

The Evolve Employment Model Demonstration: A 21st Century Innovative Approach to High-Quality Employment, Advanced Technology Careers, and Emerging Advances in Technology for Individuals Acquiring Blindness, Low Vision, and DeafBlindness

Minnesota State Services for the Blind: A Field Initiated, Peer Supported Approach

(A) SIGNIFICANCE

Overview of Evolve Employment. Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) State Services for the Blind (SSB) proposes Evolve Employment, an innovative model to create a 21st Century workforce agency focused on the unique challenges of blind, low vision, and deafblind (BLVDB) individuals who acquire vision loss during their working years, including incumbent workers at risk for or experiencing recent job loss, New Americans, and individuals who have detached from the workforce for more than 27 weeks.

The Evolve Employment Model Demonstration offers a significant opportunity for SSB to improve services for three populations of major concern, as documented by data cited below, adopt tailor studied practices to blindness services, enhance SSB's ability to meet the MN Governor's Drive for 5 Initiative with a focus on the Customer Service and Technology (CST) sector, and integrate advanced technologies in business and jobseeker services. The CST sector encompasses advanced technology (AT) careers such as computer science, data analysis, artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, robotics, desktop support, and software contact centers. Evolve Employment is an integral part of Evolve VR, a larger ongoing SSB initiative. SSB is investing in system-wide modernization and has set major goals to build capacities, change policies, reinvent partnerships, and increase its reach to the 40,000 BLVDB Minnesotans identified in the American Community Survey (ACS). Evolve Employment will ensure that Evolve VR meets these goals by creating an environment that supports the feasibility, necessary capacities, and the success of the model demonstration. SSB submits this proposal under Topic 6 "Field Initiated" as it includes a combination of 1., 2., and 4.

(i) Likely utility of the products and potential for use in other settings.

Evolve Employment Products. The project will maximize products that have been developed through multiple funding sources, assess and enhance these products for applicability within a blindness services context, assess Competitive Integrated Employment (CIE) outcomes, and use multiple channels of dissemination to ensure utility and adoption in other settings.

1. Rapid Engagement Coordinated Team Approach (RCTA)

- Techniques for a RCTA involving highly specialized positions, including career navigators, CST specialists, English Language Learning, and benefits planning.
- Three-tiered service delivery approach: universal, targeted, and intensive.
- Resources and best practices for blind agencies partnering with workforce system partners.

2. Sector-Based Approach for Advanced Technology Careers

- Training curriculum, developed with a Minnesota employer, using AT in the CST sector
- Customized training for SSB staff, providers, and partners including a modified iGREET
- Rapid Response Retention Hotline for employees/workers needing prompt retention services
- Business outreach to change perceptions and stigmas about hiring BLVDB individuals.

3. Enhanced Progressive Employment (EPE) Model

- High tech/new tech, benefits planning, and a focus on New American populations in St. Cloud and the Twin Cities
- Best practices for dual customer career services for BLVDB New Americans in these areas
- Community partner training and incentives aligned with Good Jobs principles
- Innovative technology designed for BLVDB individuals to support their career journey

These products have high utility for not just blind agencies, but all public employment systems. A project website will be created and housed on the [State Services for the Blind \(SSB\) / State Services for the Blind \(mn.gov\)](#) platform and cross-referenced on [CareerForceMN.com](#).

The website will include a data dashboard, materials, trainings, processes, and approaches.

SSB will present and distribute products at national conferences (e.g., CSAVR, NCSAB) and to organizations nationwide that serve, support, and employ individuals who are BLVDB. SSB

and partners will upload all products to the National Clearinghouse of Rehabilitation Training Materials (NCRTM). The Institute for Community Inclusion (ICI) at the University of Massachusetts Boston will distribute materials through its network, including universities, researchers, policy think tanks, legislators, individuals with disabilities, and employment services providers. ICI's website (ExploreVR.org) will link to the Evolve Employment website to supplement dissemination and support knowledge translation.

(ii) Build local capacity to provide, improve, or expand services.

Evolve Employment will build local capacity at the state, sector, and community levels. We highlight the most critical features of enhanced capacity and describe others in the Project Design and Project Services Sections.

Tier 1: Universal provides dual-customer outreach and engagement to individuals with BLVDB, establishing business and partner relationships and connecting them to needed services. SSB will design low-intensity mechanisms, such as a hotline, and marketing campaigns. A network of businesses, especially in the CST sector, will be developed to promote resources and support in recruitment, retention, advancement, accommodations, and accessibility.

Tier 2: Targeted retention services for businesses and individuals with BLVDB are achieved through a RCTA. SSB will enhance local capacity with a retention specialist, career navigators, a New American business engagement specialist, a CST sector specialist, and a benefit planning specialist. Existing staff (ELL Specialist and Employment Specialists) will be realigned.

Tier 3: Intensive services are devoted to individuals with BLVDB who are long-term unemployed or New Americans, primarily East African and Somali communities. SSB will use the EPE model to address their unique challenges. Proven by nine state VR agencies, including three Commissions for the Blind, EPE has documented CIE outcomes (see Literature Review) and includes existing tools and strategies tailored for those with vision loss. These practices include existing fidelity instrumentation and are federally funded and freely available to SSB. Outcomes are included in the Project Design, Services, Management Plan, and Evaluation Plan.

SSB will collaborate with a CST business to develop CST sector-based training curricula, building from existing current technology training. In Minnesota, the CST sector provides jobs in help desk support, IT specialists, and contact center representatives. Workers in this sector use advanced tools such as customer service management systems, AI, chatbots, and security tools. Understanding the impact of these technologies on BLVDB workers is crucial for ensuring access to these careers.

SSB will launch a community partner training and incentive program to enhance career services for BLVDB individuals, focusing on Good Jobs principles. This initiative includes forming new partnerships with businesses and community-based organizations serving New Americans. Minnesota has the largest Somali population in the U.S., residing primarily in St. Cloud and the Twin Cities. Because of this population density, we selected these locations as Evolve Employment EPE implementation sites.

SSB will expand capacity for individuals acquiring BLVDB by fostering a seamless approach across workforce system partnerships. This requires developing new processes, training, technical assistance, and support for local workforce development areas, WIOA Core partners, and other related programs. These efforts will help employers and BLVDB individuals pursue careers aligned with Good Jobs principles.

(iii) The importance or magnitude of the results or outcomes.

Reaching Individuals with Acquired BLVDB. Of the 5.7 million people living in Minnesota, the ACS reported 92,678 of any age reported a vision difficulty, with 45,896 between the ages of 18 and 64. The majority (76,836) are over 35 years old (ACS, 2022 data). The prevalence of blindness and low vision increases with age suggesting that most individuals are in their working years. SSB serves approximately 1,100 BLVDB individuals per year. Longer life expectancy and the financial advantages to delaying Social Security retirement benefits will mean increasing numbers of incumbent older workers planning to remain employed. The results of this trend will be a new category of individuals seeking VR services.

Incumbent workers acquiring BLVDB have value to employers across public, private, and non-profit sectors. Minor modifications in workplace arrangements, access to devices, accessibility of systems and documents, and software adaptations can prevent job loss. For others, retaining their current occupation may not be an option or would require extensive, long-term training. SSB's role in evaluating transferable skills, identification of rapid and long-term training, and adjustment to blindness skill development (e.g., orientation and mobility, independent living, technology, self-advocacy) may reduce the financial and emotional stress individuals face long before they leave the workforce. Intervening early, as soon as vision loss is identified, may also serve as a diversion from public benefits such as Medicaid insurance.

21st Century Emerging Populations in Minnesota. 2022 ACS data indicate that 498,826 Minnesotans are foreign born with 290,471 naturalized citizens. About 36% are from Asian countries, 30% from African countries, and 22% from Latin American countries. RSA Dashboard numbers indicate 20% of SSB's customers have cultural or language barriers to employment. Minnesota is home to the largest Somali population in the United States. For SSB, a 21st Century employment program must engage with New Americans and local communities, improve its capacity to work with both individuals and businesses who represent these communities, and adopt practices that support Good Jobs principles.

Moving long-term unemployed individuals into the labor force. Individuals who have been out of the workforce for at least 27 weeks face significant barriers to their unemployment. SSB asserts that many individuals leave work after acquiring BLVDB without early intervention or blindness services. Many BLVDB individuals do not have access to essential assistive and advanced technologies such as screen readers, braille displays, and other adaptive tools.

Governor Walz's initiatives to address medical and workforce consequences of untreated medical conditions (c.f. Minnesota Department of Health, 2024) bear directly on the employment and economic well-being of individuals who are BLVDB, or at significant risk for vision loss. SSB has a primary role and mission to provide services to BLVDB jobseekers and help

incumbent workers retain their employment. Successful efforts will be responsive, fast-paced, coordinated across WIOA systems, and address the needs of both workers and businesses. Sectors have varying responses to adopting advanced and emerging technologies that create or challenge work environment accessibility. Incumbent workers who connect virtually in high tech, high demand occupations may have much more reliance on a skilled blindness technology specialty team, while those in customer service environments or face-to-face interactions may require more adaptive skills and tools such as orientation and mobility, artificial intelligence, and communication devices. Individuals in this population may acquire both hearing and vision loss (e.g., progressive Usher Syndrome) or conditions associated with aging.

Evolve Employment allows us to make service delivery changes that provide system level investments and amendments, with a high value on transportability, outcomes, and new partnerships. The three-tiered approach will result in increased numbers of individuals with acquired BLVDB obtaining, retaining, and advancing in high quality CIE outcomes that align with the Good Jobs principles. We will close the employment gap between individuals with BLVDB and those without disabilities, improve long-term economic independence and quality of life for BLVDB individuals, foster a more inclusive and diverse workforce, and facilitate societal changes in perceptions and attitudes towards hiring individuals with disabilities.

