**VR Portion of WIOA State Plan for the State of Maine – PY2020-2023 DRAFT**

**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;**

RSA recently rolled out the Program Year. Due to this, the State Plan is now due March 2, 2020. This leaves little time to read, review and provide meaningful comments on the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation portion of the State Plan. The SRC would have appreciated more time in which to provide useful and succinct comments.

Goal 1: To obtain at least 1000 successful closures for DVR clients in FFY 2018 and 2019 thereby substantially maintaining solid employment outcomes for DVR clients in Maine.

These employment outcomes and goals from 2018 through 2019 will be impacted by the change in serving more youth in school. DVR has seen 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.

The SRC feels DVR has done great work on all objectives and strategies to achieve this goal. The SRC suggests DVR keep this goal, along with its objectives and strategies going forward. Preliminary evaluations show improvement with client retention. Great work DVR!

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.

DVR has done an awesome job reducing the number of days from application to eligibility and from eligibility to Individual Plan for Employment (IPE), consistently meeting the new standards. They have policies and procedures in place to continue to meet these standards. Is VR able to continue to serve all individuals in categories 1 and 3 given the requirements around Pre-ETs and the lack of a contract award in two regions of the state?

Regarding the objective of determining if DVR can check for proficiencies in how they process the work of providing services. The SRC feels DVR has done this and feels it is part of their philosophy. The SRC does not feel this continues to be an objective.

The objective, and its strategies, for those with significant intellectual disabilities to be able to access the waiver for long term employment supports after closure is a great idea. However, the SRC wonders how this helps reduce the number of days from eligibility to IPE? The SRC wonders if this should be a separate goal.

The last objective under this goal talks of DVR continuing the “Employment First” philosophy and reducing the unemployment rate of people with disabilities by 5%. Once again, the SRC does not how this helps reduce the number of days from eligibility to IPE. The SRC wonders if this should be a separate.

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

DVR has done great work getting those who are unserved, underserved or have minority status access to VR services. The SRC feels DVR has policies and procedures in place and this work is a part of the core work they do. The SRC feels this needs to continue to be a goal with objective and strategies as it is part of the ongoing work, they are committed to doing.

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.

The SRC is unsure if Maine’s Disability Employment Initiative Grant is still available. This objective was for 2016. The SRC suggest taking this objective out of the DVR portion of the State Plan.

DVR is still in an Order of Selection for Category 3. Therefore, the objective should continue to be a part of DVR’s portion of the State Plan.

DVR honors all MOUs so the SRC does not feel this needs to continue to be an objective under this goal.

DVR should continue to look for grant opportunities that are in keeping with the BRS mission.

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).

This is ongoing.

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

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

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

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

How will VR effective measure consumer satisfaction with both VRCs, the process, and CRPs?

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

RSA recently rolled out the Program Year. Due to this, the State Plan is now due March 2, 2020. This leaves little time to read, review and provide meaningful comments on the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation portion of the State Plan. The SRC would have appreciated more time in which to provide useful and succinct comments.

Goal 1: To obtain at least 1000 successful closures for DVR clients in FFY 2018 and 2019 thereby substantially maintaining solid employment outcomes for DVR clients in Maine.

These employment outcomes and goals from 2018 through 2019 will be impacted by the change in serving more youth in school. DVR has seen 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.

The SRC feels DVR has done great work on all objectives and strategies to achieve this goal. The SRC suggests DVR keep this goal, along with its objectives and strategies going forward. Preliminary evaluations show improvement with client retention. Great work DVR!

DVR Response: DVR appreciates the SRC’s recognition of efforts on this previous goal. DVR makes every effort to maximize employment closures while recognizing that under WIOA, there is also a focus on assisting individuals to access career pathways, so they can reach meaningful employment that meets their goals.

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.

DVR has done an awesome job reducing the number of days from application to eligibility and from eligibility to Individual Plan for Employment (IPE), consistently meeting the new standards. They have policies and procedures in place to continue to meet these standards. Is VR able to continue to serve all individuals in categories 1 and 3 given the requirements around Pre-ETs and the lack of a contract award in two regions of the state?

DVR Response: DVR appreciates the recognition of efforts to reduce days from application to eligibility and eligibility to IPE. DVR can continue to serve all individuals in categories 1 and 2 but does not anticipate being able to open the waitlist for category 3 at this time due to resource constraints. The SRC is correct that the requirement to spend 15% of the VR grant award on Pre-Employment Transition Services does mean that the agency must consistently monitor Pre-ETS expenditures, so that this requirement is met. This is done through monthly budget analysis with the Service Center. Due to not receiving satisfactory proposals, DVR was not able to make an award in the northern two regions following an issued RFP for CRP services last year. This means that the payment system in those regions remains unchanged. DVR is currently working with current providers in those regions to discuss other opportunities to ensure that community employment services and supports are available to all clients across the state in a timely manner.

Regarding the objective of determining if DVR can check for proficiencies in how they process the work of providing services. The SRC feels DVR has done this and feels it is part of their philosophy. The SRC does not feel this continues to be an objective.

DVR Response: DVR appreciates the SRC’s recognition of efforts made to more efficiently provide services. As operational needs change, DVR will continue to assess systems of service to best meet client needs.

The objective, and its strategies, for those with significant intellectual disabilities to be able to access the waiver for long term employment supports after closure is a great idea. However, the SRC wonders how this helps reduce the number of days from eligibility to IPE? The SRC wonders if this should be a separate goal.

DVR Response: DVR is partnering with the Office of Aging and Disability Services to draft new joint procedural guidance on this topic. DVR will rework this goal in the new state plan.

The last objective under this goal talks of DVR continuing the “Employment First” philosophy and reducing the unemployment rate of people with disabilities by 5%. Once again, the SRC does not how this helps reduce the number of days from eligibility to IPE. The SRC wonders if this should be a separate.

DVR Response: DVR appreciates the feedback and has repositioned this strategy in the new state plan.

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

DVR has done great work getting those who are unserved, underserved or have minority status access to VR services. The SRC feels DVR has policies and procedures in place and this work is a part of the core work they do. The SRC feels this needs to continue to be a goal with objective and strategies as it is part of the ongoing work, they are committed to doing.

DVR Response: DVR appreciates the feedback and will be continuing objectives and strategies related to meeting the needs of unserved, underserved, and individuals who are minorities.

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.

The SRC is unsure if Maine’s Disability Employment Initiative Grant is still available. This objective was for 2016. The SRC suggest taking this objective out of the DVR portion of the State Plan.

DVR Response: The SRC is correct, the Disability Employment Initiative grant is no longer available, and this strategy will not be in the new plan. Lessons learned from the effort do, however, still inform DVR’s work with its partners.

DVR is still in an Order of Selection for Category 3. Therefore, the objective should continue to be a part of DVR’s portion of the State Plan.

DVR Response: Yes, DVR will continue to examine opportunities to open Category 3 should resources become available.

DVR honors all MOUs so the SRC does not feel this needs to continue to be an objective under this goal.

DVR Response: DVR is pleased to have many partners across state agencies and strives to continue to have Memoranda of Understanding in place that support those relationships.

DVR should continue to look for grant opportunities that are in keeping with the BRS mission.

DVR Response: DVR is always open to new grant opportunities as they fit within the needs and resources of the agency and its clients.

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).

This is ongoing.

DVR Response: DVR is pleased to have strong relationships with its WIOA partners and continues to work with them to implement WIOA to the benefit of our mutual customers.

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

DVR Response: Goals in the new plan use a results-based approach which DVR believes will be helpful in aligning with other efforts across the state.

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

DVR Response: DVR ensures consistency with Community Rehabilitation Provider services through contractual agreements, ongoing joint technical assistance and training and review of new opportunities to meet the needs of clients in those regions.

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

DVR Response: It is a top priority of DVR to ensure client choice across the state. In Region, I, II, III, this is achieved in a number of ways regarding CRP services. In awarding contracts to CRPs, they had to elucidate how they would provide informed choice. Each agency offered strategies including having multiple staff who would be able to serve an individual or looking across to another region if a conflict of interest arose. Because these agencies are responsible for serving all clients in their contracted region, there will be more choice on the side of clients because a CRP will not be able to turn a client down for services.

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

DVR Response: DVR recognizes that with a focus on Measurable Skill Gains, career pathways and credential attainment, that some individuals will take longer to reach meaningful employment outcomes. This will also be true for youth who may be involved with VR for a longer period (Pre-ETS – through to successful employment closure). Under WIOA, DVR is not incentivized to close individuals in low-level jobs solely to meet employment outcome numbers. DVR is very pleased with this changing focus that supports career pathways and assisting individuals with disabilities to meet their potential.

How will VR effective measure consumer satisfaction with both VRCs, the process, and CRPs?

DVR Response: Meeting client need and providing a high level of consumer service result in consumer satisfaction. In addition to DVR’s work with the SRC, DVR has been very pleased to contract with Market Decisions for its triennial evaluation of consumer satisfaction. Questions on that survey ask about process, outcomes, and CRPs.

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

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

The 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). Presently, DVR and DHHS have two memorandums of understanding (MOU); one MOU is with the Office of Aging and Disability Services (OADS), which serves individuals with developmental disabilities; the other MOU is with the Office of Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services (SAMHS) which serves individuals with mental health issues. 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. DVR, the Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired (DBVI), OADS and SAMHS are currently holding work sessions to develop a joint MOU that will develop a cost sharing plan to address current WIOA regulations.

The current 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 June 2014) “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.

• Interagency Support of Benefits Counseling

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. 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.

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

In May 2018, 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 to better coordinate the process of student transition to employment. Cross-training opportunities are held annually.

• Veterans Administration and VR MOU

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 August 13, 2019. The MOU is currently being updated to reflect new language from WIOA and other changes and is expected to be out early in 2020. 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, DVR/DBVI and the Maine Department of Corrections (DOC) have worked together to establish procedural guidance on collaboration between the agencies. Work thus far has resulted in two procedural directives outlining how the 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. Employment has been identified as one of the most important factors in reducing recidivism among individuals who are exiting the criminal justice system.

In Maine, there are many individuals who may be eligible for VR services who are currently incarcerated and who could potentially benefit from Vocational Rehabilitation services to obtain and maintain employment upon their release. The Department of Corrections through its prisons and probation systems are committed to working collaboratively with DVR to promote appropriate referrals, as well as the exchange of information and needed documentation to support VR eligibility determination.

