**VR Portion of WIOA State Plan for the State of Maine - August 31, 2016**

**Program-Specific Requirements for Vocational Rehabilitation (General)**

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

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\* Sec. 102(b)(D)(iii) of WIOA

**a. Input of State Rehabilitation Council**

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

**1. input provided by the State Rehabilitation Council, including input and recommendations on the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan, recommendations from the Council's report, the review and analysis of consumer satisfaction, and other Council reports that may have been developed as part of the Council’s functions;**

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

SRC: Why is the DOC MOU listed as in progress? Hasn’t DVR been working with DOC for several years in terms of identifying pre–release individuals who qualify for VR? When will the MOU be completed?

(J) Statewide Assessment

SRC: The advocacy and advice of Client Assistance Program should be included.

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

SRC: Regarding AgrAbility, the plan states that funding ended in 2014. A new AgrAbility award was secured by University of Maine. Does this plan indicate that DVR funding for AgrAbility support has ended?

(d) Coordination with Education Officials

SRC: Without exception, once a DVR client, DVR has 90 days to develop the IPE. This cannot be contingent on the student leaving school as implied in this section.

(d) Coordination with Education Officials

SRC: DVR should not be determining the appropriateness of a referral. The onus of long term support should be on DVR not the school.

(d) Coordination with Education Officials

SRC: How often does this occur?

(d) Coordination with Education Officials

SRC: Is this in compliance with WIOA?

(G) Coordination with Employers

SRC: Business Relations Specialist – plan indicates position has not been filled and duties have been suspended. Will this position be filled, and if not, how will DVR work to expand/improve outreach to businesses?

(H) Interagency Cooperation SRC: Training for Employment Specialists is offered a limited number of times during the year in Maine. Is there a plan to increase the number of ACRE trainings offered?

(H) Interagency Cooperation

SRC: Why has DVR decided to suspend the mentoring program?

(H) Interagency Cooperation

SRC: Why is the limited data from MDOL’s unemployment insurance “the only data available”? What other options have been explored?

(H) Interagency Cooperation

SRC: In section on “Interagency Support of Benefits Counseling”: Additionally through its collaboration with DHHS and specifically the coordination of Maine’s benefits counseling network DVR has been able to develop opportunities and overcome barriers to competitive integrated employment for individuals with visual impairments who are eligible for MaineCare, the State’s Medicaid program.” How are these individuals being served through DBVI? What role does DVR play?

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

SRC: Regarding high rate of turnover among VRC’s (and other staff), DVR should consider adding a goal to address high turnover among VRC’s. While retirement is an issue and certainly state pay for VRC’s is lower than VRC’s can make in the private sector, DVR must identify other ways to retain VRC’s.

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

SRC: Why is VR not reporting the number of VR counselor positions that were replaced in 2015?

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

SRC: The projected number of the VRC II positions seems accurate if we are only looking at retirements; this number would be much higher if you looked at other factors such as resignations for other opportunities or medical leaves.

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

SRC: How many rehab counselors were hired in FY 2015 and how many of those were fully qualified?

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

SRC: Please elaborate on "offering personnel development opportunities that enhance the work environment and support service delivery." Has DVR examined with HR offering alternative work schedules, flexible scheduling, vacation, retirement options etc.? Has DVR developed any creative solutions to retaining and recruiting staff?

(J) Statewide Assessment

SRC: Please discuss in detail the “best practices” that emerged from the June 2015 review of the DVR Service Delivery System (Process Mapping).

(K) Annual Estimates

SRC: The State plan estimates that 20% of clients will be OOS 3 which would equate to 2000 clients. The state plan indicates that DVR is not in an order of selection for FY 16. This needs to be corrected to reflect that DVR has entered into an order of selection for category 3.

(K) Annual Estimates

SRC: The State Plan states that $1.8 million is allocated to serve category 3. Given the waitlist in this category, will all of these funds go to serving category 3 or will some be rolled into categories 1 & 2?

(L) State Goals and Priorities (Goal 1)

SRC: Given the wait list in category 3 and a delay in realizing successful closures for transition students, would it be reasonable to decrease goal of successful closures? What are the expected numbers for 2017–2020?

(L) State Goals and Priorities (Goal 2)

SRC: Add “and significant disabilities” after “To serve all individuals with the most significant disabilities.”

(M) Order of Selection

SRC: This reflects that, again DVR believes they’re able to continue to serve all categories. Please edit to reflect waitlist.

(O) State’s Strategies (Goal 1)

SRC: This goal is somewhat confusing. It does not indicate the goal for 2016 through 2018.

(O) State’s Strategies (Goal 1 Objective 3)

SRC: Include a strategy that more closely tracks the effectiveness of both CRP’s and the outcome based payment system. CRP’s are no longer required to submit reports to VRC’s or their clients; it may be helpful for all if CRP reports were required again.

(O) State’s Strategies (Goal 2)

SRC: Please include data to support the statement that the career exploration workshop has been shown to decrease case length time.

(O) State’s Strategies (Goal 2 Objective 4)

SRC: Has DVR collected evidence to support a 5% decrease in the statewide unemployment rate of people with intellectual disabilities? Why does this objective only address individuals with intellectual disabilities when Employment First Maine is a cross–disability initiative? (O) State’s Strategies (Goal 2 Objective 4)

SRC: Why are there no strategies listed here?

(O) State’s Strategies (Goal 3 Objective 2)

SRC: DVR should consider adding strategies for reaching “New Mainers.”

(O) State’s Strategies (Goal 3 Objective 3)

SRC: Please identify what I SPA is.

(O) State’s Strategies (Goals 3, 4 and 5)

SRC: There is a lot of discussion of partnering with the various agencies and the development of MOU’s. I am not seeing where or how this information is filtered down to the 65 VRC’s.

(O) State’s Strategies (Goal 4 Objective 3)

SRC: How will DVR work with WIOA core partners to support them in providing services with a “rehabilitation” component? .

(O) State’s Strategies (Goal 4 Objective 4)

SRC: Is this a realistic objective given the long–standing vacancy in the Worker’s Comp. position?

(O) State’s Strategies (Goal 4 Objective 5)

SRC: Why are there no strategies listed here?

(O) State’s Strategies (Goal 5 – Performance accountability indicators under section 116 of WIOA

SRC: The plan outlines information as it relates to DBVI. How does it relate to DVR?

(P) Evaluation and Reports of Progress: VR and Supported Employment Goals (Goal 1)

SRC: Could you please include specific data on dropouts for 2014 and 2015? Please list the numbers expected to achieve successful closures for each year of the new plan.

(P) Evaluation and Reports of Progress: VR and Supported Employment Goals (Goal 1 Objective 2 c)

SRC: Is DVR surprised by the 22.5% increase in spending on CRP expenditures? Given that costs were higher, fewer clients served, and fewer successful closures achieved, does DVR plan to analyze this more extensively and reevaluate the effectiveness of the CRP outcome–based payment system?

(P) Evaluation and Reports of Progress: VR and Supported Employment Goals (Goal 1 Objective 3 a)

SRC: Is there a plan to recruit a Business Relations Specialist? Or will these positions continue to be unfilled?

(P) Evaluation and Reports of Progress: VR and Supported Employment Goals (Goal 1 Objective 3 d)

SRC: Is there a plan to renew this partnership? CNA and nursing positions seem to be in high demand. It would be advantageous for DOL to pursue this further.

(P) Evaluation and Reports of Progress: VR and Supported Employment Goals (Goal 2 Objective 1a)

SRC: Can you please provide more specific data on the impact of the CEW and days to plan? It seems that if people need to wait a month or possibly two to attend the CEW it may create a delay in developing an IPE. The CEW seems to have become the standard practice for career exploration. Please elaborate on other tools that can be used as an alternative rather than the CEW.

(P) Evaluation and Reports of Progress: VR and Supported Employment Goals (Goal 3 Objective 2a)

SRC: Why has DVR not collected baseline data on the above individuals served?

(P) Evaluation and Reports of Progress: VR and Supported Employment Goals (Goal 3 Objective 2c)

SRC: Are these vignettes intended to replace the orientation to VR services video? The online orientation is difficult to find on the VR website, although the vignettes are very easy to access.

(P) Evaluation and Reports of Progress: VR and Supported Employment Goals (Provide a report on how the funds reserved for innovation and expansion (I&E) activities were utilized in FY 2015)

SRC: Edit SRC committees to include the following: DVR/SRC Policy Committee, Communication Committee, Membership Committee, State Plan Committee, Executive Committee and Business Committee.

(Q) Quality, Scope, and Extent of Supported Employment Services (Page 61 lines 1–5)

SRC: Please include the SRC annual training in October 2014. TACE Facilitators provided training to SRC members on WIOA and Order of Selection. In 2015, DBVI SRC and DVR SRC held joint training on implications of WIOA.

General Comments

SRC: The DVR and DBVI State Plans appear to have several sections with exact or similar information. How will DVR and DBVI work together in light of the financial issues that have occurred as well as the strained relations between the two departments during the current year?

SRC: When reading the DVR State Plan, there is little indication that the department has reported a deficit of nearly $1 million dollars for the current year. Please identify the problem as well as strategies for correcting the problem. Perhaps it would be appropriate to include a goal in this area.

SRC: The DVR draft plan released for public comment was incomplete and contained sections that were cut and pasted erroneously from DBVI state plan.

Section D – Coordination with Education Officials SRC: The SRC recommends increased training and clarification be provided to schools regarding the interagency agreement with VR, and specifically the collaborative role of both agencies in the transition planning process for youth with disabilities. There appears to be a need for increased information and clarification with school departments about the type and nature of Pre–Employment Transition Services which are available from VR, when a referred student becomes a “client” of VR, and the school department’s role in employment planning once VR is involved.

Section H – Interagency Cooperation SRC: The SRC supports and commends DVR in their efforts to foster collaborative relationships and coordinated services with the Office of Aging and Disability Services and the Office of Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services, as well as in connecting VR consumers with Benefits Counseling Services. However, the SRC recommends that DVR undertake outreach efforts with the Office of Family Independence, which is responsible for determining eligibility for MaineCare, Maine’s state Medicaid plan. All services from OADS and SAMHS flow from MaineCare eligibility, and OFI policy changes and initiatives greatly impact service provision and employment outcomes for VR consumers. As such, VR consumers would benefit greatly from education and involvement of OFI officials in the coordination of services to support employment for people with disabilities. The continued absence of this department from all statewide efforts aimed at improving employment outcomes for people with disabilities is concerning.

Section J – Statewide Assessment VR staff turnover remains a challenge and affects clients in significant ways. While entry level salaries for VR counselors remain low and budgetary constraints are unlikely to change, the SRC recommends that DVR examine other strategies for retaining new counselors, including the availability of leadership opportunities, mentoring, or other incentives that may make counselors feel engaged, appreciated, and connected to their workplace.

Section P – Evaluation and Reports of Progress: VR and Supported Employment Goals

Goal 1: Increase Successful Closures of VR Clients

SRC: Over the past several years, DVR has typically set a goal of increasing employment outcomes over the outcomes of previous years. Those goals have consistently been met, which speaks to the skill and dedication of DVR staff. These are excellent achievements. However, due to the projected budget shortfall, strained staffing resources, and newly entered Order of Selection for Category 3, expecting additional growth in the number of successful closures does not seem like a realistic goal. DVR should consider maintaining the employment outcome goal at the FY15 level, or even decreasing the successful closure number.

SRC: The SRC supports the objective of reducing the number of clients who drop out of services. The high number of clients who drop out of services remains an issue of concern. Towards that end, the SRC supports further policy changes and process streamlining based on the “Process Mapping” Project undertaken by DVR.

Goal 2: To serve all individuals with the most significant disabilities in a timely manner

SRC: The SRC notes that DVR has made significant progress in reducing the “time to plan” for VR clients, although the WIOA timeline of 90 days remains a challenge. We understand that training and projects to further reduce the time to plan are ongoing, and the SRC looks forward to further collaboration and discussion on this issue.

Goal 3: Increase clients from minority and underserved populations

SRC: The SRC requests an update on the status of installing VRI equipment at VR offices and Career Centers. A Request for Proposals on Video Remote Technology (VRI) went out in 2014, yet VRI remains unavailable at all VR and Career Center offices. The delay in implementing this communication access technology is concerning. VRI should be installed and staff trained in using VRI as soon as possible in order to guarantee accessibility to effective communication for Deaf clients. VRI availability will increase access for individuals living in remote areas of the state who are Deaf and have limited access to ASL interpreters. VRI will also increase client access for short or spontaneous meetings.

**2. the Designated State unit's response to the Council’s input and recommendations; and**

The State Rehabilitation Council for the Maine Division of Vocational Rehabilitation is pleased to offer the following comments to the 2016 VR portion of the Unified State Plan. Section (c) Cooperative Agreements with Agencies Not Carrying Out Activities Under the Statewide Workforce Development System

SRC: Why is the DOC MOU listed as in progress? Hasn’t DVR been working with DOC for several years in terms of identifying pre–release individuals who qualify for VR? When will the MOU be completed?

AGENCY RESPONSE: In Section C of the Unified State Plan, this has been updated as follows: • Department of Corrections and VR MOU – Procedural Guidance The Maine Department of Labor– Bureau of Rehabilitation Services and the Maine Department of Corrections (DOC) have worked together to establish procedural guidance on collaboration between the two agencies. Work thus far has resulted in two procedural directives outlining how the two agencies will work together to best meet the needs of individuals who are currently incarcerated or on probation and may be eligible for vocational rehabilitation services. In each of the larger offices a DVR staff member has been identified who serves as the liaison to the correctional agencies in their region. DVR corrections liaisons meet as a group on a quarterly basis with DOC staff to share updates and best practices.

(J) Statewide Assessment

SRC: The advocacy and advice of Client Assistance Program should be included.

AGENCY RESPONSE: Section J (Statewide Assessment) within the Executive Summary includes the following: Demand for community inclusion and access to employment by people with disabilities and their supporters continues to be strong across the country with consumer choice and opportunity for full participation being important for all. The advocacy and advice of the State Rehabilitation Council, Client Assistance Program, and Disability Rights Center, as well as groups such as Maine APSE and the Employment First Coalition, help to ensure that rights are being respected, laws are being followed, and practices are being improved to increase the successful employment of people with disabilities.

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

SRC: Regarding AgrAbility, the plan states that funding ended in 2014. A new AgrAbility award was secured by University of Maine. Does this plan indicate that DVR funding for AgrAbility support has ended?

AGENCY RESPONSE: Section C (Cooperative Agreements) states the following: DVR does support staff involvement in the USDA’s AgrAbility project. In Maine, the AgrAbility project is administered by Alpha One, Goodwill Industries of New England and the University of Maine. The liaison to the project ensures that DVR staff is knowledgeable about AgrAbility and related resources. Grant funding for AgrAbility is ending during 2014 and DVR anticipates development of a fee for service agreement for AgrAbility services.

(d) Coordination with Education Officials

SRC: Without exception, once a DVR client, DVR has 90 days to develop the IPE. This cannot be contingent on the student leaving school as implied in this section.

AGENCY RESPONSE: The language in this section comes from DVR’s current Memorandum of Understanding with the Maine Department of Education. The MOU will be updated following the issuance of new regulations under WIOA.

(d) Coordination with Education Officials

SRC: DVR should not be determining the appropriateness of a referral. The onus of long term support should be on DVR not the school.

AGENCY RESPONSE: As above, the language in this section comes from DVR’s current Memorandum of Understanding with the Maine Department of Education. This language will be rewritten in the new MOU. In section D (2)(A)3, the following is stated: 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." The statement included here does directly involve the VR Counselor in determining appropriateness of the referral and information on “access” to LTS, not the LTS determination.

(d) Coordination with Education Officials

SRC: How often does this occur?

AGENCY RESPONSE: in response to the question raised regarding the following in section D(2)(A)3: “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 has regular communication with Schools and Education personnel by participating in IEP meetings and having a DOE representative on the SRC. Also, in section D(1) of the State Plan, DVR states the following: 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. DVR meets monthly with DOE as part of DOE’s State Personnel Development Grant’s subcommittee on Transition. Additionally, the DVR Assistant Director serves as the Chair of the IDEA Part B State Advisory Panel.

(d) Coordination with Education Officials

SRC: Is this in compliance with WIOA?

AGENCY RESPONSE: This language is from DVR’s current MOU which will be updated to reflect changes under WIOA as soon as regulations are released.

(G) Coordination with Employers

SRC: Business Relations Specialist – plan indicates position has not been filled and duties have been suspended. Will this position be filled, and if not, how will DVR work to expand/improve outreach to businesses?

AGENCY RESPONSE: One current position is charged with the responsibility of overseeing the Progressive Employment pilot project and the full–time position is being utilized in a half–time capacity. Maine DVR applied for and is participating in a learning collaborative with the Vermont Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and the Institute for Community Inclusion (ICI) to study and determine if the Vermont Progressive Employment model can be replicated in Maine. The Progressive Employment Model is a dual–customer strategy that is designed to assist job–seekers with significant barriers to employment and assist employers who may be averse to hiring employees with disabilities. The model coordinates rehabilitation counseling with job placement and business account management. Key components of Maine’s Progressive Employment project will target transition–age youth within southern Maine service areas. Selected Community Rehabilitation Providers (CRPs) will develop Progressive Employment opportunities within the catchment area identified. These activities include: informational interviews, job shadows, business tours, on–the–job training/apprenticeships and work experiences. Business Development during the pilot project includes identifying potential business leads based on the goals of the individual referrals and contacting the employer; requesting an informational interview; requesting a tour of the business or facility; sharing information about DVR and determining if the employer is willing to allow the Employment Specialist to conduct assessments, informational interviews, job shadows or on–the–job training. The secondary purpose of this business development process, as it is described, is to gain an understanding of the various positions which this business employs and to ascertain the work environment and work culture. CRPs will develop 125 new business contacts during the length of the pilot and the contact information will be added to the list of active partnerships currently in use, which will greatly enlarge our existing global employer network.

A Rehabilitation Consultant works closely with the Bureau of Human Resources to assist eligible individuals with disabilities to access Maine State Government’s "Special Appointment" program. DVR has a number of staff with disabilities and provides appropriate accessibility accommodations to support employment. The State of Maine is an Equal Employment Opportunity/Affirmative Action employer.

The CareerCenters also provide a number of other employment programs that serve people with disabilities. The Maine Job Bank is an online accessible CareerCenter tool to allow job seekers from around the state to be matched with real–time available open positions.

Please see Goal 1 of this plan for more information about planned business outreach strategies.

(H) Interagency Cooperation SRC: Training for Employment Specialists is offered a limited number of times during the year in Maine. Is there a plan to increase the number of ACRE trainings offered?

AGENCY RESPONSE: The ACRE trainings are being provided in–person four times per year. A RFP for this work is currently out and it requests that an online option also be available for providers to consider.

(H) Interagency Cooperation

SRC: Why has DVR decided to suspend the mentoring program?

AGENCY RESPONSE: This decision was undertaken by the WDS partners based on the lack of interest by employment specialists and the availability of mentors.

(H) Interagency Cooperation

SRC: Why is the limited data from MDOL’s unemployment insurance “the only data available”? What other options have been explored?

AGENCY RESPONSE: DVR is working with MDOL and partners to identify other data sources. Unemployment Insurance is a rich data source, but does miss some workers – particularly those in self–employment, federal employment, or employment out of state.

(H) Interagency Cooperation

SRC: In section on “Interagency Support of Benefits Counseling”: Additionally through its collaboration with DHHS and specifically the coordination of Maine’s benefits counseling network DVR has been able to develop opportunities and overcome barriers to competitive integrated employment for individuals with visual impairments who are eligible for MaineCare, the State’s Medicaid program.” How are these individuals being served through DBVI? What role does DVR play?

AGENCY RESPONSE: Just as DVR clients are able to access Benefits Counseling Services and be served with provisions through MaineCare, DBVI clients are able to participate in and benefit from these services. Some examples of utilizing MaineCare to overcome barriers to employment are mental health counseling; low vision evaluations; personal support services.

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

SRC: Regarding high rate of turnover among VRC’s (and other staff), DVR should consider adding a goal to address high turnover among VRC’s. While retirement is an issue and certainly state pay for VRC’s is lower than VRC’s can make in the private sector, DVR must identify other ways to retain VRC’s.

AGENCY RESPONSE: DVR continuously explores various options for expanding human and fiscal resources. In a climate of economic fluctuations and increasing demands on public service systems, we agree completely that a high priority is creating and identifying ways to retain qualified staff. One of the ways we accomplish this is to support staff, through training and opportunities, to develop their skills as rehabilitation professionals. Also, Maine is now again offering merit or cost of living increases again after being discontinued in 2008. In addition, efforts are made through local and statewide recognition events, to acknowledge the contributions staff make to improve the lives of Maine people with disabilities.

