

VR Portion of WIOA Combined State Plan for Minnesota Vocational Rehabilitation Services

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Minnesota PYs 2020-2023 - Vocational Rehabilitation Program (Combined or General)

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

The Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Services Portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan [13] must include the following descriptions and estimates, as required by section 101(a) of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended by title IV of WIOA:

[13] Sec. 102(b)(2)(D)(iii) of WIOA

a. Input of State Rehabilitation Council

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

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

The State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) provides ongoing input and recommendations to VRS.

The SRC made several recommendations to the designated state unit, which fell into four broad categories:

1. Accessibility of information

- Conduct focus groups with youth on the waiting list to determine the best modes of communications and where to focus efforts (what are they using; where are they looking). Results may vary significantly between geographic regions.
- Consider accessibility for those individuals who do not live near a CareerForce location and those who do not have the financial resources to go to a CareerForce location for information
- Have set times in the CareerForce locations when individuals on the waiting list can connect with a counselor if they need assistance.

2. Communication

- Leverage multi-platform social media directed to individuals with disabilities in Minnesota, such as a live FaceBook page with real-time information, e.g. "There's a job fair in your locale." Other ideas include connecting with FaceBook support groups, YouTube, having an Instagram presence, and texting information to individuals.

- VRS and the SRC should share resources/information/opportunities with CTICs (Community Transition Interagency Committees) to get information out.

3. Inter-agency collaboration

- Include MOU training for county workers so everyone is receiving the same information.
- Clarify roles within the process.
- Identify who pays for what, when, and how family members access, especially if both entities have the ability to fund a service. Who should be approached so that the process isn't delayed?
- Identify who initiates the process, regardless of who will be paying. (Schools think the county will do it, counties think VR will do it, etc.). What's the first step in the process?
- Identify how disagreements or disputes under this arrangement will be resolved.
- There needs to be better inter-agency coordination for individual cases. Recommend having a case manager at the meeting level, identifying who is responsible for what and who is going to communicate across agencies.
- Collaborate with DHS to build Disability Hub capacity.

4. Building long-term relationships with employers

- Coordinate efforts with other agencies to create one system to connect individuals with employers. There are many websites and resources out there, but employers don't know where to go.
- Create a deliverable for employers outlining what VRS can do and who to contact.
- The SRC also continues to monitor available funds and category status for possible action if needed. They revisit the review of changing Order of Selection criteria annually.

Additionally, the SRC was active in the hiring process for a replacement VRS director through discussions about what characteristics are important to them in a director. The council chair also served on the interview panel.

2. The designated State unit's response to the Council's input and recommendations; and

The Director of Vocational Rehabilitation Services, the Director of Public Affairs and the Field Operations Director attended most meetings of the SRC and responded to questions from the council. The director has reviewed the

recommendations put forth by the council and agrees to maintain transparency with the council and keep recommendations at the forefront in decisions regarding the broad categories identified in this report.

Responses to specific recommendations:

1. Accessibility of information - Vocational Rehabilitation Services has not conducted focus groups with youth at this point but will do so on a small scale in the next two years to determine the best modes of communication for this group. VRS continually strives to ensure accessibility for individuals to its services, including those who don't have easy access to CareerForce locations. VR is currently working on a protocol for an appropriate hand-off between partners in the CareerForce locations. All staff and partners will receive training on how to serve people on the waiting list.
2. Communication - Vocational Rehabilitation Services maintains a close collaboration with the communications office of the designated state agency (the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development – DEED). Communications and social media staff routinely disseminate information and notifications specific to the VR program and its activities, and VRS regularly leverages that capacity to provide public information in a timely and efficient manner. We anticipate that collaboration will continue to expand. We have plans to communicate and share information and resources with the CTICs once we have a complete list that is currently being compiled by PACER Center.
3. Inter-agency collaboration: One of the key elements that VR has already discussed is joint training in person (not webinar) for lead agency staff, provider staff, DHS and VR staff so everyone is hearing the same message at the same time, followed by strategies to engage and provide ongoing support. - DEED/DHS have developed work groups consisting of DEED Field Managers, Specialists to develop process of how services, funding and staffing work together to support a person receiving waiver services who wants to move forward in achieving CIE. To create an effective, informed employment services process for persons on a waiver, the DEED/DHS Steering Team plans to create an Interagency Employment First Advisory Committee. This committee will include persons with disabilities, family members, advocacy organizations, Disability Law Center, Community Partners and other key voices that will provide essential feedback and guidance as the DEED-DHS MOU moves from a signed document to a living, breathing process that supports people become employed in CIE.
4. Building long-term relationships with employers: Previously known as Placement Partnerships, DEED-VRS now is promoting Business Engagement Networks (BENs) which bring together the efforts of DEED-VRS Placement Coordinators, Specialists, Community Rehabilitation

Providers (CRPs) and School District Work Coordinators to identify a talent pool of candidates that meet the needs of business at a local, regional and statewide level. The BENs are led at the local level by DEED-VRS staff who coordinate with CRPs and school districts to create a Single Point of Contact approach with Businesses. Additionally the Business Engagement Networks are the opportunity to coordinate Pre-ETS services with DEED-VRS Pre-ETS Representatives, Transition Counselors, CRPs and Business. DEED-VRS Placement staff seek to develop a long-term relationship with business, regard them as an essential customer, meet their hiring needs as well as provide consultation and support in their efforts to hiring talent with disabilities.