(B) QUALITY OF PROJECT DESIGN

(i) Thorough, high-quality review of the relevant literature.

SSB and partners will implement the Evolve Employment model informed by multiple areas of knowledge that have strong evidence, existing implementation guidance, and a high likelihood of addressing employment and talent needs of businesses and individuals with acquired BLVDB.

Career Advancement Strategies for Individuals who are BLVDB. Several practices specific to individuals who are BLVDB are showing promising evidence of improving employment outcomes such as business relations capacities (McDonnall, Cmar, and Tatch, 2020), accessible training (Cai, Davidson-Gibbs, Padget et al., 2020), encouragement to pursue post-secondary

education (Lund and Cmar, 2019), and the importance of educational attainment for individuals who are deafblind (McDonnall and Cmar 2019). Agency level factors such as investment in training (McDonnall, Cmar and Tatch (2020), management practices (Steinman, et al., 2013) and blindness specific approaches with business (McDonnall, 2016) have shown promise.

The National Rehabilitation Research and Training Center (RRTC) on Blindness and Low Vision at Mississippi State University is the major contributor to the research literature on the employment of individuals who are BLVDB. Dr. McDonnall, introducing a Special Issue in the *Journal of Visual Impairment and Blindness*, summarized the state of the science: “Based on existing research and anecdotal evidence, I believe the key barriers to employment experienced by people with visual impairments are (a) employers’ negative attitudes or lack of knowledge, (b) doubt in one’s own ability to work, (c) lack of assistive technology and other blindness skills needed in the workplace, (d) challenges with assistive technology in the workplace (e.g., company software that is not designed to work with screen readers), and (e) disability benefits as a disincentive (which may limit work rather than preclude it)” (McDonnall, 2019) page 479. McDonnall (2016) reported that counselors and business relations staff in VR agencies that used a combination of business relations techniques and blindness-specific techniques with business were more likely to achieve employment outcomes for individuals with visual disabilities. To date, components of career advancement services for individuals who are BLVDB including access to scripting, interpretation, non-visual instruction, and AT skills training have not been included as essential services in rigorous tests of team approaches.

Rapid Engagement. The Substantial Gainful Activity (SGA) Model Demonstration, RSA funded, tested the RCTA in Kentucky and Minnesota through randomized trials. The team included a rehabilitation counselor, employment specialist, and financial work incentive specialist working together with a client who was a Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) beneficiary (Foley, Haines, Mock, 2020). The team had specific tasks prior to initiating an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) including a benefits planning analysis, local labor

market scan, and identification of resource needs. Kentucky and Minnesota set pacing norms including completing an IPE within 30 days of eligibility. The goal was to increase the number of SSDI beneficiaries who closed successfully from VR with earnings above SGA levels.

Evidence. The Clearinghouse for Labor Evaluation and Research (CLEAR) assessed the evidence of the RCTA and determined it had high causal evidence in Kentucky (CLEAR, February 2024, accessed online). Martin and Sevak (2020) reported an increase in competitive employment and an increase in wages above substantial gainful activity at closure for those in the treatment group. Scott (2021) followed up on the 1,056 SGA participants several years later and examined unemployment insurance data to conclude that SGA treatment participants were “a) more likely to be employed, b) more likely to earn higher wages, and c) were more likely to be earning above SGA earnings levels two years after the completion of the project.” Scott (2021) also reported that SGA treatment group participants were employed faster and had \$200 more per month in earnings. Scott’s recommendations included addressing the pacing of services, involving specialists early in service delivery, and using the coordinated team approach. The Minnesota site was inconclusive as more than 40% of participants had not completed VR at the time of the study end (Kehn and Honeycutt, 2020). The SGA Project used an office level randomization approach that required enough offices and a sufficient number of individuals with SSDI. This narrowed the implementation sites to VR agencies that had at least 14 offices and at least 1000 new applicants per year. Therefore, it was not tested in Blind agencies. SSB proposes to implement the RCTA model statewide with a focus on individuals with acquired BLVDB at risk for job loss or long-term unemployment and may be applying for or receiving SSA benefits.

Progressive Employment. PE is a highly structured dual customer model that matches the talent of individuals with multiple barriers to finding, keeping, or advancing in employment with local businesses. Components exist across most public systems. This is an advantage as they are within the control of public VR agencies and other systems and are not dependent on significant changes in policy and procedure. As depicted in the attachment, PE Core Model Components,

the components are intentionally aligned, creating a structured cross-functional, cross-partner team approach, instituting multiple methods for rapid communication of actionable labor market intelligence. PE requires rapid coordination and communication across all local partners, which is not business as usual. It also requires an increased capacity for direct interaction with local businesses to understand and address talent needs both short- and long-term.

Evidence of Positive Impact for Jobseekers: PE has emerged as a promising dual-customer employment practice that is explicitly addressing how business relations activities can be aligned with counseling and field services to meet the needs of jobseekers with significant disabilities, limited to no work history, and who may be considered “not job ready” (Moore, et al., 2018). Multiple researchers are studying PE and finding the model increases the likelihood of exiting VR with an employment outcome (Mann, Stapleton, and Porter, 2018; Siwach, Yin, and de Milliano, 2021; Moore et al., 2020), potentially reduces early drop out from VR (Moore et al., 2020 and 2018b), results in high levels of satisfaction and engagement of businesses (Robertson, Noys, and Pan, 2019), and fosters collaborative environments among VR counselors and employment specialists serving individuals with disabilities (Yin and Siwach, 2019).

Mann et al. (2018) found that receiving PE services increased the probability of exiting VR with employment by 21.3% and increased the share who earned more than \$2,600 by 6.9%. The employment and earnings impacts were substantive and suggest PE could meaningfully improve outcomes for VR participants. Siwach, Yin and de Milliano, 2021) used Maine VR’s administrative data combined with unemployment insurance records to measure the impact of PE on employment outcomes for youth with disabilities. Youth receiving PE (N=180) were more likely than their non-PE counterparts to have multiple and the most significant disabilities, and they had lower employment rates before IPE. Using a quasi-experimental Mahalanobis Distance Matching technique to create comparison groups, the researchers found that youth enrolled in the PE intervention were 10.5 percentage points more likely than non-PE youth to achieve employment in the four quarters after IPE (Siwach, et al., 2021). This impact was even higher for

subgroups of youth within the cohort who had the most significant disabilities and were receiving SSI/SSDI. Fidelity of implementation was also important, as Siwach, et al. (2021) found that higher implementation quality related to better outcomes based on the observed differential outcomes for the two pilot sites. Robertson, Noyes and Pan (2019) found that 89% of businesses that engaged in PE in Vermont described the activities as successful, and 93% reported that they are likely to participate in another PE activity in the future.

Need for Sector Based Business Engagement Strategies. Individuals with disabilities have talents that many businesses disregard. Bonaccio et al., 2020; Nagtegaal et al.; 2023 and Baker et al., 2018 report the causes as lack of disability awareness, inaccessible hiring practices, and lack of support in providing reasonable accommodations. Iwanaga et al. (2021) highlight the importance of these demand-side factors as predictors of employment, noting that the negative perceptions and attitudes of employers (and co-workers) can contribute to limited engagement with jobseekers with disabilities. In the Iwanga et al. (2021) scoping review of recruitment of workers with disabilities, the authors found no randomized studies in their search and note the challenges of conducting rigorous research including experimental studies with businesses.

Sector Based Strategies. There is limited research on the use of sector-based strategies for jobseekers with BLVDB and no randomized studies to determine effectiveness. Sector based strategies grew markedly after the passage of the Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act of 2014 with the intent of advancing disadvantaged workers into high demand, high paying jobs in targeted sectors that have local demand for talent Schaberg (2020). Ratledge, Miller, and Schaberg (2023) provide a synthesis of sector strategy research providing evidence of credential attainment, job entry and wage gains across multiple initiatives in IT, finance, and health care. Successful programs tended to focus within a sector on specific occupations that required short-term knowledge gains. Though Ratledge et al. point to equitable access as a key ingredient in successful sector programs, no mention of disability or individuals with BLVDB is evident. Sahni (n.d) is leading a systematic review of sectoral programs and reported that data on

participant characteristic is inconsistent. Thus, individuals with disabilities may be participating but data is limited. Others report on large scale randomized studies suggest that sectoral strategies are very promising and showed evidence of earnings outcomes even during the pandemic (Katz, Roth, Hendra, Schaberg, 2022; Spitzer, English, Williams, et al., 2023).

(ii) Goals, objectives, and outcomes are clearly specified and measurable.

The goals, objectives, and outcomes of the Evolve Employment model are clearly defined and measurable through a structured approach. The project will gather feedback from participants, staff, and stakeholders; deliver services; collect data; and evaluate progress and impact. The goals and related objectives, activities, and outcomes are described in detail below and outlined in the Logic Model and Project Evaluation Plan. Additional detail about the project's tasks, timelines, and responsible personnel is included in the attached Management and Work Plan.

Goal 1: Implement a Rapid Engagement Coordinated Team Approach. Deploy a three-tiered rapid engagement strategy led by experts and partners to deliver specialized career services, new technology solutions, and engage businesses. This approach will achieve CIE outcomes aligned with the Good Jobs principles.

