you accidentally edit the table headers and structure, open [this link to the blank table](file:///C:\node\578526). You can copy and paste the table into the narrative field, and start over if needed.

| Priority Category (if applicable) | No. of Individuals Eligible for Services | No. of Eligible Individuals Expected to Receive Services under VR Program | Costs of Services using Title I Funds | No. of Eligible Individuals Not Receiving Services (if applicable) |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 1 | 4620 | 4620 | 6,900,000 | 0 |
| 2 | 4400 | 4400 | 4,564,120 | 0 |
| 3 | 371 | 2 | 5,000 | ~~3690~~ |
| 4 | 25 | 0 | 0 | ~~250~~ |
|  |  |  |  |  |

##### B. Supported Employment Program.

Select 'Edit' to edit the narrative.

Note, please do not edit the table header or formatting. Only edit the table contents.

If you accidentally edit the table headers and structure, open [this link to the blank table](file:///C:\node\584566). You can copy and paste the table into the narrative field, and start over if needed.

| Priority Category (if applicable) | No. of Individuals Eligible for Services | No. of Eligible Individuals Expected to Receive Services under Supported Employment Program | Costs of Services using Title I and Title VI Funds | No. of Eligible Individuals Not Receiving Services (if applicable) |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 1 | 200 | 200 | 440,000 | 0 |

### g. Order of Selection

#### 1. Pursuant to Section 101(a)(5) of the Rehabilitation Act, this description must be amended when the VR agency determines, based on the annual estimates described in description (f), that VR services cannot be provided to all eligible individuals with disabilities in the State who apply for and are determined eligible for services.

\*  VR agencies may maintain an order of selection policy and priority of eligible individuals without implementing or continuing to implement an order of selection.

The VR agency is not implementing an order of selection with one or more priority categories closed.

#### 2. For VR agencies that have defined priority categories describe—

##### A. The justification for the order

In 2015, DVR experienced a potential shortfall in funding due to contributing factors related to the implementation of the 15% set aside for Pre-Employment Transition Services along with a significant increase in the costs of case services. hen DVR became aware of the situation, the State Rehabilitation Council was advised and offered feedback and support for the implementation of an Order of Selection for Category 3 via their regularly scheduled executive committee and full group meetings. Additionally, in December 2015 two phone calls were held with RSA to apprise them of the situation.

Following the submission of the 2020 WIOA State Plan, DVR was notified by RSA of an error in the definition of Order of Selection Category 2. To correct this error with the least impact to clients, DVR consulted with RSA, the SRC and stakeholders and changed its rules to add Order of Selection Category 4 in 2021 – “All other eligible individuals”. In accordance with Maine DVR’s State Plan and policy guidance, this Priority Category also currently remains closed.

DVR’s current fiscal situation is able to absorb the costs associated with reopening the waitlist, however significant staffing shortages have made it imprudent to prematurely open the waitlist. With the addition of four new VR Counselor lines and two time-limited Rehabilitation Assistant positions, DVR projects being able to open the waitlist in July 2024 for the start of the new Program Year.

 DVR regularly reviews the waitlist status and contacts individuals who are on the waitlist to advise them of additional resources available through workforce system partners and in the community.

##### B. The order (priority categories) to be followed in selecting eligible individuals to be provided VR services ensuring that individuals with the most significant disabilities are selected for services before all other individuals with disabilities; and

If services cannot be provided to all eligible individuals who apply, the Director of DVR will implement an Order of Selection (OOS) as set forth in this section. After determining eligibility counselors must assign a priority category and follow the Order of Selection set forth below for the provision of services. Individuals determined eligible prior to the date of implementation of the Order of Selection will continue to receive cost services. Maine DVR will notify all eligible individuals of the priority categories in the Order of Selection. Eligible individuals in priority categories not currently being served will be notified in writing of their assignment to a category and their right to appeal their category assignment.

Whether in an Order of Selection or not, Maine DVR has assigned all applicants to an OOS category to ensure that DVR continues to serve the most significantly disabled. This was upon the advice of RSA staff during the 2011 Section107 Monitoring review. The priority category shall be assigned, based on their level of significance of disability; “Level of significance of disability” means one of the following: Priority Category 1, “ individual with a most significant disability”, serious limitation in terms of an employment outcome in four or more functional capacity areas; Priority Category 2, “individual with a significant disability”, serious limitation in terms of employment outcomes in at least two or three functional capacity areas;  Priority Category 3, “individual with a significant disability”, a serious limitation in terms of an employment outcome in 1 or more functional capacity areas or Priority Category 4 “ All other eligible individuals” . Individuals with disabilities shall be served first based on significance of disability and second by date of application. Eligible individuals who do not meet the Order of Selection category currently being served will have access to services through information and referral. Individuals will be appropriately referred to other programs – including those of other core WIOA partners.

##### C. The VR agency’s goals for serving individuals in each priority category, including how the agency will assist eligible individuals assigned to closed priority categories with information and referral, the method in which the VR agency will manage waiting lists, and the projected timelines for opening priority categories. NOTE: Priority categories are considered open when all individuals in the priority category may be served.

Eligible individuals who do not meet the Order of Selection category currently being served will have access to services through information and referral. Individuals will be appropriately referred to other programs – including those of other core WIOA partners. Currently DVR staff are contacting all individuals in closed OOS categories ( 3 and 4) to determine if they a) have needed referral information and resources b) have new disability-related information to share which may impact their OOS placement and c) wish to remain on the waitlist for services. DVR anticipates being able to open closed OOS categories by July 1, 2024

#### 3. Has the VR agency elected to serve eligible individuals outside of the order of selection who require specific services or equipment to maintain employment?

Not at this time

### h. Waiver of Statewideness.

The State plan shall be in effect in all political subdivisions of the State, however, the Commissioner of the Rehabilitation Services Administration (Commissioner) may waive compliance with this requirement in accordance with Section 101(a)(4) of the Rehabilitation Act and the implementing regulations in 34 C.F.R. § 361.26. If the VR agency is requesting a waiver of statewideness or has a previously approved waiver of statewideness, describe the types of services and the local entities providing such services under the waiver of statewideness and how the agency has complied with the requirements in 34 C.F.R. § 361.26. If the VR agency is not requesting or does not have an approved waiver of statewideness, please indicate “not applicable.”

not applicable

### i. Comprehensive System of Personnel Development.

In accordance with the requirements in Section 101(a)(7) of the Rehabilitation Act, the VR agency must develop and maintain annually a description (consistent with the purposes of the Rehabilitation Act) of the VR agency’s comprehensive system of personnel development, which shall include a description of the procedures and activities the State VR agency will undertake to ensure it has an adequate supply of qualified State rehabilitation professionals and paraprofessionals that provides the following:

#### 1. Analysis of current personnel and projected personnel needs including—

##### A. The number of personnel currently needed by the VR agency to provide VR services, broken down by personnel category; and

##### B. The number and type of personnel that are employed by the VR agency in the provision of vocational rehabilitation services, including ratios of qualified vocational rehabilitation counselors to clients;

##### C. Projections of the number of personnel, broken down by personnel category, who will be needed by the VR 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.

Select 'Edit' to edit the narrative.

Note, please do not edit the table header or formatting. Only edit the table contents.

If you accidentally edit the table headers and structure, open [this link to the blank table](file:///C:\node\578521). You can copy and paste the table into the narrative field, and start over if needed.

| Personnel Category | No. of Personnel Employed | No. of Personnel Currently Needed | Projected No. of Personnel Needed in 5 Years |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Director | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Assistant Director | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Rehabilitation Consultant | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| State ADA Coordinator | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Rehabilitation Services Manager | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| Regional Manager | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| Casework Supervisor | 8 | 0 | 10 |
| Rehabilitation Counselor II | 74 | 84 | 94 |
| Rehabilitation Counselor I | 15 | 17 | 19 |
| Rehabilitation Assistant | 0 | 2 | 2 |
| Secretary Associate | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Office Associate II | 6 | 7 | 9 |
| Clerk IV | 1 | 0 | 2 |
|  |  |  |  |

##### D. Ratio of qualified VR counselors to clients:

76:1:1

##### E. Projected number of individuals to be served in 5 years:

Maine DVR is not expecting significant changes to its overall client numbers over the next five years. Applications have rebounded since the end of the COVID-19 pandemic. The agency does anticipate increasing participation in Pre-Employment Transition Services – either as Potentially Eligible or Eligible students with disabilities – as a result of the Disability Innovation Fund grant – “Pathways to Partnerships”. Qualified VR Counselors are supported in delivery of these services by Rehabilitation Counselor Is. We expect that this may increase overall transition services by approximately 1000 additional students by Year 5 of the grant. In PY 22,  2639 transition age students and youth received services. Maine DVR anticipates this number increasing to approximately 4000 students within five years. This will provide an overall total of approximately 7500 individuals served in PY2028.

#### 2. Data and information on personnel preparation and development, recruitment and retention, and staff development, including the following:

##### A. A list of the institutions of higher education in the State that are preparing VR professionals, by type of program; the number of students enrolled at each of those institutions, broken down by type of program; and the number of students who graduated during the prior year from each of those institutions with certification or licensure, or with the credentials for certification or licensure, broken down by the personnel category for which they have received, or have the credentials to receive, certification or licensure.

Select 'Edit' to edit the narrative.

Note, please do not edit the table header or formatting. Only edit the table contents.

If you accidentally edit the table headers and structure, open [this link to the blank table](file:///C:\node\578516). You can copy and paste the table into the narrative field, and start over if needed.

| Institute of Higher Education | Type of Program | No. of Students Enrolled | No. of Prior Year Graduates |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| University of Maine at Farmington | Bachelor's in Rehabilitation and Human Services | 29 | 7 |
| University of Southern Maine | Master of Science in Counseling: Rehabilitation Counseling concentration | 5 | 5 |

##### B. The VR agency’s plan for recruitment, preparation and retention of qualified personnel, which addresses the current and projected needs for qualified personnel; and the coordination and facilitation of efforts between the VR agency 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.