 In each of the larger offices, a DVR staff member has been identified who serves as the liaison to the correctional facilities 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

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 need 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. The MOU is currently out for renewal with anticipated final approval in Spring 2020.

* Dual Sensory Loss: Deaf/Blind Services

The Division for the Deaf, Hard of Hearing and Late Deafened is part of the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and provides programing and services to people who are deaf, hard of hearing, and late deafened. DVR continues its joint effort with DBVI providing services for co-enrolled clients by coordinating with the University of Southern Maine Linguistics Department, Helen Keller National Center (HKNC) for the Deaf-Blind, and the Maine Deaf-Blind Project, (a project which is a member of the New England Consortium of Deaf Blind Projects, and provides technical assistance for students until the age of 21 and focuses on transition age youth) to improve services for clients who are deaf-blind or dual sensory impaired from hearing and vision loss. Although the program, *"Independence Without Fear”*has discontinued, the collaboration has expanded to include the Department of Health and Human Services, Disability Rights Maine, Division for the Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and Late Deafened, and a Tri-state Collaborative with Vermont and New Hampshire.

Efforts have included discussions to recruit, train and maintain a database of specially trained volunteers who can facilitate communication for people with significant vision and hearing impairments, as well as other services that are available to the dual sensory population.  HKNC and OIB-TAC have provided training to staff on services to this targeted population. DVR/DBVI are currently working on accessing the training needs of Community Rehabilitation Providers and coordinating with HKNC to provide training to dual sensory loss clients.

Dual sensory clients are also being provided Support Service Providers (SSP) through a program with USM. SSP’s are Linguistic students that provide home/community services for college credit.

**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 an individual’s vocational goal and appear as prescribed services on the respective individual’s signed IPE. DVR works closely with Maine cohorts, Alpha One, ALLTECH and Mainely Access and Maine CITE, assistive technology organizations which provide assistive technology technical assistance services, as well as assistive technology devices. Maine CITE is the assistive technology grantee for the state of Maine through the Administration for Community Living.

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

BRS supports staff involvement in the USDA’s AgrAbility project.  Maine AgrAbility is administered by Alpha One and the University of Maine.  The liaison to the project ensures that DVR staff is knowledgeable about AgrAbility and related resources.  Grant funding continues but may end soon.  A separate effort in 2020 will discuss a fee-for- service payment structure for work-based learning opportunities and paid work experience to increase opportunities for youth in farming careers.

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

DVR works with other state agencies and many councils and committees, including the Governor’s Children’s Cabinet which is examining the needs of out-of-school youth.

**5. State use contracting programs.**

The Division contracts with qualified organizations to provide employment support services for DVR clients. Services procured include: Pre-Employment Transition Services, Job Seeking Skills, Job Skills Training, Job Development and Placement Services; Job Coaching and Supported Employment; and Business Engagement. DVR also contracts with Maine’s sole Center for Independent Living, Alpha One.

**d. Coordination with Education Officials**

Describe:

**DSU's plans**

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

The Cooperative Agreement between the Maine Department of Education, Special Services and Maine DVR – and Maine DBVI - was updated in 2018 and now includes language to support implementation of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014. The Agreement was developed using technical assistance available through the National Technical Assistance Center on Transition (NTACT) and the Workforce Innovation Technical Assistance Center (WINTAC).

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

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

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

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

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

The purpose of the Cooperative Agreement is to set forth the commitments of DOE and DVR to cooperate to meet the needs of students with disabilities and to better coordinate the process of student transition. The Agreement also sets forth that consultation and technical assistance will be provided to assist educational agencies in planning for the transition of students with disabilities from school to post–school activities, including VR services.

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

A student with a disability is defined as a student between the ages of 14 and 21 who is enrolled in an educational program and who is eligible for and receiving special education and related services under Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (20 U.S.C. 1411 et seq.); or is an individual with a disability under Section 504. (Note: This definition includes students who may be in an alternative placement, enrolled in post-secondary education or homeschooled, among other settings)

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

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

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

**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;**

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

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

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

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

**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 is currently in development for Spring 2020 release.

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

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

Maine DVR 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 decide 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 maintains MOUs with the Department of Health and Human Services to support partnerships that benefit individuals in need of supported employment services.

**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**

Due to budget constraints, positions exclusively supporting business relations have been eliminated with the exception of a Youth Employment Consultant. This position is focused on creating business relationships to benefit the entry of youth – including students with disabilities – into the world of work through work-based learning opportunities and regular employment. The position is also charged with the responsibility of facilitating the Progressive Employment pilot project in Lewiston and Portland.

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 with disabilities. The model coordinates rehabilitation counseling with job placement and business account management. Progressive Employment offers hands-on work-based activities in the community that assist our dual client offering career exploration to students and risk-free opportunities to employers.

The Youth Employment Consultant has worked successfully with employers in Maine’s southern and western counties to set up opportunities for summer work experiences for youth – thereby meeting employer needs through introducing them to a new generation of potential workers. In FFY19, 237 clients in the Portland and Lewiston offices took part in the pilot. See it in action, watch the Progressive Employment video below.

* [Progressive Employment Model: Jobsville](https://icimedia.wistia.com/medias/esxwjh1pl4)
* Descriptive Video: [Progressive Employment Model: Jobsville](https://plugin.3playmedia.com/host?ad=1&ad_autoplay=1&ad_default_source_volume_control=0&ad_source_volume_control=0&embed=iframe&height=500px&itx=1&itx_collapse_on_load=0&itx_collapsible=1&itx_downloadable=1&itx_highlight_by_caption_frames=0&itx_keywords=0&itx_light_scroll=0&itx_multi_text_track=0&itx_progress_bar=0&itx_progressive_tracking=0&mf=3316038&p3sdk_version=1.10.6&p=24894&player_type=wistia&plugin_skin=light&video_id=esxwjh1pl4&video_target=tpm-plugin-zhvsp6zd-esxwjh1pl4&width=500px)

DVR continues to be responsive to employer need through following up on inquiries from businesses, partnering with Career Center business staff, and conducting business development via contracted Community Rehabilitation Providers. DVR participates on a Statewide Workforce Action Team (SWAT) that brings these partners together to plan coordinated activities. Data on employers engaged through DVR are added to the Maine Job Link where possible.

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

In addition to Progressive Employment, the Maine Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR)’s Transition Work-Based Learning (TWBL) Model Demonstration grant is a partnership with Jobs for Maine Graduates (JMG), the Institute for Community Inclusion (ICI) at the University of Massachusetts Boston, American Institutes for Research (AIR), and the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR). This project is using a quasi-experimental design to conduct rigorous evaluation of two innovative interventions, Enhanced JMG and Progressive Employment. Maine DVR is utilizing the Progressive Employment model to expand employer relationships and align this dual customer community-based strategy with Enhanced JMG programs for students with disabilities.

These interventions are serving students with disabilities that are within two years of graduation from high school to test whether a model of work-based learning improves attainment of competitive integrated post-secondary employment and education outcomes. Specifically, under this grant, JMG has expanded its services to five high schools in the Bangor area and DVR will launch Progressive Employment in the Augusta and Bangor regions.

Maine DVR expects that the TWBL Model Demonstration will enhance statewide collaboration that facilitates the transition process from secondary and postsecondary schools, to competitive integrated employment at or above minimum wage. Within 1 year after graduation, at least 90 percent of study participants will enter postsecondary education or competitive integrated employment.

<https://www.explorevr.org/progressive-employment-maine-transition-work-based-learning-model>

Now in Year Four of five, over 300 students have benefited from TWBL interventions.

Maine DVR works with employers to support activities such as: 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 assessments, informational interviews, job shadows or on–the–job training at this location. Through the business development process, as it is described, the purpose is to gain an understanding of the various positions which this business employs and to ascertain the work environment and work culture.

**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**

DVR/DBVI, OADS and SAMHS have resumed is currently in negotiations to develop a joint MOU in accordance with WIOA regulations. The MOU is expected to be approved by June of 2020.

Through its collaboration with DHHS and specifically the coordination of Maine’s Benefits Counseling Network, DVR/DBVI has been able to develop opportunities and overcome barriers to competitive integrated employment for individuals with disabilities who are eligible for MaineCare, the State’s Medicaid program.

**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, as described in the MOU with the DHHS Office of Aging and Disability Services mentioned elsewhere in this state plan.

DVR/DBVI, 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 for newly certified employment specialists. The system was launched in July 2011.

Coordinated planning with DHHS’ Office of Aging and Disability Services promotes implementation of best practices, smoother transition between systems and improved access.

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

DVR has a MOU that guides 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.”

A new MOU, to reflect all requirements of WIOA, is in final development.

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 several initiatives currently underway to promote employment among the individuals they serve:

## Community Employment Specialist Program:

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

###  The Clubhouse Model of Psychiatric Rehabilitation:

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

## Business to Business Strategies

## In partnership with the Department of Health and Human Services, DVR participates in the newly-launched *Maine Workplace & Disability Connection* housed at the Maine Retail Association. This business to business platform will connect and support Maine employers hiring and retaining employees with disabilities. Participating employers focus on assisting businesses in attracting and retaining new employees and customers with disabilities, developing business leaders who value diversity and actively work to promote strong communities that include individuals with disabilities, and increasing opportunities for businesses to expand their diversity recruiting efforts, not as a social model but as a business case to recruit talent and better serve their customers.

## Promoting Employment Through Traditional Mental Health Services:

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

## Jointly Funded Work Incentives Planning:

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

Jointly Funded Employment Workforce Development System and Website:

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

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

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

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

*(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;

Maine DVR averaged a 14 % turnover rate for Rehabilitation Counselor II’s (RCII) VR Counselors in FFY 19. There are currently 8 RC II positions that are vacant. Maine’s turnover rate continues to be deeply affected by the tight labor market and retirement, given the age of its workforce and less competitive wages when compared to private sector employment. VR Counselors are being actively sought by private sector employers who offer higher pay, work from home positions and other benefits. 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. In examining staffing patterns of all other DVR staff, the turnover rate is approximately 20 percent. During FFY 2019, DVR hired 17 Rehabilitation Counselor II’s.