Objective 1. *Offer a three-tiered portfolio of career services that includes universal, targeted, and intensive approaches for at-risk BLVDB individuals and businesses.* In Year 1, develop the framework and implementation plan for a three-tiered portfolio of career services, the foundation for all components of the Evolve Employment model. In Year 1 and 2, make it easy for project participants to find and connect with SSB. Mid-Year 2, with refinements throughout Years 3-5, implement Tier 1 universal services focused on outreach, engagement, and connection building; implement Tier 2 targeted services focused on retention; and implement Tier 3 intensive services focused on individuals with acquired BLVDB requiring VR.

Specific and Measurable Outcomes: 500 BLVDB project participants receive Tier 1 Universal services. 200 BLVDB project participants receive Tier 2 Targeted services; of the project participants receiving Tier 2 services, 65% of BLVDB workers retain or advance in their pre-

participation employment setting. 100 BLVDB project participants receive Tier 3 Intensive services; of the project participants receiving Tier 3 services, 55% achieved a CIE outcome that meets the Good Jobs principles. 500 business connections and contacts made.

Methodology: We will collect and maintain information on participants, including demographics, services provided, and pre/post-employment information, in our case management system Workforce One (WF1).

Objective 2. *Create a Coordinated Team Approach to support individuals with acquired BLVDB in retaining and obtaining employment as part of Tier 2 and 3 services.* In Year 1, implement a staffing structure that supports a coordinated team approach and rapid engagement. Create policies and procedures that support implementing and tracking RCTA. In Year 2, provide staff training and development on RCTA. Pilot RCTA with 10 individuals in Tier 2 and 10 in Tier 3, with full implementation after refinement in Years 3-5.

Specific and Measurable Outcomes: 100% of key personnel receive training on RCTA. 150 individuals receive services through a RCTA; of the individuals receiving a RCTA, 65% achieve a CIE Outcome that meets the Good Jobs Principles. For employed individuals receiving retention services through a RCTA, a 15% increase in wages post-participation compared to pre-participation.

Methodology: We will track training participants through registration. We will administer a satisfaction survey at the end of the training. We will collect and maintain information on participants in WF1.

Objective 3. *Enhance community partner and interagency collaboration for serving at-risk BLVDB individuals through specialized training and capacity and skill building.* In Year 1 create a State Rehabilitation Council-Blind Evolve Employment Advisory Taskforce (SRC-B EEAT) that continues through Years 2-5. In Years 1 and 2, develop and implement a customized community partner training program and develop and implement training for partners.

Specific and Measurable Outcomes: 50 community partners complete the training program;

85% of community partners rate the training as high quality, relevant, and useful to their work. Increase the number of participants in the VR program who are also working with other Workforce System partners by 15% (co-enrollments). Increase the number of community partners providing career services by 20%.

Methodology: We will track participant training registration. We will administer a satisfaction survey at the end of the training. We will track co-enrollment information using WF1.

Goal 2: Build a Sector-Based Approach for Advanced Technology Careers. Target businesses in the CST sectors to provide retention services and foster career development opportunities, supporting the MN Governor's Drive for 5 initiative.

Objective 1. *Establish and strengthen sector partnerships with businesses and organizations in the Customer Service and Technology sector.* In Years 1 and 2, identify and engage key CST business partners. Establish a CST Employer Advisory Group. In Years 3-5, organize interagency and sector partnership events and trainings.

Specific and Measurable Outcomes: 150 CST sector businesses contacted. 5 CST events and trainings conducted.

Methodology: We will use a Customer Relationship Management system (e.g., Salesforce) to track business sector, engagement level, and services provided. We will track participant training registration and administer a satisfaction survey.

Objective 2. *Develop and implement cutting-edge technology tools and training to support BLVDB individuals in obtaining careers in the CST sectors.* In Years 1 and 2, assess the technology needs of individuals and the CST sector. In Years 2-5, implement technology tools, technology training, and ongoing support. Collaborate with employers on technology integration.

Specific and Measurable Outcomes: 150 project participants receive AT tools and training. 75% of project participants indicate the tools and training helped obtain or retain CIE.

Methodology: We will collect and maintain information on participants in WF1. We will administer a customer satisfaction survey.

Objective 3. *Through a collaborative effort with partners and business, create a customized CST career readiness training program that prepares at-risk BLVDB individuals to enter this sector. In Years 2 and 3, develop and implement a CST Training Program. In Years 3-5, integrate CST Work-Based Learning Opportunities. Provide ongoing career development and placement.*

Specific and Measurable Outcomes: 50 BLVDB individuals obtain CIE in the CST sector. 65% of individuals who obtained CIE get a job that meets the Good Jobs principles.

Methodology: Collect and maintain information on participants in WF1. We will track employment outcomes in CST sector using O*NET codes.

Goal 3: Pilot an EPE Model in Two Communities. Integrate AT, benefits counseling, and sector partnerships to meet the needs of at-risk Somali jobseekers. This pilot spans St. Cloud and Minneapolis/St. Paul, supporting local businesses and enhancing community employment initiatives.

Objective 1. *Support staff in utilizing an EPE Model to create meaningful career opportunities and pathways that align with the Good Jobs principles. In Years 1 and 2, make enhancements to the progressive employment model to incorporate high-tech/new-tech, language acquisition, New American business relationships, and benefits planning. Train staff on EPE.*

Specific and Measurable Outcomes: 100% of key personnel receive training on EPE.

Methodology: We will track participants training registration and administer a satisfaction survey at the end of the training.

Objective 2. *Create a network of businesses, community-based organizations, and subject matter experts that support the CIE outcomes of New Americans participating in EPE. In Year 2, develop partnerships with businesses in MSP/St. Cloud and community-based organizations.*

Specific and Measurable Outcomes: 25 New American-specific business relationships established. 5 new agreements with New American community-based organizations.

Methodology: We will use a CRM system to track business sector, engagement level, and services provided. We will track new agreements through our contracts management system.

Objective 3. *Implement the EPE Model with New Americans in Two Pilot Locations.* In Years 3 through 5, develop IPEs that include EPE. Provide adjustment to blindness customized training and skill development. Incorporate workplace integration and support.

Specific and Measurable Outcomes: 40 New Americans have EPE on their IPE. At least 50% obtain CIE through EPE. 65% of individuals who obtained CIE get a job that meets the Good Jobs principles.

Methodology: We will collect and maintain information on participants in WF1.

For a detailed overview of goals, objectives, activities, and outcomes, please refer to the Logic Model (below) and Management and Work Plan (attached). These provide a comprehensive framework for understanding how the Evolve Employment model will achieve its mission and make a positive impact on the lives of BLVDB individuals.

Logic Model (Page 16)

Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Outcomes
<p>40,000 BLVDB individuals, 3% currently served by the VR program</p> <p>Large scale Evolve VR transformation initiative currently underway.</p> <p>An existing organizational framework that can easily be scaled up and out.</p> <p>Perfect time and environment to make innovative changes, as several initiatives across the Department and WIOA Core Partners will further support this work.</p> <p>SSB's enterprise capacity outside of the VR program that can support employers in accessibility (i.e., the Communication Center, Employer Reasonable Accommodation Fund).</p> <p>Access to existing evidence-based practices and tools, including iGREET and Progressive Employment, and the coordinated team approach.</p> <p>In-house ELL Specialist dedicated to building relationships with New Americans and communities.</p>	<p><i>Implement a three-tiered dual-customer service delivery model to 800 at-risk BLVDB individuals and 500 businesses that includes Tier 1 (Universal), Tier 2 (Targeted), and Tier 3 (Intensive) services.</i></p> <p><i>Implement a Rapid Response Coordinated Team Approach to 150 individuals with acquired BLVDB so they obtain, retain, and advance in high-quality employment outcomes.</i></p> <p><i>Expand staff, community partner, and workforce system capacity resulting in a 20% increase in community partners and 15% increase in co-enrollments.</i></p> <p><i>Implement a dual-customer focus on AT that improves the AT skills of 150 individuals (1/3 of whom obtain CIE in CST) and engages 150 CST businesses.</i></p> <p><i>Implement an Enhanced Progressive Employment model to 40 New Americans, incorporating high-quality employment with new and innovative technology, language acquisition, and benefits planning.</i></p>	<p>Non-traditional person- and business-centered 21st century organizational structure and a three-tiered service delivery approach that can be replicated.</p> <p>Resources and best practices for blind agencies partnering with workforce system programs.</p> <p>A community partner training and incentive program tailored to BLVDB career services that includes an enhanced iGREET employer engagement training.</p> <p>AT training curriculum that increases the technology skills of individuals with real-life work experience in the CST sector.</p> <p>An Enhanced Progressive Employment model that incorporates AT, benefits planning, and English language acquisition as part of the link between employers and New Americans.</p> <p>Technology tool(s) for supporting individuals in finding, obtaining, retaining, and advancing in their career.</p>	<p>Short Term: Increase in number of individuals and businesses who receive Tier 1 services.</p> <p>Intermediate: Increase in number of individuals receiving service delivery under enhanced PE or a CTA; increase in number of businesses and employees seeking retention services; increase in number of individuals and businesses receiving Tier 2 and 3 services; increase in number of individuals obtaining AT and training; increase in number of community and workforce system partners</p> <p>Long Term: Increase in number of individuals obtaining CIE in alignment with Good Jobs principles; increase in number of individuals obtaining careers in the CST sector; increase in number of New Americans obtaining CIE.</p>

(iii) Replication of project activities or strategies.

The Evolve Employment Implementation Team, with input from the SRC-B EEAT, will create a dissemination plan that identifies key audiences, scope, activities, timelines, and responsibilities. The plan will be reviewed and updated annually to adjust for changes in program design by incorporating data and user feedback. Elements that create a path to sustainability:

Marketing and Outreach. The strategy focuses on connecting with our target audience, including businesses in the CST sector and New American-owned businesses. Outreach extends to advocacy organizations for BLVDB individuals, community partners, medical providers, and disability and employment service providers. The plan uses appropriate channels like the NCTRM, CSAVR, and SSB agency website to reach diverse audiences effectively.