The tight labor market, the increasing competitiveness of non-profit agencies, the high demand for mental health professionals, and the decreased numbers of individuals graduating from area universities with a master’s degree in Rehabilitation Counseling – have all contributed to a need for Maine DVR to proactively increase recruitment and retention activities and to raise awareness of the valued of a career in rehabilitation counseling.

DVR outreaches pre-service programs and provides guest speakers, now offers paid internships at both the undergraduate and graduate level, and staff sit on program advisory councils to continue to strengthen partnership. Positions that come open are routinely sent out to universities to post and share with students and alumni.

Maine DVR maintains a relationship with CRCC, working to find or create training opportunities with CRC credits. DVR also posts open positions with CRCC.

Maine DVR is participating in the Human Resources Professional Network of the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation and is gathering information about strategies that are working in other states. To that end, DVR has recorded brief videos from current VR Counselors to use in job postings. DVR is also working with the Maine Department of Labor’s DEIA effort to ensure that job postings are inclusive, and that language is welcoming. A recently adopted Department culture statement will soon be added to all DVR job postings – helping to reinforce the message that the agency is looking for diverse talent.

The State of Maine’s “Special Appointment” process is one option for qualified individuals with disabilities who wish to apply for state government positions. In the last year, one Special Appointment hire was converted successfully to regular employment with DVR. Mentoring, structured onboarding and multi-week New Counselor training – as well as the provision of needed accommodations, all support diverse hires – including those with disabilities or from marginalized backgrounds. A targeted effort to reach underserved communities is also attracting staff from similar backgrounds into two new Rehabilitation Assistant positions.

##### C. Description of staff development policies, procedures, and activities that ensure all personnel employed by the VR agency receive appropriate and adequate training and continuing education for professionals and paraprofessionals:

###### i. Particularly with respect to assessment, vocational counseling, job placement, and rehabilitation technology, including training implemented in coordination with entities carrying out State programs under section 4 of the Assistive Technology Act of 1998; and

###### ii. Procedures for the acquisition and dissemination of significant knowledge from research and other sources to VR agency professionals and paraprofessionals and for providing training regarding the amendments to the Rehabilitation Act made by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act.

The Maine Department of Labor has established policies and procedures which are in line with the State of Maine’s Civil Services Rules and support and promote continuing education opportunities. Maine DVR has developed a comprehensive New Counselor Training curriculum that is offered at least twice per year and lasts approximately three weeks. The curriculum covers all facets of vocational rehabilitation work – ranging from eligibility determination to assistive technology to business relations and working with WIOA partners. The modules are delivered by current staff as well as community and workforce partners. Before each offering, curriculum is reviewed to ensure that it is in alignment with current rules and guidance as well as recent research and resources available via RSA-funded Technical Assistance Centers. In the last two year, Maine DVR has developed a New Casework Supervisor curriculum that has had a pilot delivery to all Casework Supervisors and is complemented by an ongoing community of practice for supervisors where current best practices are shared to enrich how casework supervisors support VR counselors across the agency.

Maine DVR offers eligible VR counselors the opportunity to complete a Certificate of Graduate Studies that is offered online via the University of Southern Maine. This program covers core courses in the field. Maine DVR supports individuals who wish to pursue graduate degrees at universities with Long-Term Training grants. Currently one Maine DVR Transition VR Counselor is pursuing Transition Certification through the University of Massachusetts Boston and is part of the leadership team for regular all-agency Transition VR Counselor meetings. Maine DVR policy allows for the reimbursement of staff for CRC certification renewal.

#### 3. Description of VR agency policies and procedures for the establishment and maintenance of personnel standards consistent with section 101(a)(7)(B) to ensure that VR agency 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; and

##### B. The establishment and maintenance of education and experience requirements, in accordance with section 101(a)(7)(B)(ii) of the Rehabilitation Act, to ensure that the personnel have a 21st century understanding of the evolving labor force and the needs of individuals with disabilities.

At the time of implementation of WIOA and reauthorization of the Rehabilitation Act, Maine DVR revisited its personnel requirements and hiring practices. Maine DVR recognizes that the standards for rehabilitation counseling personnel outlined in WIOA represent the minimum standards for qualification. These standards require a minimum of attainment of a baccalaureate degree in a field of study reasonably related to [vocational rehabilitation](https://www.law.cornell.edu/definitions/index.php?width=840&height=800&iframe=true&def_id=c8c1fa3276871ccd53891a4407c18112&term_occur=3&term_src=Title:34:Subtitle:B:Chapter:III:Part:361:Subpart:B:Subjgrp:135:361.18), to indicate a level of competency and skill demonstrating basic preparation in a field of study such as [vocational rehabilitation](https://www.law.cornell.edu/definitions/index.php?width=840&height=800&iframe=true&def_id=c8c1fa3276871ccd53891a4407c18112&term_occur=2&term_src=Title:34:Subtitle:B:Chapter:III:Part:361:Subpart:B:Subjgrp:135:361.18) counseling, social work, psychology, disability studies, business administration, human resources, special education, [supported employment](https://www.law.cornell.edu/definitions/index.php?width=840&height=800&iframe=true&def_id=550edfb6a3f5b5853538d4f19b42ce1b&term_occur=1&term_src=Title:34:Subtitle:B:Chapter:III:Part:361:Subpart:B:Subjgrp:135:361.18), [customized employment](https://www.law.cornell.edu/definitions/index.php?width=840&height=800&iframe=true&def_id=0af44c45097067210cf9345ba8394945&term_occur=1&term_src=Title:34:Subtitle:B:Chapter:III:Part:361:Subpart:B:Subjgrp:135:361.18), economics, or another field that reasonably prepares individuals to work with consumers and employers; and

***(2)*** Demonstrated paid or unpaid experience, for not less than one year, consisting of -

***(i)*** Direct work with individuals with disabilities in a setting such as an independent living center;

***(ii)*** Direct service or advocacy activities that provide such individual with experience and skills in working with individuals with disabilities; or

***(iii)*** Direct experience in [competitive integrated employment](https://www.law.cornell.edu/definitions/index.php?width=840&height=800&iframe=true&def_id=780921f38226e9d2074ac6202d0918b6&term_occur=1&term_src=Title:34:Subtitle:B:Chapter:III:Part:361:Subpart:B:Subjgrp:135:361.18) environments as an employer, as a small business owner or operator, or in self-employment, or other experience in human resources or recruitment, or experience in supervising employees, training, or other activities; or

Maine DVR continues to give priority to applicants and staff who possess master’s degrees in counseling or a counseling–related degree, defined as Social Work, Psychology, Special Education, Rehabilitation and Counseling in alignment with WIOA’s alternative requirement of attainment of a master's or doctoral degree in a field of study such as [vocational rehabilitation](https://www.law.cornell.edu/definitions/index.php?width=840&height=800&iframe=true&def_id=c8c1fa3276871ccd53891a4407c18112&term_occur=4&term_src=Title:34:Subtitle:B:Chapter:III:Part:361:Subpart:B:Subjgrp:135:361.18) counseling, law, social work, psychology, disability studies, business administration, human resources, special education, management, public administration, or another field that reasonably provides competence in the employment sector, in a disability field, or in both business-related and rehabilitation-related fields.

#### 4. Method(s) the VR agency uses to ensure that personnel 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.

The State of Maine’s Language Access Policy provides the framework for communications support. The State of Maine also maintains contracts with qualified individuals and agencies providing in-person and remote language interpretation (including ASL), translation services, and CART captioning. Maine DVR staff are able to easily access these services when needed to support communication with VR applicants and eligible individuals. Maine DVR employs four Rehabilitation Counselors for the Deaf and a Director of the Division of the Deaf, Hard of Hearing and Late-Deafened, all of whom are fluent in ASL. Visual-Gestural Communications training is regularly offered for staff in partnership with the Maine Department of Health and Human Services. Preferred language and communication method are gathered at application.

#### 5. 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.

In collaboration with the Maine Department of Education’s Office of Special Services and Inclusive Education, Maine DVR has participated in joint training opportunities. At the state level, this has included joint participation in the NTACT:C’s Capacity Building Institute, participation in the state’s ITA with NTACT:C, collaboration on the Pathways to Partnerships Disability Innovation Fund Grant as well as involvement in planning for an upcoming Transition Summit. The Maine Department of Education has representation on the State Rehabilitation Council and Maine DVR sits on the IDEA Part B State Advisory Panel.

### j. Coordination with Education Officials.

In accordance with the requirements in Section 101(a)(11)(D) of the Rehabilitation Act—

#### 1. Describe plans, policies, and procedures for coordination between the designated State agency and education officials responsible for the public education of students with disabilities, that are designed to facilitate the transition of the students with disabilities from the receipt of educational services in school to the receipt of vocational rehabilitation services, including pre-employment transition services.

.DVR has a strong partnership with the Maine Department of Education (DOE). This has been demonstrated through collaborative efforts on Employment First legislation, data sharing, joint training and technical assistance and the launch of interagency efforts, such as the Cross-Agency Council for Transition. A DOE staff member serves on the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) and the DVR Director serves on the IDEA Part B State Advisory Panel.

The Cooperative Agreement between the Maine Department of Education, Office of Special Services and Inclusive Education and Maine DVR – and Maine DBVI - was updated in 2018 and now includes language to support implementation of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014. The Agreement was developed using technical assistance available through the National Technical Assistance Center on Transition: the Collaborative (NTACT). (WINTAC). Additional partnership is now occurring due to the current Disability Innovation Fund “Pathways to Partnership” awarded to Maine DVR in 2023 in partnership with the Maine DOE – and Alpha One, Maine’s Center for Independent Living.

The purpose of the Cooperative Agreement is to set forth the commitments of DOE and DVR/DBVI to cooperate to meet the needs of students with disabilities and to better coordinate the process of student transition. DOE and DVR/DBVI are committed to the belief that all youth with disabilities can work and that they should have the opportunity to prepare to enter competitive integrated employment through participation in work-based learning and other career preparation activities before high school graduation or exit.