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:

1 Regional Manager,

3 Casework Supervisors,

6 Paraprofessionals,

2 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

 **Projected vacancies over the next 5 years:**

1) Director Vocational Rehabilitation: 0 Vacancies

2) Director SIQA: 1 Vacancy

3) Director, Division for the Deaf, Hard of Hearing and Late Deafened: 0 Vacancy

4) Assistant Director Vocational Rehabilitation: 0 Vacancies

5) Regional Manager: 1 Vacancy

6) Casework Supervisor: 3 Vacancies.

7) Rehabilitation Consultant: 0 Vacancies

8) Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor II: 18 Vacancies

9) Paraprofessional: 2 Vacancies

10) Support Personnel: 3 Vacancies

The system for collecting and analyzing data indicates approximately 10,000 individuals with disabilities will be served by Vocational Rehabilitation in PY 2020. Current service delivery is performed by Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) staff, consisting of 59 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 four Rehabilitation Consultants (program specialists), one management analyst, and clerical/secretarial support services from 22 office personnel. DVR has an additional 7 Rehabilitation Counselor I’s. In FFY 17, due to funding from the Transition Work Based Learning Grant, a Grant Manager and 3 Rehabilitation Counselor I’s, and .5FTE business account manager were able to be hired as time-limited positions for the five years of the grant.

**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 Act. In the last academic year, 30 students were enrolled full–time or part–time in its Master of Science in Rehabilitation Counseling Program. USM classes are offered on campus and via distance education. USM did not pursue the recent competition for RSA’s Long-term Training Grant. The University of Massachusetts Boston is now the nearest university which received funding under this program.

The University of Maine at Farmington (UMF), in partnership with the University of Southern Maine, began offering an accelerated program in the Fall of 2015 that allows counseling students to graduate with a master’s degree a year sooner. Graduates of the five–year program will be able to quality for both State licensing for counseling and national certification for rehabilitation counseling. The Program is accredited by the Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Programs and the Council on Rehabilitation Education.

UMF typically graduates 25 to 30 students per year with a B.S. in Rehabilitation Services. When combined with experience, this new program will meet the standards set forth under WIOA. Maine DVR has offered summer internships to UMF undergraduates to expose them to careers in vocational rehabilitation. 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 FFY 2019, Maine DVR had 9 Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors (VRCs) enrolled in the RSA–funded Rehabilitation Counseling program at University of Southern Maine.

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

2019 RSA Graduates sponsored by agency = 8

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

2019 University of Southern Maine, RSA Grant Graduates = 8

2019 VR Staff to obtain CRC credential = 4

2019 VR Staff currently enrolled in USM Master’s in Rehabilitation Program = 1

**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 high demand for the limited graduates exiting from the University of Southern Maine (USM), Maine’s sole rehabilitation counseling program, the division has struggled with finding and hiring qualified candidates. DVR continues to welcome interns from both UMF and USM and several interns have been hired as full-time employees upon graduation. A DVR Regional Manager 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.

DVR 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 several employees 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. 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**

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

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

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

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

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

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

**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 preferences to those with a master’s degree in Rehabilitation Counseling, a closely related master’s degree in Social Work, Psychology, Special Education, or Counseling or having Rehabilitation Counselor Certification (CRC). Through the interview process, DVR assesses the applicant’s ability to demonstrate an understanding of the labor force and needs of individuals with disabilities. Maine DVR supports staff to obtain and practice 21st century skills through opportunities for training through the Technical Assistance Centers and state and local workforce development partners, including Maine DOL’s Center for Workforce Research and Information.

DVR partners with DBVI to ensure active participation and representation on regional workforce boards across the State. Information is shared with DVR staff to provide local county workforce trends, high growth and demand industries, career pathways and future workforce needs. DVR’s presence on these boards allows for increased awareness of hiring individuals with disabilities to local employers.

DVR is co-located with Bureau of Employment Services statewide in CareerCenters. This co-location allows for increased collaboration on information sharing, co-enrollment opportunities, dual employer engagement and training opportunities.

**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.*

Maine DVR partnered with DBVI to offer a four-part webinar WIOA cross-training series. The series included several Workforce GPS WIOA webcasts to provide a basis of information. They were followed by topics which included Common Performance Measures, Bureau of Employment Services, Career Pathways, Youth Programming and Resources. Presentations were provided by Adult Education, Job Corps, Youth Build, Community College Workforce Development, Center for Workforce Research and Information.

A supervisor training curriculum was developed for new DVR Regional Managers and Casework Supervisors to be offered in conjunction with New Counselor Training. Curriculum includes mentoring from veteran Regional Managers/Casework Supervisor.

DVR and DBVI supervisors completed a three-day Leadership Effective Training Program (L.E.T). The training provided effective ways to communicate and to deal with conflict to create a positive climate.

 DVR staff completed a two-day communication training. Staff participated in small groups to enhance active listening skills, conflict resolution skills, I-Messages and shifting gears.

DVR staff completed a two-day Motivational Interviewing training. Training included the basic to advancing practice of MI with the intent of strengthening a client’s motivation and commitment to change in their vocational lives.

A sample of trainings that staff attended FY 2019:

Motivational Interviewing

New Counselor Training (24 new staff)

Communication training

Personality Disorders

BRS Leadership Training

Brain injury

Peer Mentoring

CRP project training (actual services)

Syntiro Training

BRS STATEWIDE (2018)

Apprenticeship

WOWI / Career Exploration workshop

IARP New England Fall Conference

Trauma Informed Care and Compassion Fatigue

Transitions: Creating great job candidates

NRE conference

Fading and Natural Support Strategies for Employment Success

WIOA Cross Training Series

Education:

8 Staff graduated with Master’s in Rehabilitation

4 staff received CRC credential

1 staff enrolled with USM- Master’s in Rehabilitation

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

*Describe how the designated State unit has personnel or obtains the services of other individuals who can 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). 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 provides direction, education and outreach on issues impacting individuals who are 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 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. DVR offices are co–located in Maine’s CareerCenter network. CareerCenters offer telecommunications devices including Interpretype, Ubi Duo, Video links, 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.

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

**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 40% of all DVR cases in Maine and one of the fastest growing populations served by DVR due to increased focus under WIOA on Pre-Employment Transition Services.

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 several 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 concerning Pre-Employment Transition Services.

 As outlined in DVR’s current Cooperative Agreement with the Maine Department of Education (DOE), DVR has provided technical assistance to DOE and school districts on disability–specific information and resources issues and issues concerning eligibility and referral for services as requested. The DVR Director is the Chair of the IDEA Part B State Advisory Panel which is responsible for advising DOE on issues related to students with disabilities ages 3–20. The DVR director regularly presents to school groups on best practices for supporting work experience for youth through WIOA.

The DVR Director is also a member of the State Special Education Directors’ Association (MADSEC). DVR and DBVI worked closely with the Maine Department of Education and developed an updated interagency Memorandum of Understanding in June 2018. The new version includes 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;**

In June 2014, Maine’s legislature enacted the Employment First Maine Act (Sec. A-1. 26 MRSA c.3), which was a natural progression in Maine’s focus on competitive integrated employment as a valued outcome for the state’s citizens with disabilities. It set forth that the Departments of Health and Human Services, Labor, and Education must implement employment as a core component of services and supports provided and is the first and preferred service or support option offered to individuals with disabilities.

The Act also convened a time-limited coalition of interested parties, including employers, state agency representatives, advocacy organizations, and people with disabilities, to review and make recommendations regarding the improvement of the administration of employment services and the employment outcomes of people with disabilities. Before its sunset in October 2016, the Employment First Maine Coalition produced a report summarizing the work that was completed and identifying twenty-seven recommendations for consideration by the Governor, the Legislature and state agencies, primarily identifying strategies that encourage the employment of youth and adults with disabilities, engage the business community, and improve EFM performance measures.

DVR is committed to the philosophy of Employment First and this has shaped all procedural guidance and operations since the law’s passage in Maine. In particular, DVR has expanded opportunities for work-based learning and paid work experience for students with significant disabilities which has resulted in changing trajectories for young people who may have not been thought of by their families and schools as able to work in the community at a competitive wage.

DHHS currently supports approximately 6,000 people with developmental disabilities, brain injuries, other related conditions and physical disabilities through five Centers for Medicaid and Medicare Services (CMS) 1915c Waivers. Individuals receiving waiver services have significant disabilities and require supports and services to obtain and maintain employment.

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. The Brain Injury waiver expanded to include a Work Ordered Day Clubhouse and the first one opened in the fall of 2017 in southern Maine. Career Planning Services are now available under all four waivers for people who need to spend time exploring interests, skills and abilities prior to going to Vocational Rehabilitation.

The service of Career Planning funded under the waivers has continued to serve 75 to 100 people a year prior to a referral for Vocational Rehabilitation.  Furthermore, OADS is providing on-the-job support through the waivers to about 1,000 people who are working throughout Maine.  These waivers funded services which provided support to both the individual to maintain employment, including support to the employer.

Beginning in 2018, all Intake and Eligibility staff share information on employment as they meet people and their families for the first time. In the packet OADS provides during intake, there is an Employment Pathway visual, an Employment Services VR brochure, and Work and Benefit Counseling information, all of which show work is possible.

The Department of Health and Human Services, in conjunction with other State Agencies and partners, continues to implement the recommendations that were developed by the Employment First Maine Coalition. The Offices of Substance Abuse and Mental Health, Child and Family Services, and Aging and Disability Services have committed to work together to ensure that the outcome of employment of people with disabilities is a strong focus of the services they provide.

 During the past year, DHHS has created new resources, developed additional employment services, and has begun to expand expectations that service providers all have a responsibility to promote employment as the *first and preferred* outcome.

**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 relatively homogeneous population and low ethnic diversity. Residents are primarily White (94.6%) with small representation of Black (1.6%), Asian (1.2%), and Native American (0.7%) individuals in certain geographical areas of the state. Native Americans represent a historically recognizable group and Maine has nearly 18,500 tribal members who are located both on reservations and defined land, as well as scattered across the state. Tribal members are primarily located in Penobscot, Washington and Aroostook counties. Unemployment figures among Micmac and Maliseet tribes range from 55% to 76%. DVR continues to work collaboratively with the Houlton Band of Maliseet’s, which was recently re-awarded a five-year Section 121 grant. The grant has been extended until 2025.