Toolkit. SSB will work with ICI to curate all related materials into a toolkit that integrates implementation resources, training curricula, participant perspectives, business perspectives, fidelity instruments, and evaluation reports. The Evolve Employment toolkit will link to two portals at ICI, including one specifically for SSB audiences (www.explorevr.org/toolkits).

Websites and Repository Hubs. ExploreVR.org will house the toolkit, serve as a repository for archived webinars and event material, and link to the project home page on the SSB website. SSB will create a public facing project page that provides an overview of the model, a list of partners, and contact information for project staff. All final products will undergo editing for content and readability and checked for accessibility making sure all content meets WCAG 2.2 and Section 508 standards. The toolkit material will be uploaded to NCRTM.

(iv) Establish linkages with other appropriate agencies and organizations.

The project will build partnerships with diverse agencies to offer comprehensive services to the target population, enhancing employability and career prospects. This network will adhere to Good Jobs principles, promote high-quality CST careers, and foster an inclusive workforce.

Businesses. One of the most critical linkages is the ongoing collaboration with employers, which will facilitate the placement of BLVDB individuals in high quality employment and

support their retention and career advancement.

Community Partners. Evolve Employment will create links to a broader range of community partners to deliver specialized services to BLVDB individuals leading to better employment outcomes. Collaboration with New American organizations, such as language training and cultural orientation, will help address the unique challenges faced by this community, thereby improving their employment outcomes.

BLVDB Advocacy Organizations. Leveraging the lived experience and expertise of the NFB, ACB, and DeafBlind Association will allow us to provide services and training that truly meet the needs of our targeted audience. Collaboration with these organizations will help dispel misconceptions about blindness and promote employment through advocacy and education.

Workforce System Partners. The partnerships allow us to provide more job training, career services, and employment assistance tailored for BLVDB individuals. Partnering allows us to offer literacy and basic education programs to New Americans that support employment readiness and integrate employment services to assist with job search and placement.

(v) Performance feedback and continuous improvement.

The Evolve Employment Implementation Team is responsible for implementing the Management and Work Plan. This team will meet weekly to track progress and will help form a SRC-B EEAT that provides feedback and guidance on the development and implementation of the model. Taskforce members are comprised of advocacy organizations, individuals with lived experience, and subject matter experts. On an annual basis, the EEAT will review progress reports, participant and business engagement, outcomes, and other content as relevant.

The Evolve Employment Implementation Team will establish a CST Employer Advisory group to gather feedback on employer needs and challenges related to retaining and advancing BLVDB employees in CST. This group will meet quarterly to provide feedback, review progress, and help refine service delivery throughout the grant period.

ICI will be responsible for reporting on findings from the progress and process evaluations

(see Quality of Project Evaluation) and make recommendations for improvements and course corrections. ICI will report on EPE fidelity and progress toward outcomes. The Implementation Team will refine the Management and Work Plan and identify the necessary improvements.

(C) QUALITY OF PROJECT SERVICES

Strategies for ensuring equal access and treatment for eligible project participants.

Focus on New Americans-Somali individuals in Minnesota. The Somali population in Minnesota is estimated to be 86,6101. This figure represents the largest Somali community in the United States and 1.5% of the total population in Minnesota. Additionally, data from the 2021 U.S. Census ACS indicates that an estimated 37,048 residents of Minnesota were born in Somalia. This community is a significant and vibrant part of Minnesota's cultural landscape. According to data from Minnesota Compass on the Somali population in Minnesota, 7.0% of the total population for whom disability status is determined have a disability. Many New Americans with vision loss lack the necessary skills in literacy, adjustment to blindness, and interpersonal to be successful in their careers in addition to a lack of awareness on the future of work and the careers that now exist. Testing out an enhanced version of Progressive Employment that engages Somali community-based organizations and Somali owned businesses in career exploration will help us create a transportable model of how to work with all New American populations in MN.

Focus on individuals acquiring BLVDB in Minnesota. Approximately 8.7 million adults reporting blindness and low vision live in the United States. The demographics of vision loss have always been skewed towards the aged and are becoming more so. As the population ages, the number of blind adults increases. In 2005, the number of Minnesotans over the age of 65 with a vision loss was estimated at 110,701. By 2030 it's projected to rise to a staggering 225,739, a 104% increase over the 2005 figure. Although we are already experiencing the increases in demand for services, we realize that many people as they age either don't consider themselves as having blindness.

Evolve Employment will include strategic recruitment and enrollment processes that ensure

underserved populations have access. The Implementation Team and the ICI evaluation team will identify ways to assess participation by racial and ethnic communities, New Americans, Indigenous peoples, individuals with multiple disabilities, LGBTQIA, socioeconomic status, and geographic distribution. Evolve Employment EPE pilot sites were selected to ensure we are in the local communities and neighborhoods of populations historically underserved. ICI will track engagement, service delivery, and outcomes by subpopulation and report back to the Implementation Team whether Evolve Employment is successful in assuring access.

(i) Collaboration of appropriate partners.

Evolve Employment will maximize the effects of project services by building off existing partnerships with advocacy organizations, businesses, and community partners. SSB has long-standing relationships with over 40 community partners that serve BLVDB individuals with the potential to connect with over 170 providers who serve all other disabilities. At the state level, SSB will work with peers across the workforce system, including WIOA core partners under the Department of Labor and Education. Collaboration also extends to the Minnesota Governor's Workforce Development Board, Minnesota National Federation of the Blind, Minnesota American Council of the Blind, Minnesota DeafBlind Association, DEED Office of New Americans, and Somali Elders communities. ICI will partner to conduct the evaluation, EPE and RCTA training to support high fidelity of implementation, and support dissemination activities. (See attached Letters of Commitment from ICI.)

(ii) Training/professional development services quality, intensity, and duration.

Evolve Employment focuses on delivering inclusive and comprehensive training of sufficient quality, intensity, and duration in the following areas: training staff on RCTA and EPE, training staff and participants on high tech/new tech, and training community and workforce system partners on providing career services to BLVDB individuals. We prioritize sustainability by integrating ongoing evaluation and improvement processes, ensuring long-term program success and system transformation. Our long-term goal is to establish sustainable practices that support

ongoing accessibility and career advancement for BLVDB individuals.

Training on RCTA and EPE will occur with 100% of the project staff. This training is provided through ICI in Year 1 and 2 with as-needed training through the life of the grant. The training will be both virtual and hands-on, meeting the individual needs of the trainees. The trainings will include pre/post-tests and surveys to measure skill acquisition and training satisfaction. Continuous improvement is based on participant feedback and industry demands.

Training for community and workforce system partners will create an inclusive environment for BLVDB individuals. These trainings ensure that partners are equipped with the knowledge and tools to support BLVDB individuals effectively. Trainings and workshops will occur throughout the grant cycle, with the most intensive training occurring in Years 1 and 2. Pre/post-tests and surveys and feedback loops are used to continuously refine and improve the training content. The RSA-funded iGREET training is an integral component of the training package.

Through the grant cycle, technology staff will be provided professional development and training that creates a cutting-edge team fluent in high-tech/new-tech. BLVDB individuals interested in the CST sector will be enrolled in an agency-developed CST training program created in partnership with businesses. This short-term training program, offered in the Years 2-5, combines technology with the required work tasks found in the CST sector. Rigorous pre/post-tests and surveys and work-based learning ensure proficiency. Program evaluation and sustainability are central to our approach. We use standardized pre/post-tests and surveys to measure initial skill levels and track improvements. An iterative process based on evaluation outcomes and participant feedback ensures continuous improvement.

(D) QUALITY OF PROJECT PERSONNEL

Encouraging applications for employment from individuals who have traditionally been underrepresented.

SSB encourages applications from individuals who are members of groups that have traditionally been underrepresented based on race, color, national origin, gender, age, and/or

disability. The State of Minnesota is an equal opportunity employer, committed to embedding diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility at our workplace. We prohibit discrimination and harassment of any kind based on race, color, creed, religion, national origin, sex (including pregnancy, childbirth, and related medical conditions), marital status, familial status, receipt of public assistance, membership or activity in a local human rights commission, disability, genetic information, sexual orientation, gender expression, gender identity, or age. SSB is a diverse organization that represents the people we serve: 30.7% have a disability; 14.2% are BIPOC; and 5.5% are a veteran.

SSB will be hiring a New American Business Engagement Specialist recruited from the East African communities and representative of the communities being served. Staff with lived experience as immigrants have first-hand experience navigating the challenges. SSB also has employed an English Language Learning Specialist who is fluent in language literacy and adult basic education. SSB utilizes the Connect 700 program, which grants priority to individuals with disabilities that impact the interview process.

(i) Qualifications, training, and experience of key project personnel.

Leadership Staff. There are four key leaders that are responsible for the oversight and management of the grant:

Natasha Jerde, SSB Director. As the Director of State Services for the Blind since August 2019, Natasha is responsible for 130+ staff and 200+ volunteers whose mission is to serve BLVDB Minnesotans. She manages an annual budget of approximately \$24m that is allocated across several programs, including the State Vocational Rehabilitation Agency for blind services and Employer Reasonable Accommodation Fund. Natasha has worked for SSB since January 2008 and was a vocational evaluator, DeafBlind rehabilitation counselor specializing, rehabilitation counseling supervisor, and the director of policy and program administration. Natasha also was an adjunct sign language instructor at the University of Wisconsin-Stout for five years. She is skilled at launching large-scale initiatives and building and maintaining

successful partnerships with other state agencies, business, and disability advocates. Natasha holds a bachelor's and master's degree in Rehabilitation Counseling from UW-Stout and a certification in DeafBlind Studies from Northern Illinois University.