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

SRC: Why is VR not reporting the number of VR counselor positions that were replaced in 2015?

AGENCY RESPONSE: During FFY 2015, 13 Rehabilitation Counselor II positions were filled. This number includes some individuals who promoted from within the agency as well as new hires from outside state government. One of those 13 was fully qualified at hire.

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

SRC: The projected number of the VRC II positions seems accurate if we are only looking at retirements; this number would be much higher if you looked at other factors such as resignations for other opportunities or medical leaves.

AGENCY RESPONSE: Yes, we concur.

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

SRC: How many rehab counselors were hired in FY 2015 and how many of those were fully qualified?

AGENCY RESPONSE: Please see above.

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

SRC: Please elaborate on "offering personnel development opportunities that enhance the work environment and support service delivery." Has DVR examined with HR offering alternative work schedules, flexible scheduling, vacation, retirement options etc.? Has DVR developed any creative solutions to retaining and recruiting staff?

AGENCY RESPONSE: DVR offers regular training opportunities to agency personnel (employees) for professional development and personal growth. Currently, alternative work schedules and flexible work time is allowed depending on operational need with supervisory approval. All state employees receive paid vacation and sick time and retirement benefit options. Some of the ways DVR has recruited new staff is through our affiliation with Universities and provision of Internship opportunities. The DVR Director sits on the Advisory Board of the University of Southern Maine’s Rehabilitation Counseling program, strengthening and coordinating the relationship between the two organizations. DVR invites USM and UMF faculty to participate in training opportunities throughout the year. Maine DVR has offered summer internships to UMF undergraduates to expose them to careers in vocational rehabilitation. UMF does expect to have three to eight students enrolled in their accelerated program beginning in January of 2016. Other means of recruitment are through participating in Regional and National Conferences and being involved with Rehabilitation organizations such as the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR).

(J) Statewide Assessment

SRC: Please discuss in detail the “best practices” that emerged from the June 2015 review of the DVR Service Delivery System (Process Mapping).

AGENCY RESPONSE: DVR is undertaking a targeted project due to be completed by July 2016 to further review and discuss which best practices listed in the report should be adopted and then a plan for how they can be adopted across other offices.

(K) Annual Estimates

SRC: The State plan estimates that 20% of clients will be OOS 3 which would equate to 2000 clients. The state plan indicates that DVR is not in an order of selection for FY 16. This needs to be corrected to reflect that DVR has entered into an order of selection for category 3.

AGENCY RESPONSE: Correct. This change will be made.

(K) Annual Estimates

SRC: The State Plan states that $1.8 million is allocated to serve category 3. Given the waitlist in this category, will all of these funds go to serving category 3 or will some be rolled into categories 1 & 2?

AGENCY RESPONSE: As above, we have revised this number from an earlier draft of the state plan to reflect the implementation of an Order of Selection.

(L) State Goals and Priorities (Goal 1)

SRC: Given the wait list in category 3 and a delay in realizing successful closures for transition students, would it be reasonable to decrease goal of successful closures? What are the expected numbers for 2017–2020?

AGENCY RESPONSE: DVR is committed to improving services and increasing successful employment outcomes for our customers/clients. While it may be challenging for the next few years and these outcomes will be impacted by changes in legislation and the waitlist, it is our belief that the projected numbers are realistic and achievable.

(L) State Goals and Priorities (Goal 2)

SRC: Add “and significant disabilities” after “To serve all individuals with the most significant disabilities.”

AGENCY RESPONSE: This has been revised in the current draft.

(M) Order of Selection

SRC: This reflects that, again DVR believes they’re able to continue to serve all categories. Please edit to reflect waitlist.

AGENCY RESPONSE: This has been changed in the current draft.

(O) State’s Strategies (Goal 1)

SRC: This goal is somewhat confusing. It does not indicate the goal for 2016 through 2018.

AGENCY RESPONSE: This has been revised in the current draft.

(O) State’s Strategies (Goal 1 Objective 3)

SRC: Include a strategy that more closely tracks the effectiveness of both CRP’s and the outcome based payment system. CRP’s are no longer required to submit reports to VRC’s or their clients; it may be helpful for all if CRP reports were required again.

AGENCY RESPONSE: DVR plans to review data and information regarding how the outcome based payment system has been working during early 2016. The SRC will be provided with this information as well and offered an opportunity to provide feedback to it. Depending on this review, there may be some changes to this system.

(O) State’s Strategies (Goal 2)

SRC: Please include data to support the statement that the career exploration workshop has been shown to decrease case length time.

AGENCY RESPONSE: Updating CEW data is part of the current process mapping resource project. DVR is examining how increasing efficiency in career exploration can support meeting the requirement to move clients into plans within 90 days. Another promising data point is that for individuals who completed the CEW and then reached a successful employment outcome – the average case cost was nearly $600 less compared to similar successful case closures without use of the CEW.

(O) State’s Strategies (Goal 2 Objective 4)

SRC: Has DVR collected evidence to support a 5% decrease in the statewide unemployment rate of people with intellectual disabilities? Why does this objective only address individuals with intellectual disabilities when Employment First Maine is a cross–disability initiative?

AGENCY RESPONSE: DVR is mandated to prioritize services to serve those with the greatest significance of disability. Individuals with intellectual disabilities have historically experienced substantial barriers to competitive, integrated employment. (O) State’s Strategies (Goal 2 Objective 4) SRC: Why are there no strategies listed here?

AGENCY RESPONSE: DVR will be adding strategies over the life of the plan.

(O) State’s Strategies (Goal 3 Objective 2)

SRC: DVR should consider adding strategies for reaching “New Mainers.”

AGENCY RESPONSE: Using data from the recently completed Needs Assessment, DVR will be developing strategies to address the needs of this population.

(O) State’s Strategies (Goal 3 Objective 3)

SRC: Please identify what I SPA is.

AGENCY RESPONSE: The Maine Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) is proposing to make changes to some MaineCare services through a 1915 (i) State Plan Amendment, also known as an iSPA. In this iSPA, Maine intends to streamline delivery systems and prioritize community and work–based habilitation support for adults. An iSPA provides states with greater autonomy and flexibility for providing services to Medicaid members while maintaining compliance with the federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS). The proposed changes will affect the following sections of MaineCare policy: Section 2, Adult Family Care Services; Section 17, Community Support Services; Section 26, Day Health Services; Section 97, Private Non–Medical Institutions DHHS is also proposing to add the following services to the MaineCare Benefits Manual: Benefits Counseling; Career Planning; Psycho–Social Club House; Residential Habilitation; Supported Employment–Individualized (O) State’s Strategies (Goals 3, 4 and 5)

SRC: There is a lot of discussion of partnering with the various agencies and the development of MOU’s. I am not seeing where or how this information is filtered down to the 65 VRC’s. AGENCY RESPONSE: DVR provides training through webinars, in services, “train the trainer” model of disseminating information and ensuring that all agency staff is informed and able to implement changes in policies and service delivery processes. In an effort to be efficient with time and funding, training may be provided through teleconference, use of the statewide Polycom system or by training the Regional Directors and Supervisors who in turn train regional staff.

(O) State’s Strategies (Goal 4 Objective 3)

SRC: How will DVR work with WIOA core partners to support them in providing services with a “rehabilitation” component? AGENCY RESPONSE: VR is represented on the three local work boards and involved in regional meetings with all four core partners to now take the goals that have been outlined in the Unified Plan and determine how to translate and integrate those goals in day to day practice. (O) State’s Strategies (Goal 4 Objective 4)

SRC: Is this a realistic objective given the long–standing vacancy in the Worker’s Comp. position?

AGENCY RESPONSE: Yes, we believe this is a realistic objective given the number of referrals that DVR receives from the Workers Compensation Board.

(O) State’s Strategies (Goal 4 Objective 5)

SRC: Why are there no strategies listed here?

AGENCY RESPONSE: DVR will be developing strategies to add as the plan goes forward.

(O) State’s Strategies (Goal 5 – Performance accountability indicators under section 116 of WIOA

SRC: The plan outlines information as it relates to DBVI. How does it relate to DVR?

AGENCY RESPONSE: This was an error and has been corrected. Both DVR and DBVI are partners with entities mentioned and will be applying the new rules related to WIOA.

(P) Evaluation and Reports of Progress: VR and Supported Employment Goals (Goal 1)

SRC: Could you please include specific data on dropouts for 2014 and 2015? Please list the numbers expected to achieve successful closures for each year of the new plan.

AGENCY RESPONSE: According to the most recent Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment, there were 1627 individuals in FFY 2011, 1177 individuals in FFY 2012, 1580 individuals in FFY 2013 and 1263 individuals in FFY 2014 who were closed before IPE Services were developed. Our goal is to increase successful closures for DVR clients from 1000 in 2014 and 1100 in 2015 to 1200 in 2016

(P) Evaluation and Reports of Progress: VR and Supported Employment Goals (Goal 1 Objective 2 c)

SRC: Is DVR surprised by the 22.5% increase in spending on CRP expenditures? Given that costs were higher, fewer clients served, and fewer successful closures achieved, does DVR plan to analyze this more extensively and reevaluate the effectiveness of the CRP outcome–based payment system?

AGENCY RESPONSE: There are increases to spending in services provided to clients through the Milestone payment process; likewise, there are benefits and improvements noted. A more thorough evaluation of the costs and benefit analysis and a determination to make adjustments to the existing process will be forthcoming. As noted earlier, DVR plans to review data and information regarding how the outcome based payment system has been working for us in spring 2016. Depending on that review, there may be some changes to this system.

(P) Evaluation and Reports of Progress: VR and Supported Employment Goals (Goal 1 Objective 3 a)

SRC: Is there a plan to recruit a Business Relations Specialist? Or will these positions continue to be unfilled?

AGENCY RESPONSE: Please see earlier response on this topic.

(P) Evaluation and Reports of Progress: VR and Supported Employment Goals (Goal 1 Objective 3 d)

SRC: Is there a plan to renew this partnership? CNA and nursing positions seem to be in high demand. It would be advantageous for DOL to pursue this further.

AGENCY RESPONSE: DVR will not include this as a strategy at this time.

(P) Evaluation and Reports of Progress: VR and Supported Employment Goals (Goal 2 Objective 1a)

SRC: Can you please provide more specific data on the impact of the CEW and days to plan? It seems that if people need to wait a month or possibly two to attend the CEW it may create a delay in developing an IPE. The CEW seems to have become the standard practice for career exploration. Please elaborate on other tools that can be used as an alternative rather than the CEW.

AGENCY RESPONSE: Training has been completed with VRC’s that if the CEW is determined to be the best tool to use to assist with career exploration, then they can write a plan for employment that includes the use of the CEW and or other exploration. VR is also using Discovering Personal Genius™ in conjunction with DHHS, or paying for it as a stand alone service if that tool is determined to be the best fit. VR also regularly refers for on the job assessments which can be included as part of someone’s plan.

(P) Evaluation and Reports of Progress: VR and Supported Employment Goals (Goal 3 Objective 2a)

SRC: Why has DVR not collected baseline data on the above individuals served?

AGENCY RESPONSE: VR has been collecting baseline data through the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment. This new data will assist to inform goal–setting.

(P) Evaluation and Reports of Progress: VR and Supported Employment Goals (Goal 3 Objective 2c)

SRC: Are these vignettes intended to replace the orientation to VR services video? The online orientation is difficult to find on the VR website, although the vignettes are very easy to access.

AGENCY RESPONSE: No, the intent of the captioned/audio video vignettes is to supplement the other web based and in person Orientations to VR.

(P) Evaluation and Reports of Progress: VR and Supported Employment Goals (Provide a report on how the funds reserved for innovation and expansion (I&E) activities were utilized in FY 2015)

SRC: Edit SRC committees to include the following: DVR/SRC Policy Committee, Communication Committee, Membership Committee, State Plan Committee, Executive Committee and Business Committee.

AGENCY RESPONSE: Done

(Q) Quality, Scope, and Extent of Supported Employment Services (Page 61 lines 1–5)

SRC: Please include the SRC annual training in October 2014. TACE Facilitators provided training to SRC members on WIOA and Order of Selection. In 2015, DBVI SRC and DVR SRC held joint training on implications of WIOA.

AGENCY RESPONSE: DVR will review the request for potential inclusion.

General Comments

SRC: The DVR and DBVI State Plans appear to have several sections with exact or similar information. How will DVR and DBVI work together in light of the financial issues that have occurred as well as the strained relations between the two departments during the current year?

AGENCY RESPONSE: There are certain requirements of the Title I Vocational Rehabilitation Program that result in both State Agencies sharing similar or as mentioned the same information. However, the solution to each agency’s budget/financial challenges has been and will be unique as a result of having different resources, missions, program goals and client needs. This being said, it makes sense to collaborate and share our efforts when our client’s best interests are met more effectively and efficiently by doing so.

SRC: When reading the DVR State Plan, there is little indication that the department has reported a deficit of nearly $1 million dollars for the current year. Please identify the problem as well as strategies for correcting the problem. Perhaps it would be appropriate to include a goal in this area.

AGENCY RESPONSE: DVR has been taking important and vital steps toward addressing the budget issues that surfaced in the recent months. We have categorized our responses into immediate, short term and long range actions to mitigate the shortfall in order to continue with provision of essential services to clients and provide a quality program. In the immediate, we have put a hold filling/expanding certain positions (i.e. Office Associates; Business Relations Specialist). Some of the short term solutions include the implementation of Process Mapping findings that will enable DVR to be more efficient and effective with both human and fiscal resources. Long term considerations include identifying and utilizing resources (human and fiscal) and working with WIOA partners to assist with preparing clients for employment and helping them to remain gainfully employed. Goal 2 of the plan addresses this topic.

SRC: The DVR draft plan released for public comment was incomplete and contained sections that were cut and pasted erroneously from DBVI state plan.

AGENCY RESPONSE: The new draft removes language that was inadvertently included.

Section D – Coordination with Education Officials SRC: The SRC recommends increased training and clarification be provided to schools regarding the interagency agreement with VR, and specifically the collaborative role of both agencies in the transition planning process for youth with disabilities. There appears to be a need for increased information and clarification with school departments about the type and nature of Pre–Employment Transition Services which are available from VR, when a referred student becomes a “client” of VR, and the school department’s role in employment planning once VR is involved.

AGENCY RESPONSE: Please see the current MOU with DOE

Section H – Interagency Cooperation SRC: The SRC supports and commends DVR in their efforts to foster collaborative relationships and coordinated services with the Office of Aging and Disability Services and the Office of Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services, as well as in connecting VR consumers with Benefits Counseling Services. However, the SRC recommends that DVR undertake outreach efforts with the Office of Family Independence, which is responsible for determining eligibility for MaineCare, Maine’s state Medicaid plan. All services from OADS and SAMHS flow from MaineCare eligibility, and OFI policy changes and initiatives greatly impact service provision and employment outcomes for VR consumers. As such, VR consumers would benefit greatly from education and involvement of OFI officials in the coordination of services to support employment for people with disabilities. The continued absence of this department from all statewide efforts aimed at improving employment outcomes for people with disabilities is concerning.

AGENCY RESPONSE: As OFI has expressed increasing interest in promoting the employment of beneficiaries with disabilities, MDOL has been increasingly involved in strategic planning and collaborative efforts with the agency to support our mutual customers. DVR supervisors and managers in the field offices know and interact with their colleagues from ASPIRE, TANF, SNAP and other OFI–administered programs on a regular basis.

Section J – Statewide Assessment

VR staff turnover remains a challenge and affects clients in significant ways. While entry level salaries for VR counselors remain low and budgetary constraints are unlikely to change, the SRC recommends that DVR examine other strategies for retaining new counselors, including the availability of leadership opportunities, mentoring, or other incentives that may make counselors feel engaged, appreciated, and connected to their workplace.

AGENCY RESPONSE: Please see an earlier response on this topic.

Section P – Evaluation and Reports of Progress: VR and Supported Employment Goals

Goal 1: Increase Successful Closures of VR Clients

SRC: Over the past several years, DVR has typically set a goal of increasing employment outcomes over the outcomes of previous years. Those goals have consistently been met, which speaks to the skill and dedication of DVR staff. These are excellent achievements. However, due to the projected budget shortfall, strained staffing resources, and newly entered Order of Selection for Category 3, expecting additional growth in the number of successful closures does not seem like a realistic goal. DVR should consider maintaining the employment outcome goal at the FY15 level, or even decreasing the successful closure number.

AGENCY RESPONSE: Thank you for your comment and recognition of DVR staff.

SRC: The SRC supports the objective of reducing the number of clients who drop out of services. The high number of clients who drop out of services remains an issue of concern. Towards that end, the SRC supports further policy changes and process streamlining based on the “Process Mapping” Project undertaken by DVR.

AGENCY RESPONSE: DVR appreciates the support and participation of the SRC as we undertake this project.

Goal 2: To serve all individuals with the most significant disabilities in a timely manner

SRC: The SRC notes that DVR has made significant progress in reducing the “time to plan” for VR clients, although the WIOA timeline of 90 days remains a challenge. We understand that training and projects to further reduce the time to plan are ongoing, and the SRC looks forward to further collaboration and discussion on this issue.

AGENCY RESPONSE: DVR appreciates this recognition by the SRC. We agree that there have been improvements in this area, and we look forward to this as well.

Goal 3: Increase clients from minority and underserved populations

SRC: The SRC requests an update on the status of installing VRI equipment at VR offices and Career Centers. A Request for Proposals on Video Remote Technology (VRI) went out in 2014, yet VRI remains unavailable at all VR and Career Center offices. The delay in implementing this communication access technology is concerning. VRI should be installed and staff trained in using VRI as soon as possible in order to guarantee accessibility to effective communication for Deaf clients. VRI availability will increase access for individuals living in remote areas of the state who are Deaf and have limited access to ASL interpreters. VRI will also increase client access for short or spontaneous meetings.

AGENCY RESPONSE: VRI is soon to be deployed at CareerCenters, although some staff is already using it as needed. There are statewide master contracts, so VRI service is available to any State office. Equipment acquisition and training for all CareerCenter staff are coming this spring.

**3. the designated State unit’s explanations for rejecting any of the Council’s input or recommendations.**

We have addressed all the input and recommendations.

**b. Request for Waiver of Statewideness**

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

**1. a local public agency will provide the non-Federal share of costs associated with the services to be provided in accordance with the waiver request;**

This agency has not requested a waiver of Statewideness. The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation is able to provide Vocational Rehabilitation services statewide under an Order of Selection. Therefore the waiver request is not necessary.

**2. the designated State unit will approve each proposed service before it is put into effect; and**

see above (a)

**3. All State plan requirements will apply**

requirements of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan will apply to the services approved under the waiver.

see above (a)

**c. Cooperative Agreements with Agencies Not Carrying Out Activities Under the Statewide Workforce Development System.**

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

**1. Federal, State, and local agencies and programs;**

Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) works with other state agencies and many Councils and Committees whose focus is on individuals with disabilities. DVR has a long standing relationship and works very closely with the Maine Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). DVR and DHHS have two memorandums of understanding (MOU); one MOU is with the Office of Aging and Disability Services, which serves individuals with developmental disabilities; the other MOU is with the Office of Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services (SAMHS) which serves individuals with mental health issues. The MOU’s address the combined efforts that DVR and DHHS have initiated and clarify roles to improve the successful outcomes for these jointly served populations. • DHHS Office of Aging and Disability Services and DVR/DBVI MOU (updated November 2013) “This Memorandum is intended to guide the Maine Department of Labor’s Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS), through its Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired and Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, and the Office of Aging and Disability Services (OADS) in the Maine Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), through a system change planning process for the purpose of implementing an aligned service delivery system that promotes evidence–based practices. It contains information about policies and processes that pertain to maintaining and enhancing the relationship between these two entities. ” • DHHS Office of Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services and DVR MOU (updated August 2013) “This Memorandum is intended to guide the Maine Department of Labor’s Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS), through its Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired and the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, and the Maine Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), through its Office of Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services (SAMHS), in the course of planning and implementing an aligned service delivery system that promotes evidence–based practices. It contains information about policies and processes that pertain to maintaining and enhancing the relationship between these two entities.” Through these strong partnerships with OADS and SAMHS, DVR has been able to maximize federal and state funding to Maine by drawing down its full federal allotment for public rehabilitation services and accessing employment support services through Medicaid waivers. Additionally, DVR, OADS and SAMHS have developed and are implementing joint approaches to the workforce development of community rehabilitation providers and business engagement throughout the state.