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 several other programs that are components of the statewide workforce system and can support the employment of people with disabilities. The CareerCenters provide several employment programs that serve people with disabilities. The newly redesigned Maine Job Link is an online accessible CareerCenter tool to allow job seekers from around the state to be matched with real-time available open (currently over 11,000) positions. The Job Link has 42,700 active job bank registrants of whom 505 are self-disclosed job seekers with disabilities. This represents 1.1% of total Job Link registrants. Data reported on the ETA 9002 for Program Year 2019 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. However, while the number of individuals with disabilities served was much lower than during the recession, the proportion of those with disabilities served remained almost unchanged.

While the Bureau of Employment Services (BES) collects data on self-reported disability, it does not require that individuals disclose having a disability. As a result of past work through collaborative efforts, including two rounds of the Disability Employment Initiative grant funding, there is increased awareness and attention in the CareerCenter to increasing access to expanded services for customers with disabilities. There are concerns about the accuracy of the current case management database; the system defines disability status within the context of vocational rehabilitation. Individuals who have a disability, which does not constitute a significant barrier to employment, are often not recorded as having a disability at all. Administrative override is required to update a person’s disability status when they disclose post-enrollment.

Research has shown that the number of people with disabilities served by CareerCenters is under-reported. According to 2016 estimates from the American Community Survey, people with disabilities comprise 13.7% of Maine’s working age population. ((ACS), 2012-2016). We would be hard pressed to assert that we are serving them in numbers commensurate with their presence in the general population.

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

Since passage of WIOA and promulgation of the final rules, Maine DVR has worked to develop, adopt and implement procedural guidance, programming and training to support the identification and registration of students with disabilities who are eligible or potentially eligible for Pre-Employment Transition Services. Through previously established relationships with school districts and through outreach initiatives and pilot activities, Maine DVR has sought to offer Pre-Employment Transition Services across the state. According to the most recent 2019 data from the Maine Department of Education, there are 10, 450 students from ages 14-20 receiving special education services across the state. Additionally, approximately 3000 students grade 9-12 were identified as having a 504 plan. While overall numbers of school-age students have dropped in Maine, the numbers and percentage of students enrolled in special education services continue to increase. In 2015, 17.25 % of Maine students received special education services; in 2019 this number had risen to 18.9 %. Maine DVR has targeted the problem of early exiters from VR services and is collecting data and implementing targeted initiatives for transition-age youth designed to engage youth with disabilities and get them involved in community-based work experiences and other work-based learning sooner.

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

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

 **3. 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.**

Since the passage of WIOA and promulgation of final rules, DVR has worked closely with the Maine Department of Education to understand the numbers of students with disabilities in Maine who are eligible for Pre-Employment Transition Services. At the local education agency level, this has played out as VR counselors have worked with individual school districts to determine what services are already being provided in the school, what other service providers are involved, and how the LEA can partner with DVR to jointly deliver Pre-Employment Transition Services. Education and outreach to LEA’s has focused on the value of starting early, at age 14, with Pre-Employment Transition Services. Maine Department of Education’s Special Services IDEA monitoring team has reinforced this message by providing VR materials during monitoring visits along with examples of how Pre-Employment Transition Services can inform the Individualized Education Program (IEP).

With partners at the Institute for Community Inclusion and the American Institutes for Research, Maine DVR is undertaking an evaluation of the impact of delivery of Pre-Employment Transition Services on eventual application and eligibility for DVR Transition Services. It is anticipated that by providing a rich array of Pre-Employment Transition Services earlier in students’ high school careers, that some students with disabilities may not need individualized transition services through DVR. It is possible, however, that with increased awareness of VR services – through exposure to Pre-Employment Transition Services some students will not need Vocational Rehabilitation services.

Maine DVR continues in its efforts to fully and properly implement of WIOA, working cooperatively with agencies that have the most impact on transition–age students and prepare them well for post-secondary education and employment success.

**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 2018, the estimated number of individuals eligible for services based on the American Community Survey (ACS) (average from 2013 to 2017) was 208,646 DVR–eligible adults in Maine. This is equal to about 15.9% of the civilian non-institutionalized population of 1.3 million. This data, from the ACS, was most recently updated in 2018.

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

**A. The VR Program;**

In FFY 19, DVR served 9,374 individuals. Estimates for PY 2020 are 10,000 individuals.

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

Maine DVR was not able to expend Supported Employment grant funds for FFY 19. In FFY 20, DVR received $252,000 in Supported Employment grant funding. DVR has struggled to expend Supported Employment funds in recent years due to limitations on how funding may be used. In FFY 2019, DVR served 626 individuals in a Supported Employment plan. DVR anticipates having funding to serve 650 individuals in PY 2020.

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

The expected services provision for PY 2020 by priority category is as follows:

OOS 1 – 5,480 = 54.8%

OOS 2 – 4,330 = 43.3%

OOS 3 – 190 = 1.9%

**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 PY2020. 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:

Maine implemented an Order of Selection for Category 3 on January 18, 2016. One hundred and seventy individuals were served in Category 00S 3 in 2019. With no new individuals coming off the waitlist for Category 3, it would be anticipated that the number of individuals being served in Category 3 would continue to decline as they exit the VR program to employment. A new law requiring hearing aids to be covered by Maine insurance companies is also predicted to reduce applications for VR services for individuals who have fewer barriers to employment and would have been found eligible in Category 3. This number is expected to be less given that individuals will be leaving this category and new individuals will not be added. The proposed case service budget is $7,400,000. The expected services provision by priority category is as follows:

OOS Category 1 = 55% = $ 4,070,000

OOS Category 2 = 44% = $ 3,256,000

OOS Category 3 = 1% = $ 74,000 (this reflects those already in Category 3 at the time of the OOS implementation)

Maine DVR projects FFY 2020 closures goals to be the following:

OOS 1 - 55% = 550 Closures

OOS 2 – 44% = 440 Closures

OOS 3 - 1% = 10 Closures

 Total: 1000

**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.**

OOS Category 1 - 55% = $ 4,070,000

OOS Category 2 - 44% = $ 3,256,000

OOS Category 3 - 1% = $ 74,000 (this reflects those already in Category 3 at the time of the OOS implementation).

**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 has discussed State Plan goals and progress at its meetings throughout the year which has aided development of the plan. The SRC provides data on consumer satisfaction which is reviewed along with DVR’s triennial customer satisfaction assessment.

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

Goal 1

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

**Goal 2**

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

**Goal 3**

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

**Goal 4**

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

**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 2018 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 Maine AWARE 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 2018 consumer satisfaction survey conducted by Market Decisions, LLC. This is the sixth 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 most recent Annual Report

**m. Order of Selection**

Describe:

**1. Whether the designated State unit will implement an 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 category and their right to appeal their category assignment.

Whether in an Order of Selection or not, Maine DVR has assigned all applicants to an OOS category to ensure that DVR continues to serve the most significantly disabled. This was upon the advice of RSA staff during the 2011 Section107 Monitoring review. The priority category shall be assigned, based on their level of significance of disability; “Level of significance of disability” means one of the following: Priority Category 1, “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.

At the time of this plan, DVR fiscal and human resources continue to merit a waitlist for Category 3. DVR regularly reviews the waitlist status and is actively exploring opportunities to ensure that individuals who are found eligible in Category 3 have awareness and access to other resources in the community.

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

Maine implemented an Order of Selection for Category 3 on January 18, 2016. The projected numbers of clients to be served under an IPE is 6000 in PY 20. The proposed case service budget is $7,400,000. The expected services provision by priority category is as follows:

OOS Category 1 = 55% = $ 4,070,000

OOS Category 2 = 44% = $ 3,256,000

OOS Category 3 = 1% = $ 74,000 (this reflects those already in Category 3 at the time of the OOS implementation)

Maine DVR projects FFY 2019 closures goals to be the following 1,000.

OOS 1 - 55% = 550 Closures

OOS 2 - 44% =440 Closures

OOS 3 - 1% = 10 Closures

Total: 1000 Closures

**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.**

**DVR’s goals include supported employment services. DVR has struggled to expend all of its Supported Employment grant funds in recent years due to new regulations.**

**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 waiver services will fund career planning, 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. This agreement is being updated at the time of this State Plan,

DVR contracts 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; 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.

**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 PY 2020-2023 goals developed based on the recommendations from the 2018 Statewide Needs Assessment as well as input from the State Rehabilitation Council.

Goal 1

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

Objective 1.1: To continue to reduce early exit from DVR services from 2,636 in PY 2018 to 2, 500 in PY 2020 and further reducing to 2, 000 in PY 2023.

Strategies:

1. Provide staff training on techniques that promote engagement – such as Motivational Interviewing and Progressive Employment
2. Explore technological options to promote regular communication between clients and VR counselors

Objective 1.2: To promote increased access to and delivery of Pre–Employment Transition Services to all students with disabilities from 2, 287 reported activities in PY 2018 to 3,000 in PY 2020 and 4000 annually by PY2023 leading to improved post-secondary education and employment readiness.

Strategies:

1. Through use of Progressive Employment, Summer Work Experience, and other work- based learning opportunities, DVR will support at least 300 students with disabilities to have paid work experiences annually during PY 2020 through PY 2023.
2. Maine DVR - in collaboration with DBVI and with support from WINTAC – will launch a statewide peer mentoring effort during PY 2020. Peer mentoring will be provided by “near peers” to support preparation for post-secondary education and employment.
3. In partnership with the Maine Department of Education and Local Education Agencies, Maine DVR will deliver Pre-Employment Transition Services to Potentially Eligible and Eligible students with disabilities across Maine. This will include through joint activities such as job tours, job clubs, Transition Career Exploration Workshop, and delivery of information on labor markets and career pathways.
4. Maine DVR will partner with the Maine Department of Education’s Special Services and Career and Technical Education offices to develop opportunities to increase the delivery of Pre-Employment Transition Services to students in Career and Technical Education programs.
5. Maine DVR will partner with the Maine Department of Health and Human Services’ Office of Child and Family Services to ensure access to and participation in Pre-Employment Transition Services of youth served through child welfare and children’s behavioral health services.
6. Maine DVR will expand delivery of strategies to address the needs of rural youth including through online resources and Virtual Job Shadow.
7. Maine DVR will work with Maine’s Parent Training and Information Center to increase family awareness of Pre-Employment Transition Services and the value of early career exploration and planning for students with disabilities
8. Through its Division for the Deaf, Hard of Hearing and Late Deafened, DVR will develop and deliver targeted Pre-Employment Transition Services in conjunction with the Maine Educational Center for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing/Governor Baxter School.
9. Maine DVR will explore opportunities to support delivery of Pre-Employment Transition Services in conjunction with Job Corps and YouthBuild programming.
10. Maine DVR will participate in the Cross-Agency Council on Transition and support inclusion of DVR clients in the “Youth Advisory Group” to receive feedback and input on needed transition services and related policies.
11. In keeping with current research, Employment First, and the State of Maine’s Economic Development plan - collect and record data to track progress towards ensuring that all Maine youth have a paid work experience before high school graduation.
12. Maine DVR will implement and sustain promising practices and lessons learned for work-based learning from the RSA-funded Transition Work Based Learning Model Demonstration Grant.