#### 2. Describe the current status and scope of the formal interagency agreement between the VR agency and the State educational agency. Consistent with the requirements of the formal interagency agreement pursuant to 34 C.F.R. § 361.22(b), provide, at a minimum, the following information about the agreement:

##### A. Consultation and technical assistance, which may be provided using alternative means for meeting participation (such as video conferences and conference calls), to assist educational agencies in planning for the transition of students with disabilities from school to post-school activities, including pre-employment transition services and other vocational rehabilitation services;

##### B. Transition planning by personnel of the designated State agency and educational agency personnel for students with disabilities that facilitates the development and implementation of their individualized education programs (IEPs) under Section 614(d) of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act;

##### C. The roles and responsibilities, including financial responsibilities, of each agency, including provisions for determining State lead agencies and qualified personnel responsible for transition services and pre-employment transition services;

##### D. Procedures for outreach to and identification of students with disabilities who need transition services and pre-employment transition services. Outreach to these students should occur as early as possible during the transition planning process and must include, at a minimum, a description of the purpose of the vocational rehabilitation program, eligibility requirements, application procedures, and scope of services that may be provided to eligible individuals;

##### E. Coordination necessary to satisfy documentation requirements set forth in 34 C.F.R. part 397 regarding students and youth with disabilities who are seeking subminimum wage employment; and

##### F. Assurance that, in accordance with 34 C.F.R. § 397.31, neither the SEA nor the local educational agency will enter into a contract or other arrangement with an entity, as defined in 34 C.F.R. § 397.5(d), for the purpose of operating a program under which youth with a disability is engaged in work compensated at a subminimum wage.

The Designated State unit's plans, policies, and procedures for coordination with education officials to facilitate the transition of students with disabilities from school to the receipt of VR services, including pre-employment transition services, as well as procedures for the timely development and approval of individualized plans for employment for the students.

Provide information on the formal interagency agreement with the state educational agency: DVR will assist in transition planning and in the development of each student’s individualized education program (IEP). For students eligible for services with an agreed upon vocational goal, DVR is expected to develop an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) before the student leaves the school setting.

In providing transition services, DVR will facilitate the use of available and appropriate community–based services. Services will be provided in the most cost-effective manner. In recognition of the importance of promoting information sharing and in order to ensure an effective and timely system of referrals for DVR services, DVR requests that school personnel adopt the following process: When a student with an Individualized Education Program (IEP) begins the transition planning process prior to entering ninth grade, the student and his/her parents or guardians will receive general information about VR services, including those Pre-Employment Transition Services available to Potentially Eligible students. This information will introduce VR and will inform the parents/guardians when it is appropriate to make a VR referral. When the student to be referred is within two years of school graduation or exit, the services offered by VR should be re–introduced at the student’s IEP or 504 meeting. Both the student and the parents/guardians should have an opportunity to receive materials outlining VR services and to ask questions concerning the referral. If during or after the meeting, they (or the adult student) are interested in having a referral made for services the school will assist in doing so.

Provide information on the formal interagency agreement with the state educational agency with respect to consultation and technical assistance to assist educational agencies in planning for the transition of students with disabilities from school to post–school activities, including VR services.

The purpose of the Cooperative Agreement is to set forth the commitments of DOE and DVR to cooperate to meet the needs of students with disabilities and to better coordinate the process of student transition. The Agreement also sets forth that consultation and technical assistance will

be provided to assist educational agencies in planning for the transition of students with disabilities from school to post–school activities, including VR services.

The mission of the MOU is to help students with disabilities achieve full participation in society by ensuring equal opportunity and access to education, employment and community. To achieve this mission: • People will work together for the student’s benefit • Students and families will be included and respected • Regular and meaningful communication will be established • Personnel Development will be collaborative • Data will be shared to improve outcomes. The parties shall agree on methods to maintain updated information about best practices and resources related to the transition of students, including the use of Dispatches and maintenance of a copy of the Agreement on the agencies’ websites. Consultation and technical assistance to educational agencies in planning for the transition of students with disabilities from school to post–school activities, including VR services; DOE and DVR will work together to inform the following entities about the existence and intent of this Agreement: • Superintendents of Schools • Directors of Special Education • Parent Training & Information Center • DVR Regional Managers, Supervisors, and Transition Counselors • Directors of Career & Technical Education • Directors of Adult Education • Client Assistance Program • Protection and Advocacy for Beneficiaries of Social Security (PABSS) • State Special Education Advisory Panel Effective implementation requires ongoing communication and sharing of information between the parties.

A student with a disability is defined as a student between the ages of 14 and the 22nd birthday who is enrolled in an educational program and who is eligible for and receiving special education and related services under Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (20 U.S.C. 1411 et seq.); or is an individual with a disability under Section 504. (Note: This definition includes students who may be in an alternative placement, enrolled in post-secondary education or homeschooled, among other settings)

Under the WIOA amendments to the Rehabilitation Act, a youth with a disability may be defined as an individual with a disability who is between the ages of 14 and 24 and who is or is not enrolled in an educational program.

It is especially critical that any changes in resources, regulations, policies and procedures that affect students served jointly by DOE and DVR/DBVI be immediately communicated and that coordinated efforts are made to mitigate any negative impact that may occur as a result of those changes. DVR will provide schools with an orientation video, brochures, and PowerPoint presentation on services for transition–age youth and a representative to serve as a member of the Maine IDEA Part B State Advisory Panel.

DVR will also support VR counselors with transition caseloads to join Maine Administrators of Services for Children with Disabilities (MADSEC) and participate in regional and state meetings and training. DVR will provide technical assistance to DOE and school districts on disability–specific information and resources issues and issues concerning eligibility and referral for services as requested. DVR will provide technical assistance and training as requested to DOE and school districts on the Americans with Disabilities Act in conjunction with the State ADA Coordinator. DOE will notify DVR of issues of mutual interest identified during monitoring or as a result of a special education due process finding.

For students who have applied for VR services, DVR staff work closely with students, parents and the LEA to collect and share information (with a signed release) that allows for timely determination of eligibility (60 days) and development of the Individualized Plan for Employment (90 days). Current postsecondary goals identified on Individualized Education

Programs often present excellent starting points for development of the IPE. Training to LEA staff as well as DVR staff helps to reinforce the importance of collaboration to create a coordinate set of activities to promote transition opportunities for the student.

1. PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION SERVICES

Under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014 amendments to the Rehabilitation Act. VR agencies are required to set aside 15% of their federal grant funding to provide a new set of “Pre-Employment Transition Services” to eligible or potentially eligible students with a disability. Pre-Employment Transition Services must be available statewide to all students with disabilities who need them. Services begin once a request has been made and a Pre -Employment Transition Services registration form has been completed along with documentation of disability.

There are five required services and nine authorized services (that may be provided if funds remain after the required activities are provided) along with pre-employment transition coordination. Pre-Employment Transition Services are to be delivered in conjunction and collaboration with schools and are designed to assist students with identifying career interests.

The required Pre- Employment Transition Services are:

• Job exploration counseling

• Work-based learning experiences, which may include in-school or after school opportunities, experiences outside of the traditional school setting, and/or internships

• Counseling on opportunities for enrollment in comprehensive transition or postsecondary educational programs

• Workplace readiness training to develop social skills and independent living

• Instruction in self-advocacy

If funds remain, VR agencies may provide the following nine authorized Pre-Employment Transition Services to improve the transition of students with disabilities from school to postsecondary education or an employment outcome:

• implement effective strategies that increase independent living and inclusion in their communities and competitive integrated workplaces;

• develop and improve strategies for individuals with intellectual and significant disabilities to live independently, participate in postsecondary education experiences, and obtain and retain competitive integrated employment;

• provide training to vocational rehabilitation counselors, school transition staff, and others supporting students with disabilities;

• disseminate information on innovative, effective, and efficient approaches to implement Pre-Employment Transition Services;

• coordinate activities with transition services provided by local educational agencies under IDEA;

• apply evidence-based findings to improve policy, procedure, practice, and the preparation of personnel;

• develop model transition demonstration projects;

• establish or support multistate or regional partnerships that involve States, local educational agencies, designated State units, developmental disability agencies, private businesses, or others; and

• disseminate information and strategies to improve the transition to postsecondary activities of those who are traditionally unserved.

Funds reserved for pre-employment transition services may be used for the required, authorized, and Pre-Employment Transition Services coordination activities.

Pre-Employment Transition Services coordination consists of:

• Attending individualized education program meetings for students with disabilities, when invited;

• Working with the local workforce development boards, one-stop centers, and employers to develop work opportunities for students with disabilities, including internships, summer employment and other employment opportunities available throughout the school year, and apprenticeships;

• Working 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;

• When invited, attending person-centered planning meetings for individuals receiving services under title XIX of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 1396 et seq.);

Eligibility and Registering for Pre-Employment Transition Services

Potentially Eligible

In addition to authorizing new services, the WIOA amendments also now allows students with disabilities who are “Potentially Eligible” to receive Pre-Employment Transition Services without needing to apply and be found eligible for VR services. Potentially Eligible students are those who meet the definition of a “Student with a Disability” (see below) and who have not yet applied and been found eligible (or ineligible) for VR services. In the event that there is a waitlist for VR services, individuals who have been found eligible and placed on a waitlist may only receive Pre-ETS if they were receiving Pre-ETS services before being found eligible.

Registering for Services

In order for students to receive services as Potentially Eligible they (and their guardian if under age 18) must complete and sign a registration form. The registration form collects basic demographic information that is then inputted into the AWARE case management system to create a case record. The record must reflect that the student has a disability. Documentation that is acceptable includes the following:

• Information from an education official documenting spec ed or 504 status

• Case note documenting counselor observation or review of medical information from the referral source

• Referral from Juvenile Justice with data elements

• IEP

• SSA award letter

• Medical documentation

A student with a disability is defined as a student between the ages of 14 and the 22nd birthday who is enrolled in an educational program and who is eligible for and receiving special education and related services under Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (20 U.S.C. 1411 et seq.); or is an individual with a disability under Section 504. (Note: This definition includes students who may be in an alternative placement, enrolled in post-secondary education or home-schooled, among other settings)

Under the WIOA amendments to the Rehabilitation Act, a youth with a disability may be defined as an individual with a disability who is between the ages of 14 and 24 and who is or is not enrolled in an educational program.