• Interagency Support of Benefits Counseling – 2013

DVR continues to work closely with many other state partners to ensure that Maine’s benefits counseling services remain available to beneficiaries of SSI/SSDI, and specifically, DVR applicants and eligible clients. This allowed the services to remain intact while a resolution was determined on a federal level as to the continuation of this critical service in 2013. DVR currently administers a single contract with Maine’s approved WIPA provider, Maine Medical Center’s Department of Vocational Services, which includes funding from four sources of state and federal funds, including from the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired, Office of Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services, and Office of Aging and Disability Services. The contract’s scope of work includes direct service provision of benefits counseling, training of VR counselors and case managers, and service capacity building through quarterly system development network meetings, which include representatives from the Disability Rights Center’s Protection and Advocacy for Beneficiaries of Social Security (PABSS) and the Bureau of Employment Services’ Disability Employment Initiative

•Memorandum of Understanding with PJCC (Penobscot Job Corps Center) – 2015

In June 2015, Maine DVR finalized a Memorandum of Understanding with PJCC. The purpose of the agreement is to set forth the commitments of PJCC and the Maine DVR to meet the needs of students and young adults with disabilities and in particular to better coordinate the process of student transition to employment.

• Veterans Administration and VR MOU, November 2011

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

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

Maine DVR held its annual meeting with the Veterans’ Administration Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Services on February 24, 2016. The MOU is currently being updated to reflect new language from WIOA and other changes. Maine DVR has identified staff that operate as veterans liaisons in each office.

• Department of Corrections and VR MOU – Procedural Guidance

The Maine Department of Labor– Bureau of Rehabilitation Services and the Maine Department of Corrections (DOC) have worked together to establish procedural guidance on collaboration between the two agencies. Work thus far has resulted in two procedural directives outlining how the two agencies will work together to best meet the needs of individuals who are currently incarcerated or on probation and may be eligible for vocational rehabilitation services. In each of the larger offices a DVR staff member has been identified who serves as the liaison to the correctional agencies in their region.

DVR corrections liaisons meet as a group on a quarterly basis with DOC staff to share updates and best practices.

• Workers Compensation Board and DVR MOU, November 2012

During 2012, representatives of the Workers Compensation Board (WCB) and Maine Division of Vocational Rehabilitation worked together to create a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). The MOU was completed and signed, effective November 2012. DVR and the WCB are committed to working together to improve services and employment outcomes for individuals who, as a result of injury, are in need of vocational rehabilitation services to return to employment. Through the efforts outlined in the MOU, DVR and the WCB will strive to maximize employment opportunities for injured Maine workers, minimize duplication of services, improve information sharing and referrals, and coordinate activities in accordance with all applicable statutes and regulations.

Since then, DVR has met annually to review the MOU and to share updates and successes.

**2. State programs carried out under section 4 of the Assistive Technology Act of 1998;**

Assistive technology services and assistive technology devices are provided to individuals with disabilities as determined by each individual’s vocational goal, and appear as prescribed services on the respective individual’s signed IPE. DVR services include assistive technology and assistive technology devices if required for the individual’s IPE, necessary for the attainment of the individual’s employment goal. DVR works closely with Maine cohorts, Alpha One and ALLTECH, assistive technology organizations which provide assistive technology technical assistance services as well as assistive technology devices.

**3. Programs carried out by the Under Secretary for Rural Development of the United States Department of Agriculture;**

The Division had meetings with USDA Rural Development a few years ago, but unfortunately loss of funding ended those discussions of formal cooperation. DVR is open to working with the USDA Rural Development in the future. DVR does support staff involvement in the USDA’s AgrAbility project. In Maine, the AgrAbility project is administered by Alpha One, Goodwill Industries of New England and the University of Maine. The liaison to the project ensures that DVR staff is knowledgeable about AgrAbility and related resources. Grant funding for AgrAbility is ending during 2014 and DVR anticipates development of a fee for service agreement for AgrAbility services.

**4. Noneducational agencies serving out-of-school youth; and**

DVR will be addressing this area when the final regulations are promulgated.

**5. State use contracting programs.**

The Division has implemented an outcome payment system for employment support services for DVR clients with both private non–profit and for–profit Community Rehabilitation Providers. DVR contracts with Maine’s sole Center for Independent Living, Alpha One.

**d. Coordination with Education Officials**

Describe:

**1. DSU's plans**

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.

DVR has a strong partnership with the Maine Department of Education (MDOE). Collaborative efforts have continued to expand over the last years. A MDOE staff member serves on the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) and the DVR Assistant Director serves on the IDEA Part B State Advisory Panel.

The Cooperative agreement between the Maine Department of Education, Special Services, Career and Technical Education and Adult Education and the Maine Department of Labor, Bureau of Rehabilitation Services Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired December 2010 was amended September 2011 to update language and clarify funding responsibilities and establish an interagency dispute process. Maine DVR had an on–site 107 Review in June 2011. At that time, the review team made recommendations for changes to the MOU which were then accepted by all the parties. A new MOU with MDOE will be developed as soon as WIOA regulations are released.

Provide information on the formal interagency agreement with the state educational agency: DVR will assist in transition planning and in the development of 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. 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 Cooperative Agreement between the Maine Department of Education, Special Services, Career and Technical Education and Adult Education and the Maine Department of Labor, Bureau of Rehabilitation Services Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired was written during FY 2010. The amended MOU was signed in September 2011. 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 in particular 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. 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.

**2. Information on the formal interagency agreement with the State educational agency with respect to:**

**A. 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;**

DOE will provide representation to the State Rehabilitation Council, as well as technical assistance and training on educational issues to DVR/DBVI as requested.

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. Interagency Disputes; 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.

**B. transition planning by personnel of the designated State agency and educational agency that facilitates the development and implementation of their individualized education programs;**

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.

**C. roles and responsibilities, including financial responsibilities, of each agency, including provisions for determining State lead agencies and qualified personnel responsible for transition services;**

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.

**D. procedures for outreach to and identification of students with disabilities who need transition services.**

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. A protocol to serve students who are in out–of–district placements in accordance with current policy will be developed

**e. Cooperative Agreements with Private Nonprofit Organizations**

(Formerly known as Attachment 4.8(b)(3)). Describe the manner in which the designated State agency establishes cooperative agreements with private non-profit VR service providers.

Maine does not have any cooperative agreements with private non–profit VR service providers.

**f. Arrangements and Cooperative Agreements for the Provision of Supported Employment Services**

(Formerly known as Attachment 4.8(b)(4)). Describe the designated State agency’s efforts to identify and make arrangements, including entering into cooperative agreements, with other State agencies and other appropriate entities in order to provide supported employment services and extended employment services, as applicable, to individuals with the most significant disabilities, including youth with the most significant disabilities.

DVR does not have separate efforts to provide these services. All services are geared to assist individuals with most significant disabilities.

**g. Coordination with Employers**

(Formerly known as Attachment 4.8(b)(5)). Describe how the designated State unit will work with employers to identify competitive integrated employment and career exploration opportunities in order to facilitate the provision of:

**1. VR services; and**

During the last State of Maine legislative session, a time–limited Business Relations Specialist position was approved as a permanent position. This new, permanent position has not been filled at the time this report was written and the majority of the Business Relations Specialist duties and responsibilities have been suspended.

The second Business Relations Specialist position is charged with the responsibility of overseeing the Progressive Employment pilot project and the full–time position is being utilized in a half–time capacity. Maine DVR applied for and is participating in a learning collaborative with the Vermont Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and the Institute for Community Inclusion (ICI) to study and determine if the Vermont Progressive Employment model can be replicated in Maine. The Progressive Employment Model is a dual–customer strategy that is designed to assist job–seekers with significant barriers to employment and assist employers who may be averse to hiring employees with disabilities. The model coordinates rehabilitation counseling with job placement and business account management.

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

Key components of Maine’s Progressive Employment project will target transition–age youth within southern Maine service areas. Selected Community Rehabilitation Providers (CRPs) will develop Progressive Employment opportunities within the catchment area identified. These activities include: informational interviews, job shadows, business tours, on–the–job training/apprenticeships and work experiences. Business Development during the pilot project includes identifying potential business leads based on the goals of the individual referrals and contacting the employer; requesting an informational interview; requesting a tour of the business or facility; sharing information about DVR and determining if the employer is willing to allow the Employment Specialist to conduct assessments, informational interviews, job shadows or on–the–job training at this location. The secondary purpose of this business development process, as it is described, is to gain an understanding of the various positions which this business employs and to ascertain the work environment and work culture. CRPs will develop 125 new business contacts during the length of the pilot and the contact information will be added to the list of active partnerships currently in use, which will greatly enlarge our existing global employer network.

**h. Interagency Cooperation**

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

**1. the State Medicaid plan under title XIX of the Social Security Act;**

Through its collaboration with DHHS and specifically the coordination of Maine’s benefits counseling network DVR has been able to develop opportunities and overcome barriers to competitive integrated employment for individuals with visual impairments who are eligible for MaineCare, the State’s Medicaid program. DVR entered into the Ticket to Work Partnership Plus agreement with the Bureau of Employment Services in July 2014. The purpose of this agreement is to strengthen the partnerships within CareerCenters in the provision of vocational rehabilitation and employment and training services to individuals with disabilities seeking employment in Maine. This agreement expands service options and the overall capacity of Maine’s workforce investment activities and offers individuals the opportunity to achieve employment outcomes, decrease reliance on public benefits and increase personal economic assets and resources.

**2. the State agency responsible for providing services for individuals with developmental disabilities; and**

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 and the availability of support services for clients who need them.

EMPLOYMENT SPECIALISTS WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM UPDATES

DVR, in collaboration with the Maine Department of Health & Human Services (DHHS), continues to contract with Syntiro, a technical assistance and training provider, to administer a comprehensive workforce development system for Employment Specialists in the Community Rehabilitation Provider sector. This project, Employment for ME Workforce Development System, includes basic certification (ACRE) training, advanced topical skills training, maintenance of a comprehensive training calendar and a mentoring program for newly certified employment specialists. The system was launched in July 2011.

2014–2015 Mentor program forms were posted on the website in July 2014. Four people were interested in being protégés and two mentors. It was decided that the program would not be offered this year.

**3. the State agency responsible for providing mental health services.**

DVR has a MOU that is intended to guide the Maine Department of Labor’s Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS), through its Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired and the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, and the Maine Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), through its Office of Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services (SAMHS), in the course of planning and implementing an aligned service delivery system that promotes evidence–based practices. It contains information about policies and processes that pertain to maintaining and enhancing the relationship between these two entities.” Through these strong partnerships with OADS and SAMHS, DVR has been able to maximize federal and state funding to Maine by drawing down its full federal allotment for public rehabilitation services and accessing employment support services through Medicaid waivers. Additionally, DVR, OADS and SAMHS have developed and are implementing joint approaches to the workforce development of community rehabilitation providers and business engagement throughout the state.

**i. Comprehensive System of Personnel Development; Data System on Personnel and Personnel Development**

(Formerly known as Attachment 4.10)). Describe the designated State agency's procedures and activities to establish and maintain a comprehensive system of personnel development designed to ensure an adequate supply of qualified State rehabilitation professional and paraprofessional personnel for the designated State unit, including the following:

**1. Data System on Personnel and Personnel Development**

**A. Qualified Personnel Needs.**

Describe the development and maintenance of a system for collecting and analyzing on an annual basis data on qualified personnel needs with respect to:

i. the number of personnel who are employed by the State agency in the provision of VR services in relation to the number of individuals served, broken down by personnel category;

In FFY 2014, Maine DVR experienced a turnover rate just over 15 percent among its Rehabilitation Counselors. In FFY 2013 the turnover rate was at 20 percent and prior to that DVR has averaged greater than 15 percent annual turnover rate of Rehabilitation Counselors. There are currently 7 RC II positions that are vacant. Maine’s turnover rate continues to be deeply affected by retirement; the age of its workforce and low wages when compared to private sector employment. Turnover rates over the past five years, average just below 16%. Assuming retention levels remain consistent, it can be projected that DVR staffing needs could require as many as 19 new Rehabilitation Counselors in the next 5 years. The average turnover rate for non–rehabilitation counselor staff has been relatively consistent, approximately 13–15 percent annually, until this year. In examining staffing patterns of all other DVR staff, the turnover rate is approximately 20 percent. During this reporting year of 2015, Maine DVR has replaced:

1 Casework Supervisor

13 Rehabilitation Counselor II

9 Clerical/Support Personnel

4 Rehabilitation Consultants, with one Rehabilitation Consultant position that continues to be unfilled.

ii. the number of personnel currently needed by the State agency to provide VR services, broken down by personnel category; and

When applying the average turnover rates, it can be forecasted that Maine DVR will need to replace:

3 Regional Managers,

6 Casework Supervisors,

3 Paraprofessionals,

5 Clerical/Support Personnel and

0 Rehabilitation Consultants

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

Within the next five years. The projections for staff vacancies are dependent upon current levels of funding as well as stability in state hiring and contracts. Maine DVR will keep RSA apprised of developments on this issue. Row Job Title Total positions Current vacancies Projected vacancies over the next 5 years

1 Director Vocational Rehabilitation 1 0 0

2 Director SIQA 1 0 0

3 Director, Division for the Deaf, Hard of Hearing and Late Deafened 1 0 0

4 Assistant Director Vocational Rehabilitation 1 0 0

5 Regional Manager 3 0 3

6 Casework Supervisor 8 0 6

7 Rehabilitation Consultant 5 1 0

8 Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor II 65 7 19

9 Paraprofessional 8 1 3

10 Support Personnel 23 2 5

The system for collecting and analyzing data indicates approximately 10,000 individuals with disabilities will be served by Vocational Rehabilitation in FFY 2015. Current service delivery is performed by Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) staff, consisting of 65 Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors, eight Paraprofessionals, eight Casework Supervisors, and three Regional Managers. DVR staff receives administrative and organizational support and guidance from the Director of DVR, the Director of SIQA (Systems Improvement and Quality Assurance), the Director of the Division for the Deaf, Hard of Hearing and Late Deafened, DVR Assistant Director, and six Rehabilitation Consultants (program specialists) and clerical/secretarial support services from 23 office personnel. DVR has an additional five time–limited Rehabilitation Counselor I’s. Data gathered during the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) grant when DVR also had temporary RCI’s demonstrated that DVR’s ability to efficiently meet the needs of clients was significantly improved when these positions were available.

**B. Personnel Development**

Describe the development and maintenance of a system for collecting and analyzing on an annual basis data on personnel development with respect to:

i. a list of the institutions of higher education in the State that are preparing VR professionals, by type of program;

The University of Southern Maine (USM) is the only in–state institution of higher education offering a graduate program which satisfies the standards set forth by the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA). During the most recent year, USM had 32 students enrolled full–time or part–time in its Master of Science in Rehabilitation Counseling Program. Five students graduated during the past academic year. USM classes are offered on campus and via distance education. USM does offer RSA grant funding for Maine DVR Employees for their Rehabilitation Counseling Program participants at the present time. It should be noted that USM did submit an application for long–term grant funding to RSA and was given granted approval for RSA funding. Maine DVR has been utilizing RSA funding since January 2015.

The University of Maine at Farmington (UMF) in partnership with the University of Southern Maine began offering an accelerated program in the Fall of 2015 that will allow counseling students to graduate with a master’s degree a year sooner. Graduates of the five–year program will be able to quality for both State licensing for counseling and national certification for rehabilitation counseling. The Program is accredited by the Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Programs and the Council on Rehabilitation Education. UMF typically graduates 25 to 30 students per year with a B.S. in Rehabilitation Services. This new program will meet the standards set forth by RSA for "fully qualified" vocational rehabilitation counselors (i.e. qualifies to sit for the Certified Rehabilitation Counselor (CRC) exam). Maine DVR has offered summer internships to UMF undergraduates to expose them to careers in vocational rehabilitation. UMF does expect to have three to eight students enrolled in their accelerated program beginning, in January of 2016.

Maine DVR has limited resources to pay educational/training costs associated with its efforts to develop and maintain a fully qualified staff and, as such, conducts on–going investigation of distance education programs that offer RSA grant funding to participants.

ii. the number of students enrolled at each of those institutions, broken down by type of program; and

During this reporting year, Maine DVR has had fourteen Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors (VRCs) enrolled in the RSA–funded Rehabilitation Counseling program at University of Southern Maine, Maine DVR has had one VRC enrolled in the distance education Rehabilitation Counseling program at Virginia Commonwealth University and four VRCs enrolled in the University of Southern Maine to complete "core courses” During this year, two VRC’s have successfully passed the CRC exam.

Institutions; Students enrolled; Employee sponsored by agency and/or RSA;Graduates sponsored by agency and/or RSA; Graduates from the previous year;

1 Virginia Commonwealth University 1 1 0 0

2 University of Southern Maine 17 17 0 0

3 0 0 0 0

iii. the number of students who graduated during the prior year from each of theose 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.

USM had 32 students enrolled full–time or part–time in its Master of Science in Rehabilitation Counseling Program. Five students graduated during the past academic year. USM classes are offered on campus and via distance education.

During this reporting year, Maine DVR has had fourteen Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors (VRCs) enrolled in the RSA–funded Rehabilitation Counseling program at University of Southern Maine, Maine DVR has had one VRC enrolled in the distance education Rehabilitation Counseling program at Virginia Commonwealth University and four VRCs enrolled in the University of Southern Maine to complete "core courses” During this year, two VRC’s have successfully passed the CRC exam.

Institution; Students enrolled; Emp sponsored; grads from prev.yr;

1 Virginia Commonwealth University 1 1 0 0

2 University of Southern Maine 17 17 0 0

3 0 0 0 0

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

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

DVR, with the support of the Commissioner of the Department of Labor, continues to work closely with the State of Maine’s Bureau of Human Resources (BHR) to fill vacancies. Recent recruitment efforts have included electronic vacancy postings on national and State of Maine websites, local postings with community providers and information sharing with USM, the only Maine College that offers a rehabilitation program. Recruitment efforts for fully qualified rehabilitation counselors have become increasingly difficult, in comparison to previous years. With high turnover rates and less than desirable number of candidates graduating from the University of Southern Maine (USM), Maine’s sole rehabilitation counseling program, the division has struggled with finding and hiring fully qualified candidates, as defined by the RSA. During FFY 2014, twelve rehabilitation counselors were hired; eleven of the twelve Rehabilitation Counselors hired, that is 92 percent, were not fully qualified by RSA standards. Currently, 57 percent of all rehabilitation counselors do not meet fully qualified status. Twenty two of the rehabilitation counselors that work for DVR require a Master’s degree to meet the standard. An additional five counselors require “core” courses. As noted in the chart above, thirteen individuals are currently enrolled in an education program in order to meet the standards, as outlined. The DVR Director sits on the Advisory Board of the University of Southern Maine’s Rehabilitation Counseling program, strengthening and coordinating the relationship between the two organizations. DVR invites USM and UMF faculty to participate in training opportunities throughout the year. A Rehabilitation Consultant works closely with the Bureau of Human Resources to assist eligible individuals with disabilities to access Maine State Government’s "Special Appointment" program. DVR has a number of staff with disabilities and provides appropriate accessibility accommodations to support employment. The State of Maine is an Equal Employment Opportunity/Affirmative Action employer. An area of concern for Maine DVR is the retention of qualified staff. The State of Maine has recently begun to offer merit or cost of living increases again after being discontinued in 2008. DVR is committed to offering personnel development opportunities that enhance the work environment and support service delivery. DVR continues to review and assess essential job functions within the Division in view of the CSPD requirements and seeks the development of alternative and evidence–based approaches in the provision and maintenance of high quality service delivery.

**3. Personnel Standards**

Describe the State agency's policies and procedures for the establishment and maintenance of personnel standards consistent with section 101(a)(7)(B) and 34 CFR 361.18(c) to ensure that designated State unit professional and paraprofessional personnel are adequately trained and prepared, including:

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

Maine DVR personnel requirements and hiring practices are aligned with the Rehabilitation Act mandates and its regulations. The State of Maine does not have an established state standard for fully qualified Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors so defers to the Rehabilitation Services Administration standard. This standard states that an individual must possess a Master’s Degree in Rehabilitation Counseling, CRC status, or be eligible to sit for the CRC examination when filling Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor II vacancies. Priority is then given 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 – which meets the standard if a graduate course in Counseling Theories and Techniques of Counseling course was completed as part of the degree requirements. Other required courses including: Assessment, Occupational Information or Placement, Medical, Psychosocial and Cultural Aspects of Disabilities, and in Community Resources or Delivery of Rehabilitation Services.

**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.**

When recruiting or hiring new staff, Maine DVR gives preference to fully qualified individuals. However, if there is a critical agency staffing need and recruitment efforts do not secure a suitable candidate, DVR can hire individuals conditionally. These individuals are required to enter into an agreement to acquire the appropriate credentials to become fully qualified under a Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD) plan. The CSPD education plans, for becoming "fully qualified" according to the standards set forth by the Rehabilitation Act, are responsive to the needs of the individual counselor, and agreed to by management. The plan is incorporated into the employee’s annual performance review to ensure continuity and progress toward "fully qualified" status. Counselors who require a full master’s degree program to meet the "fully qualified" status are allotted up to five years after completion of their probationary period to meet the CSPD requirements. Those with related counseling master’s degrees who meet the qualifications to sit for the CRC exam or who are currently in a master’s degree program in counseling are provided accelerated timeframes dependent on remaining coursework. Maine DVR strives to ensure that all CSPD plans are accomplished in the most cost effective manner.