Objective 1.3: To promote careers in high wage-high growth, STEM, and other promising industry sectors through the exploration and inclusion of career pathways in DVR clients’ Individualized Plans for Employment.

Strategies:

1. Deliver joint training opportunities for DVR staff and Community Rehabilitation Providers on best practices in the use of Career Pathways.
2. Provide training for DVR staff on using the Comprehensive Assessment of Rehabilitation Needs to promote use of Apprenticeship and self-employment as approaches to Career Pathways
3. DVR will build on pilot efforts in partnership with the Maine Department of Labor’s Apprenticeship program to develop statewide policies and practices to promote increased use of Apprenticeship as a Career Pathways strategy.
4. DVR will work with DBVI and the Maine Department of Labor’s Apprenticeship Program to ensure that clients who Deaf/Hard of Hearing or who have significant disabilities are included in the growth and expansion of apprenticeships in Maine.
5. Open and closed case reviews will monitor for inclusion of career pathway strategies.
6. DVR will participate in WINTAC-provided technical assistance on utilization of Career Pathways strategies

Objective 1.4: Through lessons learned from the use of Progressive Employment, expand the number of Maine employers who implement diversity hiring activities through engagement with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and workforce system partners.

Strategies:

a. In partnership with the Department of Health and Human Services, participate in the newly-launched *Maine Workplace & Disability Connection* housed at the Maine Retail Association. This business to business platform will connect and support Maine employers hiring and retaining employees with disabilities.

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

c. Actively participate in the Statewide Workforce Action Team (SWAT) that is made of 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.

d. Develop, support and maintain DVR staff in each region with a specialized knowledge in business relations.

**Goal 2**

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

Objective 2.1: To continue progress to reach substantial compliance (94%) in determining eligibility within 60 days of receiving an application for DVR services. DVR will progress from 79.4% in PY2018 to substantial compliance in PY 2020 and maintain substantial compliance or better in PY 2021-2023.

Strategies:

1. Collect data on eligibility determination and disseminate quarterly to DVR supervisors and managers to support best practices in the field.
2. Deliver staff training and supervision on best practices in eligibility determination – including use of strategies provided through technical assistance provided by RSA
3. Provide education and outreach on the use and ease of new electronic options - such as W.O.R.K. Services – to access and submit an application and supporting materials for DVR services.

Objective 2.2: To continue progress to reach substantial compliance (94%) in timely plan development by increasing the percentage of clients who are have an Individualized Plan for Employment developed within 90 days from 78.9% in PY 2018 to substantial compliance in PY 2020 and maintain substantial compliance or better in PY 2021-2023.

Strategies:

1. Collect data on timely plan development and disseminate quarterly to DVR supervisors and managers to support best staff practices in the field.
2. Deliver staff training and supervision on best practices in IPE plan development and Order of Selection (OOS) determination.
3. Increase use of the Career Exploration Workshop, which has been shown to decrease case length time.
4. Work closely with the Maine Department of Education to ensure implementation of the joint Cooperative Agreement and best practice guidelines on referral and timely application for transition age students.

Objective 2.3: Maine DVR will address the underemployment of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities by assisting them to prepare for, reach, maintain and advance in careers of their choice in keeping with Maine’s Employment First law and as documented by measurable skills gains, credential attainment and successful closures in employment.

Strategies:

1. DVR will partner with Maine DHHS’ Office of Aging and Disability Services and the Maine Department of Education to develop a plan to improve employment outcomes of people with disabilities in competitive integrated settings.
2. DVR will work with DHHS’s Office of Aging and Disability Services to provide joint education and outreach to individuals, families, case managers and other providers, on the benefits of employment and the process to access DVR services.
3. Increase post-secondary education and employment participation for high school students on the Autism Spectrum through participation in the DVR-sponsored “Step Up” program – a 5-week summer residential program held on a college campus. Step Up includes a 3-credit undergraduate course, paid work experience, and social skill instruction among other components.
4. Continue to provide access to and training on the BRIDGE – Career Exploration Workshop

Objective 2.4: Maine DVR clients will have timely access to appropriate Community Employment Services – including the use of qualified Community Rehabilitation Providers.

Strategies:

1. DVR will maintain and review data quarterly on the use of Community Rehabilitation Providers and related outcomes.
2. DVR will partner with other state agencies to maintain professional development for employment support providers through Maine’s Employment for ME Workforce Development system.

Objective 2.5 Maine DVR will ensure client services reflect access to and best practices in the use of Assistive Technology

Strategies:

1. DVR staff will participate in training opportunities provided by Maine CITE, Maine’s federally-funded Assistive Technology program.
2. Individualized Plans for Employment will address the need for Assistive Technology as appropriate.
3. DVR will develop in-house capacity around the use of Assistive Technology to support vocational rehabilitation services through the support of two to three DVR staff in the new University of Maine at Farmington post-bachelor’s certificate in Assistive Technology Studies.

**Goal 3**

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

Objective 3.1: Maine DVR will work closely with Maine’s Section 121 VR Grant – Wabanaki Vocational Rehabilitation, to increase co–enrollment from 3 individuals in PY2019 to 10 individuals annually by PY 2023.

Strategies:

1. Maine DVR will include Wabanaki Vocational Rehabilitation in training and technical assistance opportunities – including New Counselor Training.
2. Wabanaki VR will provide training and technical assistance to Maine DVR on issues related to cultural competency and best practices in Native employment supports.
3. DVR will work with Wabanaki VR to increase opportunities for collaboration on delivery of Pre-Employment Transition Services to Native American students with disabilities attending Maine high schools.
4. According to the joint Memorandum of Understanding, Maine DVR and Wabanaki VR will meet at least annually to review the agreement.

Objective 3.2: To address the growing numbers of Maine residents who are “New Mainers” and who may be eligible for DVR services, Maine DVR will strengthen its services to this population through the following strategies:

* 1. Provide staff training and development to DVR staff to increase cultural competence as measured through pre- and post- training evaluation.
	2. Conduct educational and outreach activities to increase awareness of availability of DVR services.
	3. Join with other workforce system partners to address common barriers to employment – such as transcript analysis, English language skills, and need for support services.
	4. Ensure language access in all DVR-produced and delivered materials.
	5. Include best practices in hiring and retaining New Mainers in employer engagement activities.

Objective 3.3: To support the successful reentry of individuals with disabilities exiting the correctional systems and reentering employment, Maine DVR will strengthen its services to this population through the following strategies:

1. Building on a successful pilot effort, Maine DVR will partner with the Department of Corrections and the Bureau of Employment Services to expand delivery of a targeted pre-release “Career Exploration Workshop” to state and county correctional facilities throughout the state.
2. Strengthen DVR participation in the Reentry Network, leading to increased knowledge of resources and supports to promote employment and reduce recidivism.
3. Maintain “Corrections Liaisons” in each office. Liaisons will be paired with regional correctional facilities leading to increased collaboration and timely pre-release referrals. Liaisons will participate in joint DVR/Department of Corrections quarterly meetings leading to increased coordination of services for mutual clients.
4. Provide annual staff training on best practices leading to successful employment for individuals with a criminal history.

Objective 3.4: To support successful employment of individuals who are Veterans, DVR will strengthen its services to this population through the following strategies:

1. Continue to collaborate with Bureau of Employment Services’ Veterans Services leading to increased co-enrollment opportunities for veterans with disabilities
2. DVR will maintain “Veterans Liaisons” in each office. Liaisons will participate in quarterly Bureau of Employment Services’ Veterans Services team meetings to exchange information and plan joint events (such as targeted job fairs).
3. During PY2020, DVR will update its Memorandum of Understanding with federal Veterans’ Affairs Vocational Rehabilitation & Employment leading to increased referrals of Veterans eligible for both services.
4. DVR will provide training to staff on the employment needs of Veterans.

Objective 3.5: To support successful employment and community inclusion of individuals with dual sensory impairments (Deaf/Blind), DVR will strengthen its services to this population through the following strategies:

1. Through its Division for the Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and Late Deafened, DVR will work in partnership with DBVI and other community organizations to explore opportunities to build capacity of Support Service Providers across the state.

Objective 3.6: Maine DVR will develop new strategies to increase the employment of people with mental health disabilities:

 Strategies:

1. DVR will partner with the Department of Health and Human Services’ Office of Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services and MaineCare Services to explore opportunities for collaboration to strengthen and expand employment services to individuals with mental health disabilities
2. 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.
3. DVR will partner with Clubhouses (that are certified or pursuing certification) to provide employment services that meet Clubhouse International standards.
4. DVR will maintain a liaison to the local Clubhouse in each office and work with them on joint training and outreach needs.
5. DVR will provide staff training at least annually on best practices in vocational rehabilitation for individuals with mental health disabilities.

Objective 3.7: Maine DVR will continue implementation of a Memorandum of Understanding with the public Workers’ Compensation system in order to better serve injured Maine workers who eligible for Vocational Rehabilitation services.

Strategies:

1. DVR will maintain a roster of Board-approved Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors.
2. In conjunction with the Board, DVR will ensure at least annual training for all Board-approved VRCs.
3. DVR will meet at least annually with the Workers’ Compensation Board to assess the success of the MOU initiative.

Objective 3.8: Maine DVR will work with state agencies, treatment providers, and other partners to promote and support employment for individuals impacted by substance use.