If students with a disability require interpreter or reader services or accessible informational materials to ensure equal access to work-based learning experiences or other Pre-Employment Transition Services, those supports may be paid by VR with reserved funds, unless they would customarily be paid by another source, including local education agencies.

It is the expectation that DOE and DVR/DBVI will work closely together to ensure that students, families and schools are aware of the availability of Pre-Employment Transition Services and will jointly promote Pre-Employment Transition Services activities so that students with disabilities have access to these important career preparatory resources.

Schools can aid in increasing access for students with a disability to Pre-Employment Transition Services by:

• identifying students to refer to Pre-Employment Transition Services

• Collecting registration forms for Pre-Employment Transition Services

• Developing and delivering Pre-Employment Transition Services with VR staff.

• Braidingof ~~and~~ ~~blending~~ funding for Pre-Employment Transition Services activities.

In order to promote better understanding and implementation of best practices in transition planning, DOE and DVR/DBVI will collaborate to offer technical assistance, cross-training and joint training opportunities. Topics may include transition services, Pre-Employment Transition Services, rehabilitation technology or other. All training and technical assistance will be provided in an accessible format and may be delivered via in-person, conference call, webinar, Zoom, Skype or other appropriate means.

In recognition of the importance of promoting information sharing and in order to ensure an effective and timely system of referrals for DVR services, DVR requests that school personnel adopt the following process: 1. When a student with an Individualized Education Program (IEP) is in the transition planning process prior to entering ninth grade, the student and his/her parents or guardians will receive general information about VR services. 2. When a student is within two years of school graduation or exit from school, the services offered by VR should be re–introduced at the student’s IEP or 504 meeting. Both the student and the parents/guardians should have an opportunity to receive VR materials outlining services and to ask questions concerning the referral. 3. VR Counselors should be invited to attend IEP meetings for students who have been determined eligible for services, as well as in cases where the presence of the Counselor at the meeting would assist in determining the appropriateness of a referral to VR.

VR Counselors will provide support to the IEP team to facilitate the IEP process as appropriate. DVR will provide information as requested to school personnel on access to "Long Term Support." DOE will provide guidance to schools on the release of information (including assessment, IEP, Summary of Performance etc.) for students who are working with DVR or who are in the eligibility process. DVR will inform the designated school case manager as to the status of the DVR referral/intake process on individual students with appropriate releases. DVR will determine eligibility and provide services to eligible students within two years prior to expected high school graduation or exit.

If disagreements arise regarding any aspect of the implementation of this Cooperative Agreement, they should first be attempted to be resolved between the specific parties involved. If this is unsuccessful, the dispute should be taken to the next successive leadership level until resolution is achieved.

DOE and DVR will collaborate on possible grant opportunities that have an impact on services to students. DOE will assist DVR to share information about vocational rehabilitation services with students with disabilities who may be eligible for VR and provide DVR with de–identified data on an annual basis of numbers and demographics of transition–age students with disabilities who have reached ninth grade in public and private schools across Maine. DOE will provide information to DVR on eligibility, availability, and accessibility of CTE (Career and Technical Education) programs.

DOE will provide technical assistance to schools on IEP transition plan development. DVR will participate in DOE’s efforts to maintain students in school and to prevent and reduce drop–out rates among students with disabilities. The agency will collaborate with schools on the delivery of the "Career Exploration Workshop" curriculum for eligible students with disabilities. At least annually, an in–house training for Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors on topics in best practices in working with transition–age youth will be provided.

DOE and DVR are committed to promoting competitive, integrated employment opportunities for all Maine youth with disabilities as they transition from high school. To meet the requirements of Section 511 of the Rehabilitation Act, DVR/ in consultation with DOE will undertake the following process for youth with a disability:

Outreach and Identification – DVR will develop informational materials that describe services available for students and families who may be considering sub-minimum wage employment. These materials will include information on Pre- Employment Transition Services and individualized transition services available through DVR. DOE will assist by sharing this information with schools and families. Documentation – DVR will collect information to satisfy the requirement to document the completion of required activities under Section 511 for youth who are seeking subminimum wage employment. This documentation will include:

• Youth’s name;

• Determination made or activity/services completed;

• Name of individual making the determination or providing the service/activity; date determination made or required service or activity completed

• Applicable signatures of DVR/VRC transmitting documentation to youth and dates; and

• Method via which documentation was transmitted to the youth (including if refusal, youth names, description of refusal and reason, signature of youth or guardian, signature of DVR VRC documenting the refusal, date of signatures, date and method).

VR will provide documentation to the youth of all activities completed (such as the Bridge Career Exploration Workshop or career planning ), regardless of whether they were completed under the VR program or IDEA. DOE will support the schools to provide documentation to VR no later than 30 days (after the completion of each activity) unless there are extenuating circumstances of all transition services completed by the youth under IDEA. It is the expectation that all documentation is exchanged and maintained in a confidential manner. MDOE assures that it will not enter into, nor permit any school to enter into a contract or other arrangement with an entity as defined in 34 CFR 397.5 (d) for the purpose of operating a program under which a youth with a disability is engaged in work compensated at a subminimum wage.

**Note:** 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.

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 disabilities who meets the eligibility criteria of that agency. If a participating agency, meaning a state or local agency other than the educational agencies responsible for the student’s education, that is financially and legally responsible for providing transition services to the student fails to provide the transition services described in the IEP, the education agency shall reconvene the IEP team to identify alternative strategies to meet the transition objectives for the child set out in the IEP.

DVR 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 DVR concerning proposed changes in regulations, policies and procedures at the state or federal level that may impact students with whom DVR works.

DVR 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. DVR will provide a list of Transition Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors and the schools they serve to DOE and each school district on an annual basis.

### k. Coordination with Employers

In accordance with the requirements in Section 101(a)(11)(E) of the Rehabilitation Act, describe how the VR agency will work with employers to identify competitive integrated employment and career exploration opportunities in order to facilitate the provision of VR services; and transition services for youth and students with disabilities, including pre-employment transition services for students with disabilities.

Over the last year, Maine DVR has re-established a statewide Employer Services team which meets biweekly. This team has a lead Statewide Business Relations Consultant who is based in the agency’s Central Office. A position created in recognition of the need to provide more coordinated services. USDOL funding to the Bureau of Employment Services in MDOL has also allowed for the placement of an Apprenticeship Navigator who is a targeted Rehabilitation Counselor II and bridges both the work of the Maine Apprenticeship Program and Vocational Rehabilitation. DVR’s Business Relations work also bridges to the Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired and other workforce systems partners.

Over the last year, Maine also has created a small group of trained Windmills Disability Awareness Curriculum facilitators. Recognizing the need for employers to have increased comfort levels with attracting and hiring employees with disabilities, Windmills has been offered to employers in part or in whole. Windmills participation is a requirement for Registered Apprenticeship Intermediary organizations. Maine’s Director for the Division for the Deaf, Hard of Hearing and Late Deafened regularly offers Deaf Awareness training to employers and organizations. The State ADA Coordinator also provides resources and supports to employers as requested or in conjunction with the Business Services Team.

Maine DVR has been implementing the Progressive Employment Dual Customer approach since 2015 – first with youth in two regions of the state – then with adults and youth clients statewide. Progressive Employment puts a focus on meeting employers where they are at for work based learning activities ranging from informational interviews and job shadows to paid work experiences and OJT. This approach has been an effective strategy to introduce individuals with barriers to employment to employers in a low/no risk environment. With ARPA funding, MDOL’s Bureau of Employment Services is currently piloting Progressive Employment in collaboration with Maine DVR for individuals in recovery or re-entry.

### l. Interagency Cooperation with Other Agencies

In accordance with the requirements in Section 101(a)(11)(C) and (K), 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 to develop opportunities for community-based employment in integrated settings, to the greatest extent practicable for the following:

#### 1. State programs (designate lead agency(ies) and implementing entity(ies)) carried out under Section 4 of the Assistive Technology Act of 1998;

DVR works closely with Maine CITE,  which is the federally funded agency, through the Administration for Community Living , for technical assistance and training on Assistive Technology. Maine DVR staff sit on Maine CITE’s working groups and advisory council. Maine CITE staff provide training to DVR on foundational and targeted Assistive Technology topics through New Counselor Training, webinars and regional and statewide in-person events. At the time of this writing, Maine CITE was exploring seeking membership on the State Rehabilitation Council to promote increased collaboration.

#### 2. Programs carried out by the Under Secretary for Rural Development of the Department of Agriculture;

Maine DVR – along with 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 DVR staff is knowledgeable about AgrAbility and related resources. Current efforts are also looking at incorporating AgrAbility into Pre-Employment Transition Services and work-based learning to support increased interest in farming and agricultural careers in Maine.

#### 3. Non-educational agencies serving out-of-school youth;

* ~~DVR 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~~.
* DVR works with Bureau of Employment Services (BES) and their contracted providers in co-enrollment with out-of-school youth. Co-enrollment offers additional opportunities for youth which may include paid work experiences, training and career exploration.
* DVR works closely with the Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Child and Family Services (OCFS) with foster involved youth. Each region in DVR has a VRC foster liaison whose priority is to connect with OCFS staff to facilitate enrollment with the VR program.
* DVR staff sit on three Regional Care Teams which is a network made up of individuals from youth-serving agencies, organizations who meet monthly to share resources, develop strategies to inform policy and practice for justice involved youth.
* The Bureau Director sits on the Governor’s Children’s Cabinet which is examining the needs of out-of-school youth.

#### 4. State use contracting programs;

DVR follows State of Maine Procurement policies and procedures to contract with qualified organizations to provide employment support services for DVR clients. DVR employs a contract grant manager that interfaces with Division of Procurement Services. Procurement Services provides Master Agreements with vendors for commodities and goods and services. 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. These services are paid on a fee per service unit cost. DVR also contracts with Maine’s sole Center for Independent Living, Alpha One.

#### 5. State agency responsible for administering the State Medicaid plan under title XIX of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 1396 et seq.);

DVR/DBVI, DHHS-OADS and  DHHS-OBH have resumed regular meetings monthly and are  currently in negotiations to develop a joint MOU in accordance with WIOA regulations. The COVID-19 pandemic has delayed completion of this MOU, however it will be a priority for completion during 2024.