Jon Benson, Deputy Director, Program Services, has worked with SSB for over 30 years as a vocational rehabilitation counselor, counselor supervisor, director of SSB's administrative services, director of the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) and Business Enterprises Program (BEP) and currently as Deputy Director, Program Services, which includes VR, BEP, and older blind. His responsibilities include fiscal and program delivery oversight and ensuring spending and services comply with state and federal standards and that services are of high quality and continually seeking ways to innovate and improve.

SSB will be hiring a **Project Manager** to oversee the model demonstration. We will seek out a person with the ability to lead diverse teams and motivate staff, partners, and stakeholders. The Project Manager will need strong organizational skills to manage multiple tasks, set priorities, and ensure deadlines are met. They will need to have the ability to identify issues, analyze problems, and implement effective solutions, and the flexibility to adapt to changing circumstances and manage project pivots as needed. Finally, having a Project Manager who understands the unique needs of those who are BLVDB, or they themselves have experience, is vital to building rapport and respect with the community at large.

Lindsey Hanson, Employment and Training Manager. Lindsey has worked for SSB since 2006. Prior to her current role, she was a DeafBlind rehabilitation counselor and rehabilitation counseling supervisor. In her current role, she manages the employment and adjustment to blindness services at SSB. She provides supervisory support to business relations specialists, assistive technologists and trainers, orientation and mobility instructors, a rehabilitation teacher, and an English Language Learning Specialist. Lindsey also manages the Employer Reasonable Accommodation Fund and supervises two staff within that program.

Direct Service Staff. The budget for Evolve Employment includes sufficient funding to

expand internal capacity for direct service staff that will allow us to achieve the goals and objectives of the model demonstration. While we may be a small organization, we have many ancillary staff paid for through 110 and state appropriated funds that are available to assist. These include our employment and training team, rehabilitation counselors, Chief Technology Officer, Communication Center staff, and vocational rehabilitation technicians.

Administrative Staff. We have allocated a percentage of time of current staff to provide outreach, fiscal oversight, contract management, and data analytics. These positions are critical to the behind-the-scenes functions for managing the project. The FTE Table below includes a more detailed description of the FTEs and level of effort for the project.

FTE Table

Position	Description	Level of Effort
Director	Provide overall direction and oversight	Y1: 25% Y 2 – 5: 5%
Deputy Director of Program Services	Managerial and supervisory oversight of leadership key personnel	Y1: 25% Y2 – 5: 10%
Employment and Training Manager	Supervision of existing staff that support goals and objectives	Y1: 25% Y2 – 5: 10%
Project Manager	Manages the project, including ensuring timelines are met and work plan is followed	Y1, Q2- 5: 100%
Retention Specialist	Main point of contact for all retention-related services	Y2-5: 100%
New American Business Engagement Specialist	Works directly with New Americans and businesses to facilitate all components of EPE	Y2-5: 100%
CST Sector Specialist	Business engagement in the CST sector	Y2-5: 100%
7 Career Navigators	Provides career-related services directly to customers	Y2-5: 100%
Benefit Planning Specialist	Provides early benefits planning support and guidance to Social Security recipients	Y2-5: 100%
English Language Learning Specialist	Language literacy support	Y1-5: 25%
2 Outreach Specialists	Assist in outreach and engagement efforts	Y1-5: 25%
Contracts Specialist	Establishes new contracts with partners	Y1-5: 10%
Fiscal Coordinator	Financial reporting and oversight	Y1-5: 10%
Data Analyst	Data analytics and reporting	Y1-5: 10%

(E) ADEQUACY OF RESOURCES.

(i) Budget is adequate to support the proposed project.

The Evolve Employment project budget is meticulously crafted and based on the Logic Model and Management and Work Plan, and is further defined in the Budget Narrative, ensuring that all personnel costs and non-personnel services are thoroughly accounted for.

Personnel Costs. For the 5-year term of the grant, we have projected funding to support an adequate staffing level, which will encompass salaries and benefits for four leadership staff who will oversee the implementation and management of the program; compensation for 12 individuals providing direct services to individuals with acquired BLVDB; and costs associated with five administrative support staff essential for the smooth operation of the project, including outreach specialists, contract coordinator, fiscal coordinator, and data analyst.

Non-Personnel Services Cost. The budget also includes critical non-personnel services necessary to support the grant's objectives.

Participant Support Costs are specific to Tier 2 participants not in the VR program and include short-term adjustment to blindness training, as well as tools and technology implementation to support them in retaining their position.

Training and Professional Development is necessary for staff and stakeholders to stay updated with the latest employment practices, technology, and support methods for BLVDB individuals. To better implement technology with both businesses and individuals, especially in the CST sector, SSB will need to invest in training for staff, businesses, and individuals. This includes developing a training program that brings together AT and the CST sector.

Contracts and Agreements include engaging with external experts, consultants, and organizations to provide specialized services and training. SSB will enter into a contractual agreement with ICI. This agreement will be in effect during all five years and will enable the agency to obtain independent evaluation, fidelity assessment, technical assistance, and training over the grant term. SSB anticipates entering into contractual agreements with technology

providers for technology tools, (e.g., artificial intelligence and spatial recognition) to support individuals in their CIE outcomes. SSB will enter into and amend contracts with community partners to incorporate an incentive program that meet Good Jobs principles. The incentives encourage providers to gain additional skill sets in serving BLVDB individuals.

Advanced Technology Tools include an investment in cutting-edge technology and software that enhance the employability and workplace productivity of BLVDB individuals and support individuals in their CIE outcomes. This includes exploring innovative technology developed for individuals who are in the CST sector.

Outreach and Engagement initiatives raise awareness, engage community partners, and attract potential employers and participants. SSB will develop and implement an outreach and engagement plan focused on both businesses and core partners, which will include costs related to campaign development and marketing materials.

Administrative Costs. Expenses related to data tracking systems, office supplies, and other overheads essential for project management and compliance. SSB will implement minor modifications to WF1 to allow for tracking of the project participants. We will also obtain a Salesforce license to track business engagement. We expect to incur modest travel and supply expenses during each of the five years. While some employees under this grant may be current employees, there may be several new hires who will need supplies such as a laptop.

(ii) Costs are reasonable related to objectives, design, and significance of program.

The proposed project's budget is aligned with its objectives, design, and potential significance. The costs are reasonable and justified by the comprehensive approach to addressing the employment challenges faced by BLVDB individuals. By investing in skilled personnel, technology, and partnerships, the project is well-positioned to achieve meaningful and lasting impact. For specific detail of proposed costs, see Budget Narrative.

The budget for developing and implementing a three-tiered portfolio of career services is justified by the targeted outcomes of reaching 500 BLVDB individuals with universal services,

200 with targeted services, and 100 with intensive services. This tiered approach ensures that resources are allocated efficiently to address varying levels of need. By providing a structured and scalable framework, the project can significantly improve employment outcomes for BLVDB individuals.

Costs related to hiring, training, and staffing are reasonable given the importance of having a dedicated team to support individuals with acquired BLVDB. A RCTA ensures that individuals receive comprehensive and consistent support, enhancing their chances of employment retention and advancement.

Training programs for community and workforce system partners build capacity and enhance service delivery, leading to a significant increase in the number of participants and community partners providing career services. Collaboration and capacity building leads to a more integrated and effective service network, benefiting BLVDB individuals and improving outcomes.

Costs associated with identifying and engaging business partners are crucial for building strong sector partnerships that can provide meaningful career opportunities for BLVDB individuals.

Investing in technology tools, and training for project participants is justified. The goal of equipping 150 participants with technology and training, with a high percentage indicating improved employment outcomes, demonstrates the value of these expenditures. These items are critical for enhancing the employability and productivity of BLVDB individuals, leading to better job retention and career advancement.

Developing and implementing a CST Training Program is a reasonable investment. 50 BLVDB individuals obtaining CIE in the CST sector highlights the potential impact of these activities. Customized training programs tailored to the needs of BLVDB individuals will significantly enhance their readiness for CST careers, addressing a critical skills gap.

Costs associated with enhancing the progressive employment model to include high-tech solutions, language acquisition, and benefits planning are justified. Training staff on this

enhanced model is crucial for effective implementation. Enhancing the progressive employment model will provide a more comprehensive approach to employment support, leading to better job outcomes for participants.

Developing partnerships with businesses and community-based organizations specific to New Americans is a reasonable investment. The target of establishing 25 business relationships and 5 agreements with community organizations demonstrates the potential for significant impact. Building a strong support network will facilitate better employment opportunities and integration for New Americans, addressing a key demographic within the target population.

Implementing the enhanced employment model in two pilot locations, including developing IPEs and providing customized training, is justified. The target outcomes of 40 New Americans with enhanced employment plans and a significant percentage achieving CIE underscore the value of these investments. Pilot programs allow for testing and refining strategies, leading to scalable solutions that can be expanded statewide, maximizing the project's impact.

(iii) Costs reasonable relative to # of individuals served, anticipated results, and benefits.

The Evolve Employment financial strategy is carefully tailored to maximize impact while ensuring efficient resource allocation. By aligning costs with anticipated benefits and focusing on targeted interventions across service tiers, we will significantly enhance employment opportunities and overall well-being for BLVDB individuals, thereby fostering a more inclusive and equitable society. The overall cost per participant is higher than typical case services costs. This relates to higher-than-average training expenses for participants, as well as substantial expenditures to a subgrantee for program evaluation. It is difficult to quantify the monetary impact that may result from successfully reaching out to over 800 individuals who acquire BLVDB and 500 employers, but the additional productivity gains experienced by employers and increased taxes paid by participants with higher paying jobs has a multiplier effect.