Strategies:

1. DVR will provide training to staff, at least annually, on best practices in supporting the employment of individuals impacted by substance use.
2. DVR will participate in grant advisory and other work groups as requested.
3. DVR will participate with WIOA and other partners in targeted efforts to promote employment of individuals impacted by substance use.
4. DVR will explore effective strategies – like Progressive Employment – for use with this population.

Objective 3.9: Maine DVR will provide equitable vocational rehabilitation services to potentially eligible students and eligible youth and adults who identify as LGBTQ+.

Strategies:

1. DVR will convene a work group to review best practices in serving this population and make recommendations for policy and practice changes.
2. DVR will provide training to staff and review policies at least annually.

Objective 3.10 Maine DVR will work with Maine’s TANF/ASPIRE programs and contracted providers to increase collaboration – leading to improved employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities.

Strategies:

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

**Goal 4**

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

Objective 4.1: Maine DVR will refer clients to workforce system programs and services to meet their needs and increase access to comparable benefits.

Strategies:

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

Objective 4.2: Maine DVR will work with Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act partners to share data and information leading to increased alignment of program and services and expanded opportunities for DVR clients.

Strategies:

1. DVR will complete Memoranda of Understanding with all required partners.
2. DVR, in conjunction with DBVI, will provide representation on Local Workforce Boards.
3. DVR will engage MDOL’s Center for Workforce Research and Information to produce updated disability data on the employment status of Maine people with disabilities.
4. 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.

**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.

Objective 2.5 Maine DVR will ensure client services reflect access to and best practices in the use of Assistive Technology

Strategies:

1. DVR staff will participate in training opportunities provided by Maine CITE, Maine’s federally-funded Assistive Technology program.
2. Individualized Plans for Employment will address the need for Assistive Technology as appropriate.
3. DVR will develop in-house capacity around the use of Assistive Technology to support vocational rehabilitation services through the support of two to three DVR staff in the new University of Maine at Farmington post-bachelor’s certificate in Assistive Technology Studies.

**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**

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

Objective 3.1: Maine DVR will work closely with Maine’s Section 121 VR Grant – Wabanaki Vocational Rehabilitation, to increase co–enrollment from 3 individuals in PY2019 to 10 individuals annually by PY 2023.

Strategies:

1. Maine DVR will include Wabanaki Vocational Rehabilitation in training and technical assistance opportunities – including New Counselor Training.
2. Wabanaki VR will provide training and technical assistance to Maine DVR on issues related to cultural competency and best practices in Native employment supports.
3. DVR will work with Wabanaki VR to increase opportunities for collaboration on delivery of Pre-Employment Transition Services to Native American students with disabilities attending Maine high schools.
4. According to the joint Memorandum of Understanding, Maine DVR and Wabanaki VR will meet at least annually to review the agreement.

Objective 3.2: To address the growing numbers of Maine residents who are “New Mainers” and who may be eligible for DVR services, Maine DVR will strengthen its services to this population through the following strategies:

* 1. Provide staff training and development to DVR staff to increase cultural competence as measured through pre- and post- training evaluation.
	2. Conduct educational and outreach activities to increase awareness of availability of DVR services.
	3. Join with other workforce system partners to address common barriers to employment – such as transcript analysis, English language skills, and need for support services.
	4. Ensure language access in all DVR-produced and delivered materials.
	5. Include best practices in hiring and retaining New Mainers in employer engagement activities.

Objective 3.3: To support the successful reentry of individuals with disabilities exiting the correctional systems and reentering employment, Maine DVR will strengthen its services to this population through the following strategies:

1. Building on a successful pilot effort, Maine DVR will partner with the Department of Corrections and the Bureau of Employment Services to expand delivery of a targeted pre-release “Career Exploration Workshop” to state and county correctional facilities throughout the state.
2. Strengthen DVR participation in the Reentry Network, leading to increased knowledge of resources and supports to promote employment and reduce recidivism.
3. Maintain “Corrections Liaisons” in each office. Liaisons will be paired with regional correctional facilities leading to increased collaboration and timely pre-release referrals. Liaisons will participate in joint DVR/Department of Corrections quarterly meetings leading to increased coordination of services for mutual clients.
4. Provide annual staff training on best practices leading to successful employment for individuals with a criminal history.

Objective 3.4: To support successful employment of individuals who are Veterans, DVR will strengthen its services to this population through the following strategies:

1. Continue to collaborate with Bureau of Employment Services’ Veterans Services leading to increased co-enrollment opportunities for veterans with disabilities
2. DVR will maintain “Veterans Liaisons” in each office. Liaisons will participate in quarterly Bureau of Employment Services’ Veterans Services team meetings to exchange information and plan joint events (such as targeted job fairs).
3. During PY20, DVR will update its Memorandum of Understanding with federal Veterans’ Affairs Vocational Rehabilitation & Employment leading to increased referrals of Veterans eligible for both services.
4. DVR will provide training to staff on the employment needs of Veterans.

Objective 3.5: To support successful employment and community inclusion of individuals with dual sensory impairments (Deaf/Blind), DVR will strengthen its services to this population through the following strategies:

1. Through its Division for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, DVR will work in partnership with DBVI and other community organizations to explore opportunities to build capacity of Support Service Providers across the state.

Objective 3.6: Maine DVR will develop new strategies to increase the employment of people with mental health disabilities:

 Strategies:

1. DVR will partner with the Department of Health and Human Services’ Office of Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services and MaineCare Services to explore opportunities for collaboration to strengthen and expand employment services to individuals with mental health disabilities
2. 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.
3. DVR will partner with Clubhouses (that are certified or pursuing certification) to provide employment services that meet Clubhouse International standards.
4. DVR will maintain a liaison to the local Clubhouse in each office and work with them on joint training and outreach needs.
5. DVR will provide staff training at least annually on best practices in vocational rehabilitation for individuals with mental health disabilities.

Objective 3.7: Maine DVR will continue implementation of a Memorandum of Understanding with the public Workers’ Compensation system in order to better serve injured Maine workers who eligible for Vocational Rehabilitation services.

Strategies:

1. DVR will maintain a roster of Board-approved Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors.
2. In conjunction with the Board, DVR will ensure at least annual training for all Board-approved VRCs.
3. DVR will meet at least annually with the Workers’ Compensation Board to assess the success of the MOU initiative.

Objective 3.8: Maine DVR will work with state agencies, treatment providers, and other partners to promote and support employment for individuals impacted by substance use.

Strategies:

1. DVR will provide training to staff, at least annually, on best practices in supporting the employment of individuals impacted by substance use
2. DVR will participate in grant advisory and other work groups as requested.
3. DVR will participate with WIOA and other partners in targeted efforts to promote employment of individuals impacted by substance use
4. DVR will explore effective strategies – like Progressive Employment – for use with this population.

Objective 3.9: Maine DVR will provide equitable vocational rehabilitation services to potentially eligible students and eligible youth and adults who identify as LGBTQ+.

Strategies:

1. DVR will convene a work group to review best practices in serving this population and make recommendations for policy and practice changes.
2. DVR will provide training to staff and review policies at least annually.

Objective 3.10 Maine DVR will work with Maine’s TANF/ASPIRE programs and contracted providers to increase collaboration – leading to improved employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities.

Strategies:

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

**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).**

Objective 1.2: To promote increased access to and delivery of Pre–Employment Transition Services to all students with disabilities from 2, 287 reported activities in PY 2018 to 3,000 in PY 2020 and 4000 annually by PY2023 leading to improved post-secondary education and employment readiness.

Strategies:

1. Through use of Progressive Employment, Summer Work Experience, and other work- based learning opportunities, DVR will support at least 300 students with disabilities to have paid work experiences annually during PY20 20 through PY 2023.
2. Maine DVR - in collaboration with DBVI and with support from WINTAC – will launch a statewide peer mentoring effort during PY 2020. Peer mentoring will be provided by “near peers” to support preparation for post-secondary education and employment.
3. In partnership with the Maine Department of Education and Local Education Agencies, Maine DVR will deliver Pre-Employment Transition Services to Potentially Eligible and Eligible students with disabilities across Maine. This will include through joint activities such as job tours, job clubs, Transition Career Exploration Workshop, and delivery of information on labor markets and career pathways.
4. Maine DVR will partner with the Maine Department of Education’s Special Services and Career and Technical Education offices to develop opportunities to increase the delivery of Pre-Employment Transition Services to students in Career and Technical Education programs.
5. Maine DVR will partner with the Maine Department of Health and Human Services’ Office of Child and Family Services to ensure access to and participation in Pre-Employment Transition Services of youth served through child welfare and children’s behavioral health services.
6. Maine DVR will expand delivery of strategies to address the needs of rural youth including through online resources and Virtual Job Shadow.
7. Maine DVR will work with Maine’s Parent Training and Information Center to increase family awareness of Pre-Employment Transition Services and the value of early career exploration and planning for students with disabilities
8. Through its Division for the Deaf, Hard of Hearing and Late Deafened, DVR will develop and deliver targeted Pre-Employment Transition Services in conjunction with the Maine Educational Center for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing/Governor Baxter School.
9. Maine DVR will explore opportunities to support delivery of Pre-Employment Transition Services in conjunction with Job Corps and YouthBuild programming.
10. Maine DVR will participate in the Cross-Agency Council on Transition and support inclusion of DVR clients in the “Youth Advisory Group” to receive feedback and input on needed transition services and related policies.
11. In keeping with current research, Employment First, and the State of Maine’s Economic Development plan - collect and record data to track progress towards ensuring that all Maine youth have a paid work experience before high school graduation.
12. Maine DVR will implement and sustain promising practices and lessons learned for work-based learning from the RSA-funded Transition Work Based Learning Model Demonstration Grant.

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Goal 4**

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

Objective 4.1: Maine DVR will refer clients to workforce system programs and services to meet their needs and increase access to comparable benefits.

Strategies:

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

Objective 4.2: Maine DVR will work with Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act partners to share data and information leading to increased alignment of program and services and expanded opportunities for DVR clients.

Strategies:

1. DVR will complete Memoranda of Understanding with all required partners
2. DVR, in conjunction with DBVI, will provide representation on Local Workforce Boards.
3. DVR will engage MDOL’s Center for Workforce Research and Information to produce updated disability data on the employment status of Maine people with disabilities
4. 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.