Through its collaboration with DHHS and specifically the coordination of Maine’s Benefits Counseling Network, DVR/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.

#### 6. State agency responsible for providing services for individuals with developmental disabilities;

To ensure that individuals with the most significant disabilities receive quality vocational rehabilitation services and equal access to employment opportunities throughout the state of Maine, the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation takes a multi–faceted approach that includes workforce development, engagement of business community, cross training of staff and the availability of support services for clients who need them, as described  with the DHHS Office of Aging and Disability Services elsewhere in this state plan.

DVR/DBVI, in collaboration with the Maine Department of Health & Human Services (DHHS),  supports the funding of a comprehensive workforce development system for Employment Specialists in the Community Rehabilitation Provider sector. This project, Maine Working Together, includes basic certification (ACRE) training, advanced topical skills training, maintenance of a comprehensive training calendar and for newly certified employment specialists.

Coordinated planning with DHHS’ Office of Aging and Disability Services promotes implementation of best practices, smoother transition between systems and improved access. OADS will also participate with Maine’s Pathways to Partnership grant initiative for transition-age youth.

The addition of four new targeted caseload  Rehabilitation Counselor II positions will strengthen services to individuals with I/DD who are served by both agencies. Joint training and cross-training will continue to be key to the best alignment of services.

#### 7. State agency responsible for providing mental health services; and

The DHHS – Office of Behavioral Health is an important partner to DVR. Exciting initiatives are currently launching to provide training to DVR Counselors on the evidence-based IPS model with a focus on increasing capacity and shared language across systems leading to effective practices and better outcomes for mutual clients.

Community Employment Specialist Program: DHHS-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.

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 (not supported through Vocational Rehabilitation) 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 SE as needed. There are four 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), as well as 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. DHHS-OBH funds specific employment services and collaborates with the Department of Labor’s Division of Vocational Rehabilitation to provide resources to address vocational needs. In keeping with the fidelity of the model, all ACT 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 DHHS-OBH, OADS, and the Department of Labor’s Bureau of Rehabilitation Services DVR/DBVI.

#### 8. Other Federal, State, and local agencies and programs outside the workforce development system.

Maine DVR works with a wide variety of agencies and programs ranging from the University and Community College systems, community resource organizations, disability focused organizations, and the Parent and Training Information Center among others as needed to provide high quality services to DVR clients

#### 9. Other private nonprofit organizations.

While Maine DVR does not have any third-party cooperative agreements with private non–profit VR service providers, the agency does work closely with many non-profit organizations across the state through informal collaborative relationships. Additionally, Maine DVR follows State of Maine procurement policies to contract with private nonprofits to provide services to VR clients where and when appropriate.

### Assurances

The designated State agency or designated State unit, as appropriate and identified in the State certifications included with this VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement, through signature of the authorized individual, assures the Commissioner, that it will comply with all of the requirements of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement, as set forth in sections 101(a) and 606 of the Rehabilitation Act. The individual authorized to submit the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement makes the following assurances:

**The VR agency must select the “Edit” button to review and agree to the VR State plan Assurances.**

| The State Plan must include |
| --- |
| 1. Public Comment on Policies and Procedures: The designated State agency assures it will comply with all statutory and regulatory requirements for public participation in the VR Services Portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan, as required by section 101(a)(16)(A) of the Rehabilitation Act. |
| 2. Submission of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and Its Supplement: The designated State unit assures it will comply with all requirements pertaining to the submission and revisions of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement for the State Supported Employment Services program, as required by sections 101(a)(1), (22), (23), and 606(a) of the Rehabilitation Act; section 102 of WIOA in the case of the submission of a Unified State plan; section 103 of WIOA in the case of a submission of a Combined State Plan; 34 CFR 76.140. |
| 3. Administration of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan: The designated State agency or designated State unit, as appropriate, assures it will comply with the requirements related to: |
| 3.a. the establishment of the designated State agency and designated State unit, as required by section 101(a)(2) of the Rehabilitation Act. |
| 3.b. either a State independent commission or State Rehabilitation Council, as required by section 101(a)(21) of the Rehabilitation Act. |
| 3.c. consultations regarding the administration of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan, in accordance with section 101(a)(16)(B) of the Rehabilitation Act. |
| 3.d. the financial participation by the State, or if the State so elects, by the State and local agencies, to provide the amount of the non-Federal share of the cost of carrying out the VR program in accordance with section 101(a)(3). |
| 3.e. as applicable, the local administration of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan, in accordance with section 101(a)(2)(A) of the Rehabilitation Act. |
| 3.f. as applicable, the shared funding and administration of joint programs, in accordance with section 101(a)(2)(A)(ii) of the Rehabilitation Act. |
| 3.g. statewideness and waivers of statewideness requirements, as set forth in section 101(a)(4) of the Rehabilitation Act. |
| 3.h. the requirements for cooperation, collaboration, and coordination, as required by sections 101(a)(11) and (24)(B); and 606(b) of the Rehabilitation Act. |
| 3.i. all required methods of administration, as required by section 101(a)(6) of the Rehabilitation Act. |
| 3.j. the requirements for the comprehensive system of personnel development, as set forth in section 101(a)(7) of the Rehabilitation Act. |
| 3.k. the compilation and submission to the Commissioner of statewide assessments, estimates, State goals and priorities, strategies, and progress reports, as appropriate, and as required by sections 101(a)(15), 105(c)(2), and 606(b)(8) of the Rehabilitation Act. |
| 3.l. the reservation and use of a portion of the funds allotted to the State under section 110 of the Rehabilitation Act for the development and implementation of innovative approaches to expand and improve the provision of VR services to individuals with disabilities, particularly individuals with the most significant disabilities as set forth in section 101(a)(18)(A). |
| 3.m. the submission of reports as required by section 101(a)(10) of the Rehabilitation Act. |
| 4. Administration of the Provision of VR Services: The designated State agency, or designated State unit, as appropriate, assures that it will: |
| 4.a. comply with all requirements regarding information and referral services in accordance with sections 101(a)(5)(E) and (20) of the Rehabilitation Act. |
| 4.b. impose no duration of residence requirement as part of determining an individual's eligibility for VR services or that excludes from services under the plan any individual who is present in the State in accordance with section 101(a)(12) of the Rehabilitation Act. |
| 4.c. provide the full range of services listed in section 103(a) of the Rehabilitation Act as appropriate, to all eligible individuals with disabilities in the State who apply for services or, if implementing an order of selection, in accordance with criteria established by the State for the order of selection as set out in section 101(a)(5) of the Rehabilitation Act. |
| 4.d. determine whether comparable services and benefits are available to the individual in accordance with section 101(a)(8) of the Rehabilitation Act. |
| 4.e. comply with the requirements for the development of an individualized plan for employment in accordance with section 102(b) of the Rehabilitation Act. |
| 4.f. Comply with requirements regarding the provisions of informed choice for all applicants and eligible individuals in accordance with section 102(d) of the Rehabilitation Act |
| 4.g. provide vocational rehabilitation services to American Indians who are individuals with disabilities residing in the State, in accordance with section 101(a)(13) of the Rehabilitation Act. |
| 4.h. comply with the requirements for the conduct of semiannual or annual reviews, as appropriate, for individuals employed either in an extended employment setting in a community rehabilitation program or any other employment under section 14(c) of the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, as required by sections 101(a)(14) and 511 of the Rehabilitation Act. |
| 4.i. meet the requirements in sections 101(a)(17) and 103(b)(2) of the Rehabilitation Act if the State elects to construct, under special circumstances, facilities for community rehabilitation programs. |
| 4.j. With respect to students with disabilities, the State, |
| 4.j.i. has developed and will implement, |
| 4.j.i.A. strategies to address the needs identified in the assessments; and |
| 4.j.i.B. strategies to achieve the goals and priorities identified by the State, to improve and expand vocational rehabilitation services for students with disabilities on a statewide basis; and |
| 4.j.ii. has developed and will implement strategies to provide pre-employment transition services (sections 101(a)(15), 101(a)(25) and 113). |
| 4.j.iii. shall reserve not less than 15 percent of the allocated funds for the provision of pre-employment transition services; such funds shall not be used to pay for the administrative costs of providing pre-employment transition services. |
| 5. Program Administration for the Supported Employment Title VI Supplement to the State plan: |
| 5.a. The designated State unit assures that it will include in the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan all information required by section 606 of the Rehabilitation Act. |
| 5.b. The designated State agency assures that it will submit reports in such form and in accordance with such procedures as the Commissioner may require and collects the information required by section 101(a)(10) of the Rehabilitation Act separately for individuals receiving supported employment services under title I and individuals receiving supported employment services under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act. |
| 6. Financial Administration of the Supported Employment Program (Title VI): |
| 6.a. The designated State agency assures that it will expend no more than 2.5 percent of the State's allotment under title VI for administrative costs of carrying out this program; and, the designated State agency or agencies will provide, directly or indirectly through public or private entities, non-Federal contributions in an amount that is not less than 10 percent of the costs of carrying out supported employment services provided to youth with the most significant disabilities with the funds reserved for such purpose under section 603(d) of the Rehabilitation Act, in accordance with section 606(b)(7)(H) and (I) of the Rehabilitation Act. |
| 6.b. The designated State agency assures that it will use funds made available under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act only to provide supported employment services to individuals with the most significant disabilities, including extended services to youth with the most significant disabilities, who are eligible to receive such services; and, that such funds are used only to supplement and not supplant the funds provided under Title I of the Rehabilitation Act, when providing supported employment services specified in the individualized plan for employment, in accordance with section 606(b)(7)(A) and (D), of the Rehabilitation Act. |
| 7. Provision of Supported Employment Services: |
| 7.a. The designated State agency assures that it will provide supported employment services as defined in section 7(39) of the Rehabilitation Act. |
| 7.b. The designated State agency assures that the comprehensive assessment of individuals with significant disabilities conducted under section 102(b)(1) of the Rehabilitation Act and funded under title I of the Rehabilitation Act includes consideration of supported employment as an appropriate employment outcome, in accordance with the requirements of section 606(b)(7)(B) of the Rehabilitation Act an individualized plan for employment that meets the requirements of section 102(b) of the Rehabilitation Act, which is developed and updated with title I funds, in accordance with sections 102(b)(3)(F) and 606(b)(7)(C) and (E) of the Rehabilitation Act. |

Do you attest that these assurances will be met?  
Yes

### Vocational Rehabilitation (Combined or General) Certifications

States must provide written and signed certifications that:

#### 1. The (enter the name of designated State agency or designated State unit, as appropriate,) is authorized to submit the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan under title I of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Rehabilitation Act), as amended by title IV of WIOA[1], and its State Plan supplement under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act;

[1] Public Law 113-128.