**4. Staff Development.**

Describe the State agency's policies, procedures, and activities to ensure that, consistent with section101(a)(7)(C) of the Rehabilitation Act, all personnel employed by the designated State unit receive appropriate and adequate training in terms of:

**A. System of staff development**

a system of staff development for professionals and paraprofessionals within the designated State unit, particularly with respect to assessment, vocational counseling, job placement, and rehabilitation technology, including training implemented in coordination with entities carrying out State programs under section 4 of the Assistive Technology Act of 1998; and

Staff development is delivered through formal and informal modalities, internal and external. DVR employees participate in annual performance reviews, a portion of which specifically addresses personnel development. At these reviews, staff and supervisors jointly identify training required to address performance enhancement.

**B. Acquisition and dissemination of significant knowledge**

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

The Bureau of Rehabilitation Services hosts a biennial, two–day statewide training event at which multiple trainings – identified and prioritized by staff surveys, case reviews and oversight bodies (i.e. State Rehabilitation Council) are offered to all staff. Training needs and activities are often identified and offered at the regional/office levels through free or low cost workshops. DVR also supports educational programming for existing staff seeking to meet fully qualified status and, for those who have achieved CRC status and require on–going CRC training credits, by acting as a sanctioned provider of CRC training credits. Maine had limited RSA–funded In–Service Training Grant dollars to support personnel development until USM was granted RSA funding for their Master’s Rehabilitation Program in 2014. RSA funding became available to Maine DVR in January 2015 for VRC’s. Maine DVR has made continuous efforts to seek and identify pertinent learning opportunities, particularly through the use of distance learning. Videoconferencing capacity has been established on a statewide basis and has led to extensive learning collaborations. Maine DVR staff also seeks distance training opportunities through webinars, online training and teleconferences such as those offered by Syntiro, the Institute for Community Inclusion, the National Clearing House of Rehabilitation Training Materials, Independent Living Research Utilization, Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification (CRCC), Social Security Administration, the National Coalition for Parent Education Advocacy Training Center and Maine’s Parent Information and Resource Center. DVR’s new counselor training curriculum is a two–week, comprehensive overview of the DVR program, policy and procedures and includes topics such as rehabilitation technology, job placement and assessment, vocational counseling, as well as interactive training modules in the casework flow process. New counselor training is routinely evaluated and revised to meet the changing needs of clients and to incorporate recent evidence–based practices and requirements of the RSA and CRCC. During New Counselor Training, all DVR staff have the opportunity to refresh skills by attending any training session. In addition, training has been designed for paraprofessionals and support staff to increase their knowledge of the rehabilitation process, procedural directives and Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Rules. DVR continued to make use of the New England Technical and Continuing Education Center (TACE) for its technical assistance and training until this funding ended December 31, 2014. Training opportunities and conference materials are shared through a number of statewide means, including the Internet and DVR intranet and counselor, managerial and supervisory networking activities and interactions. A library of training resources, including texts, journals and videotapes addressing vocational rehabilitation topic areas is available to be loaned to regional offices as needed. Materials include Institute on Rehabilitation Issues publications, CDs offering American Sign Language tutorials, videotapes addressing learning disabilities, Consumer Choice News, National Clearinghouse of Rehabilitation Training Materials, and other documents from the various National Rehabilitation and Research and Training Programs throughout the United States. Over the past year, a continued focus of staff development has been on the administration and interpretation of assessments used as part of the DVR Career Exploration Workshop (CEW) as well as deaf awareness and other disability–related awareness. During FY 2014 DVR staff participated in 154 hours of DVR sponsored training representing a total of 309 attendees.

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

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

DVR has four Rehabilitation Counselors for the Deaf (three of whom are Deaf). DVR has also has a Regional Manager, two Rehabilitation Counselors and one Rehabilitation Assistant who are d/Deaf. This year, DVR was able to convert all Rehabilitation Counselor for the Deaf lines to permanent status which made it possible to attract staff for a hard–to–fill Rehabilitation Counselor for the Deaf in the northern part of the state. The Director of the Division for the Deaf, Hard of Hearing and Late Deafened (who is Deaf himself) supervises the four Rehabilitation Counselors for the Deaf and also provides direction, education and outreach on issues impacting individuals who are d/Deaf or Hard of Hearing. As a state with a high percentage of older residents, there has been an increasing need to serve individuals who have age–related hearing loss and who wish to remain working. The Division Director has offered many workshops on deaf awareness/etiquette to employers, providers and state agencies this year to help increase awareness of promoting inclusion of employees who are d/Deaf, Hard of Hearing or Late Deafened. The Division Director meets once a month with his staff to address topics such as best practices in case management, communication strategies for individuals who use gestural communication for their primary mode of communication, among many other topics. Staff who are Deaf have videophones at their desks for visual communication with consumers. An additional six employees are proficient in ASL, including the DVR Director. DVR offices are co–located in Maine’s CareerCenter network. CareerCenters offer telecommunications devices including Interpretype, Ubi Duo, Videolinks, Video Relay and Video Remote Interpreting. Captioning (CART) services are used frequently to ensure access for staff and clients alike and are provided as needed. An online video introduction to CareerCenter services for individuals who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing is available. Spoken language interpreter services are accessed through a statewide contract for both in–person and telephone interpreting. This year a statewide contract for Video Remote Interpreting was signed – allowing for increased access for clients in rural parts of Maine. DVR also employs some bilingual staff. Additionally, DVR through its Division for the Deaf, Hard of Hearing and Late Deafened, is working closely with the Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired to increase availability of Deaf–Blind Interpreters and Support Service Providers.

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

As appropriate, describe the procedures and activities to coordinate the designated State unit's comprehensive system of personnel development with personnel development under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

As outlined in Section 606 (Employment of Individuals with Disabilities) of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, Maine DVR continually makes "positive efforts to employ and advance in employment qualified individuals with disabilities in programs assisted under this title". Currently 25 Transition VR Counselors are assigned to work with the more than 200 Maine High Schools, as well as with out–of–school youth and youth attending private institutions. Transition–aged youth represent nearly one third of all DVR cases in Maine and one of the fastest growing populations served by DVR. Maine DVR has a Statewide Transition Counselor Advisory Group that meets quarterly to promote best practices in the provision of VR transition services. During the last year, this group heard from a number of guest speakers on disability and employment issues – including benefits counseling – and focused much of its efforts on WIOA implementation and the requirement for increased collaboration with schools and the Maine Department of Education. As outlined in DVR’s current Cooperative Agreement with the Maine Department of Education (MDOE), DVR has provided technical assistance to MDOE and school districts on disability–specific information and resources issues and issues concerning eligibility and referral for services as requested. One way that DVR has provided this information is through participation in MDOE’s State Personnel Development Grant (SPDG). This five–year grant from the US Department of Education targets five significant areas of need concerning personnel development and the education of children with disabilities. Improving transition services is one of the identified five goals. The DVR Assistant Director as well as a Rehabilitation Counselor II both sit on the Transition work group and the Assistant Director is also a member of the larger SPDG Advisory Council. During the past year, DVR worked very closely with the SPDG to participate in a number of trainings for schools and other stakeholders on transition planning for students with disabilities. DVR (and Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired) Transition VR Counselors have attended SPDG–sponsored regional trainings to provide content area knowledge as well as gain additional understanding of best practices in post–secondary transition planning. During the trainings, DVR’s Transition Career Exploration Workshop was highlighted as an effective tool to assist schools to improve transition planning outcomes for their students. Over the last year Maine Department of Education received intensive technical assistance from the National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center (NSTTAC). As a result, Maine sent a team of stakeholders – including the DVR Assistant Director – to the 2015 Annual Capacity Building Institute. As a result of the plan developed at that conference, a number of follow–up steps were developed.

The DVR Assistant Director is a member of the IDEA Part B State Advisory Panel which is responsible for advising MDOE on issues related to students with disabilities ages 3–20. She presented at the 2015 Fall Conference of MADSEC – the state association for special education directors – on best practices for supporting work experience for youth through WIOA.

In anticipation of release of WIOA regulations, DVR and DBVI have been working closely with the Maine Department of Education to begin development of an updated interagency Memorandum of Understanding. The new version is anticipated to include language detailing how the state agencies will work together to strengthen transition planning for a broader group of eligible and potentially eligible students.

**j. Statewide Assessment**

(Formerly known as Attachment 4.11(a)).

**1. Provide an assessment of the rehabilitation needs of individuals with disabilities residing within the State, particularly the VR services needs of those:**

**A. with the most significant disabilities, including their need for supported employment services;**

The Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) continues to be a strong partner in the support and delivery of employment services for people with disabilities. – DHHS currently supports approximately 5,200 people with developmental disabilities, brain injuries or physical disabilities through four Centers for Medicaid and Medicare Services (CMS) 1915c Waivers. The waivers allow individuals who have been found eligible for the Maine Office of Aging and Disability Services (OADS) Services based on disability/eligibility to become prepared for employment through Community Supports Services that can assist the person to volunteer, increase work–readiness skills, and address issues of health and safety. New in 2014 was the addition of Career Planning Services using Discovering Personal Genius which is a tool that supports an individual to discover skills, abilities, capacities and three Vocational Themes. Approximately 150 people have accessed the service in the first year and been referred to Vocational Rehabilitation. Furthermore, OADS is providing on–the–job support through the waivers to about 1000 people who are working throughout Maine. These services can provide support to both the individual and the employer to maintain employment. At this time, approximately 3,000 working–age MaineCare waiver recipients are not working but are being asked about their interest and desire to move toward employment.

– In addition to providing ongoing employment support to more than 200 employed individuals with mental illness through contracts with CRP’s, the DHHS Office of Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services (SAMHS) has a number of initiatives currently underway to promote employment among the individuals they serve. SAMHS and OADS are coordinating the use of Balancing Incentive Program funds to increase system capacity to support individuals with disabilities on the path to employment. This initiative includes training for Work and Benefits Navigators, an Employment 101 curriculum, and training in Individual Placement and Support /Supported Employment

**B. who are minorities;**

Vocational rehabilitation services to minorities with disabilities in Maine have always been a challenge to DVR because of the state’s homogeneous population and low ethnic diversity. A vast majority (96%) of the VR population, a slight variation from Maine’s general population (95%), is White and only 4% identify themselves as being members of a racial or ethnic minority. In a state that has little statistical diversity of minority populations, Native Americans represent a historically recognizable group and Maine has nearly 18,500 tribal members who are located both on reservations and defined land, as well as scattered across the state. Tribal members are primarily located in Penobscot, Washington and Aroostook counties. Unemployment figures among Micmac and Maliseet tribes range from 55% to 76%. DVR continues to work collaboratively with the Houlton Band of Maliseets, which was awarded a five year Section 121 grant in FY 2008 which was extended again through 2017.

While Maine’s minority population is small, two areas of Maine have seen significant increases in the numbers of non–English speakers due to refugee resettlement programs. According to the 2014 American Community Survey, approximately 65,000 Maine residents speak a language other than English at home. Targeted culturally appropriate outreach may be needed to ensure that information concerning VR resources is available to individuals who belong to potentially underserved minority populations.

**C. who have been unserved or underserved by the VR program;**

In addition to the unserved and underserved populations identified above, this assessment also gathered data and provided information on the anticipated vocational needs of incarcerated individuals with disabilities, older workers, veterans, those receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), and individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing.

**D. who have been served through other components of the statewide workforce development system; and**

Co–location in Maine’s network of Department of Labor (MDOL) One–Stop CareerCenters has provided DVR the opportunity to work in partnership with a number of other programs that are components of the statewide workforce investment system and can support the employment of people with disabilities. In October of 2010, DVR assisted MDOL’s Bureau of Employment Services in obtaining a Disability Employment Initiative Grant to continue work successfully started under Maine’s Disability Program Navigator Grant. In October 2013, the state was awarded another three–year round of DEI funding but its focus is on a different area of the state. Designed to improve CareerCenter services and programs for people with disabilities in targeted regions of the state, Maine’s DEI grant work includes operating a statewide workforce employment network providing Ticket to Work services to SSI and SSDI beneficiaries. The DEI grant is collecting limited data on individuals served by the grant. One objective of the grant is to conduct Integrated Resource Team (IRT) meetings on individuals with unmet needs that are impacting employment. To motivate CareerCenter counselors and case managers to enroll people with disabilities in employment and training programs, particularly WIOA–supported services, the grant offers training and supportive services funds to WIOA–enrolled people with disabilities. These funds supplement existing dollars and are designed to help CareerCenters maximize the likelihood of a successful employment outcome. The funds, which are known as the Flexible Employment Fund (FEF), require an IRT to convene, thus encouraging an integrated, or unified, approach to employment services.

The CareerCenters also provide a number of other employment programs that serve people with disabilities. The Maine Job Bank is an online accessible CareerCenter tool to allow job seekers from around the state to be matched with real–time available open positions. The Job Bank currently has 22,248 active job bank registrants of whom 1,634 are self–disclosed job seekers with disabilities. This represents 7.3% of total Job Bank registrants. Data reported on the ETA 9002 for Program Year 2014 showed that under the Wagner–Peyser Act, Maine served 2,627 individuals who disclosed a disability. This represents only 3.4% of all individuals served – and a significant decrease from the 4,525 individuals served in 2008. In Program Year 2014 (July 1, 2014–June 30, 2015), Maine’s Workforce Investment Act (WIA) data indicate that 172 individuals with self–disclosed disabilities were enrolled in WIA services. Among those that exited services, the entered employment rate was 77.1% compared to 73.2% for public assistance recipients and 69.6% for veterans. Average earnings data reveal that individuals with disabilities earned only $10,749 compared to $11,762 for public assistance recipients and $12,366 for veterans.

**E. who are youth with disabilities and students with disabilities, including, as appropriate, their need for pre-employment transition services or other transition services.**

It is appropriate to note here the impact that WIOA has on the requirements to service more in school youth with disabilities as they transition to adulthood and the world of work.

The Challenges and Opportunities under WIOA One of the core challenges of WIOA is the capacity of public VR from a resource perspective, to take on these additional responsibilities, particularly given the challenges that already exist for VR nationally in meeting the needs of job seekers with disabilities, with many states already in order of selection. If WIOA is to deliver on its promise in terms of improved transition outcomes for all students with disabilities, it will be critically important for VR systems to work in a highly cooperative fashion with state and local education agencies and school districts, as well as other public agencies and funders, to leverage resources. In addition, simply assuming that the details will be worked out at the local level between VR offices and local school districts in terms of delivery and funding of the transition services required under WIOA, will likely result in a lack of consistent implementation, to the detriment of students with disabilities. (Hoff, 2014)

Maine DVR continues in its efforts to fully and properly implement all of the components of this new legislation to work cooperatively with agencies that have the most impact on transition–age students and ensure optimal success for our consumers, including assessing the future needs of this population once the final regulations are received.

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

DVR has seen some improvement in the length of time that it takes individuals to move into a plan for services along with the overall time spent in the VR program as a whole. DVR’s concerted efforts to improve employment outcomes for people with disabilities have resulted in increases in the rehabilitation rate and successful employment outcomes each of the last several years. As was noted, however, DVR struggles with a higher than average staff turnover and large case load sizes in some areas of the state which have resulted in concerns about responding to consumers in a timely manner. While the new Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) brings with it many opportunities that support building upon and improving DVR’s partnerships with other state agencies and councils and commissions, it also provides DVR with some challenges regarding how to provide more services to in school youth, for example, while not adding any additional financial or staff resources. DVR will be undertaking a project to review all of the recommendations that were provided in the Process Mapping exercise this past fall. As DVR reviews processes and how current staff and financial resources are used, we plan to develop some specific time and financial savings methodologies that will assist in providing more efficient services while maintaining overall quality and consistency of these services across the state. In addition, once the new rules for WIOA are available, DVR will be adjusting our services and procedures accordingly.

**3. Include an assessment of the needs of individuals with disabilities for transition career services and pre-employment transition services, and the extent to which such services are coordinated with transition services provided under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act .**

It is appropriate to note here the impact that WIOA has on the requirements to service more in school youth with disabilities as they transition to adulthood and the world of work.

The Challenges and Opportunities under WIOA One of the core challenges of WIOA is the capacity of public VR from a resource perspective, to take on these additional responsibilities, particularly given the challenges that already exist for VR nationally in meeting the needs of job seekers with disabilities, with many states already in order of selection. If WIOA is to deliver on its promise in terms of improved transition outcomes for all students with disabilities, it will be critically important for VR systems to work in a highly cooperative fashion with state and local education agencies and school districts, as well as other public agencies and funders, to leverage resources. In addition, simply assuming that the details will be worked out at the local level between VR offices and local school districts in terms of delivery and funding of the transition services required under WIOA, will likely result in a lack of consistent implementation, to the detriment of students with disabilities. (Hoff, 2014)

Maine DVR continues in its efforts to fully and properly implement all of the components of this new legislation to work cooperatively with agencies that have the most impact on transition–age students and ensure optimal success for our consumers, including assessing the future needs of this population once the final regulations are received.

**k. Annual Estimates**

(Formerly known as Attachment 4.11(b)). Describe:

**1. The number of individuals in the State who are eligible for services;**

In the Comprehensive Needs Assessment completed for the 2015 State Plan, the estimated number of individuals eligible for services based on the American Community Survey (ACS) in 2010 was 73,000 DVR–eligible adults in Maine. This data, from the ACS, was most recently updated in 2010.

**2. The number of eligible individuals who will receive services under:**

**A. The VR Program;**

The FFY 2015 projections for Maine DVR were 4,000 new applicants with 3,300 individuals to become eligible for services. Maine DVR anticipated that 2,000 clients will develop Individualized Plans for Employment and projected 1,000 successful employment closures. • In FFY 2015, Maine processed 4,115 new applicants, found 3,434 individuals eligible, wrote 2,473 plans, and closed 1,132 clients in employment. Maine DVR served 8,990 clients with $8,185,386.11 (total case service expenditures from the RSA–2 110 & VI–B funds) in Title I funds. • Each priority category, if under an order of selection – This is the fifth full federal fiscal year Maine DVR was able to serve all eligible consumers. o In FFY 2014, Maine’s successful employment closures, by Order of Selection category: ? 452 clients (45%) were mostly significantly disabled; ? 391 clients (38%) were significantly disabled; and ? 167 clients (17%) were disabled. o In FFY 2015, Maine’s successful employment closures, by Order of Selection category: ? 493 clients (44%) were mostly significantly disabled; ? 401 clients (35%) were significantly disabled; and ? 238 clients (21%) were disabled. • The average expenditure per client closed in FFY 2015 was estimated to be $2,000. The proposed case service budget was $9,000,000. Actual expenditures for cases closed in FFY 2015 were $8,185,386.11 with the average case cost of $2,009 per client. Maine served individuals in all three priority categories in FFY 2014. The projected number of clients to receive services after being found eligible was 9,000 in which 5,000 were expected to be served under an employment plan.

**B. The Supported Employment Program; and**

Maine DVR received $252,000 in Title VI–B grant funds and $13,150,933 in Title I funds for the FY 2013 grant. • In FFY 2014, DVR closed 136 Supported Employment cases of which 46 cased closed with an employment outcome. • In FFY 2015, DVR closed 117 Supported Employment cases of which 47 cased closed with an employment outcome. In FFY 2016, it is expected that Maine DVR will serve 110 individuals with Title VI funds and at least another 30 with Title I funds. The number served with Title I funds has been stable over the past three years.

**C. each priority category, if under an order of selection;**

The expected services provision by priority category was as follows:

Category Percent Individuals; All Served/With IPE

1 (Most Significantly Disabled) 50% 4,500/2,500

2 (Significantly Disabled) 30% 2,700/1,500

3 (Disabled) 20% 1,800/1,000

As of this report date, Maine DVR served all eligible clients. In terms of employment outcomes for FFY 2014, DVR projected 1,000 employment closures as follows:

Category Percent Successful Closures

1 (Most Significantly Disabled) 50% 500

2 (Significantly Disabled) 30% 300

3 (Disabled) 20% 200

Maine continued to serve individuals in all three priority categories during FFY 2014 as stated above. The projected number of clients to receive services after being found eligible was 9,000. With a case service budget of $8,500,000, the expected services provision by priority category was as follows:

Category Percent Clients Dollars

1 (Most Significantly Disabled) 50% 4,500 $4,250,000

2 (Significantly Disabled) 30% 2,700 $2,550,000

3 (Disabled) 20% 1,800 $1,700,000

**3. The number of individuals who are eligible for VR services, but are not receiving such services due to an order of selection; and**

State Plan Estimates for FFY 2016 During FFY 2016, DVR determined that it could no longer serve individuals in OOS Category 3 due to lack of resources. The projected number of clients to receive services after being found eligible is 10,000 of which 6,000 are expected to be served under an employment plan. Since open cases in Category 3 will continue to be served, they are included below. The expected services provision by priority category was as follows:

Category Percent Individuals All Served/With IPE

1 (Most Significantly Disabled) 55% 5,500/3,300

2 (Significantly Disabled) 35% 3,500/2,100

3 (Disabled) 10% 1,000/600

In terms of employment outcomes for FFY 2016, DVR is projecting 1,200 employment closures as follows:

Category Percent Successful Closures

1 (Most Significantly Disabled) 55% 660

2 (Significantly Disabled) 35% 420

3 (Disabled) 10% 120

The projected number of clients to receive services after being found eligible is 10,000.