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

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

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 a density of 43 people per square mile. The largest population center can be found in southern Maine in the greater Portland area where approximately 91,200 individuals reside. Residents are primarily White (93.5%) with small representation of Black (1.5%), Asian (1.2%), and Native American (0.7%) individuals in certain geographical areas of the state. Maine’s population growth is significantly lower than the rest of the country with a rate of 0.6% between 2010 and 2017 as compared to the national rate of 5.5%.[[1]](#footnote-1) Additionally, the 2017 demographic profile released by the US Census Bureau indicates that Maine’s median age is 44.0 years, which is the oldest in the country.

According to the Maine Department of Labor’s Center for Workforce Research and Information[[2]](#footnote-2), economic conditions in much of Maine are favorable. The size of the economy and the number of jobs continue to reach new highs, driving unemployment and other measures of labor market slack to new lows. These tight labor market conditions provide a positive environment for individuals with high numbers of job openings and rising wages, but they are a challenge for employers, who are concerned about finding the staff they need. The economy continues to grow. Total output, measured by gross domestic product, has been increasing at an accelerating rate in recent years. GDP in Maine reached $64 billion in 2018.The statewide seasonally adjusted unemployment rate has been below 4% each month since the beginning of 2016, the longest period on record. Unemployment has been close to 3% throughout the second half of 2019.

The tight labor market is driving wages up. Over the last four years the average wage paid in Maine has increased at the fastest rate in decades after adjusting for inflation. In the 12 months through June 2019 the average wage per job reached $46,100. Per capita personal income has steadily increased. Over the last two decades, per capita income in Maine relative to the nation was higher in the two recessionary periods (early 2000s and 2008 & 2009) than it was during expansionary periods. That is because the downturns were not as deep here as in much of the country. For the last seven years per capita income in Maine was close to 90% of the national level. The labor force participation rate has declined in Maine for nearly 20 years and the size of the labor force has not changed appreciably in 14 years. The primary reasons labor force participation has declined, and is expected to continue to do so, are the advancing age structure of the population and lower participation in areas of the state where the economic base has eroded.

In an environment in which the labor force is shrinking, Maine does not have the luxury of tens of thousands of people less than fully engaged in the workforce. Many will require education or training intervention to acquire meaningful skills employers need. (CWRI, 2015).

The passage of *The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) of 2014* and reauthorization of the Rehabilitation Act of 1998, along with the subsequent release of final rules in 2016, has resulted in important changes to the practices of state vocational rehabilitation agencies including increased collaboration with other workforce development system partners and expanded services to students with disabilities.

Many changes designed to help youth and adults with disabilities access employment education, job training and support services, have been made, including:

* Establishing a much larger role for public vocational rehabilitation (VR) as youth with disabilities make the transition from school to adult life. Public VR funds in the amount of a 15% set-aside, must now be used for transition services, specifically pre-employment transitions services that include job exploration counseling, work-based learning experiences, counseling on post-secondary opportunities, workplace readiness training, and training on self-advocacy. Each local VR office must also undertake pre-employment transition coordination activities and they must involve schools and workforce development system in these activities.
* Focusing supported employment state grants to VR agencies on youth. Half the money the state receives under these grants will now have to be used to support youth up to age 24 with the most significant disabilities to achieve supported competitive integrated employment.
* VR may now provide extended supported employment services for up to 24 months (previously the limit was 18 months).
* Limiting the use of sub-minimum wage. Section 511 is specifically intended to reduce the number of transition-age youth entering sheltered workshops and working for sub-minimum wage. The emphasis is on moving young people with significant disabilities into integrated community employment. The bill prohibits individuals with disabilities age 24 and younger from working in jobs paying less than the federal minimum of $7.25 per hour unless they first apply for and receive vocational rehabilitation services, among other requirements. There are exceptions but only for those already working for subminimum wage and cases where individuals may be deemed ineligible for vocational rehabilitation services. Section 511 also prohibits schools from contracting for services, training or work experiences that involve the use of sub-minimum wage.
* Requiring state VR agencies to have formal agreements with the state Medicaid systems, and the state intellectual and developmental disability (IDD) agency.
* Adding a definition of “customized employment” in federal statute, and an updated definition of “supported employment” that includes customized employment.
* Adding a definition for “competitive integrated employment” as an optimal outcome.
* Enhancing roles and requirements for the general workforce system and One-Stop Career Centers in meeting the needs of people with disabilities, including the expectation of full programmatic accessibility. (Lisa A. Mills, 2015)

This Act regulates a major portion of the state’s rehabilitation services, including consumer-related services that are routinely purchased from community-based service providers.

The Bureau is engaged 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. DVR is a full contributor to the unified State Plan and is actively engaged in WIOA implementation across the workforce system.

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, Independent Living Council, and Disability Rights Maine, as well as groups, such as Maine APSE and the Alliance for Full Participation, 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.

In June 2014, Maine’s legislature enacted the Employment First Maine Act (Sec. A-1. 26 MRSA c.3), which was a natural progression in Maine’s focus on competitive integrated employment as a valued outcome for the state’s citizens with disabilities. It set forth that the Departments of Health and Human Services, Labor, and Education must implement employment as a core component of services and supports provided and is the first and preferred service or support option offered to individuals with disabilities.

The Act also convened a time-limited coalition of interested parties, including employers, state agency representatives, advocacy organizations, and people with disabilities, to review and make recommendations regarding the improvement of the administration of employment services and the employment outcomes of people with disabilities. Before its sunset in October 2016, the Employment First Maine Coalition produced a report summarizing the work that was completed and identifying twenty-seven recommendations for consideration by the Governor, the Legislature and state agencies, primarily identifying strategies that encourage the employment of youth and adults with disabilities, engage the business community, and improve EFM performance measures. (See complete report at: <http://employmentfirstmaine.org/>). Since that time, the Commission on Disability and Employment, which is a subcommittee of the State Workforce Board, has been monitoring progress on the recommendations with the Departments of Education, Labor, and Health and Human Services.

According to the Center for Workforce Research and Information[[3]](#footnote-3), from 2013 through 2017, an average of 208,600 persons with one or more disabilities resided in Maine, equal to about 16% of its civilian non-institutionalized population of 1.3 million. This proportion was higher than that of the United States, where an estimated 13% of residents had a disability. Of additional note, is that the age distribution of civilian noninstitutionalized population with disabilities differs from the general population (with and without disabilities), with higher shares of persons over 64 and lower shares in cohorts 64 or younger. In Maine, nearly 40% of the population with disabilities is over 64 years, more than double the comparable share of the general population (18%).

Workers with disabilities in Maine are less likely to be employed than adults without disabilities. Fewer than half work or seek work; the unemployment rate among adults with disabilities is three times that of other working age adults. From 2013 through 2017, 33% of working-age Mainers with disabilities was employed compared to 80% of those with no disability. Those who do work earn less than those with no disability; median earnings of Maine workers with disabilities were $18,434 in a twelve-month period, compared median earnings of $31,217 among Maine workers with no disability.

Adults with a disability are more likely to live in or near poverty, regardless of work status, and are less likely to have postsecondary education than adults with no disability.

While DVR services are an important resource for individuals with disabilities who are looking to enter, or re-enter the Maine workforce, VR services are only one option in an expanding array of employment supports and services. Co-location in Maine’s network of Department of Labor (MDOL) One-Stop CareerCenters has provided DVR the opportunity to work in partnership with several other programs that support employment of people with disabilities.

The CareerCenters provide several employment programs that serve people with disabilities. The newly redesigned Maine Job Link is an online accessible CareerCenter tool to allow job seekers from around the state to be matched with real-time available open (currently over 11,000) positions. The Job Link has 42,700 active job bank registrants of whom 505 are self-disclosed job seekers with disabilities. This represents 1.1% of total Job Link registrants. Data reported on the ETA 9002 for Program Year 2019 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. However, while the number of individuals with disabilities served was much lower than during the recession, the proportion of those with disabilities served remained almost unchanged.

While the Bureau of Employment Services (BES) collects data on self-reported disability, it does not require that individuals disclose having a disability. As a result of past work through collaborative efforts, including two rounds of the Disability Employment Initiative grant funding, there is increased awareness and attention in the CareerCenter to increasing access to expanded services for customers with disabilities. There are concerns about the accuracy of the current case management database; the system defines disability status within the context of vocational rehabilitation. Individuals who have a disability, which does not constitute a significant barrier to employment, are often not recorded as having a disability at all. Administrative override is required to update a person’s disability status when they disclose post-enrollment.

Research has shown, that the number of people with disabilities served by CareerCenters is under-reported. According to 2016 estimates from the American Community Survey, people with disabilities comprise 13.7% of Maine’s working age population. ((ACS), 2012-2016). We would be hard pressed to assert that we are serving them in numbers commensurate with their presence in the general population.

commensurate with their presence in the general population.

**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 employ 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 is 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.

**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:**

2018 State Plan Amendment Goals:

Goal 1

To obtain at least 1000 successful closures for DVR clients in FFY 2018 and 2019 thereby substantially maintaining solid employment outcomes for DVR clients in Maine. These employment outcomes and goals from 2018 through 2019 will be impacted by the change in serving more youth in school. DVR has seen 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

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 SWIB, and the larger workforce development system to incorporate and apply the new rules related to the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA).

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

**Goal 1:** Maine DVR, while not attaining the number of closures forecast, due in large part to OOS Category 3 closure, has continued to place individuals with significant disabilities in competitive integrated employment. DVR has focused on strategies that engage clients to reduce early exit from VR. Maine has done this through implementation of effective practices and an attention to partnerships both within and outside the workforce system. Pre-Employment Transition Services have introduced VR services to younger clients and have strengthened students with disabilities’ skills and preparation for post-secondary education and employment. Maine has met its annual requirement to expend 15% of grant funds on Pre-Employment Transition Services. For example, a school-based mentoring pilot with the Center for Independent Living is leading to roll-out of a statewide fee for service peer mentoring model for students and youth with disabilities – with WINTAC assistance. A tight labor market coupled with VR’s roll-out of dual customer strategies such as Progressive Employment have increased employer awareness of jobseekers with disabilities as an untapped talent pool. DVR continues to work closely with Community Rehabilitation Providers to ensure that they have the training and tools to effectively provide services to VR clients. This is provided in large part through DVR’s support with the Department of Health and Human Services of Maine’s Employment for ME Workforce Development System that regularly offers ACRE-certified employment specialist training as well as advanced topical training.