##### Enter the name of designated State agency or designated State unit, as appropriate

Maine Division of Vocational Rehabilitation

#### 2. In the event the designated State agency is not primarily concerned with vocational and other rehabilitation of individuals with disabilities, the designated State agency must include a designated State unit for the VR program (Section 101(a)(2)(B)(ii) of the Rehabilitation Act). As a condition for the receipt of Federal funds under title I of the Rehabilitation Act for the provision of VR services, the (designated State agency or the designated State unit when the designated State agency has a designated State unit)[2]agrees to operate and is responsible for the administration of the State VR Services Program in accordance with the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan[3], the Rehabilitation Act, 34 CFR 361.13(b) and (c), and all applicable regulations[4], policies, and procedures established by the Secretary of Education. Funds made available to States under section 111(a) of the Rehabilitation Act are used solely for the provision of VR services and the administration of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan;

[2] All references in this plan to "designated State agency" or to "the State agency" relate to the agency identified in this paragraph.

[3] No funds under title I of the Rehabilitation Act may be awarded without an approved VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan in accordance with section 101(a) of the Rehabilitation Act.

[4] Applicable regulations, in part, include the Education Department General Administrative Regulations (EDGAR) in 34 CFR parts 76, 77, 79, 81, and 82; 2 CFR part 200 as adopted by 2 CFR part 3474; and the State VR Services program regulations at 34 C.F.R. part 361.

##### Enter the name of designated State agency

Maine Department of Labor

#### 3. As a condition for the receipt of Federal funds under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act for supported employment services, the designated State agency, or the designated State unit when the designated State agency has a designated State unit, agrees to operate and is responsible for the administration of the State Supported Employment Services Program in accordance with the supplement to the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan[5], the Rehabilitation Act, and all applicable regulations[6], policies, and procedures established by the Secretary of Education. Funds made available under title VI are used solely for the provision of supported employment services and the administration of the supplement to the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan;

[5] No funds under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act may be awarded without an approved supported employment supplement to the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined  State Plan in accordance with section 606(a) of the Rehabilitation Act.

[6] Applicable regulations, in part, include the citations in footnote 4, as well as Supported Employment program regulations at 34 C.F.R. part 363.

#### 4. The designated State unit or, if not applicable, the designated State agency has the authority under State law to perform the functions of the State regarding the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement and is responsible for the administration of the VR program in accordance with 34 CFR 361.13(b) and (c);

#### 5. The State legally may carry out each provision of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement.

#### 6. All provisions of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement are consistent with State law.

#### 7. The (enter the name of authorized representative below) has the authority under State law to receive, hold, and disburse Federal funds made available under the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement;

##### Enter the name of authorized representative below

Samantha J. Fenderson

#### 8. The (enter the title of authorized representative below) has the authority to submit the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and the supplement for Supported Employment services;

##### Enter the title of authorized representative below

Director, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation

#### 9. The agency that submits the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement has adopted or otherwise formally approved the plan and its supplement.

#### Footnotes

[1] Public Law 113-128.

[2] All references in this plan to "designated State agency" or to "the State agency" relate to the agency identified in this paragraph.

[3] No funds under title I of the Rehabilitation Act may be awarded without an approved VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan in accordance with section 101(a) of the Rehabilitation Act.

[4] Applicable regulations, in part, include the Education Department General Administrative Regulations (EDGAR) in 34 CFR parts 76, 77, 79, 81, and 82; 2 CFR part 200 as adopted by 2 CFR part 3474; and the State VR Services program regulations at 34 C.F.R. part 361.

[5] No funds under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act may be awarded without an approved supported employment supplement to the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined  State Plan in accordance with section 606(a) of the Rehabilitation Act.

[6] Applicable regulations, in part, include the citations in footnote 4, as well as Supported Employment program regulations at 34 C.F.R. part 363.

#### Certification Signature

**To review and complete the Certification section of the VR portion of the State plan, please select the “Edit” button.**

Note, please do not edit the table header or formatting. Only edit the table contents.

If you accidentally edit the table headers and structure, open [this link to the blank table](file:///C:\node\578531). You can copy and paste the table into the narrative field, and start over if needed.

| Signatory information | Enter Signatory information in this column |
| --- | --- |
| **Name of Signatory** | Samantha J. Fenderson |
| **Title of Signatory** | Director, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation |
| **Date Signed** | March 22, 2024 |

### Vocational Rehabilitation Program Performance Indicators

Each State VR program must submit expected levels of performance in its Unified or Combined State Plan and in the two-year modification of that plan. Expected levels of performance for the first two years of a state plan must be submitted in the initial submission of the Unified or Combined State Plan and in the initial submission of the two-year modification of that Plan, for years three and four, as described in 34 CFR § 361.170(a). Expected levels of performance must be stated to the nearest tenth of a percent (XX.X %) or to the nearest whole dollar for median earnings. State VR programs are reminded that the expected levels of performance must be published for public comment prior to plan submission in accordance with state law, regulation, and policy.

After the Unified or Combined State Plan submission, each State VR program must reach agreement with RSA on the negotiated levels of performance for the indicators for each of the first two years of the Unified or Combined State Plan (or for the third and fourth years of the Unified or Combined State Plan during the required two-year modification process) in accordance with WIOA section 116(b)(3)(A)(iv).

RSA will use its statistical adjustment model to derive pre-program year estimated levels of performance for each indicator. Each State VR program and RSA will consider the negotiation factors outlined in WIOA section 116(b)(3)(A)(v) during the negotiation process. Once negotiated levels of performance are agreed upon, each State VR program must incorporate the negotiated levels of performance into the Unified or Combined State Plan and the two-year modification of that plan prior to the plan’s approval (section 116(b)(3)(A)(iv) of WIOA).

**Effectiveness in Serving Employers**

In the final rule implementing WIOA, the Departments indicated that they would initially implement this indicator in the form of a pilot to test the feasibility and rigor of three proposed approaches. During Program Year (PY) 2022, the Departments initiated the rulemaking process to establish a standard definition of Effectiveness in Serving Employers. States will continue to report two of three proposed approaches until the Departments issue the final rule and implement the indicator.

| Performance Indicators | PY 2024 Expected Level | PY 2024 Negotiated Level | PY 2025 Expected Level | PY 2025 Negotiated Level |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Employment (Second Quarter After Exit) | 48.0 | 48.0 | 50.0 | 50.0 |
| Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit) | 45.0 | 45.0 | 47.0 | 47.0 |
| Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit) | 4650.0 | 4650.0 | 4900.0 | 4900.0 |
| Credential Attainment Rate | 53.0 | 53.0 | 54.0 | 54.0 |
| Measurable Skill Gains | 45.0 | 45.0 | 47.0 | 47.0 |
| Effectiveness in Serving Employers | Not Applicable [1](#footnote-1) | Not Applicable [1](#footnote-1) | Not Applicable [1](#footnote-1) | Not Applicable [1](#footnote-1) |

*1*

*The Departments have not issued the final rule defining Effectiveness in Serving Employers. As a result, states will not submit expected levels of performance for this indicator and the Departments will not establish negotiated levels of performance for PYs 2024 and 2025.*

### GEPA 427 Form Instructions for Application Package - Vocational Rehabilitation

**EQUITY FOR STUDENTS, EDUCATORS, AND OTHER PROGRAM BENEFICIARIES**

OMB Control Number 1894-0005 Expiration 02/28/2026

**Section 427 of the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA)** ([20 U.S.C. 1228a](https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/USCODE-2020-title20/html/USCODE-2020-title20-chap31-subchapII-part2-sec1228a.htm)) applies to a State applicant submitting a state plan for a formula grant from the US Department of Education.  The State applicant is responsible for completing the GEPA Section 427 form that provides a description of the steps the State proposes to take to ensure all program beneficiaries have equitable access to, and participation in, its Federally funded, State-level project or activity.

**GEPA Section 427 Form Instructions for State Applicants**

**State applicants must respond to the following four questions:**

1. Describe how your entity’s existing mission, policies, or commitments ensure equitable access to, and equitable participation in, the proposed project or activity.

2. Based on your proposed project or activity, what barriers may impede equitable access and participation of students, educators, or other beneficiaries?

3. Based on the barriers identified, what steps will you take to address such barriers to equitable access and participation in the proposed project or activity?

4. What is your timeline, including targeted milestones, for addressing these identified barriers?

• Applicants identify any barriers that may impede equitable access and participation in the proposed project or activity, including, but not limited to, barriers based on economic disadvantage, gender, race, ethnicity, color, national origin, disability, age, language, migrant status, rural status, homeless status or housing insecurity, pregnancy, parenting, or caregiving status, and sexual orientation.

• Applicants use the associated text box to respond to each question.  However, applicants might have already included some or all this required information in the narrative sections of their applications or their State Plans.  In responding to this requirement, for each question, applicants may provide a cross-reference to the section(s) in their State Plans that includes the information responsive to that question on this form or may restate that information on this form.

• Applicants are not required to have mission statements or policies that align with equity to apply.

• Applicants that have already undertaken steps to address barriers must still provide an explanation and/or description of the steps already taken in each text box, as appropriate, to satisfy the GEPA Section 427 requirement.

• Applicants that believe no barriers exist must still provide an explanation and/or description to each question to validate that perception, as appropriate, to satisfy the GEPA Section 427 requirement.

Please refer to [GEPA 427 - Form Instructions for Application Package](https://wioaplans.ed.gov/node/584561)

#### 1. Describe how your entity’s existing mission, policies, or commitments ensure equitable access to, and equitable participation in, the proposed project or activity.