**4. The cost of services for the number of individuals estimated to be eligible for services. If under an order of selection, identify the cost of services for each priority category.**

With a case service budget of $8,000,000, the expected services provision by priority category is as follows:

Category Percent Clients Dollars

1 (Most Significantly Disabled) 55% 5,500 $4,400,000

2 (Significantly Disabled) 35% 3,500 $2,800,000

3 (Disabled) 10% 1,000 $800,000

**l. State Goals and Priorities**

The designated State unit must:

**1. Identify if the goals and priorities were jointly developed**

Identify if the goals and priorities were jointly developed and agreed to by the State VR agency and the State Rehabilitation Council, if the State has a Council, and jointly agreed to any revisions.

Maine DVR, in concert with the DVR SRC, developed a plan to assess the VR needs in Maine. This included information from several public forums that were held throughout 2015. The goal of these forums was for the SRC to solicit constructive feedback from current and former clients of Maine DVR. Although DVR and the SRC followed a similar process to how feedback was sought during the previous year, only five members of the community attended and one gave verbal feedback to the VR program.

**2. Identify the goals and priorities in carrying out the VR and Supported Employment programs.**

Goal 1 To increase successful closures for DVR clients from 1200 in 2016 and 1300 in 2017, thereby substantially improving employment outcomes for DVR clients in Maine. Employment outcomes and goals from 2016 through 2020 will be impacted by the change in serving more youth in school. Initially, it is believed that DVR may see a decrease in their overall employment outcomes, as DVR will not realize successful outcomes from these in school youth for a few years. In addition, with the focus of DVR’s resources put toward school youth, there may be fewer VR resources for adults with significant disabilities.

Goal 2 To serve all individuals with the most significant disabilities in a timely manner, which means determining eligibilities within 60 days and developing plans for employment for all consumers within the new 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 category 3 in the future.

Goal 3 To ensure that individuals with disabilities who may be unserved or underserved or who have minority status have access to DVR services.

Goal 4 Maine DVR will partner with the larger workforce development system to improve opportunities and access for DVR clients as measured annually by documented collaborative activities, technical assistance, and training.

Goal 5 Maine DVR will partner with Adult Education, the SWB, and the larger workforce development system to incorporate and apply the new rules related to the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA).

**3. Ensure that the goals and priorities are based on an analysis of the following areas:**

**A. The most recent comprehensive statewide assessment, including any updates;**

Maine DVR completed its comprehensive needs assessment and presented it to the State Rehabilitation Council for comment.

The SRC reviewed the Comprehensive Needs assessment in December 2015 and were invited to develop goals and strategies to gaps in the system and services to un– served and underserved individuals.

**B. the State's performance under the performance accountability measures of section 116 of WIOA; and**

Standards and Indicators are tracked on a quarterly basis and the new MaineAWARE case management system software enables Maine DVR to track in real time if needed. This is done and reported out to the Bureau Lead Team staff, as well as Regional managers, so that all are aware of how DVR is are doing in meeting these specific goals.

Other available information on the operation and effectiveness of the VR program, including any reports received from the State Rehabilitation Council and findings and recommendations from monitoring activities conducted under Section 107.

The SRC also provided questions asked in Maine’s 2014 consumer satisfaction survey conducted by Market Decisions, LLC. This is the fifth consumer satisfaction survey conducted by Market Decisions since 2003. The SRC has provided and approved "the state specific" questions.

**C. other available information on the operation and effectiveness of the VR program, including any reports received from the State Rehabilitation Council and finding and recommendations from monitoring activities conducted under section 107.**

No recommendations from SRC to DVR in their 2015 Annual Report.

**m. Order of Selection**

Describe:

**1. Whether the designated State unit will implement and order of selection. If so, describe:**

**A. The order to be followed in selecting eligible individuals to be provided VR services.**

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 particular 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 107 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, “most significantly disabled”; Priority Category 2, “significantly disabled”; or Priority Category 3, “disabled” as set forth below. Individuals with disabilities shall be served first based on significance of disability and second by date of application in the following priority order: A. Priority Category 1, "Most significantly disabled" means an eligible individual who meets the following criteria: (1) who has a serious limitation in terms of an employment outcome in four or more functional capacity areas. Functional capacity areas are; mobility, work tolerance, communication, self–care, interpersonal skills, cognition and learning (self– direction), or work skills. "Serious limitation in terms of an employment outcome" means a reduction of one’s capacity to perform, due to severe physical or mental impairment, to the degree that the individual requires services or accommodations in order for the individual to work or be a fully functioning member of the community; and (2) whose vocational rehabilitation can be expected to require multiple vocational rehabilitation services, meaning two or more core vocational rehabilitation services as outlined in Section 9 of this rule, services 9.1 through 9.14; and (3) whose vocational rehabilitation can be expected to require an extended period of time. B. Priority Category 2, "Significantly disabled" means an eligible individual who meets the following criteria: (1) who has a serious limitation in terms of an employment outcome in at least two or three functional capacity areas. Functional capacity areas are; mobility, work tolerance, communication, self–care, interpersonal skills, cognition and learning (self– direction), or work skills. "Serious limitation in terms of an employment outcome" means a reduction of one’s capacity to perform, due to severe physical or mental impairment, to the degree that the individual requires services or accommodations in order for the individual to work or be a fully functioning member of the community; and (2) whose vocational rehabilitation can be expected to require multiple vocational rehabilitation services, meaning two or more core vocational rehabilitation services as outlined in Section 9 of this rule, services 9.1 through 9.14; and (3) whose vocational rehabilitation can be expected to require an extended period of time; and (4) who has one or more physical or mental disabilities resulting from amputation, arthritis, autism, blindness, burn injury, cancer, cerebral palsy, cystic fibrosis, deafness, head injury, acquired traumatic brain injury, heart disease, hemiplegia, hemophilia, HIV infection, respiratory or pulmonary dysfunction, mental retardation, mental illness, multiple sclerosis, muscular dystrophy, musculo–skeletal disorders, neurological disorders (including stroke and epilepsy), spinal cord conditions (including paraplegia and quadriplegia), sickle cell anemia, specific learning disability, end–stage renal disease, or another disability or combination of disabilities determined on the basis of an assessment for determining eligibility and vocational rehabilitation needs to cause comparable substantial functional limitation. C. Priority Category 3, "Disabled" means an eligible individual who has: (1) a serious limitation in terms of an employment outcome in 1 or more functional capacity areas. Functional capacity areas are; mobility, work tolerance, communication, self–care, interpersonal skills, cognition and learning (self– direction), or work skills. "Serious limitation in terms of an employment outcome" means a reduction of one’s capacity to perform, due to severe physical or mental impairment, to the degree that the individual requires services or accommodations in order for the individual to work or be a fully functioning member of the community; and (2) whose vocational rehabilitation may or may not require multiple core vocational rehabilitation services as outlined in Section 9 of this rule, services 9.1 through 9.14; or (3) whose vocational rehabilitation may or may not require an extended period of time Individuals Not Meeting the Order of Selection Criteria – 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.

**B. The justification for the order.**

In late 2015, DVR was made aware of a potential shortfall in funding. Further analysis of the reasons behind the projected shortfall revealed: • The required 15% Title I set–aside for Pre Employment Transition Services is reducing the funding available for all other clients other than Students with Disabilities. • Case service costs and expenditures have increased over the past year by approximately 20%, mostly due to an increase in applications by individuals seeking assistance with hearing aid costs • DVR has increased the numbers of individuals served and successfully closed in employment in each of the last five years while funding has not increased. • A high level of staff vacancies over the last year may result in immediate and premature referrals to fee–for–service providers

When 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.

In 2014 and 2015, DVR spent approximately $567,000 and $690,000 respectively on individuals with disabilities who were in Category 3. By instituting an Order of Selection for Category 3, DVR believes that it will achieve the cost savings that will allow it to keep serving Categories 1 and 2. Individuals who have the fewest barriers to employment may be served through referrals to other services provided by Maine’s workforce development system.

**C. The service and outcome goals.**

Maine anticipates implementing an Order of Selection as of January 18, 2016. After that date, DVR plans to serve all eligible clients in Categories 1 and 2 during the remainder of FFY 2016. The projected numbers of clients to be served under an IPE is 6000. The proposed case service budget is $8,000,000. The expected services provision by priority category is as follows:

OOS Category 1 55% $4,400,000

OOS Category 2 35% $2,800,000

OOS Category 3 10% $800,000 (this reflects those already in Category 3 at the time of the OOS implementation) Based on successful employment closures in 2015, Maine DVR projects employment closures as follows:

OOS 1 55% 660

OOS 2 35% 420

OOS 3 10% 120 Total: 1200

**D. The time within which these goals may be achieved for individuals in each priority category within the order.**

Maine DVR is unable to project a date when Category 3 will be able to be re–opened for service.

**E. How individuals with the most significant disabilities are selected for services before all other individuals with disabilities; and**

Individuals with disabilities shall be served first based on significance of disability and second by date of application in the following priority order: Priority Category 1, “ most significantly disabled”; Priority Category 2, “significantly disabled”; or Priority Category 3, “disabled”.

**2. If the designated State unit has elected to serve eligible individuals, regardless of any established order of selection, who require specific services or equipment to maintain employment.**

Maine DVR has not selected to serve eligible individuals in this manner.

**n. Goals and Plans for Distribution of title VI Funds.**

**1. Specify the State's goals and priorities for funds received under section 603 of the Rehabilitation Act for the provision of supported employment services.**

Maine DVR has provided extensive training for those staff who are serving in school youth. Maine receives approximately $252,000 in Supported Employment funds each year. The set–aside for transition age youth at 50% then is quite small. Using our case management system, DVR staff will be able to continue to identify those students and adults who have significant support needs which would qualify then for supported employment funds.

**2. Describe the activities to be conducted, with funds reserved pursuant to section 603(d), for youth with the most significant disabilities, including:**

**A. the provision of extended services for a period not to exceed 4 years; and**

• At the time of application, if an individual is believed to require extended services due to the severity of their disability and barriers to employment, a “flag” is placed on the individual within our AWARE case management system. Then, when it comes time to develop a plan for employment for the individual there is another decision point at which time the “flag” either stays on or is taken off depending on the need of the individual at that time. When a referral is made to a provider, there is a discussion that extended services are available to this individual and that he or she may require longer term support services. Those extended services expenditures (such as job development and job coaching) are then coded to the specific grant.

**B. how the State will leverage other public and private funds to increase resources for extended services and expanded supported employment opportunities for youth with the most significant disabilities.**

• DVR has a close working relationship with our partners at DHHS Office of Aging and Disability Services and Mental Health Services we have developed a procedural directive which spells out how wavier services will fund career planning (specifically they fund Discovering Personal Genius© as the career planning model) and once Discovery is completed (waiver services will fund up to 50 hours), a referral is made to DVR who will work with the case manager and agency to proceed with job development and perhaps further exploration as needed. Then, when an individual has been successfully placed in a job and is stable and closed out successfully (may utilize extended services for this as needed), waiver funds will then pick up again and cover long term support services (usually job coaching) which will help the individual continue to remain stable on the job.

• DVR is in the process of developing a partnership with Jobs for Maine Graduates (JMG) which is a local affiliate of the National Jobs for Americas Graduates programs. JMG provides pre-employment services to in school youth with a variety of barriers including those with disabilities and as part of our desire to improve our services to in-school youth, we are discussing how to provide additional training for JMG staff so that more students with disabilities can be served by their program. We also plan to develop a fee structure to make JMG a vender so these services can be paid for through the VR program.

**o. State's Strategies**

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

**1. The methods to be used to expand and improve services to individuals with disabilities.**

These Goals, Objectives and Strategies to attain 2013–2015 goals developed based on the recommendations from the 2015 Statewide Needs Assessment.

Goal 1

To increase successful closures for DVR clients from 1000 in 2014 and 1100 in 2015 to 1200 in 2016, thereby substantially improving employment outcomes for DVR clients in Maine. These employment outcomes and goals from 2016 through 2018 will be impacted by the change in serving more youth in school. Initially, it is believed that DVR may see a decrease in their overall employment outcomes, as DVR will not realize successful outcomes from these in school youth for a few years. In addition, with the focus of DVR’s resources to in school youth, there may be fewer VR resources for adults with disabilities.

Objective: To reduce early exit from services from 42% in 2015 to 38 % during FFY 2016.

Strategies:

a. Collect and analyze data on reasons for drop out for cases closed in status 30/found eligible no plan developed

b. Provide staff training on case management techniques that promote engagement.

Objective: To provide access to Pre–Employment Transition Services (as defined under WIOA) to students with disabilities

Strategies:

a. During FY2016, DVR will engage in a “Progressive Employment” pilot initiative to increase work experience activities for 200 youth and young adult clients in the Lewiston and Portland offices.

b. During FY 2016, DVR will engage in a pilot with AlphaOne (Maine’s Center for Independent Living) to provide services to at least 100 students in two high schools that will increase their self–determination skills and independent living skills.

c. During FY 2016, DVR will explore partnerships with Career and Technical Education regional schools as a means to deliver PETS services

d. During FY 2016, DVR will increase summer youth work experience opportunities for PETS eligible clients

e. During FY 2016, explore opportunities to partner with the Maine Department of Health and Human Resources – Office of Children and Family Services to blend and braid funding to deliver PETS services for jointly served youth.

f. During FY 2016, will continue to work closely with WIOA partners to develop a service pathway for youth

Objective: To increase the percentage of successful employment closures for individuals who receive services from community rehabilitation providers.

Strategies:

a. Provide joint training opportunities for CRP’s on topics to promote best practices in employment supports for people with disabilities.

Objective: Through lessons learned from the Progressive Employment pilot, expand the number of Maine employers who implement diversity hiring activities through engagement with the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services’ Business Services Team to 15 in FFY 2016 in conjunction with workforce system partners

Strategies:

a. Continue to actively support the Maine Chapter of the US Business Leadership Network.

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

c. Take a lead role with Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) core partners and others in the workforce development system to grow and diversify Maine’s workforce through targeted outreach to employers, reinforcing the message that “We need every Mainer”.

Goal 2

To serve all individuals with the most significant disabilities in a timely manner, which means determining eligibilities within 60 days and developing plans for employment for all consumers within the new 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 category 3 in the future.

Objective: To reduce the average time in plan development from 217 days in FFY 2014 to the federal standard of 90 days in FFY 2016

Strategies:

a. Increase use of the Career Exploration Workshop, which has been shown to decrease case length time.

b. 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

c. Deliver staff training and supervision on best practices in IPE plan development and Order of Selection (OOS) determination

Objective: To determine if there could be efficiencies in how DVR processes the work of providing services across the state by building on the recommendations of a process mapping report completed for DVR in summer 2015.

Strategies:

a. Convene a steering team made up of a representative from the State Rehabilitation Council, at least one clerical staff, three VR counselors, three casework supervisors, the three regional managers, and four Central Office staff.

b. Beginning in January 2016, establish and launch five work groups to review DVR processes in the following areas:

• Case Flow Process

• Clerical Support work flow

• Technology

• Training and Communication

• Review of policies and procedural directives

Objective: To increase the number of individuals with significant intellectual disabilities who access the available waiver employment support for long term employment support needs after closure from BRS.

Strategies:

b. Continue to work with the Maine Department of Health and Human Services to ensure that all individuals who have the waiver – but have not taken advantage of employment services – are aware of employment supports open to them through coordination between the two Departments

c. Continue to provide access and training to the BRIDGE –Career Exploration Workshop, appropriate for individuals with intellectual disabilities

Objective: Maine DVR will undertake efforts to continue to embrace and implement an “Employment First” philosophy during the next year as documented by a decrease of 5% in the statewide unemployment rate of people with intellectual disabilities.

Strategies:

a. DVR will continue to participate in work of Employment First Maine’s coalition, which includes targeted goals to improve employment outcomes for individuals with significant disabilities.

b. By October 2016, Employment First Maine coalition will present a report or "roadmap" for how Maine will move forward to address this goal.

Goal 3

To ensure that individuals with disabilities who may be unserved or underserved or who have minority status have access to DVR services.

Objective: Maine DVR will work closely with Maine’s Section 121 VR Grant – Wabanaki Vocational Rehabilitation, to increase co–enrollment to 10 individuals in FFY 2016

Strategies:

a. Maine DVR will include Wabanaki Vocational Rehabilitation in training and technical assistance opportunities.

b. Wabanaki VR will provide technical assistance to Maine DVR on issues related to cultural competency and best practices in Native employment supports.

c. According to the joint MOU, Maine DVR and Wabanaki VR will meet at least annually to review the agreement.

Objective: Maine DVR will collect data on the numbers of individuals served – belonging to the following categories in FY 2012 to establish a baseline and future goals:

a. individuals involved with the correctional system

b. individuals who are veterans

c. individuals who are “older workers”

d. individuals who are “New Mainers”

Strategies: a. DVR will develop and utilize special indicators in its case management system to track individuals who belong to one of the above groups.

Objective: DVR will ensure that all materials distributed or published by the agency will be accessible and demonstrate cultural competency.

Strategies:

a. To promote more efficient use of resources and increase access for individuals who use ASL, DVR will explore the benefits of hiring staff interpreters versus contracting for ASL interpreting services.

Objective: Maine DVR will develop new strategies to increase the employment of people with mental health disabilities

Strategies:

a. DVR will partner with the Department of Health and Human Services’ Office of Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services to explore opportunities available through the I SPA

b. DVR will work with the Department of Corrections through its quarterly joint meetings to identify effective practices in referring and supporting individuals for whom mental health is a barrier to employment.

Objective: Maine DVR will maintain statewide consistency in its practices with regard to “Clubhouses” offering services to DVR clients as measured by client case review.

Strategies:

a. DVR will maintain a liaison to the local Clubhouse in each office.

b. DVR will invite Clubhouse program staff to participate in DVR training opportunities.

Objective: In keeping with WIOA legislation, ensure individuals working at sub–minimum wage are aware of and have access to DVR services

Strategies:

a. DVR will partner with the Department of Health and Human Services’ Office of Aging and Disability Services(OADS) and the Bureau of Labor Standards (BLS) to identify individuals who are currently working at sub–minimum wage

b. DVR will develop an outreach strategy to these workers in collaboration with OADS and BLS

c. DVR will develop procedural guidance and training for staff on conversion of workers from sub–minimum wage settings to competitive, integrated employment

Goal 4

Maine DVR will partner with the larger workforce development system to improve opportunities and access for DVR clients as measured annually by documented collaborative activities, technical assistance, and training.

Objective: Maine DVR will continue to partner with Maine’s Disability Employment Initiative (DEI) Grant to include 50 non–VR CareerCenter customers with disabilities in Career Exploration Workshops Strategies in FFY 2016

Strategies:

a. The DEI team will include one VR Rehabilitation Counselor I who will assist in piloting a jointly–delivered Career Exploration Workshop

b. DVR will participate in DEI Integrated Resource Team meetings

c. DVR will work with the DEI team and others in the Bureau of Employment Services to ensure accessibility in Maine’s CareerCenter network

d. DVR will partner with DEI staff in the delivery of an asset development summit in FY 2016

Objective: DVR will work with the Maine Department of Labor’s Center for Workforce Research and Information to maintain a triennial snapshot of the employment status of people with disabilities in Maine as well as a webpage where disability data can be easily accessed.

Strategies:

a. DVR will engage CWRI to offer training to DVR staff on use of current labor market information and tools

b. DVR will work with CWRI to develop a triennial snapshot of the employment status of people with disabilities in Maine as well as a webpage where disability data can be easily accessed.

Objective: DVR will develop strategies with WIOA core partners to provide referrals to workforce services for individuals found eligible for DVR under Category 3 but unable to be served by DVR due to waitlist.

Strategies:

a. DVR will attend regular LWIB and One Stop partnerships with the goal of developing specific cross referral and common intake processes across core partner agencies and organizations.

b. Processes developed will be piloted in all areas of the state to be vetted and finalized before being adopted statewide.

Objective: Maine DVR will continue implementation of a Memorandum of Understanding with the public Worker’s Compensation system. In order to better serve injured Maine workers who are in need of rehabilitation services DVR will increase the number of individuals served through a referral from the Workers’ Compensation Board from 65 in FFY 2015 to 75 in FFY 2016.