**Goal 2:** DVR has made significant progress with this goal due in large part to regular review of time to eligibility and time to plan data with VRCs, management, and the State Rehabilitation Council. Additionally, training to staff on best practices in determining eligibility and plan development (based on technical assistance from RSA) have supported counselors to change their process for determining eligibility and plan development. DVR has also increased use of work-based learning, paid work experiences, Progressive Employment, and other strategies like use of the Career Exploration Workshop to help individuals find out more about the world of work sooner in the VR process. DVR has embraced the philosophy that “everyone is ready for something” meaning that clients can take steps with VR’s support towards their employment goals more rapidly than they would have been able to in the past.

**Goal 3:** DVR has taken several measures to meet the needs of underserved and minority populations. A Memorandum of Understanding with the Tribal VR 121 Grant has resulted in co-enrollment and cross-training opportunities. Reentry of individuals with disabilities exiting the corrections system is supported by a quarterly working group made up of identified DVR liaisons and Department of Corrections representatives. Recently, in collaboration with the Bureau of Employment Services, DVR delivered a Career Exploration Workshop series to inmates in the Maine Correctional Center to prepare them for employment success after release. Each DVR office has a VR Veterans liaison who has additional knowledge of Veterans services and resources. The liaisons meet quarterly with the Maine’s Bureau of Employment Services’ VETS team. These meetings often include representatives of the Veterans’ Affairs – Vocational Rehabilitation & Education team as well. DVR has contracts with Clubhouse programs across the state to support employment goals of individuals with mental health disabilities. Staff are assigned to each Clubhouse and have scheduled times during each month when they are available on site. Maine continues to see increasing numbers of individuals who are “New Mainers”. DVR has participated in efforts to increase awareness of DVR services among this population. Maine’s population typically is the oldest in the nation. DVR routinely assists workers who have age-related acquired disabilities (such as hearing loss) who wish to remain in the workforce. As of April 2019, there were no individuals working at subminimum wage in Maine – nor were any certificates issued to employers or community rehabilitation programs. This reflects Maine’s long-standing commitment to competitive integrated employment.

**Goal 4:** Since the implementation of WIOA – and using lessons learned from previous initiatives like ODEP’s Disability Employment Initiative grant - DVR has worked with its WIOA and workforce system partners to provide cross-training and technical assistance on best practices on serving individuals with disabilities. The Director of the Division for the Deaf, Hard of Hearing and Late-Deafened provides Deaf Awareness and Etiquette training within the CareerCenters and in the community for workforce partners like Adult Education. Hires of individuals with disabilities to work in the CareerCenters has also reinforced the message that individuals with disabilities are welcome. At a state level, partners work together to address access through the Information Technology Accessibility Committee. DVR houses the State ADA Accessibility Coordinator who routinely provides technical assistance formally and informally as new programs, services and physical spaces are developed. The Center for Workforce Research and Information hosts a webpage on Maine Workers with Disabilities <https://www.maine.gov/labor/cwri/disabilities/index.html>,which is a useful resource both within and outside the workforce system. Maine DVR continues to maintain a Memorandum of Understanding with the Workers Compensation Board that allows for referral of applicants seeking vocational rehabilitation services via the Board and provides for reimbursement to DVR for those services. That MOU is currently out for updating.

**Goal 5:** Since the passage of WIOA, DVR has worked to amend and align its rules, policies, procedures. DVR meets regularly with core partners and has engaged in the challenging work of finding new ways to meet client needs through collaboration. This work has been aided by technical assistance from WINTAC, NTACT, JDVRTAC and other targeted resources. Co-location within the Maine Department of Labor has supported progress on development and ongoing support of partnerships. One recent example is use of Maine’s Reemployment Systems Integration Dislocated Worker Grant to create an online integrated web portal, called W.O.R.K. Services, across Employment Services, Rehabilitation Services and Adult Education. Currently being piloted, W.O.R.K. Services provides virtual “no wrong door” access to individuals who are seeking employment and training but who may be unaware of state services and programs. Users can select for information to be shared across systems thereby increasing efficiencies and timely access to services.

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

**Goal 1:** This goal was originally established before the full implementation and rules under WIOA were available. Recent success in this goal was impacted by a continued waitlist in Category 3, which reduced the overall number of successful employment closures. Additionally, increasing focus on serving youth – who may be in services much longer – means that successful closure in employment may be delayed. DVR will continue to explore efficiencies and additional resources that may allow for opening of Category 3, which is currently closed.

**Goal 2:** Staff turnover and prolonged vacancies have been challenging to timely service. In order to meet clients’ needs, casework supervisors have taken on caseloads and VR counselors have taken on extra clients. Recent agency-wide training on effective practices like Motivational Interviewing, changes in the Community Rehabilitation Provider payment system, and repurposing of positions are designed to promote operational efficiencies that lead to improved outcomes for DVR clients.

**Goal 3:** While progress was made in this goal, turnover rates and related vacancies resulted in additional training needs to support attainment of the goal. During the next State Plan, DVR will increase staff training to promote cultural competencies and will explore opportunities with other state partners to increase diversity in hiring of agency staff.

**Goal 4:** Turnover among DVR and partner staff makes cross-training an ongoing need. However, use of recorded webinars, video-conferencing and other asynchronous learning is supporting systemic ways to ensure that information and resources are effectively shared.

**Goal 5:** DVR continues to make progress with its partners of full realization of both the spirit of WIOA and its mandates. Execution of Memoranda of Understanding, cost allocation, and other areas are in development.

**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.**

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

**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, but DVR has recently gotten access to the State Wage Interface System (SWIS), which will expand access to national wage data.

**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 employ 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 and 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.

**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 works together with its state partners, community providers and advocacy groups to ensure Supported Employment Services are available to eligible individuals.

* + 1. Quality. Our management information system (AWARE) 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. This information provides the information necessary to manage resources and ensure quality outcomes are achieved. The development of a joint data tracking system with the Department of Health and Human Services- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services (SAHMS)and Aging and Disability Services (OADS)-continues to be pursued and would increase the ability to monitor ongoing supports provided to an individual to obtain and maintain successful, quality, employment

 The Division and the Department of Health and Human Services oversee a comprehensive workforce development system for employment staff such as Employment Specialists, Job Coaches and Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors, as well as other professionals who support individuals with disabilities in their pursuit of employment, including case managers, education staff, and care coordinators. The Employment Workforce Development System provides basic Employment Specialist certification, Advanced Topical Trainings, monthly webinars and a registry of certified Employment Specialists and Career Planners in the state. The Training Calendar provides a place where employment professionals and other human service professionals can get information on national, state and online options for employment related trainings.

 Community Rehabilitation Providers who contract with The Division can be approved to provide services following two different paths to accreditation-- CARF (Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities) or The Division’s In–State approval process. In addition, they are required to employ staff who meet the Accreditation of Community Educators (ACRE) Employment Specialist qualifications, or other Division approved training, and meet ongoing continuing education requirements.

The comprehensive In-State approval process includes evaluating areas such as:

* Mission statement,
* Policies and Procedures (including assuring adherence to APSE standards for Supported Employment)
* Admission Criteria,
* Assessment Policy and Practice,
* Case Coordination,
* Client Input,
* Health and Safety,
* Personnel records documenting staff qualifications and background checks,
* Policies and practices regarding client rights and appeal procedures.

The approval process also includes interviews with key stakeholders such as clients, employers, and funding agents.

B. Scope of Supported Employment:

 The primary service provided to clients in supported employment is job coaching since funds must be now used to support an individual who is in employment status. These direct services are provided by an Employment Specialist or a Job Coach, who supports the client through activities such as interactions with supervisors and peers, and integration into the workplace culture.

Additional services that may be provided as needed include social skills training, consultation with the employer and facilitation of natural supports.

Individuals with brain injuries, physical disabilities, developmental disabilities and autism that receive assistance from the Division in obtaining employment may require ongoing supports to maintain successful employment. These individuals can access employment related services through one of the four Home and Community Based Waivers (HCBS). Career Planning is available to assist an individual in exploring interests, skills and abilities prior to a referral to VR. All four HCBS waivers offer long term work supports to provide support at the job site. These supports are also available to assist a waiver member with their own business. All employment services are determined by individual need through a person-centered planning approach that can include the VRC.

OADS has expanded available employment services to all 6,000 waiver participants during the last several years. Currently there are an estimated 1,200 of these individuals employed but an additional 3,500 are of working age and have employment funding available to them when they choose to go to work. We anticipate three to four hundred of these individuals will be applying for VR during the next year.

Individuals with Mental Illness who meet diagnostic eligibility criteria for Maine Care Section 17.02 Community Support Services, and/or Maine Care Section 92.03 Behavioral Health Home Services and require ongoing supports to maintain successful employment may access Mental Health Long Term Supported Employment Services funded by the DHHS Office of Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services (SAMHS). SAMHS contracts with Kepro, Inc to administer these services.

 The Division also has limited state dollars available to provide long term employment supports through two separate programs to VR consumers with the most significant disabilities who have been closed successfully. The programs are The Basic Extended Support Program (BES) and the Brain Injury Support Program (BIS). The BES program has an annual cap per client of $3,000 and the BIS program has an annual cap per client of $8,000.

Employment services are also available to individuals with mental illness through Vocational Clubhouses. There are currently four vocational clubhouses in Maine. Transitional Employment is intended to build on basic job skills and build clubhouse members’ confidence in their ability to maintain competitive employment. It is one of several employment options available through the Clubhouse approach. Transitional employment offers part-time positions in integrated worksites in the community, for 6-9 months. The individuals are paid by employers who have an agreement with the clubhouse that if the individual is not able to work their shift, the position will be covered by staff from the clubhouse. Clubhouse staff are also responsible for the training of the member on the job site, as well as providing job coaching on the job, thereby relieving the employer of these responsibilities. Transitional employment sites are meant to be a bridge on the way to permanent employment within the community, for those who need it.

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

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

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

**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:

1. US Census Bureau. Maine Quick Facts. https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/ME. Retrieved January 24, 2018. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Center for Workforce Research and Information, <https://www.maine.gov/labor/cwri/publications/pdf/Maine2019AnnualWorkforceReport.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. <https://www.maine.gov/labor/cwri/disabilities/index.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)