Evolve Employment categorizes services into three tiers to cater to diverse participant needs. Tier 1 focuses on broad engagement, planning to reach 500 participants through foundational

activities like outreach and initial engagement efforts. This allocation is justified by its critical role in raising awareness and fostering initial connections essential for project uptake.

Moving to Tier 2, Evolve Employment intensifies its support for 200 participants with personalized career development and retention services. The higher costs associated with this tier reflect the depth of engagement required to help individuals retain and advance within their current employment settings. The project aims for a 65% retention or advancement rate among Tier 2 participants, highlighting the effectiveness of these targeted interventions.

Tier 3 involves intensive services tailored for 100 participants facing significant barriers to employment. These services include individualized career planning and vocational rehabilitation efforts. Despite the higher costs involved, these investments are deemed necessary to achieve CIE outcomes, with a targeted success rate of 55% among Tier 3 participants.

Evolve Employment will dedicate resources to engage 500 businesses. This engagement will foster inclusive employment environments and enhance job retention among BLVDB individuals. The costs associated with these efforts encompass extensive outreach, training, and ongoing collaboration, underscoring the project's commitment to expanding job opportunities within supportive workplace cultures. Moreover, the project emphasizes collaboration with community partners, training 50 organizations to enhance service delivery across various touchpoints. This collaborative effort strengthens the overall support ecosystem for BLVDB individuals, ensuring they receive comprehensive and effective assistance throughout their employment journey.

Technological integration plays a crucial role, with investments in advanced tools and training for 150 participants targeted at boosting employability. We expect 75% of project participants will indicate the tools and training helped them obtain or retain CIE, underscoring the strategic importance of technology in modern job markets. Furthermore, Evolve Employment adopts a sector-based approach by partnering with 150 businesses in CST. This collaboration will create targeted career pathways, facilitating job placements for 50 BLVDB individuals.

(F) QUALITY OF MANAGEMENT PLAN

(i) Achieve objectives on time and within budget.

The Evolve Employment Management Plan features clearly defined responsibilities, timelines, and milestones for accomplishing project tasks, ensuring meticulous oversight and accountability throughout the project's lifespan, and is designed to ensure that all objectives are achieved on time and within budget. (For more detail, see the Management and Work Plan.)

Team Structure and Responsibilities. The Evolve Employment Implementation Team will lead the project, holding weekly meetings to review progress, address issues, and make necessary adjustments. This team is comprised of experienced director and managers, direct service staff, and administrative support staff, each with specific roles and responsibilities.

Timelines and Milestones. The project timeline includes key milestones, such as the completion of hiring and designing the three-tiered approach in Year 1, launch of training and piloting the approach in Year 2, and full implementation in Years 3 through 5. Detailed timelines are provided in the Management and Work Plan, outlining specific tasks and deadlines to keep the project on track.

Meetings and Oversight. The Evolve Employment Implementation Team will convene weekly to review progress, discuss challenges, and plan upcoming activities. The team will have a quarterly look back/look ahead session that will evaluate past performance and strategize for the next quarter, ensuring needed course corrections and continuous alignment with project goals.

Stakeholder and Participant Input and Feedback. Engaging stakeholders and participants is crucial for the Evolve Employment success. The State Rehabilitation Council-Blind Evolve Employment Advisory Taskforce will meet at least six times each year to provide strategic guidance and oversight. The CST Employer Advisory Council will meet quarterly to ensure employer needs and expectations are being met. Satisfaction Surveys will be distributed to participants, partners, and employers to gather feedback and identify areas for improvement.

Financial Analysis and Reporting. Effective financial management is critical to project

management. We will utilize a monthly financial snapshot that tracks spending and ensure alignment with the budget. The fiscal coordinator will meet monthly with the Department Administrative and Financial Services team to ensure timely cash draws. On a quarterly basis, the team will receive a detailed financial report with fiscal forecasting and trajectories to anticipate and mitigate financial risks. If we encounter budget overruns or are not meeting milestones, immediate action will be taken. The Project Manager, in collaboration with the AFS team, will investigate the issues, adjust the project plan, and implement corrective measures to get back on track.

Performance Tracking. To ensure we are meeting our goals, objectives, and outcomes, we will employ rigorous performance tracking. On a monthly basis, the team will review a snapshot of key outcome measures to monitor progress. Quarterly, there will be a detailed evaluation to identify trends and areas needing improvement. A data dashboard will also be compiled and uploaded onto the project website. An annual comprehensive performance review will be used to assess overall project impact and success. ICI will be responsible for working with the SSB data analyst to report findings from progress and process evaluations and provide recommendations for improvements and mid-course corrections.

Communication and Reports of Progress. Transparent and regular communication will be maintained with all stakeholders. Updates will be provided during the State Rehabilitation Council-Blind meetings held six times per year, with the State Rehabilitation Council-Blind taskforce meetings on the off months. An online dashboard will be updated quarterly to provide stakeholders with real-time progress data. In the SSB Annual Report and State Rehabilitation Council-Blind Annual Report, a section will be dedicated to report on Evolve Employment.

(ii) Procedures for ensuring feedback and continuous improvement.

The State Rehabilitation Council-Blind Evolve Advisory Taskforce provides feedback and guidance on the development and implementation of the model. Advisory taskforce members are comprised of advocacy organization representation, individuals with lived experience, and

subject matter experts. On an annual basis, the State Rehabilitation Council-Blind Advisory Taskforce will review progress, reports generated, participant engagement, business engagement, target population outcomes, fidelity assessments, and other content as relevant to the design, pilot, and refinement years.

The CST Employer Advisory group will provide feedback on employer needs and challenges related to retaining and advancing BLVDB employees in CST. This group will meet quarterly to provide feedback, review progress, and help refine service delivery throughout the grant period.

Satisfaction Surveys will be distributed to participants, partners, and employers to gather feedback and identify areas for improvement. ICI will be responsible for reporting on findings from the progress and process evaluations (see Quality of Project Evaluation) and make recommendations for improvements and mid-course corrections. ICI will report on EPE fidelity and progress toward outcomes. Using the feedback, the Implementation Team will refine the Management and Work Plan and make the necessary improvements for full implementation.

(iii) Mechanisms for ensuring high-quality products and services.

Evolve Employment incorporates multiple mechanisms to ensure the delivery of high-quality products and services, including performance reviews, comprehensive project management and oversight, rigorous program evaluation and outcomes analysis, a structured product review process, and active involvement of the State Rehabilitation Council-Blind Employment Advisory Committee. Additionally, feedback from individuals with lived experiences and businesses will be actively sought to ensure the project remains relevant and effective.

Regular performance reviews are integral to our quality assurance process. These reviews will be conducted at an individual level as well as from a team perspective. Formal annual performance reviews are conducted for all team members to assess their contributions and identify areas for improvement. However, performance is managed on an ongoing basis so that coaching is provided, and course corrections are made in a timely manner. This will help identify any issues early and ensure that corrective actions are taken promptly to maintain high standards.

(G) QUALITY OF PROJECT EVALUATION

(i) Methods of evaluation are thorough, feasible, and appropriate.

The Institute for Community Inclusion (ICI) at the University of Massachusetts Boston will conduct an evaluation of Evolve Employment. SSB has dedicated sufficient funds to cover the costs of developing, refining, and implementing the evaluation. The ICI will work collaboratively to coordinate and share data with other RSA-appointed evaluation partners as well as technical assistance providers guided by data sharing agreements and human subjects review protocols. The ICI and SSB will disseminate evaluation reports including briefs, interim and annual reports, journal articles, and updates through the Evolve Employment website, ExploreVR.org (ICI's website for VR projects), peer-reviewed journals, NCRTM, and RSA portals. All evaluation activities will be submitted to the UMass Boston Institutional Review Board to ensure the protection of human subjects. Methods of evaluation are designed to assess whether the Evolve Employment model demonstration components lead to targeted goals and outcomes as defined in the Logic Model, the Goals and Objectives, and the Management and Work Plan. The ICI's evaluation approach includes: Formative Evaluation, Fidelity Assessment, Summative Evaluation, Participant Experience, and Progress Reporting. Each year the ICI will compile an interim and an end of performance year report that will include, at minimum, the following chapters: Innovative Strategies Used for Systemic Change and Partnerships, Participants' Engagement by Component and Key Outcomes to Date, Modifications Needed to Logic Model, Component Implementation and Workplan, and Perspectives of Participants and Businesses.

The intention of the five-pronged evaluation is to leverage data collection, analysis, and methodologies that can help build evidence for the Evolve Employment model demonstration components and activities.

Evaluation Activity 1. Formative Evaluation

Goal and Evaluation Questions. The ICI will use a formative evaluation approach to

document implementation, changes over time, and to assess the use of resources and progress toward objectives. Evaluation measures are designed to improve ongoing implementation through an iterative approach (Elwy et al., 2020) that is refined over time, while the intervention is ongoing (Molas-Gallart et al., 2021). Guided by the project's Logic Model, formative process questions include:

- Did the program activities operate according to scope, sequence, and timeline?
- Did the partners participate and complete quality work on time and within budget?
- What implementation strategies were most effective in carrying out the model?
- What were the challenges encountered during program implementation?
- What strategies did Evolve Employment leadership use to address challenges?

Data Sources. The ICI will use multiple sources of data that include documents and materials, key informant interviews and small-group interviews, and administrative data.