Strategies:

a. DVR will meet at least annually with the Workers’ Compensation Board to assess the success of the MOU initiative.

Objective: DVR will explore opportunities for new grants to support the mission of BRS. During 2015, DVR will apply for at least two new grant opportunities.

Strategies:

a. DVR Assistant Director will continue to look at websites and email list serves for possible grant opportunities that may be relevant.

Goal 5

Maine DVR will partner with Adult Education, the SWIB, and the larger workforce development system to incorporate and apply the new rules related to the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA).

Objective: To learn, and apply all rules of WIOA with the DVR program, including drafting a unified state plan, adopting new performance measures and continued collaboration with the One–Stop system.

Strategies:

a. New rules will be reviewed and adopted by DVR within the time frames given in the new law.

A steering committee has been formed with all affected partners and a project plan developed to address the changes agencies face with the advent of WIOA.

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

Assistive technology services and assistive technology devices are provided to individuals with disabilities as determined by each individual’s vocational goal, and appear as prescribed services on the respective individual’s signed IPE. DVR services include assistive technology and assistive technology devices if required for the individual’s IPE, necessary for the attainment of the individual’s employment goal. DVR works closely with Maine cohorts, Alpha One and ALLTECH, assistive technology organizations which provide assistive technology technical assistance services as well as assistive technology devices.

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

Goal 3

To ensure that individuals with disabilities who may be unserved or underserved or who have minority status have access to DVR services.

Objective: Maine DVR will work closely with Maine’s Section 121 VR Grant – Wabanaki Vocational Rehabilitation, to increase co–enrollment to 10 individuals in FFY 2016

Strategies:

a. Maine DVR will include Wabanaki Vocational Rehabilitation in training and technical assistance opportunities.

b. Wabanaki VR will provide technical assistance to Maine DVR on issues related to cultural competency and best practices in Native employment supports.

c. According to the joint MOU, Maine DVR and Wabanaki VR will meet at least annually to review the agreement.

Objective: Maine DVR will collect data on the numbers of individuals served – belonging to the following categories in FY 2012 to establish a baseline and future goals:

a. individuals involved with the correctional system

b. individuals who are veterans

c. individuals who are “older workers”

d. individuals who are “New Mainers”

Strategies:

a. DVR will develop and utilize special indicators in its case management system to track individuals who belong to one of the above groups.

b. DVR will ensure that all materials distributed or published by the agency will be accessible and demonstrate cultural competency.

c. To promote more efficient use of resources and increase access for individuals who use ASL, DVR will explore the benefits of hiring staff interpreters versus contracting for ASL interpreting services.

Objective: Maine DVR will develop new strategies to increase the employment of people with mental health disabilities

Strategies:

a. DVR will partner with the Department of Health and Human Services’ Office of Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services to explore opportunities available through the I SPA b. DVR will work with the Department of Corrections through its quarterly joint meetings to identify effective practices in referring and supporting individuals for whom mental health is a barrier to employment.

Objective: Maine DVR will maintain statewide consistency in its practices with regard to “Clubhouses” offering services to DVR clients as measured by client case review.

Strategies:

a. DVR will maintain a liaison to the local Clubhouse in each office.

b. DVR will invite Clubhouse program staff to participate in DVR training opportunities.

Objective: In keeping with WIOA legislation, ensure individuals working at sub–minimum wage are aware of and have access to DVR services

Strategies:

a. DVR will partner with the Department of Health and Human Services’ Office of Aging and Disability Services(OADS) and the Bureau of Labor Standards (BLS) to identify individuals who are currently working at sub–minimum wage

b. DVR will develop an outreach strategy to these workers in collaboration with OADS and BLS

c. DVR will develop procedural guidance and training for staff on conversion of workers from sub–minimum wage settings to competitive, integrated employment

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

Goal 1 To increase successful closures for DVR clients from 1000 in 2014 and 1100 in 2015 to 1200 in 2016, thereby substantially improving employment outcomes for DVR clients in Maine. These employment outcomes and goals from 2016 through 2018 will be impacted by the change in serving more youth in school. Initially, it is believed that DVR may see a decrease in their overall employment outcomes, as DVR will not realize successful outcomes from these in school youth for a few years. In addition, with the focus of DVR’s resources to in school youth, there may be fewer VR resources for adults with disabilities.

Objective: To reduce early exit from services from 42% in 2015 to 38 % during FFY 2016.

Strategies:

a. Collect and analyze data on reasons for drop out for cases closed in status 30/found eligible no plan developed

b. Provide staff training on case management techniques that promote engagement.

Objective: To provide access to Pre–Employment Transition Services (as defined under WIOA) to students with disabilities.

Strategies:

a.During FY2016, DVR will engage in a “Progressive Employment” pilot initiative to increase work experience activities for 200 youth and young adult clients in the Lewiston and Portland offices.

b.During FY 2016, DVR will engage in a pilot with AlphaOne (Maine’s Center for Independent Living) to provide services to at least 100 students in two high schools that will increase their self–determination skills and independent living skills.

c.During FY 2016, DVR will explore partnerships with Career and Technical Education regional schools as a means to deliver PETS services

d.During FY 2016, DVR will increase summer youth work experience opportunities for PETS eligible clients

e.During FY 2016, explore opportunities to partner with the Maine Department of Health and Human Resources – Office of Children and Family Services to blend and braid funding to deliver PETS services for jointly served youth.

f.During FY 2016, will continue to work closely with WIOA partners to develop a service pathway for youth

Objective: To increase the percentage of successful employment closures for individuals who receive services from community rehabilitation providers.

Strategies:

a. Provide joint training opportunities for CRP’s on topics to promote best practices in employment supports for people with disabilities.

Objective: Through lessons learned from the Progressive Employment pilot, expand the number of Maine employers who implement diversity hiring activities through engagement with the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services’ Business Services Team to 15 in FFY 2016 in conjunction with workforce system partners

Strategies:

a. Continue to actively support the Maine Chapter of the US Business Leadership Network.

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

c. Take a lead role with Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) core partners and others in the workforce development system to grow and diversify Maine’s workforce through targeted outreach to employers, reinforcing the message that “We need every Mainer”.

Goal 2 To serve all individuals with the most significant disabilities in a timely manner, which means determining eligibilities within 60 days and developing plans for employment for all consumers within the new 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 category 3 in the future.

Objective: To reduce the average time in plan development from 217 days in FFY 2014 to the federal standard of 90 days in FFY 2016

Strategies:

a. Increase use of the Career Exploration Workshop, which has been shown to decrease case length time.

b. 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

c. Deliver staff training and supervision on best practices in IPE plan development and Order of Selection (OOS) determination

Objective: To determine if there could be efficiencies in how DVR processes the work of providing services across the state by building on the recommendations of a process mapping report completed for DVR in summer 2015.

Strategies:

a.Convene a steering team made up of a representative from the State Rehabilitation Council, at least one clerical staff, three VR counselors, three casework supervisors, the three regional managers, and four Central Office staff.

b.Beginning in January 2016, establish and launch five work groups to review DVR processes in the following areas: • Case Flow Process • Clerical Support work flow •Technology • Training and Communication • Review of policies and procedural directives

Objective: To increase the number of individuals with significant intellectual disabilities who access the available waiver employment support for long term employment support needs after closure from BRS.

Strategies:

a. Continue to work with the Maine Department of Health and Human Services to ensure that all individuals who have the waiver – but have not taken advantage of employment services – are aware of employment supports open to them through coordination between the two Departments

b. Continue to provide access and training to the BRIDGE –Career Exploration Workshop, appropriate for individuals with intellectual disabilities

Objective: Maine DVR will undertake efforts to continue to embrace and implement an “Employment First” philosophy during the next year as documented by a decrease of 5% in the statewide unemployment rate of people with intellectual disabilities.

Strategies:

a. DVR will continue to participate in work of Employment First Maine’s coalition, which includes targeted goals to improve employment outcomes for individuals with significant disabilities.

b. By October 2016, Employment First Maine coalition will present a report or "roadmap" for how Maine will move forward to address this goal.

**5. If applicable, plans for establishing, developing, or improving community rehabilitation programs within the State.**

Goal 1:

Objective: To increase the percentage of successful employment closures for individuals who receive services from community rehabilitation providers.

Strategies: a. Provide joint training opportunities for CRP’s on topics to promote best practices in employment supports for people with disabilities.

Objective: Through lessons learned from the Progressive Employment pilot, expand the number of Maine employers who implement diversity hiring activities through engagement with the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services’ Business Services Team to 15 in FFY 2016 in conjunction with workforce system partners

Strategies: a. Continue to actively support the Maine Chapter of the US Business Leadership Network. b. Partner with the Maine State Chamber of Commerce, local Chambers, and the Society of Human Resource Managers (SHRM) to expand business outreach/network. c. Take a lead role with Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) core partners and others in the workforce development system to grow and diversify Maine’s workforce through targeted outreach to employers, reinforcing the message that “We need every Mainer”.

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

Performance accountability indicators under section 116 of WIOA – DVR is a partner with Adult Education, the SWIB, and the larger workforce development system to incorporate and apply the new rules related to the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), including drafting a unified state plan adopting new performance measures and further collaboration with the One–Stop system. DVR is a member of the Maine WIOA steering committee, which is guiding the Act’s implementation, and also has participants on multiple related sub–committees. DVR will be using wage data from the Maine Department of Labor’s Unemployment Insurance to establish baseline and initial WIOA performance targets for employment outcomes. Although it does not provide information on individuals who are placed in self–employment or other jobs, such as federal and out–of–state positions, this is the only data set available at this time. DVR is seeking further definition and data sources for the other WIOA performance indicators.

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

Goal 4 Maine DVR will partner with the larger workforce development system to improve opportunities and access for DVR clients as measured annually by documented collaborative activities, technical assistance, and training.

Objective: Maine DVR will continue to partner with Maine’s Disability Employment Initiative (DEI) Grant to include 50 non–VR CareerCenter customers with disabilities in Career Exploration Workshops Strategies in FFY 2016

Strategies: a. The DEI team will include one VR Rehabilitation Counselor I who will assist in piloting a jointly–delivered Career Exploration Workshop b. DVR will participate in DEI Integrated Resource Team meetings c. DVR will work with the DEI team and others in the Bureau of Employment Services to ensure accessibility in Maine’s CareerCenter network d. DVR will partner with DEI staff in the delivery of an asset development summit in FY 2016

Objective: DVR will work with the Maine Department of Labor’s Center for Workforce Research and Information to maintain a triennial snapshot of the employment status of people with disabilities in Maine as well as a webpage where disability data can be easily accessed.

Strategies: a. DVR will engage CWRI to offer training to DVR staff on use of current labor market information and tools b. DVR will work with CWRI to develop a triennial snapshot of the employment status of people with disabilities in Maine as well as a webpage where disability data can be easily accessed.

Objective: DVR will develop strategies with WIOA core partners to provide referrals to workforce services for individuals found eligible for DVR under Category 3 but unable to be served by DVR due to waitlist.

Strategies:

a. DVR will attend regular LWIB and One Stop partnerships with the goal of developing specific cross referral and common intake processes across core partner agencies and organizations.

b. Processes developed will be piloted in all areas of the state to be vetted and finalized before being adopted statewide.

Objective: Maine DVR will continue implementation of a Memorandum of Understanding with the public Worker’s Compensation system. In order to better serve injured Maine workers who are in need of rehabilitation services DVR will increase the number of individuals served through a referral from the Workers’ Compensation Board from 65 in FFY 2015 to 75 in FFY 2016.

Strategies: a. DVR will meet at least annually with the Workers’ Compensation Board to assess the success of the MOU initiative.

Objective: DVR will explore opportunities for new grants to support the mission of BRS. During 2015, DVR will apply for at least two new grant opportunities.

Strategies: Goal 5 Maine DVR will partner with Adult Education, the SWIB, and the larger workforce development system to incorporate and apply the new rules related to the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA).

Objective: To learn, and apply all rules of WIOA with the DVR program, including drafting a unified state plan, adopting new performance measures and continued collaboration with the One–Stop system.

Strategies: a. New rules will be reviewed and adopted by DVR within the time frames given in the new law. A steering committee has been formed with all affected partners and a project plan developed to address the changes agencies face with the advent of WIOA

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

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

The Maine Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) assists eligible individuals with disabilities to prepare for, achieve and retain employment in integrated community settings. DVR administers the General Vocational Rehabilitation program in Maine for the Rehabilitation Services Administration. A separate program is available to individuals who are blind or have visual impairments through the Maine Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired. This Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment focuses on the General Vocational Rehabilitation program and on the needs of individuals eligible for those services.

The assessment, conducted jointly with the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC), is designed to answer important questions about the population eligible for DVR services that live in Maine and their vocational rehabilitation needs. It serves to inform DVR’s strategic plan and goal development for the next three fiscal years, 2016 – 2018. In its compilation, we rely on a variety of publicly available sources, including survey information from the United States Census Bureau and data from the Rehabilitation Services Administration and the Social Security Administration. We gathered information from the Maine Departments of Labor, Education, and Health and Human Services, as well as numerous stakeholder groups, including people with disabilities, employers, and Vocational Rehabilitation counselors.

Maine is a large geographical state, which spans 30,843 square miles. The state is primarily rural in nature with a dispersed population of 1.3 million people and density of 43 people per square mile. Census data available in 2010 indicates that the population is primarily homogeneous with 95% of the residents being white and a median age of 43.1 years. At the time of this report, workforce conditions in Maine continue to improve, though there has been virtually no real economic growth for a decade. Underlying those seemingly contradictory statements is a rapidly advancing age structure of the population that is constraining growth and tightening the labor market at the same time. Through 2014, real gross domestic product has been little changed since 2004, after relatively steady growth in previous decades. Meanwhile, the number of jobs is up since the 2010 post–recession low, but still nearly 2% short of the 2008 peak level. In the middle of 2015 the state has about the same number of jobs as in 2004. This situation is in stark contrast to the nation, which began reaching new highs in GDP in 2012 and in nonfarm payroll jobs in 2014.

Though lagging from a net growth perspective, Maine is outperforming the nation in terms of employment and unemployment rates. As of September 2015, the 4.4% unemployment rate was back to pre–recession levels and below the 5.1 percent U.S. average and the employment to population ratio remained higher than the nation.

Since DVR’s last comprehensive statewide needs assessment in 2012, The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) of 2014 reauthorized the Rehabilitation Act of 1998. The purposes of WIOA include aligning the workforce development system with education, businesses, labor market information and trends, and increasing collaboration among state and federal agencies.

Maine’s legislature passed the Employment First Maine Act into law in June of 2013, establishing integrated community–based employment and customized employment as the “first and preferred service or support option” for people with disabilities. The passage of the law is a natural progression in Maine’s focus on competitive integrated employment as a valued outcome for the state’s citizens with disabilities. The state, like many that have passed Employment First laws, is now grappling with what it means to be fully compliant with the law.

Demand for community inclusion and access to employment by people with disabilities and their supporters continues to be strong across the country with consumer choice and opportunity for full participation being important for all. The advocacy and advice of the State Rehabilitation Council, Client Assistance Program, and Disability Rights Center, as well as groups such as Maine APSE and the Employment First Coalition, help to ensure that rights are being respected, laws are being followed, and practices are being improved to increase the successful employment of people with disabilities.

Maine’s Bureau of Rehabilitation Services, which includes the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, is involved at all levels as the implementation of WIOA transforms existing systems into a more cohesive, effective and collaborative entity through participation in restructuring the One–Stop Career Center processes, Workforce Boards, training, employment and youth workforce activities. Achieving expectations posed by these two significant changes in practice, challenges Maine to push forward with more systems changes that prioritize and assure access to competitive integrated employment services and supports.

In June of 2015, Maine DVR contracted with an outside consultant to review its service delivery process. The agency maintains a goal of providing timely, quality and efficient services to consumers. Expectations of outcomes included the examination of our internal service delivery process, in order to identify efficiencies and best practices that can help improve our timeliness and efficiency while continuing to provide quality services. Changes to the Rehabilitation Act including, the requirement of “90 days to plan” and new pre–employment training services for transition youth will impact our service delivery and resource capacity. This review included process mapping and brainstorming in six local Maine DVR offices around the state. The process detailed, reviewed, evaluated, discussed, and critiqued. Performance related to time, effectiveness, and efficiencies were analyzed. Best practices emerged.

The consultants reviewed documentation and data about the Maine VR program, and employment of people with disabilities in Maine. The most salient circumstance encountered in Maine VR offices was large caseloads, and the amount of work required to provide quality services to all of these clients. Maine VR has less than half the average complement of support staff according to national standards. On the surface, Maine VR has an adequate supply of counselors, but the geographical distances counselors have to travel and the lack of available Community Rehabilitation Providers (CRPs) across the state, impact their effectiveness. More importantly, as many other VR programs in states are adding more business relations and in– house employment specialists, Maine VR is lacking positions available to provide direct job placement and work experiences for its clients. The lack of adequate levels of support staff requires VR Counselors to perform a large share of administrative support functions, taking time away from their counseling function with clients.

The State Rehabilitation Council surveyed current and former clients of Maine DVR to solicit feedback regarding DVR services and opportunities for changes or improvement. During FY14, the SRC conducted an online survey. During FY15, the SRC held a series of public forums soliciting feedback in Lewiston, Rockland, Augusta, and Bangor. Individuals who were unable to attend the forum were able to provide feedback directly to the forum organizers by phone or email. In addition, the SRC Communications Committee met regularly during FY15 to review public forum input in comparison with data and information provided by DVR. DVR clients report high levels of satisfaction with VR services. DVR staff is diligent, committed and skilled. The number of clients reporting problems with their counselor has increased slightly when compared to the previous satisfaction survey. Resolving problems with VR clients is an area for further improvement. Based on SRC forum feedback, self–employment appears to be an increasingly common goal among DVR clients. DVR is serving increasing numbers of transition–age youth, and this trend is likely to continue under the new WIOA requirements.

In terms of case service expenditures, job development and placement continues to be the largest single service group, representing over 29% percent of total DVR case costs each year. A number of service groups saw large decreases, including College or University training, on–the–job supports and diagnosis & treatment while large increases were noted in hearing aid costs, and occupational/vocational & other training.

In identifying the general population eligible for DVR services and estimating unmet needs of those with significant disabilities, this report used data available through the American Community Survey, the Social Security Administration, and the Maine Departments of Education and Health and Human Services:

At the end of FFY 2014, DVR had 6,531 individuals in an active case status. For that same year, the ACS estimated that there were approximately 73,000 working–age adults with a disability who were not employed.

The Maine Department of Education reported an anticipated need of employment services in 2015 for 9,178 special education students, ages 14 – 20, of which those with learning disabilities (37.1%) and physical impairments (24.4) were the largest disability populations. That noted, Maine, like the rest of the United States, is experiencing an increase in the numbers of individuals identified with Autism spectrum disorders.

It is appropriate to note here the impact that WIOA has on the requirements to service more in school youth with disabilities as they transition to adulthood and the world of work.

The Challenges and Opportunities under WIOA One of the core challenges of WIOA is the capacity of public VR from a resource perspective, to take on these additional responsibilities, particularly given the challenges that already exist for VR nationally in meeting the needs of job seekers with disabilities, with many states already in order of selection. If WIOA is to deliver on its promise in terms of improved transition outcomes for all students with disabilities, it will be critically important for VR systems to work in a highly cooperative fashion with state and local education agencies and school districts, as well as other public agencies and funders, to leverage resources. In addition, simply assuming that the details will be worked out at the local level between VR offices and local school districts in terms of delivery and funding of the transition services required under WIOA, will likely result in a lack of consistent implementation, to the detriment of students with disabilities. (Hoff, 2014)

Maine DVR continues in its efforts to fully and properly implement all of the components of this new legislation to work cooperatively with agencies that have the most impact on transition–age students and ensure optimal success for our consumers.

The Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) continues to be a strong partner in the support and delivery of employment services for people with disabilities. – DHHS currently supports approximately 5,200 people with developmental disabilities, brain injuries or physical disabilities through four Centers for Medicaid and Medicare Services (CMS) 1915c Waivers. The waivers allow individuals who have been found eligible for the Maine Office of Aging and Disability Services (OADS) Services based on disability/eligibility to become prepared for employment through Community Supports Services that can assist the person to volunteer, increase work–readiness skills, and address issues of health and safety. New in 2014 was the addition of Career Planning Services using Discovering Personal Genius which is a tool that supports an individual to discover skills, abilities, capacities and three Vocational Themes. Approximately 150 people have accessed the service in the first year and been referred to Vocational Rehabilitation. Furthermore, OADS is providing on–the–job support through the waivers to about 1000 people who are working throughout Maine. These services can provide support to both the individual and the employer to maintain employment. At this time, approximately 3,000 working–age MaineCare waiver recipients are not working but are being asked about their interest and desire to move toward employment.