***Section 427 of the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA)****(*[*20 U.S.C. 1228a*](https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/USCODE-2020-title20/html/USCODE-2020-title20-chap31-subchapII-part2-sec1228a.htm)*) applies to a State applicant submitting a state plan for a formula grant from the US Department of Education.  The State applicant is responsible for completing the GEPA Section 427 form that provides a description of the steps the State proposes to take to ensure all program beneficiaries have equitable access to, and participation in, its Federally funded, State-level project or activity.*

[*GEPA 427 - Form Instructions for Application Package*](https://wioaplans.ed.gov/node/584561)

***State applicants must respond to four questions.***

***The first of four questions is:***

*Describe how your entity’s existing mission, policies, or commitments ensure equitable access to, and equitable participation in, the proposed project or activity.*

The State of Maine has committed to the principles of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility and this is reflected in many initiatives including cross-Bureau leadership development activities at the DSA level. Additionally, Maine DVR has identified an individual to serve as a lead on DEIA and this position supports a DSU-level workgroup that has developed and delivered ongoing staff training and is working towards ongoing policy and practice recommendations. The DEIA lead also participates in the CSAVR DEIA committee nationally and Maine DVR has received training on targeted DEIA needs through national TA centers. Maine DVR  ensures client informed choice through its rules and procedural directives governing VR services <https://www.maine.gov/sos/cec/rules/12/152/152c001.docx> and notifies applicants and clients of their rights through its notice of Client Rights and Responsibilities <https://www.maine.gov/rehab/docs/2023/dvr/ClientRightsandResponsibilitiesDVR.docx>. Language access for non-English speakers and Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals who use ASL is assured through state and agency policies. The State of Maine maintains contracts for qualified interpreters and language translation. The Maine Human Rights Act is Maine's anti-discrimination law. It prohibits discrimination on the basis of protected class in employment, housing, places of public accommodation, education, and extension of credit. <https://www.maine.gov/mhrc/about>. Maine’s Employment First law, ensures that employment is the first and preferred service option for individuals with disabilities. <https://employmentfirstmaine.org/> Six-week long comprehensive New Counselor Training contains a number of modules designed to ensure that VR counselors are well-prepared with knowledge of resources and strategies to ensure inclusive practices.

#### 2. Based on your proposed project or activity, what barriers may impede equitable access and participation of students, educators, or other beneficiaries?

***Section 427 of the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA)****(*[*20 U.S.C. 1228a*](https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/USCODE-2020-title20/html/USCODE-2020-title20-chap31-subchapII-part2-sec1228a.htm)*) applies to a State applicant submitting a state plan for a formula grant from the US Department of Education.  The State applicant is responsible for completing the GEPA Section 427 form that provides a description of the steps the State proposes to take to ensure all program beneficiaries have equitable access to, and participation in, its Federally funded, State-level project or activity.*

[GEPA 427 - Form Instructions for Application Package](https://wioaplans.ed.gov/node/584561)

***State applicants must respond to four questions.***

***The second of four questions is:***

*Based on your proposed project or activity, what barriers may impede equitable access and participation of students, educators, or other beneficiaries?*

* Lack of financial resources that impact ability to access virtual or in-person services
* Lack of transportation to services and employment
* Gender identity which may result in intersectional stigma or stereotyping that impairs access to programs and services
* Age-related stereotyping leading to intersectional barriers
* Lack of English language proficiency leading to lack of access to or awareness of programs and services
* Lack of access to ASL interpreters due to demand level across the state
* Lack of access to service providers due to rural geographic location
* Lack of physical and programmatic access due to barriers in places of employment
* Lack of awareness of Assistive Technology resources
* Lack of housing stability leading to challenges in consistent access to programs and services including employment
* Unmet behavioral health or substance use treatment needs leading to lack of ability to access certain programs and services
* Unmet childcare needs which prevent individual from accessing programs and services

#### 3. Based on the barriers identified, what steps will you take to address such barriers to equitable access and participation in the proposed project or activity?

***Section 427 of the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA)****(*[*20 U.S.C. 1228a*](https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/USCODE-2020-title20/html/USCODE-2020-title20-chap31-subchapII-part2-sec1228a.htm)*) applies to a State applicant submitting a state plan for a formula grant from the US Department of Education.  The State applicant is responsible for completing the GEPA Section 427 form that provides a description of the steps the State proposes to take to ensure all program beneficiaries have equitable access to, and participation in, its Federally funded, State-level project or activity.*

[*GEPA 427 - Form Instructions for Application Package*](https://wioaplans.ed.gov/node/584561)

***State applicants must respond to four questions.***

***The third of four questions is:***

*Based on the barriers identified, what steps will you take to address such barriers to equitable access and participation in the proposed project or activity?*

* With One-Stop partners, offer ongoing regional staff training on local resources to address food, housing, transportation, childcare instability so that VR counselor are aware of referral opportunities.
* Leverage technical assistance from DEIA efforts at the agency, state and national level to ensure Maine DVR procedural guidance reflects DEIA principles
* Leverage Maine’s Cabinet on Aging work to promote age-inclusive practices within Maine DVR and contracted vendors
* With SRC support, continue to develop resources in languages other than English. New Rehabilitation Assistant positions will provide outreach to marginalized and underserved populations
* Continue cross-state agency partnership to expand number and skill of ASL interpreters available to support access for people who are Deaf.
* Statewide Business Relations Consultant and other certified staff to provide Windmills training to employers and other partners
* Offer staff training on IPS model of supported employment to better support individuals with mental health in employment
* In partnership with Maine CITE, develop and deliver staff training on Assistive Technology.

#### 4. What is your timeline, including targeted milestones, for addressing these identified barriers?

***Section 427 of the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA)****(*[*20 U.S.C. 1228a*](https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/USCODE-2020-title20/html/USCODE-2020-title20-chap31-subchapII-part2-sec1228a.htm)*) applies to a State applicant submitting a state plan for a formula grant from the US Department of Education.  The State applicant is responsible for completing the GEPA Section 427 form that provides a description of the steps the State proposes to take to ensure all program beneficiaries have equitable access to, and participation in, its Federally funded, State-level project or activity.*

[*GEPA 427 - Form Instructions for Application Package*](https://wioaplans.ed.gov/node/584561)

***State applicants must respond to four questions.***

***The final of four questions is:***

*What is your timeline, including targeted milestones, for addressing these identified barriers?*

See Goals, Objectives and Strategies for additional information on implementation of barrier amelioration.

* With One-Stop partners, offer ongoing regional staff training on local resources to address food, housing, transportation, childcare instability so that VR counselors are aware of referral opportunities
  + Milestone: Regional staff meeting agendas include standing item on area resources
  + Timeline: Within three months of State Plan approval
* Leverage technical assistance from DEIA efforts at the agency, state and national level to ensure Maine DVR procedural guidance reflects DEIA principles
  + Milestone: DEIA workgroup identifies schedule to review DVR procedural directives
  + Timeline: Within three months of State Plan approval
* Leverage Maine’s Cabinet on Aging work to promote age-inclusive practices within Maine DVR and contracted vendors
  + Milestone: Recommendations for age-inclusive practices identified via Cabinet on Aging
  + Timeline: Within three months of State Plan approval
* With SRC support, continue to develop resources in languages other than English. New Rehabilitation Assistant positions will provide outreach to marginalized and underserved populations
  + Milestone: DVR hires, trains and deploys Rehabilitation Assistants in the regions
  + Timeline: Immediately
  + Milestone: With SRC, DVR establishes plan for which materials to make available in additional languages
  + Timeline: Within three months of State Plan approval
* Continue cross-state agency partnership to expand number and skill of ASL interpreters available to support access for people who are Deaf.
  + Milestone: Recommendation report and plan issued
  + Timeline: Within three months of State Plan approval
* Statewide Business Relations Consultant and other certified staff to provide Windmills training to employers and other partners
  + Milestone: Statewide Business Relations Consultant provides data on number and role of individuals trained with Windmills curriculum
  + Timeline: Within three months of State Plan approval and then ongoing quarterly
* Offer staff training on IPS model of supported employment to better support individuals with mental health in employment
  + Milestone: All VR counselors and casework supervisors have participated in foundational IPS training
  + Timeline: Within six months of State Plan approval
* In partnership with Maine CITE, develop and deliver staff training on Assistive Technology.
  + Milestone: All VR counselors and casework supervisors have participated in foundational AT training
  + Timeline: Within three months of State Plan approval

### GEPA 427 Form Instructions for Application Package - Supported Employment

**EQUITY FOR STUDENTS, EDUCATORS, AND OTHER PROGRAM BENEFICIARIES**

OMB Control Number 1894-0005 Expiration 02/28/2026

**Section 427 of the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA)** ([20 U.S.C. 1228a](https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/USCODE-2020-title20/html/USCODE-2020-title20-chap31-subchapII-part2-sec1228a.htm)) applies to a State applicant submitting a state plan for a formula grant from the US Department of Education.  The State applicant is responsible for completing the GEPA Section 427 form that provides a description of the steps the State proposes to take to ensure all program beneficiaries have equitable access to, and participation in, its Federally funded, State-level project or activity.

**GEPA Section 427 Form Instructions for State Applicants**

**State applicants must respond to the following four questions:**

1. Describe how your entity’s existing mission, policies, or commitments ensure equitable access to, and equitable participation in, the proposed project or activity.

2. Based on your proposed project or activity, what barriers may impede equitable access and participation of students, educators, or other beneficiaries?

3. Based on the barriers identified, what steps will you take to address such barriers to equitable access and participation in the proposed project or activity?

4. What is your timeline, including targeted milestones, for addressing these identified barriers?

• Applicants identify any barriers that may impede equitable access and participation in the proposed project or activity, including, but not limited to, barriers based on economic disadvantage, gender, race, ethnicity, color, national origin, disability, age, language, migrant status, rural status, homeless status or housing insecurity, pregnancy, parenting, or caregiving status, and sexual orientation.