Document /Materials Review. Materials produced will be systematically reviewed and assessed. This includes products and written documents (e.g., policy handbooks, project summaries), tools (e.g., recruitment materials, project fact sheets or presentations), and electronic content (e.g., online training).

Monthly/Quarterly Videoconference Calls. The ICI will conduct small-group interviews with key Evolve Employment staff and partners relevant to the timeline and component of the model. We anticipate conference calls or video starting monthly in year 1 and quarterly thereafter. The interview protocol will include a systematic review of the project activities to date, with the focus to document progress and strategies to address challenges. The ICI will provide post meeting summaries and quarterly reports to SSB and highlight what is working well, what needs review, and what needs improvement.

Administrative Data Review. SSB will be responsible for administrative data tracking at the individual client and business level in the WF1 case management system. WF1 is a proprietary system and SSB will modify and add data elements specific to Evolve Employment using a

custom program. The WF1 custom program options also include a mechanism to track individual level data for participants who may receive services in the light touch portfolio and who do not apply to SSB for services. Data collected for Evolve Employment participants includes but is not limited to demographics (e.g., gender, race, ethnic group), disability type, pre/post-project participation, services received, employment and wage outcomes, geographic information (such as which region of the state), occupational sector, business characteristics if employed. During Year 1, specific data elements required to track additional performance and program measures will be developed, tested, and refined in WF1. SSB and the ICI will work with RSA, the contracted national evaluator, and the contracted technical assistance provider. The ICI will develop data extract requests and data sharing agreements to obtain administrative case record data quarterly. The ICI and SSB will determine strategies for collecting the data either through intake or direct pre/post surveys to Evolve Employment participants.

Evaluation Activity 2. Fidelity Assessment.

The ICI will use a fidelity assessment method to determine how SSB implementation strategies align with the core components of the Evolve Employment model. There are likely many dimensions of implementation quality that will influence performance outcomes (Lockett et al., 2018) and together with the formative evaluation, the goal of the fidelity assessment is to understand and describe the core model components and implementation strategies. Fidelity assessment questions include:

- Is the Evolve Employment model applied consistently across the targeted service delivery sites and with the target population(s)? Is there evidence of model drift or further evolution of the model over time or across locations? What are those changes?
- What is the staff capacity to provide Evolve Employment services to the target population, as measured by pre/post-training (knowledge/skills/abilities)?
- How does fidelity to the Evolve Employment model affect estimates of impact on outcomes?

Data Collection Strategies. Fidelity Instrumentation. The ICI has existing fidelity instruments

for the PE and RCTA. The PE fidelity tools include scores for observations and self-assessments. The Progressive Employment Fidelity of Implementation Toolkit will be expanded to include the enhanced components under Evolve Employment. The RCTA fidelity instrument includes an observation tool used in a randomized controlled trial. The ICI will create a similar RCTA Fidelity of Implementation Toolkit including a self-assessment process. During year 1, the ICI will work with SSB to create a fidelity assessment plan, review the working tools, and create new instruments as needed for the Regional Sector Based Approach and the light touch approach. The core model components will be described, along with corresponding implementation criterion and measurement scales. The RCTA self-assessment fidelity instrument will be tested and validated in Year 1 through a small-scale pilot effort in the Twin Cities and St. Cloud locations within the state. The ICI will coordinate with SSB to produce periodic reports timed with implementation (such as six months post initiation) and recommend strategies for improving fidelity including at counselor, agency, and systems levels. The fidelity assessment plan will include measures that account for Good Jobs principles.

Annual Assessment. The ICI will use a phased approach to an annual fidelity review. First, the ICI will compile documents, quarterly reports, and meeting notes to complete a Pre-Assessment. Second, the ICI will distribute the self-assessment tools as an online survey to all implementation partners. ICI will analyze the data and complete a fidelity of implementation report. Third, the ICI will conduct an in-person fidelity review over a two-day site-visit and include observations, document and data review, and semi-structured focus groups with small groups of project staff. This will include SSB staff, points of contact from key partnering entities, businesses, and education or training providers, and individuals with disabilities participating in the model demonstration. The ICI will produce a yearly report aligned with reporting time periods. The ICI has used this process in other Progressive Employment settings and found the self-assessment includes a wide range of partners, while the observational data is based upon expert opinion. Fidelity reports include recommendations for system and local capacities and

knowledge needs and for understanding differences in outcomes by site or population.

Pre/Post Tests of Knowledge Gains and Quality, Relevance, and Usefulness of Training will be fielded to measure internal capacity (# of staff demonstrating knowledge gains) for efforts to train project staff on model implementation. Tests will be customized by training topic content, administered as online surveys with the pre-test two weeks prior the event and the post-test no more than one week post event. The ICI will prepare reports summarizing knowledge gains, quality, and usefulness by comparing pre/post-scores of those that answered both tests. This data will be used to improve onboarding processes and curricula.

Evaluation Activity 3. Summative Evaluation

Goal and Evaluation Questions. The summative evaluation activities will build upon the ongoing formative evaluation procedures to examine end-of-cycle program outcomes. The objective is to determine if the program has been successful (Fragala-Pinkham et al., 2020). The summative assessment will incorporate evaluation inputs from the formative and fidelity activities to further examine the relationship between Evolve Employment program participants' engagement with or use of specific practices and strategies implemented by the project and key outcomes, as listed in the NIA and included in the Logic Model.

Activity 3.1: Reporting on the Required Measures in the Notice Inviting Applications. The ICI will produce descriptive reports that provide the required measures including the numbers and characteristics of individuals served: a) Number of individuals served; b) Number of referrals; c) number of participants; d) the demographics of individuals participating; and c) of those participating, disability type. All those served will be individuals who are BLVDB, therefore, the evaluators will track secondary disabilities as well. The above numbers will be tallied by component (RCTA, PE, Sector) and by region. The ICI will refrain from detail in public documents that risks inadvertent disclosure (e.g., indicating a person who is Deaf/Blind, living in St. Cloud, who is Somali). Descriptive reports will provide SSB leadership with indicators of progress that signal whether the project is meeting goals and any indicators of skewed outreach.

A similar strategy will be used to measure the required outcomes achieved by program participants including a) the number of individuals who achieve CIE; b) the number of individuals who received services and did not achieve CIE; and c) the pre/post-participation employment and wage outcomes. During Year 1, the ICI will create a dashboard approach and provide updates on the numbers by overall project, component, and region at least quarterly in Evolve Employment project meetings. The ICI will report the numbers in a yearly interim evaluation report and also provide numbers in time for the RSA progress reports in the spring.

Activity 3.2: Reporting on Targeted Program Outcomes Aligned with Good Jobs. SSB set performance targets for each component as described in the Logic Model with more detail in the Management and Work Plan. These include:

- 800 at risk BLVDB will receive at least one Evolve Employment Services, depending upon circumstances and need. Tier 1 Universal, Tier 2 Targeted and Tier 3 Intensive.
- 500 businesses will receive at least one Evolve Employment Services, depending upon circumstances and need.
- Of those receiving intensive services, 150 BLVDB individuals will participate in a coordinated team approach anywhere in the state.
- Of those receiving intensive services, 40 New Americans will participate in Progressive Employment in either St. Cloud or the Twin Cities.
- SSB will increase community partners by 20% and increase co-enrollments by 15%.
- SSB will improve the AT skills of 150 BLVDB individuals with at least 33% obtaining CIE meeting Good Jobs principles in Customer Support and Technology (CST) occupations.
- SSB will increase engagement of CST businesses with a target goal of 150 CST businesses.

The ICI and SSB will coordinate with RSA, the contracted evaluator, and contracted technical assistance provider to refine program outcomes that align with the Good Jobs principles and refine performance improvement goals for the model as a whole, and for the component parts. For example, for the Progressive Employment implementation sites, a high percentage of

participants may be long-term unemployed or underemployed at initial participation. A target goal would be to determine what % of PE participants will achieve CIE, what % will achieve wages at household sustainability, and what % work full-time. These goals will be based on baseline numbers in St. Cloud and the Twin Cities for New Americans in Year 1. For the RCTA component, a substantial number of participants may be working or at high risk of job loss. The refined CIE measures might include job retention, promotion, or job change without gaps in work. Additional project outcomes beyond those in the Logic Model may include diversion from SSDI or earnings above substantial gainful activity. At the end of year 1, the ICI will create an analysis plan specific to the outcome and component of the model to determine if available data will support descriptive, bivariate or multivariate analysis. For the RCTA, the ICI will explore using propensity score matching to determine differences in key outcomes. For PE, the ICI will explore the option of pre/post implementation changes for St. Cloud and the Twin Cities on pacing, retention, IPE completion, services delivered, and outcomes for New Americans prior to Evolve Employment and by year.

Administrative Data. SSB will use the WF1 case management system to generate data extracts for the summative evaluation of program outcomes at the individual participant level. The projected sample size is 800 individuals with BLVDB participating in at least one component. SSB will provide de-identified case file data in excel format with key personally identifiable information redacted, according to the timelines and processes outlined in a data sharing agreement developed in Year 1. The ICI will create a feedback loop with SSB and partners by generating short data summaries (either as part of quarterly reporting or ad hoc reporting) to provide periodic assessment and cross-check reliability of data.

Activity 3.3: Assessing Professional and Employer Capacity Building Indicators.

The ICI will track professional and capacity building indicators through pre/post tests, administrative data, and Evolve Employment logs to address the following target goals.

- The number of services professionals who completed professional training and the N/% who

reported the training is high in quality, relevant, and useful.