– In addition to providing ongoing employment support to more than 200 employed individuals with mental illness through contracts with CRP’s, the DHHS Office of Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services (SAMHS) has a number of initiatives currently underway to promote employment among the individuals they serve. SAMHS and OADS are coordinating the use of Balancing Incentive Program funds to increase system capacity to support individuals with disabilities on the path to employment. This initiative includes training for Work and Benefits Navigators, an Employment 101 curriculum, and training in Individual Placement and Support /Supported Employment.

Vocational rehabilitation services to minorities with disabilities in Maine have always been a challenge to DVR because of the state’s homogeneous population and low ethnic diversity. A vast majority (96%) of the VR population, a slight variation from Maine’s general population (95%), is White and only 4% identify themselves as being members of a racial or ethnic minority. In a state that has little statistical diversity of minority populations, Native Americans represent a historically recognizable group and Maine has nearly 18,500 tribal members who are located both on reservations and defined land, as well as scattered across the state. Tribal members are primarily located in Penobscot, Washington and Aroostook counties. Unemployment figures among Micmac and Maliseet tribes range from 55% to 76%. DVR continues to work collaboratively with the Houlton Band of Maliseets, which was awarded a five year Section 121 grant in FY 2008 which was extended again through 2017.

While Maine’s minority population is small, two areas of Maine have seen significant increases in the numbers of non–English speakers due to refugee resettlement programs. According to the 2014 American Community Survey, approximately 65,000 Maine residents speak a language other than English at home. Targeted culturally appropriate outreach may be needed to ensure that information concerning VR resources is available to individuals who belong to potentially underserved minority populations.

In addition to the unserved and underserved populations identified above, this assessment also gathered data and provided information on the anticipated vocational needs of incarcerated individuals with disabilities, older workers, veterans, those receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), and individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Co–location in Maine’s network of Department of Labor (MDOL) One–Stop CareerCenters has provided DVR the opportunity to work in partnership with a number of other programs that are components of the statewide workforce investment system and can support the employment of people with disabilities. In October of 2010, DVR assisted MDOL’s Bureau of Employment Services in obtaining a Disability Employment Initiative Grant to continue work successfully started under Maine’s Disability Program Navigator Grant. In October 2013, the state was awarded another three–year round of DEI funding but its focus is on a different area of the state. Designed to improve CareerCenter services and programs for people with disabilities in targeted regions of the state, Maine’s DEI grant work includes operating a statewide workforce employment network providing Ticket to Work services to SSI and SSDI beneficiaries. The DEI grant is collecting limited data on individuals served by the grant. One objective of the grant is to conduct Integrated Resource Team (IRT) meetings on individuals with unmet needs that are impacting employment. To motivate CareerCenter counselors and case managers to enroll people with disabilities in employment and training programs, particularly WIOA–supported services, the grant offers training and supportive services funds to WIOA–enrolled people with disabilities. These funds supplement existing dollars and are designed to help CareerCenters maximize the likelihood of a successful employment outcome. The funds, which are known as the Flexible Employment Fund (FEF), require an IRT to convene, thus encouraging an integrated, or unified, approach to employment services.

The CareerCenters also provide a number of other employment programs that serve people with disabilities. The Maine Job Bank is an online accessible CareerCenter tool to allow job seekers from around the state to be matched with real–time available open positions. The Job Bank currently has 22,248 active job bank registrants of whom 1,634 are self–disclosed job seekers with disabilities. This represents 7.3% of total Job Bank registrants. Data reported on the ETA 9002 for Program Year 2014 showed that under the Wagner–Peyser Act, Maine served 2,627 individuals who disclosed a disability. This represents only 3.4% of all individuals served – and a significant decrease from the 4,525 individuals served in 2008. In Program Year 2014 (July 1, 2014–June 30, 2015), Maine’s Workforce Investment Act (WIA) data indicate that 172 individuals with self–disclosed disabilities were enrolled in WIA services. Among those that exited services, the entered employment rate was 77.1% compared to 73.2% for public assistance recipients and 69.6% for veterans. Average earnings data reveal that individuals with disabilities earned only $10,749 compared to $11,762 for public assistance recipients and $12,366 for veterans.

In conclusion, DVR has seen some improvement in the length of time that it takes individuals to move into a plan for services along with the overall time spent in the VR program as a whole. DVR’s concerted efforts to improve employment outcomes for people with disabilities have resulted in increases in the rehabilitation rate and successful employment outcomes each of the last several years. As was noted, however, DVR struggles with a higher than average staff turnover and large case load sizes in some areas of the state which have resulted in concerns about responding to consumers in a timely manner. While the new Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) brings with it many opportunities that support building upon and improving DVR’s partnerships with other state agencies and councils and commissions, it also provides DVR with some challenges regarding how to provide more services to in school youth, for example, while not adding any additional financial or staff resources. DVR will be undertaking a project to review all of the recommendations that were provided in the Process Mapping exercise this past fall. As DVR reviews processes and how current staff and financial resources are used, we plan to develop some specific time and financial savings methodologies that will assist in providing more efficient services while maintaining overall quality and consistency of these services across the state. In addition, once the new rules for WIOA are available, DVR will be adjusting our services and procedures accordingly.

**B. support innovation and expansion activities; and**

State Independent Living Council (SILC) To assist the SILC to increase organizational capacity and member effectiveness, Maine DVR continued to support the SILC to maintain an Executive Director to envision and articulate the organization’s goals and establish the systems and mechanisms to achieve these goals. The SILC Executive Director will be responsible for conducting the work of the SPIL under the supervision and direction of the Maine SILC to accomplish tasks such as a) recruitment and management of members and volunteers b) establish and maintain partnerships with community members and organizations c) market and promote the Maine SILC d) increase and diversify the resources related to the six core areas of the SILC. State Rehabilitation Council Support Innovation & Expansion funds are used to support the activities and administration of the Statewide Rehabilitation Council (SRC) for the Division and the SRC meets monthly as a full council. The SRC has standing committees that meet regularly. These committees include, DVR/SRC Policy Group, CSPD Subcommittee, Membership, Annual Meeting, Website committee, and the Executive Committee. For more information regarding the SRC, please visit www.mainesrc.org. At its annual meeting in September 2013 the SRC benefited from the New England Technical Assistance and Continuing Education Center (TACE) facilitators. TACE successfully facilitated the SRC annual meeting as TACE staff understood not only the SRC mission, but also its current challenges, future goals and the critical importance of its work on behalf of PWD.

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

DVR does not have separate efforts to provide these services. All services are geared to assist individuals with most significant disabilities.

**p. Evaluation and Reports of Progress: VR and Supported Employment Goals**

Describe:

**1. An evaluation of the extent to which the VR program goals described in the approved VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan for the most recently completed program year were achieved. The evaluation must:**

**A. Identify the strategies that contributed to the achievement of the goals.**

Goal 1 To increase successful closures for DVR clients from 705 in FFY 2011 to 800 in FFY 2012 and 900 in FFY 2013, 1000 in 2014, and 1100 in 2015; thereby substantially improving employment outcomes for DVR clients in Maine

Objective: Reduction of the numbers of DVR clients who “drop out” of services from 1627 in FFY 2011 to 1500 in FFY 2012 to 1300 in FY 2013 (continued for 2014 & 2015)

Strategies: a. Collect and analyze data on reasons for drop out for cases closed in status 30/found eligible no plan developed.

REPORT ON PROGRESS: DVR contracted with the Center for Workforce Research and Information to conduct a preliminary analysis on early exiters from services. That report was released in January 2015 and presented to the SRC at their February meeting. The report indicated that clients under the age of 25 were particularly likely to exit services before successful employment. In this past year, DVR has undertaken a number of initiatives and provided additional training to staff in the attempt to decrease the number of individuals who do not complete their programs within VR. These initiatives, include implementing a Progressive Employment pilot geared to transition age youth in the hopes that youth will stay engaged with the VR process once they graduate from High School. In addition DVR has provided additional training to staff to impress upon them the need to move clients into plan earlier, which we believe will have a positive impact by lessening the early exit of individuals from VR.

b. Provide staff training on case management techniques that promote engagement.

REPORT ON PROGRESS: The DVR Director presented a webinar on March 23, 2015 on WIOA and Time to Plan. This was then followed up by targeted in–person training to all field office staff during the summer of 2015. The training included best practices on time to plan for a variety of client populations as well as technical strategies to improve case management. To continue to strengthen employment plan development, casework supervisors regularly review open cases as well as meet with VRCs to provide guidance on appropriate plan development. New Counselor Training includes a module on plan development and all VRCs who would like to brush up on their plan development skills are welcome to attend along with new counselors when it is offered during the year.

Objective: To increase the percentage of successful employment closures for individuals who receive services from community rehabilitation providers.

Strategies: a. Provide joint training opportunities for CRP’s on topics to promote best practices in employment supports for people with disabilities.

REPORT ON PROGRESS: DVR through its partnership in the Workforce Development System sponsors regular training for CRPs on topics such as Discovering Personal Genius and Fading and Natural Supports. Additionally, DVR offered in–person and webinar training to CRPs on the Progressive Employment model, collaboration with DHHS and other relevant topics during the year. DVR strives to provide cross–training between CRPs and VR counselors whenever possible.

c. Monitor data on the implementation of the Milestone Outcome Payment System for quality assurance.

REPORT ON PROGRESS: Monitoring of expenditures and employment outcomes is occurring; a detailed analysis is in early stages with the assistance of Management Analyst II hired during FFY 15. Using the Community Rehabilitation Provider (CRP) expenditures from SFY 2012 as a baseline and comparing it to SFY 2015 expenditures, there was an increase of total expenditures for CRP services of $655, 453; which equates to a 22.5% increase in spending. Using the same baseline data information, comparing SFY 2012 to SFY 2015, 263 less clients were referred to and received services from CRPs and there were 9 less CRP successful closures. Cost per successful closure was $11,345 in SFY 2012 and $14,412 in SFY 2015 or in an increase per client of $3,067. Costs for all clients served by CRPs in SFY 2012 were $1,169 and in SFY 2015 $1,602, an increase of $433 per client. Improvements were noted in service time length from Eligibility to Employment and from Eligibility to Closure during the same SFY comparison and closure trends showed an increase in the rehabilitation rate, comparing successful closures to unsuccessful closures, of 5.7% points. Another area of note is the number of authorizations created by Support Staff during the same time period decreased by 1,275; this demonstrates a decrease in workload for administrative staff within the agency and has implications for improvements throughout the State of Maine payment system and process. As noted above, there are increases to spending in services provided to clients through the Milestone payment process; likewise, there are benefits and improvements noted. A more thorough evaluation of the costs and benefit analysis and a determination to make adjustments to the existing process will be forthcoming.

Objective: To expand the number of Maine employers who implement diversity hiring activities through engagement with the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services’ Business Services Hiring Initiative Team from two in FFY 2011 to four in FFY 2012 to six in FY 2013 to twelve in FY 2014 to sixteen in FY 2015.

Strategies: a. Continue to actively support the Maine Chapter of the US Business Leadership Network.

REPORT ON PROGRESS: DVR continues with participation in the development of the Maine Business Leadership Network infrastructure and participates on the MEBLN advisory team. No one was sent to the conference in FY15 because there was no one in that position at the time the conference was held. DVR did participate the two previous years however. DVR has experienced the retirement of one Business Relations Specialist and the resignation of another. Despite these setbacks, DVR maintains a dual customer approach as evidenced by the activities below. Recruitment of new businesses has, however, been slowed by this staff turnover.

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

REPORT ON PROGRESS: DVR renewed its agreement with the Chamber of Commerce which serves as the host for the MEBLN, the Business Relations Specialist and MEBLN members submitted a proposal on increasing hiring of people with disabilities which was selected for presentation at Maine’s annual Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) conference in May 2015.

c. With input from field staff (VRCs and CRPs), develop Regional Business Relations Plans for each region. These plans will clearly identify roles, responsibilities, and strategies to engage business partners in the field.

d. Participate with other MDOL programs to pilot a sector strategy to respond to workforce needs in health care. A major emphasis is on the development of a Maine Health Care Academy to train job seekers for CNAs and/or nursing positions.

REPORT ON PROGRESS: This partnership was put on hold due to staffing turnover. Goal 2 To serve all individuals with the most significant disabilities in a timely manner including maintenance of no waitlist for services during the period FFY 2012 – 2015

Objective: To reduce the average time in plan development (status 10) from 300 days in FFY 2011 to 240 days in FFY 2012 to 210 days in FY 2013 to 180 days in FY 2014& FY 2015.

Strategies: a. Increase use of the Career Exploration Workshop, which has been shown to decrease case length time.

REPORT ON PROGRESS: DVR continues to use the Career Exploration Workshop as a powerful tool in assisting clients to clarify their career goals. The CEW is offered on a regular basis (at least monthly) in five CareerCenter locations and as needed at other sites. Currently DVR is conducting its second analysis of the impact of CEW on client outcomes. According to recent data from our last quarter, the Statewide average number of days for all VR clients to get into an Individualized Plan from their date of eligibility is 134 days. At the end of 2014, the average time to plan was 217 days. While DVR has continued to address and improve on this time frame, our goal is to meet the 90 days to plan requirement that is stated in the Rehab Act. This is the goal that we will strive for in this next Federal Fiscal year.

b. 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.

REPORT ON PROGRESS: DVR sits on DOE’s State Personnel Development Grant and has participated in multiple joint training opportunities. DVR Asst. Director serves as Co–Chair of IDEA Part B Advisory Committee. DOE is a partner in Employment First and Special Services Director Jan Breton co–chairs subcommittee on transition. DVR presented at the MADSEC Special Education Directors annual conference in October 2014 as well as recorded a webinar on DVR services for posting on the Maine Department of Education website. Maine DVR works very closely with the Maine Department of Education to ensure timely referrals. Through MDOE sponsored trainings and regional groups, Maine DVR has had the opportunity to reinforce the message that the best time for referrals to DVR is two years before high school graduation or exit. Due to staff turnover in the field this is an area that needs regular attention.

c. Deliver staff training and supervision on best practices in IPE plan development

REPORT ON PROGRESS: To continue to strengthen employment plan development, casework supervisors regularly review open cases as well as meet with VRCs to provide guidance on appropriate plan development. New Counselor Training includes a module on plan development and all VRCs who would like to brush up on their plan development skills are welcome to attend along with new counselors when it is offered during the year. Transition VR counselors were participants in the Maine Department of Education’s regional trainings on transition on March 3 –5, 2015. Additionally, transition clients were a targeted focus of the “Time to Plan” training provided to staff during Summer 2015. Transition VRCs receive regular updates on best practices via quarterly meetings. This year a particular focus of those meetings has been on WIOA’s Pre Employment Transition Services

Objective: To increase the number of individuals with significant intellectual disabilities who access the available waiver employment support for long term employment support needs after closure from BRS by 50 people during FFY 2013.

Strategies: a. Continue to work in collaboration with the Maine Department of Health and Human Services to address the significant waitlist for employment waiver services.

REPORT ON PROGRESS: DVR developed a joint procedural directive with DHHS on long–term support and shared via webinar in November 2014 for DHHS, VR and CRP staff.

b. Continue to work with the Maine Department of Health and Human Services to ensure that all individuals who have the waiver – but have not taken advantage of employment services – are aware of employment supports open to them through coordination between the two Departments.

REPORT ON PROGRESS: During this last year DVR has partnered with DHHS on the implementation of the discovery model for individuals with significant disabilities “Discovering Personal Genius”. DVR and DHHS issued joint guidance on DPG and presented a webinar on that guidance in September 2015. Regular DPG training was offered for interested staff and providers.

c. Complete and pilot the recently developed Career Exploration Workshop appropriate for individuals with intellectual disabilities The BRIDGE CEW has been used extensively since its release with 29 agencies trained to date by DVR staff (Clubhouse, Strive U, case management agencies, homeless shelters, schools and more)

Goal 3 To ensure that individuals with disabilities who may be unserved or underserved or who have minority status have access to DVR services, Maine DVR will increase the numbers of individuals with disabilities from racial and minority groups from 3.2 percent in FY 2011 to meet the federal standard as determined by RSA’ s Indicator 2.1 RSA is looking at the proportion of minorities who receive services compared to the ratio of non–minorities served. The Federal standard is 0.80 or greater

Objective: Maine DVR will work closely with Maine’s Section 121 VR Grant – Wabanaki Vocational Rehabilitation, to increase co–enrollment from no one co–enrolled in FY 2011 to four in FY 2012, six in FY 2013, eight in FY 2014, and 10 in FY 2015

Strategies: a. Maine DVR will include Wabanaki Vocational Rehabilitation in training and technical assistance opportunities.

REPORT ON PROGRESS: a. Wabanaki VR Counselor participated in DVR New Counselor training in Nov/Dec 2014

b. Wabanaki VR will provide technical assistance to Maine DVR on issues related to cultural competency and best practices in Native employment supports.

REPORT ON PROGRESS: Individual TA and consultation is provided by Wabanaki VR on an as needed basis. In the coming fiscal year DVR will work with Wabanaki VR to develop a webinar for DVR staff

c. According to the joint MOU, Maine DVR and Wabanaki VR will meet at least annually to review the agreement.

REPORT ON PROGRESS: The MOU was last updated June 2013; regionally DVR and the WVR communicate regularly. The Directors of Maine DVR and Wabanaki VR met in March 2015 to review the Memorandum of Understanding. The Director of the Section 121 Grant serves on the State Rehabilitation Council. DVR’s Business Relations Consultant has provided outreach to the Wabanaki VR program to ensure that individuals served by that program have access to employment opportunities developed with larger companies in northern Maine. During the reporting year, Maine DVR and Wabanaki Vocational Rehabilitation co–enrolled four (4) clients. Both programs value the partnership between the programs and continually review case sharing, training, and other issues to ensure optimal collaboration. Maine DVR also has made gains on meeting the federal standard (RSA Indicator 2.1). RSA looks at the proportion of minorities who receive services compared to the ratio of non–minorities served. The Federal standard is 0.80 or greater. As of December, 2013 the Maine service rate for minorities was 0.967.

Objective: Maine DVR will collect data on the numbers of individuals served – belonging to the following categories in FY 2012 to establish a baseline and future goals:

a. individuals involved with the correctional system

b. individuals who are veterans c. individuals who are “older workers” d. individuals who are “New Mainers”

Strategies: a. DVR will develop and utilize special indicators in its case management system to track individuals who belong to one of the above groups.

REPORT ON PROGRESS: DVR is currently working on collecting these baseline measures.

b. DVR will ensure that all materials distributed or published by the agency will be accessible and demonstrate cultural competency.

REPORT ON PROGRESS: Members of DVR staff – including the State ADA Coordinator and the Director of the Division for the Deaf Hard of Hearing and Late Deafened served as part of a RFP team on Video Remote Interpreting services for the State of Maine. VRI availability will increase access for individuals living in remote areas of the state who are Deaf and have limited access to ASL interpreters. VRI will also increase client access for short or spontaneous meetings.

c. Maine DVR will complete a new video “Orientation to VR Services” in conjunction with the Maine Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired (DBVI) and the New England TACE.

REPORT ON PROGRESS: DVR and the Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired, in collaboration with the Institute for Community Inclusion, completed seven new captioned/audio described video vignettes that tell the stories of individuals with diverse disabilities who have benefited from VR services. The videos are currently posted on the state website for viewing

Objective: Maine DVR will undertake efforts to embrace and implement an “Employment First” philosophy during the next year as documented by a decrease of 5% in the statewide unemployment rate of people with intellectual disabilities.

Strategies:

REPORT ON PROGRESS: Employment First Maine held a successful Summit in October 2014 to mark the accomplishments since the passage of Employment First legislation in 2013.

Objective: Maine DVR will increase the numbers of individuals who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing who are served by DVR in the Northern and Western regions of the state.

Strategies: a. DVR will hire two additional Rehabilitation Counselors for the Deaf

REPORT ON PROGRESS: One position (Bangor) is currently posted, the other is filled. Both positions are in the budget to become permanent.

Objective: Maine DVR will maintain statewide consistency in its practices with regard to “Clubhouses” offering services to DVR clients as measured by client case review.

Strategies: a. DVR will maintain a liaison to the local Clubhouse in each office.

REPORT ON PROGRESS: DVR has either specifically assigned VRC’s or a regional manager who works closely with each of the clubhouses.

b. DVR will invite Clubhouse program staff to participate in DVR training opportunities.

REPORT ON PROGRESS: Training opportunities have been offered, including learning to use The Bridge CEW, which has been piloted at one clubhouse with some success.

Goal 4 Maine DVR will partner with the larger workforce development system to improve opportunities and access for DVR clients as measured annually by documented collaborative activities, technical assistance, and training.