• Applicants use the associated text box to respond to each question.  However, applicants might have already included some or all this required information in the narrative sections of their applications or their State Plans.  In responding to this requirement, for each question, applicants may provide a cross-reference to the section(s) in their State Plans that includes the information responsive to that question on this form or may restate that information on this form.

• Applicants are not required to have mission statements or policies that align with equity to apply.

• Applicants that have already undertaken steps to address barriers must still provide an explanation and/or description of the steps already taken in each text box, as appropriate, to satisfy the GEPA Section 427 requirement.

• Applicants that believe no barriers exist must still provide an explanation and/or description to each question to validate that perception, as appropriate, to satisfy the GEPA Section 427 requirement.

Please refer to [GEPA 427 - Form Instructions for Application Package](https://wioaplans.ed.gov/node/584561)

#### 1. Describe how your entity’s existing mission, policies, or commitments ensure equitable access to, and equitable participation in, the proposed project or activity.

***Section 427 of the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA)****(*[*20 U.S.C. 1228a*](https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/USCODE-2020-title20/html/USCODE-2020-title20-chap31-subchapII-part2-sec1228a.htm)*) applies to a State applicant submitting a state plan for a formula grant from the US Department of Education.  The State applicant is responsible for completing the GEPA Section 427 form that provides a description of the steps the State proposes to take to ensure all program beneficiaries have equitable access to, and participation in, its Federally funded, State-level project or activity.*

[*GEPA 427 - Form Instructions for Application Package*](https://wioaplans.ed.gov/node/584561)

***State applicants must respond to four questions.***

***The first of four questions is:***

*Describe how your entity’s existing mission, policies, or commitments ensure equitable access to, and equitable participation in, the proposed project or activity.*

Maine DVR, as part of the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services in the Maine Department of Labor, works to bring about full access to employment, independence and community integration for people with disabilities. The State of Maine has committed to the principles of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility and this is reflected in many initiatives including cross-Bureau leadership development activities at the DSA level. Additionally, Maine DVR has identified an individual to serve as a lead on DEIA and this position supports a DSU-level workgroup that has developed and delivered ongoing staff training and is working towards ongoing policy and practice recommendations. The DEIA lead also participates in the CSAVR DEIA committee nationally and Maine DVR has received training on targeted DEIA needs through national TA centers. Maine DVR  ensures client informed choice through its rules and procedural directives governing VR services <https://www.maine.gov/sos/cec/rules/12/152/152c001.docx> and notifies applicants and clients of their rights through its notice of Client Rights and Responsibilities <https://www.maine.gov/rehab/docs/2023/dvr/ClientRightsandResponsibilitiesDVR.docx>. Language access for non-English speakers and Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals who use ASL is assured through state and agency policies. The State of Maine maintains contracts for qualified interpreters and language translation. The Maine Human Rights Act is Maine's anti-discrimination law. It prohibits discrimination on the basis of protected class in employment, housing, places of public accommodation, education, and extension of credit. <https://www.maine.gov/mhrc/about>. Maine’s Employment First law, ensures that employment is the first and preferred service option for individuals with disabilities. <https://employmentfirstmaine.org/> . Six-week long comprehensive New Counselor Training contains a number of modules designed to ensure that VR counselors are well-prepared with knowledge of resources and strategies to ensure inclusive practices.

#### 2. Based on your proposed project or activity, what barriers may impede equitable access and participation of students, educators, or other beneficiaries?

***Section 427 of the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA)****(*[*20 U.S.C. 1228a*](https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/USCODE-2020-title20/html/USCODE-2020-title20-chap31-subchapII-part2-sec1228a.htm)*) applies to a State applicant submitting a state plan for a formula grant from the US Department of Education.  The State applicant is responsible for completing the GEPA Section 427 form that provides a description of the steps the State proposes to take to ensure all program beneficiaries have equitable access to, and participation in, its Federally funded, State-level project or activity.*

[GEPA 427 - Form Instructions for Application Package](https://wioaplans.ed.gov/node/584561)

***State applicants must respond to four questions.***

***The second of four questions is:***

*Based on your proposed project or activity, what barriers may impede equitable access and participation of students, educators, or other beneficiaries?*

Potential barriers include:

* Lack of coordination between HCBS Medicaid waiver services and Vocational Rehabilitation
* Lack of information on benefits counseling and impace of employment on public benefits
* Lack of financial resources that impact ability to access virtual or in-person services
* Lack of transportation to services and employment
* Gender identity which may result in intersectional stigma or stereotyping that impairs access to programs and services
* Age-related stereotyping leading to intersectional barriers
* Lack of English language proficiency leading to lack of access to or awareness of programs and services
* Lack of access to ASL interpreters due to demand level across the state
* Lack of access to service providers due to rural geographic location
* Lack of physical and programmatic access due to barriers in places of employment
* Lack of awareness of Assistive Technology resources
* Lack of housing stability leading to challenges in consistent access to programs and services including employment
* Unmet behavioral health or substance use treatment needs leading to lack of ability to access certain programs and services
* Unmet childcare needs which prevent individual from accessing programs and services

#### 3. Based on the barriers identified, what steps will you take to address such barriers to equitable access and participation in the proposed project or activity?

***Section 427 of the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA)****(*[*20 U.S.C. 1228a*](https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/USCODE-2020-title20/html/USCODE-2020-title20-chap31-subchapII-part2-sec1228a.htm)*) applies to a State applicant submitting a state plan for a formula grant from the US Department of Education.  The State applicant is responsible for completing the GEPA Section 427 form that provides a description of the steps the State proposes to take to ensure all program beneficiaries have equitable access to, and participation in, its Federally funded, State-level project or activity.*

[*GEPA 427 - Form Instructions for Application Package*](https://wioaplans.ed.gov/node/584561)

***State applicants must respond to four questions.***

***The third of four questions is:***

*Based on the barriers identified, what steps will you take to address such barriers to equitable access and participation in the proposed project or activity?*

* Launch four (4) new Rehabilitation Counselor II positions to serve targeted caseloads of individuals with Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities (I/DD) and collaborate with Maine’s Office of Aging and Disability Services.
* Contract with Maine Medical Center for the provision of Community Work Incentive Coordinator/Benefits Counseling services
* With One-Stop partners, offer ongoing regional staff training on local resources to address food, housing, transportation, childcare instability so that VR counselors are aware of referral opportunities
* Leverage technical assistance from DEIA efforts at the agency, state and national level to ensure Maine DVR procedural guidance reflects DEIA principles
* Leverage Maine’s Cabinet on Aging work to promote age-inclusive practices within Maine DVR and contracted vendors
* With SRC support, continue to develop resources in languages other than English. New Rehabilitation Assistant positions will provide outreach to marginalized and underserved populations
* Continue cross-state agency partnership to expand number and skill of ASL interpreters available to support access for people who are Deaf.
* Statewide Business Relations Consultant and other certified staff to provide Windmills training to employers and other partners
* Offer staff training on IPS model of supported employment to better support individuals with mental health in employment
* In partnership with Maine CITE, develop and deliver staff training on Assistive Technology.

#### 4. What is your timeline, including targeted milestones, for addressing these identified barriers?

***Section 427 of the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA)****(*[*20 U.S.C. 1228a*](https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/USCODE-2020-title20/html/USCODE-2020-title20-chap31-subchapII-part2-sec1228a.htm)*) applies to a State applicant submitting a state plan for a formula grant from the US Department of Education.  The State applicant is responsible for completing the GEPA Section 427 form that provides a description of the steps the State proposes to take to ensure all program beneficiaries have equitable access to, and participation in, its Federally funded, State-level project or activity.*

[*GEPA 427 - Form Instructions for Application Package*](https://wioaplans.ed.gov/node/584561)

***State applicants must respond to four questions.***

***The final of four questions is:***

*What is your timeline, including targeted milestones, for addressing these identified barriers?*

* Launch four (4) new Rehabilitation Counselor II positions to serve targeted caseloads of individuals with Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities (I/DD) and collaborate with Maine’s Office of Aging and Disability Services.
  + Milestone: Four new targeted-caseload Rehabilitation Counselor IIs hired and trained in collaboration with the Office of Aging and Disability Services
  + Timeline: Underway currently to be completed within 60 days
* With One-Stop partners, offer ongoing regional staff training on local resources to address food, housing, transportation, childcare instability so that VR counselors are aware of referral opportunities
  + Milestone: Regional staff meeting agendas include standing item on area resources
  + Timeline: Within three months of State Plan approval
* Leverage technical assistance from DEIA efforts at the agency, state and national level to ensure Maine DVR procedural guidance reflects DEIA principles
  + Milestone: DEIA workgroup identifies schedule to review DVR procedural directives
  + Timeline: Within three months of State Plan approval
* Leverage Maine’s Cabinet on Aging work to promote age-inclusive practices within Maine DVR and contracted vendors
  + Milestone: Recommendations for age-inclusive practices identified via Cabinet on Aging
  + Timeline: Within three months of State Plan approval
* With SRC support, continue to develop resources in languages other than English. New Rehabilitation Assistant positions will provide outreach to marginalized and underserved populations
  + Milestone: DVR hires, trains and deploys Rehabilitation Assistants in the regions
  + Timeline: Immediately
  + Milestone: With SRC, DVR establishes plan for which materials to make available in additional languages
  + Timeline: Within three months of State Plan approval
* Continue cross-state agency partnership to expand number and skill of ASL interpreters available to support access for people who are Deaf.
  + Milestone: Recommendation report and plan issued
  + Timeline: Within three months of State Plan approval
* Statewide Business Relations Consultant and other certified staff to provide Windmills training to employers and other partners
  + Milestone: Statewide Business Relations Consultant provides data on number and role of individuals trained with Windmills curriculum
  + Timeline: Within three months of State Plan approval and then ongoing quarterly
* Offer staff training on IPS model of supported employment to better support individuals with mental health in employment
  + Milestone: All VR counselors and casework supervisors have participated in foundational IPS training
  + Timeline: Within six months of State Plan approval
* In partnership with Maine CITE, develop and deliver staff training on Assistive Technology.
  + Milestone: All VR counselors and casework supervisors have participated in foundational AT training
  + Timeline: Within three months of State Plan approval