- The number of employers/businesses who completed professional training and the number and % who reported the training is high quality, relevant, and useful.
- Did SSB meet the target goal of 20% increase in community partners?
- Did SSB meet the target goal of 15% new co-enrollments?
- Did SSB achieve the target goal of 500 new businesses engaged? What proportion were CST sector businesses?

Evaluation Activity 4. Perspectives of BLVDB and Employers participating in Evolve Employment.

Activity 4.1: Participant and Employer Annual Survey. The ICI will conduct an annual multi-modal participation survey to evaluate services provided. SSB will send a request to current participants to participate in a survey that includes online, telephonic, email, and videoconference options and options for accommodations. The ICI will design the survey in year 1 and modify or add questions as needed each year to correspond to implementation and to create identifiers that can be matched to WF1 data. Design of the survey will be customized to participant experiences using skip patterns or other mechanisms. The ICI will use a similar strategy to administer a survey to businesses/employers receiving services during that program year. Employer data will not be matched to administrative data.

Activity 4.2: In-depth following-along study of a cohort of BLVD participants over time. The ICI will recruit up to 15 participants per year who are receiving at least one of the components: Rapid Coordinated Team Approach, PE, CST sector trainings, and any light touch service. The purpose is to understand experience over time and understand the nuances of services, motivation for participation, and changes in employment and household economic well-being (c.f., Taylor and Blackburn (2020)). A qualitative, semi-structured approach will be used to generate data that reflects the experiences, perspectives, and priorities of the model demonstration participants. Weaving the perspectives of participants into ongoing fidelity,

progress, and process reports provides an opportunity to attend to participant experiences while making leadership decisions on implementation modifications. Reports will also help understand how participants navigated the choices presented.

Activity 4.2: In-depth follow-along study of Customer Support and Technology businesses.

The ICI will recruit 3 to 5 businesses who had intensive connection with the Regional Sector Business Engagement Staff in designing customized training, changing technology adoption in the workplace, or partnering with SSB to prevent job loss of incumbent workers or hire new workers. Similarly, to Activity 4.1, interview findings will weave into progress reports and provide leadership with implementation feedback. They will also be used to understand how CST Businesses view SSB and the model components.

Evaluation Activity 5. Progress Reporting

The ICI will work with SSB to prepare evaluation reports that align with the RSA bi-annual annual performance report (October 1 – March 31) and end of year performance report (October 1 – September 30) requirements. This evaluation activity will draw from the ongoing formative evaluation, fidelity assessment and end-of-cycle summative evaluation activities to inform reporting for the purposes of project management and oversight both internally by SSB leadership and externally by RSA and other stakeholders.

(ii) Methods of evaluation provide for examining the effectiveness of project implementation strategies.

The proposed five-prong approach to evaluation will allow for a comprehensive documentation of the program implementation strategies, challenges, and outcomes. The timeline for evaluation activities will align with the overall project timeline, which includes the phases described in the Management and Work Plan. The evaluation outputs inform knowledge translation efforts that consider the sustainability of the approach, as well as the opportunity for other agencies to adopt or replicate the model. The formative evaluation reporting will be structured to cover three major areas: project management, project implementation, and

sustainability and systems change. The fidelity instrument will generate numeric scores and qualitative descriptions of model implementation that will be a useful tool for future model replication. The summative evaluation will produce estimates of the model impact on outcomes as well as rich qualitative descriptions of the experience of individuals with disabilities and businesses that participated in the program. Regular reporting will serve to track progress at different points in time and provide snapshots of model demonstration implementation over the course of five years. Metadata in the form of survey tools, secondary data files and syntax, and interview protocols will provide opportunities for coordination across grantees and replication of evaluation strategies. The evaluation plan will produce quantitative and qualitative measures that inform each objective performance measure.

Across Evaluation Activities, all quantitative data, will either be imported into the statistical software package SPSS v.28 or maintained in Excel depending on the complexity of the data and the need for data cleaning. Using Excel or SPSS, the ICI transforms and recodes key variables in preparation for data analysis. For participant-level outcomes, the ICI will use descriptive analyses to analyze for selected person- and state-level variables and different model demonstration outcomes of interest (e.g., employment outcome, wage, hours, employer- benefits) as guided by the listed evaluation questions. Pre/post data analysis will compare single subject outcomes at the time of application versus the time of case closure or exit from the program to measure increases in targeted outcomes. Qualitative data elements will include documents, open text field data from surveys, interview transcripts, etc. These will be imported into Atlas.ti qualitative data analysis software for coding and short memo-writing. Emerging themes will be presented and will include supporting quotations to exemplify key findings.

The table below provides an overview of the timeline for evaluation activities including staff assignments, availability of reports for annual performance reports (APR) October through March 31 and End of Year Performance Reports (EYPR) October through September 30th. The Table designates an ICI lead for the activity, though other ICI staff not named as key personnel

are on budget including research support staff and senior fellows.

Table: Timeline for Evaluation Activities, Designated Lead Staff, Availability of Data for Annual Performance Reports and End of Year Performance Reports.

E1 Formative Evaluation

Evaluation Activity	Staff Lead	Year 1	Years 2 -5	APR	EoYPR
Document review	DiBiase	Ongoing	Quarterly	Yes	Yes
Key informant interviews	Foley	Monthly	Quarterly	Yes	Yes
Admin. data review	Kwan	Quarterly	Quarterly	Yes	Yes

E2 Fidelity Assessment

Evaluation Activity	Staff Lead	Year 1	Years 2 -5	APR	EoYPR
Refine fidelity toolkit	Foley	Complete		Yes	Yes
Develop New Toolkit Items	Foley	Complete		Yes	Yes
ICI Fidelity Review	All ICI		Yearly	Yes	Yes
Training Pre/Post Knowledge Gains	All ICI	Timed w/ training	Timed w/ training	Yes	Yes
Partner Self-Assessment	DiBiase		Annual late fall	Yes	Yes
ICI On-Site Observation	All ICI		Annual late fall	Yes	Yes
Feedback mtgs. & reports	All ICI/SSB		Yearly Feb.	Yes	Yes

E3: Summative Evaluation

Evaluation Activity	Staff Lead	Year 1	Years 2 -5	APR	EoYPR
Development of Analysis Plan Per Component	Kwan Foley	Complete	Revise as needed	Yes	Yes
Administrative Data Analysis	Kwan	End of Year 1	Quarterly data pulls, periodic dashboard memos	Yes	Yes

Evaluation Activity	Staff Lead	Year 1	Years 2 -5	APR	EoYPR
Final Summative Report	ICI Staff		End of Year 5		Yes

E4: Participant Experiences

Evaluation Activity	Staff Lead	Year 1	Years 2 -5	APR	EoYPR
Multi-model participant survey	Foley	Design	Yearly Oct/Nov	Yes	Yes
Multi-model business survey	Foley DiBiase	Design	Yearly Oct/Nov	Yes	Yes
Follow-along of participants	Taylor Dibiase	Design	Rolling recruitment and interviews	Yes	Yes
Follow-along of CST businesses	DiBiase	Design	Rolling recruitment and interviews	Yes	Yes

E5: Progress Reporting

Evaluation Activity	Staff Lead	Year 1	Years 2 -5	APR	EoYPR
Synthesis of Findings	Foley	Design	Ongoing	Yes	Yes
Progress Reports	Foley	Design	Ongoing	Yes	Yes

(iii) Evaluator qualifications, including relevant training, experience, and independence.

Housed at the University of Massachusetts Boston, the ICI is a University Center for Excellence on Development Disability that is well established in the disability employment field as a leader in research, training, and technical assistance. The ICI has partnered with multiple state VR agencies on research and model demonstration projects, most recently in Minnesota VRS on the SWTCIE model demonstration project. The evaluation will be led by Dr. Susan Foley (evaluation lead), Dr. Allison Taylor (Qualitative Evaluation), and Dr. Ngai Kwan (Summative Evaluation). CVs are attached. Dr. Susan Foley (PhD, Advanced Social Welfare

Policy, Brandeis University) will coordinate with Mary DiBiaise at the ICI who will serve as Project Lead for all technical assistance, curricula development, and fidelity reviews. Dr. Allison Taylor (PhD, Anthropology, Brandeis University) is also a licensed social worker with extensive experience in trauma-informed services. Her work has included community engaged work with New American communities including the Somali diaspora in the Twin Cities and Spanish speaking populations in Eastern Massachusetts. Dr. Ngai Kwan (PhD, Gerontology, University of Massachusetts Boston) has decades of experiences with administrative case management data, RSA 911, and supporting the work of multiple model demonstration grantees for statistical support including multivariate analysis, propensity score matching, and logistic regression as appropriate for the study.

Independence of Evaluators: All evaluators are employees of a public university (University of Massachusetts Boston) that is the expected contractor. Prior contracts with the ICI as evaluators have stipulated the independence of the evaluator defining intellectual property, human subjects responsibilities, data sharing agreements, report approval processes, academic freedom and publishing, and professional ethics. All university employees are required to maintain conflict of interest, disclosure, and professional ethics certifications. The ICI will also be responsible for assisting SSB to uptake Progressive Employment and the Coordinated Team Approach. The evaluation team includes the ICI staff who have expertise in training, technical assistance, Blindness services, and fidelity assessment. Multiple staff are individuals with disabilities and members of BIPOC communities. The ICI considers the entire team to be the evaluation partner with an applied approach to onboarding innovations, maintaining support for adaptations based upon *in situ* and just in time data collection, fidelity reviews, and outcome achievement. The ICI is an independent evaluator that has significant involvement in rapid cycle evaluation (c.f. .Atukpawa-Tipton and Poes, 2020).