Objective: Maine DVR will partner with Maine’s Disability Employment Initiative (DEI) Grant to increase the numbers of non–VR CareerCenter customers with disabilities who participate in Career Exploration Workshops from 3 in FY 2011 to 10 in FY 2012 to 25 in FY 2013

Strategies: a. The DEI team will include one VR Rehabilitation Counselor I who will assist in piloting a jointly–delivered Career Exploration Workshop

REPORT ON PROGRESS: New RCI, Lindsay Ball began on November 10 and is serving the Augusta, Skowhegan, Wilton and Lewiston offices.

b. DVR will participate in DEI Integrated Resource Team meetings

REPORT ON PROGRESS: DEI is just now launching the IRT process.

c. DVR will work with the DEI team and others in the Bureau of Employment Services to ensure accessibility in Maine’s CareerCenter network

REPORT ON PROGRESS: The ADA Coordinator has surveyed for physical accessibility compliance

Objective: Maine DVR will work with the Bureau of Labor Standards to support integrated competitive community–based employment of people with disabilities by a review and examination of organizations paying sub–minimum wage in Maine with the goal of reducing these certificates from 17 in FY 2011 to 15 in FY 2012 to 13 in FY 2013

Strategies: a. DVR will hire three Rehabilitation Counselor II’s to serve specialty Workers’ Compensation caseloads

REPORT ON PROGRESS: DVR currently is advertising for openings for two WC RC IIs. b. DVR will meet at least annually with the Workers’ Compensation Board to assess the success of the MOU initiative.

Objective: DVR will explore opportunities for new grants to support the mission of BRS. During 2015, DVR will apply for at least two new grant opportunities.

REPORT ON PROGRESS: DVR has submitted an application to the Institute for Community Inclusion for participation in a Learning Collaborative on Implementation of Vermont’s Progressive Employment model.

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

Assistive technology services and assistive technology devices are provided to individuals with disabilities as determined by each individual’s vocational goal, and appear as prescribed services on the respective individual’s signed IPE. DVR services include assistive technology and assistive technology devices if required for the individual’s IPE, necessary for the attainment of the individual’s employment goal. DVR works closely with Maine cohorts, Alpha One and ALLTECH, assistive technology organizations which provide assistive technology technical assistance services as well as assistive technology devices.

**B. Describe the factors that impeded the achievement of the goals and priorities.**

While progress was made and goals were achieved, DVR experienced staff turnovers, in part as a result of retirements. Also, DVR experienced fiscal challenges which impacted the program. DVR has responded to these and other issues by evaluating the delivery of services, priorities of our program and most importantly, how to overcome these and other challenges to serve our clients effectively.

**2. An evaluation of the extent to which the Supported Employment program goals described in the Supported Employment Supplement for the most recent program year were achieved. The evaluation must:**

**A. Identify the strategies that contributed to the achievement of the goals.**

Services and strategies are evaluated as part of the entire program.

**B. Describe the factors that impeded the achievement of the goals and priorities.**

• DVR has several goals and strategies in place (listed earlier in this document) with the overarching goal of improving outcomes for individuals with significant disabilities, including adults and students with intellectual and developmental disabilities which is the population that Maine would most likely be serving within the supported employment program. During FY 2014, Maine DVR served 181 individuals with the primary disability of intellectual and developmental disability and 52 were successfully closed in competitive employment. In FY 2015, DVR served 241 individuals with Intellectual and developmental disabilities with 48 closed successfully in competitive integrated employment and to date (FFY 2016), DVR has served 399 individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities with 40 successful closures in integrated competitive employment. There are improvements in how we are serving this population, and the addition of employment and career services that are being provided to this population with waiver funds is helping with this effort. DVR plans to continue to reach out and improve services to this population by expanding efforts in the use of progressive employment (discussed earlier in the plan), and training and supports for the Jobs for Maine Graduates programs so that they are better able to serve students with disabilities.

**3. The VR program's performance on the performance accountability indicators under section 116 of WIOA.**

DVR is a partner with Adult Education, the SWIB, and the larger workforce development system to incorporate and apply the new rules related to the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), including drafting a unified state plan adopting new performance measures and further collaboration with the One–Stop system. DVR is a member of the Maine WIOA steering committee, which is guiding the Act’s implementation, and also has participants on multiple related sub–committees. DVR will be using wage data from the Maine Department of Labor’s Unemployment Insurance to establish baseline and initial WIOA performance targets for employment outcomes. Although it does not provide information on individuals who are placed in self–employment or other jobs, such as federal and out–of–state positions, this is the only data set available at this time. DVR is seeking further definition and data sources for the other WIOA performance indicators.

**4. How the funds reserved for innovation and expansion (I&E) activities were utilized.**

State Independent Living Council (SILC) To assist the SILC to increase organizational capacity and member effectiveness, Maine DVR continued to support the SILC to maintain an Executive Director to envision and articulate the organization’s goals and establish the systems and mechanisms to achieve these goals. The SILC Executive Director will be responsible for conducting the work of the SPIL under the supervision and direction of the Maine SILC to accomplish tasks such as a) recruitment and management of members and volunteers b) establish and maintain partnerships with community members and organizations c) market and promote the Maine SILC d) increase and diversify the resources related to the six core areas of the SILC. State Rehabilitation Council Support Innovation & Expansion funds are used to support the activities and administration of the Statewide Rehabilitation Council (SRC) for the Division and the SRC meets monthly as a full council. The SRC has standing committees that meet regularly. These committees include, DVR/SRC Policy Group, CSPD Subcommittee, Membership, Annual Meeting, Website committee, and the Executive Committee. For more information regarding the SRC, please visit www.mainesrc.org. At its annual meeting in September 2013 the SRC benefited from the New England Technical Assistance and Continuing Education Center (TACE) facilitators. TACE successfully facilitated the SRC annual meeting as TACE staff understood not only the SRC mission, but also its current challenges, future goals and the critical importance of its work on behalf of PWD.

**q. Quality, Scope, and Extent of Supported Employment Services.**

Include the following:

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

The Division continues to take steps to ensure the quality of Supported Employment. Our management information system reports provide information on weekly wages, hours worked, and public assistance at the time of application and closure. The reports also provide information on the type of disabilities being served, the cost per case, and the average cost by counselor, region, and state. Planning discussions continue with both Developmental Services and Mental Health Services to work with DVR in tracking employment outcomes. We are able to document individuals who are eligible for VR, but who lack long–term support preventing plan development. Maine strives to improve the quality of supported employment services through the provision of various training opportunities. The Division continues to work with the Maine DHHS to oversee the implementation of a comprehensive workforce development system for Employment Specialists and case managers. The inclusion of cases managers in these events is to educate about the importance of work in our consumers’ lives, the sharing staff training is supported by the MOUs between BRS and DHHS. In 2011 classes were held for case managers on employment tools and resources at four different CareerCenters throughout the state. The Division regularly shares relative training and webinar announcements with the Provider community and provides ongoing staff development. We have identified minimum training requirements for the new CRPs to become approved providers. CRPs must provide evidence that all Employment Specialists and Job Coaches have completed one of the BRS approved training curricula. The Division and DHHS have agreed that any curriculum must be ACRE certified in order to be added to the list of approved Employment Specialist or Job Coach Certification training programs. DVRs expectation is that this training requirement and a comprehensive workforce development system, along with other established standards for service provided through the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF) and our in–state accreditation process will continue to improve services to all DVR consumers. The CARF and In–State approval process for CRPs consists of a number of facets such as reviewing policies and procedures that reflect knowledge and application of quality supported employment services in adherence to APSE standards for Supported Employment. Areas evaluated are: • mission statement, • admission criteria, • policy and practice on Assessments, • case coordination, client input, • health and safety issues, • human resource issues such as staff qualifications and background checks, • client rights and • appeal procedures. Other parts of the approval process include interviews with key stakeholders such as clients, employers, funding agents, etc. 1. Scope of Supported Employment The primary services provided to clients in supported employment continue to be • Assessment, • Job Skills Coaching, and • Job Placement. These direct services are provided by an Employment Specialist or a Job Coach, who supports the client through activities such as: intervention with supervisors and peers, and aids integration into the company’s social environment. Other allowable services that are provided when a need is identified include supplemental assessments, social skills training, observation or supervision of the individual, transportation, and facilitation of natural supports. The Division provides whatever is required to achieve and maintain integrated competitive employment. Based on ongoing commitments from the DHHS Office Adult Mental Health Services to provide extended support to all individuals using the supported employment model when they have stabilized and are ready for extended support, the DVR continues to expand the percentage of individuals with long–term mental illness who require ongoing supports to sustain employment. Changes through the DHHS approved June 1, 2006 increased resources available for the extended support funds for individuals with developmental disabilities. This results in up to 600 hours of Supported Employment services available per year expanding opportunity for extended job supports for an estimated 1400 individuals. We anticipate that 300 to 400 hundred of these individuals will be applying for VR during the next year. In this past year extended support services have been more limited for individual with developmental disabilities. Developmental Services did implement a new Medicaid waiver program shifting resources from day habilitation services to community supports which includes employment. This has resulted in additional individuals with developmental disabilities being eligible for supported employment with Developmental Services providing extended supports. We developed an agreement which coordinates the delivery of supported employment services including extended supports. Unfortunately, due to funding cuts the new waiver is not open to new applicants at this time. DVR and Developmental Services are committed to working with those individuals already on the waiver. The Division continues to receive funds from the state to provide extended support to individuals with traumatic brain injuries. We estimated in 2012 that between 25 to 30 individuals with traumatic brain injury will be able to participate in supported employment using state funded extended support. DVR ended 2012 having served 46. Another state funded program providing long term supports is the Basic Extended Support Program that purchases extended support for all disability groups. The annual services CAP for individuals receiving long term supports from this fund is $3000. This funding supported 144 individuals during 2012. Presently, the disability groups this program funds includes any individuals who have been closed successfully in the DVR or DBVI program, who require no more than $3000 a year in long term support (for job coaching). Transitional employment is also available to individuals with chronic mental illness. Transitional employment recognizes that persons with mental illness, in some cases, can learn a skill at a community based training site and transfer those skills to an actual work site. It also recognizes that the primary need is not always job skills training but emotional support, reinforcement, and evaluation of the client’s mental health. 2. Extent of Supported Employment Services We anticipate three to four hundred of these individuals will be applying for VR during the next year. In this past year extended support services have been more limited for individual with developmental disabilities. Developmental Services did implement a new Medicaid waiver program shifting resources from day habilitation services to employment. The new waiver program has resulted in additional individuals with developmental disabilities being eligible for supported employment with Developmental Services providing extended supports. DVR developed an agreement which coordinates the delivery of supported employment services including extended supports. Unfortunately, due to funding cuts the new waiver is not open to new applicants at this time. DVR and Developmental Services are committed to working with those individuals already on the waiver. DVR continues to look closely at the true need for ongoing supports and reserving this model for those with the most severe disability. There were a number of individuals that benefited from the "place" and "train" model without necessarily needing the extended support. There is also greater emphasis on natural supports.

**2. The timing of transition to extended services.**

The Division’s rules state the maximum time period for DVR time–limited services is eighteen (18) months, unless the IPE indicates that more than eighteen (18) 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.

**Certifications**

Name of designated State agency or designated State unit, as appropriate

Name of designated State agency

Full Name of Authorized Representative:

Title of Authorized Representative:

**States must provide written and signed certifications that:**

1. The **designated State agency or designated State unit (as appropriate) listed above** is authorized to submit the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan under title 1 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Rehabilitation Act), as amended by WIOA\*, and its supplement under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act.\*\*     Yes

2. 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 listed above** agrees to operate and administer the State VR Services Program in accordance with the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan , the Rehabilitation Act, and all applicable regulations , policies, and procedures established by the Secretary of Education. Funds made available under section 111 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;     Yes

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 agrees to operate and administer the State Supported Employment Services Program in accordance with the supplement to the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan\* , the Rehabilitation Act, and all applicable regulations , 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;\*\*     Yes

4. The designated State agency and/or the designated State unit 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;     Yes

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

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

7. The **Authorized Representative listed above** 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;     Yes

8. The **Authorized Representative listed above** has the authority to submit the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and the supplement for Supported Employment services;     Yes

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.     Yes

**Footnotes**

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**Certification 1 Footnotes**

\* Public Law 113-128.

\*\* Unless otherwise stated, "Rehabilitation Act" means the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended by WIOA, signed into law on July 22, 2014.

**Certification 2 Footnotes**

\* All references in this plan to "designated State agency" or to "the State agency" relate to the agency identified in this paragraph.

\*\* No funds under title 1 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.

\*\*\* 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 3485; and the State VR Services Program regulations.

**Certification 3 Footnotes**

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

\*\* Applicable regulations, in part, include the citations in \*\*\* under Certification 2 footnotes

**Additional Comments on the Certifications from the State**

**Certification Regarding Lobbying — Vocational Rehabilitation**

Certification for Contracts, Grants, Loans, and Cooperative Agreements The undersigned certifies, to the best of his or her knowledge and belief, that:

(1) No Federal appropriated funds have been paid or will be paid, by or on behalf of the undersigned, to any person for influencing or attempting to influence an officer or employee of an agency, a Member of Congress, an officer or employee of Congress, or an employee of a Member of Congress in connection with the awarding of any Federal contract, the making of any Federal grant, the making of any Federal loan, the entering into of any cooperative agreement, and the extension, continuation, renewal, amendment, or modification of any Federal contract, grant, loan, or cooperative agreement.

(2) If any funds other than Federal appropriated funds have been paid or will be paid to any person for influencing or attempting to influence an officer or employee of any agency, a Member of Congress, an officer or employee of Congress, or an employee of a Member of Congress in connection with this Federal contract, grant, loan, or cooperative agreement, the undersigned shall complete and submit Standard Form-LLL, ''Disclosure of Lobbying Activities,'' in accordance with its instructions.

(3) The undersigned shall require that the language of this certification be included in the award documents for all subawards at all tiers (including subcontracts, subgrants, and contracts under grants, loans, and cooperative agreements) and that all subrecipients shall certify and disclose accordingly. This certification is a material representation of fact upon which reliance was placed when this transaction was made or entered into. Submission of this certification is a prerequisite for making or entering into this transaction imposed by section 1352, title 31, U.S. Code. Any person who fails to file the required certification shall be subject to a civil penalty of not less than $10,000 and not more than $100,000 for each such failure.

**Statement for Loan Guarantees and Loan Insurance**

The undersigned states, to the best of his or her knowledge and belief, that:
If any funds have been paid or will be paid to any person for influencing or attempting to influence an officer or employee of any agency, a Member of Congress, an officer or employee of Congress, or an employee of a Member of Congress in connection with this commitment providing for the United States to insure or guarantee a loan, the undersigned shall complete and submit Standard Form-LLL, ''Disclosure of Lobbying Activities,'' in accordance with its instructions. Submission of this statement is a prerequisite for making or entering into this transaction imposed by section 1352, title 31, U.S. Code. Any person who fails to file the required statement shall be subject to a civil penalty of not less than $10,000 and not more than $100,000 for each such failure.

Applicant’s Organization      **Department of Labor - Division of Vocational Rehabilitation**

Full Name of Authorized Representative:      **Jeanne S. Paquette**

Title of Authorized Representative:      **Commissioner**

SF LLL Form – Disclosure of Lobbying Activities (only if applicable) (http://www2.ed.gov/fund/grant/apply/appforms/appforms.html). If applicable, please print, sign, and email to MAT\_OCTAE@ed.gov

**Certification Regarding Lobbying — Supported Employment**

Certification for Contracts, Grants, Loans, and Cooperative Agreements The undersigned certifies, to the best of his or her knowledge and belief, that:

(1) No Federal appropriated funds have been paid or will be paid, by or on behalf of the undersigned, to any person for influencing or attempting to influence an officer or employee of an agency, a Member of Congress, an officer or employee of Congress, or an employee of a Member of Congress in connection with the awarding of any Federal contract, the making of any Federal grant, the making of any Federal loan, the entering into of any cooperative agreement, and the extension, continuation, renewal, amendment, or modification of any Federal contract, grant, loan, or cooperative agreement.

(2) If any funds other than Federal appropriated funds have been paid or will be paid to any person for influencing or attempting to influence an officer or employee of any agency, a Member of Congress, an officer or employee of Congress, or an employee of a Member of Congress in connection with this Federal contract, grant, loan, or cooperative agreement, the undersigned shall complete and submit Standard Form-LLL, ''Disclosure of Lobbying Activities,'' in accordance with its instructions.

(3) The undersigned shall require that the language of this certification be included in the award documents for all subawards at all tiers (including subcontracts, subgrants, and contracts under grants, loans, and cooperative agreements) and that all subrecipients shall certify and disclose accordingly. This certification is a material representation of fact upon which reliance was placed when this transaction was made or entered into. Submission of this certification is a prerequisite for making or entering into this transaction imposed by section 1352, title 31, U.S. Code. Any person who fails to file the required certification shall be subject to a civil penalty of not less than $10,000 and not more than $100,000 for each such failure.

**Statement for Loan Guarantees and Loan Insurance**

The undersigned states, to the best of his or her knowledge and belief, that:
If any funds have been paid or will be paid to any person for influencing or attempting to influence an officer or employee of any agency, a Member of Congress, an officer or employee of Congress, or an employee of a Member of Congress in connection with this commitment providing for the United States to insure or guarantee a loan, the undersigned shall complete and submit Standard Form-LLL, ''Disclosure of Lobbying Activities,'' in accordance with its instructions. Submission of this statement is a prerequisite for making or entering into this transaction imposed by section 1352, title 31, U.S. Code. Any person who fails to file the required statement shall be subject to a civil penalty of not less than $10,000 and not more than $100,000 for each such failure.

Applicant’s Organization      **Department of Labor - Division of Vocational Rehabilitation**

Full Name of Authorized Representative:      **Jeanne S. Paquette**

Title of Authorized Representative:      **Commissioner**

SF LLL Form – Disclosure of Lobbying Activities (only if applicable) (http://www2.ed.gov/fund/grant/apply/appforms/appforms.html).

**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 of the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA), 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 State Plan must provide assurances that:**

**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 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:

**a. the establishment of the designated State agency and designated State unit, as required by section 101(a)(2) of the Rehabilitation Act.**

**b. the establishment of either a State independent commission or State Rehabilitation Council, as required by section 101(a)(21) of the Rehabilitation Act.**

The designated State agency or designated State unit, as applicable       **(B) has established a State Rehabilitation Council**

**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.**

**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).**

**e. 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.**

The designated State agency allows for the local administration of VR funds       **No**

**f. the shared funding and administration of joint programs, in accordance with section 101(a)(2)(A)(ii) of the Rehabilitation Act.**

The designated State agency allows for the shared funding and administration of joint programs:       **No**

**g. statewideness and waivers of statewideness requirements, as set forth in section 101(a)(4) of the Rehabilitation Act.**

Is the designated State agency requesting or maintaining a waiver of statewideness for one or more services provided under the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan? See Section 2 of this VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan.      **No**

**h. the descriptions for cooperation, collaboration, and coordination, as required by sections 101(a)(11) and (24)(B); and 606(b) of the Rehabilitation Act.**

**i. all required methods of administration, as required by section 101(a)(6) of the Rehabilitation Act .**

**j. the requirements for the comprehensive system of personnel development, as set forth in section 101(a)(7) of the Rehabilitation Act.**

**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.**

**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.**

**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:

**a. comply with all requirements regarding information and referral services in accordance with sections 101(a)(5)(D) and (20) of the Rehabilitation Act.**

**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 .**

**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 in accordance with section 101(a)(5) of the Rehabilitation Act?**

Agency will provide the full range of services described above

**d. determine whether comparable services and benefits are available to the individual in accordance with section 101(a)(8) of the Rehabilitation Act.**

**e. comply with the requirements for the development of an individualized plan for employment in accordance with section 102(b) of the Rehabilitation Act.**

**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.**

**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.**

**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 section 101(a)(14)of the Rehabilitation Act.**

**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**

**j. with respect to students with disabilities, the State,**

1. **has developed and will implement,**
	1. **strategies to address the needs identified in the assessments; and**
	2. **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**
2. **has developed and will implement strategies to provide pre-employment transition services (sections 101(a)(15) and 101(a)(25)).**

**5. Program Administration for the Supported Employment Title VI Supplement:**

**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.**

**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.**

**c. The designated state unit will coordinate activities with any other State agency that is functioning as an employment network under the Ticket to Work and Self-Sufficiency program under Section 1148 of the Social Security Act.**

**6. Financial Administration of the Supported Employment Program:**

**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)(G) and (H) of the Rehabilitation Act.**

**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:**

**a. The designated State agency assures that it will provide supported employment services as defined in section 7(39) of the Rehabilitation Act.**

**b. The designated State agency assures that:**

1. **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**
2. **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)(6)(C) and (E) of the Rehabilitation Act.**

**Additional Comments on the Assurances from the State**