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

There were no formal recommendations made to VRS that were rejected by the designated state unit.

b. Request for Waiver of Statewideness

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

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

VRS has no waivers of statewideness at this time.

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

VRS has no waivers of statewideness at this time.

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

VRS has no waivers of statewideness at this time.

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

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

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

Following is a discussion of Vocational Rehabilitation Services' collaborative arrangements with federal, state and local agencies and with private entities that are not formal components of the statewide workforce investment system.

A. OLMSTEAD SUBCABINET

The Department of Employment and Economic Development is active on the Governor's subcabinet to implement the Olmstead Plan that was approved by the U.S. District Court on September 29, 2015. The subcabinet "embraces the Olmstead decision as a key component of achieving a better Minnesota for all Minnesotans, and strives to ensure Minnesotans with disabilities will have the opportunity, both now and in the future, to live close to their families and friends, to live more independently, to engage in productive employment and to participate in community life" (2013 vision statement). The employment section of the plan listed two population-level indicators: 1) Increase the employment rate of persons with disabilities so that it is comparable to the employment rate of persons without disabilities and 2) Increase the employment earnings of persons with disabilities so that they are comparable to the earnings of persons without disabilities.

B. MINNESOTA AUTISM INTERAGENCY COMMITTEE

Representatives from Minnesota's Departments of Education, Human Services, Health, and Employment and Economic Development meet monthly to share information, departmental innovation, and the ongoing needs of individuals and families affected by autism.

C. MINNESOTA EMPLOYMENT CENTER FOR INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE DEAF OR HARD-OF-HEARING

Provides VRS-funded short-term employment services and state-funded long-term employment support services for individuals who are deaf or hard-of-hearing. Awarded \$498,231.00 for ongoing employment supports through June 30, 2020 to support five locations statewide. Services include supporting businesses and employers with education and training in how to work with employees who are deaf or hard-of-hearing, as well as supporting employees themselves.

D. CAREER VENTURES, INC.

Program provides transition services to students who are deaf or hard-of-hearing from identified schools in the seven-county Twin Cities metropolitan area. Awarded \$161,735 to serve students through June 30, 2020. Students are offered opportunities to try work experiences, develop resumes, fill out applications and practice interviews while conducting career interest surveys.

E. COOPERATIVE AGREEMENTS WITH THE WHITE EARTH NATION TRIBAL VR PROGRAM AND THE RED LAKE NATION TRIBAL VR PROGRAM

VRS and State Services for the Blind provide information, technical assistance, training opportunities, and support to the state's two tribal VR programs. A formal process is in place for referral and transfer of cases in accordance with best practices ensuring choice. Although not a part of the formal written agreement, the Social Security Administration's Area Work Incentive Coordinator plays a crucial role in providing technical assistance on benefits planning.

F. U.S. DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION AND EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

Memorandum of Understanding to enhance work opportunities for veterans with disabilities by sharing information, coordinating activities, and offering complementary services.

G. TICKET TO WORK EMPLOYMENT NETWORKS

In the past, VRS, State Services for the Blind and SSA have co-hosted periodic meetings of the Employment Networks to provide staff training, updates on Ticket to Work procedural changes, and to promote Partnership Plus job retention services after VRS/SSB case closure. They plan to resume these meetings.

H. PROFESSIONAL VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION COUNSELING ORGANIZATIONS

Active participation relating to ongoing professional development for staff and to counselor recruitment takes place through well-established working relationships with and memberships on the boards of the Minnesota Rehabilitation Association, including the Minnesota Rehabilitation Counseling Association chapter.

I. PERFORMANCE-BASED FUNDING FOR PLACEMENT SERVICES PROVIDED BY COMMUNITY REHABILITATION PROGRAMS AND LIMITED-USE VENDORS

Placement providers receive milestone and outcome payments for facilitating successful outcomes for VR customers. The first milestone is payable when the Placement Plan is developed, the second milestone is paid when the first employment shift is completed, and a final outcome payment is paid with successful placement closure. Beginning July 1, 2017, VRS included Placement and Retention Services information in both VRS Policy and Guidance as well as an electronic link to that same guidance within the Professional/Technical Contract for all Community Rehabilitation Providers (CRP) and Limited Use Vendors (LUV). Guidance includes guidance on Performance Based Agreement (PBA) milestones and outcomes as well as definitions and Service Types and Titles. VRS staff

and Community Rehabilitation Providers express that the consistent guidance has reduced confusion and is leading to better common understanding about PBA milestones, invoicing and payments.

J. INTERAGENCY AGREEMENT WITH MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES MINNESOTA STATE OPERATED COMMUNITY SERVICES (DHS-MSOCS)

Beginning May 15, 2019, DEED-VRS developed an interagency agreement with DHS Minnesota State Operated Community Services to coordinate Trainers and Mentors for the Minnesota Customized Employment Training (MNCE). The agreement lays out the expectations of both DEED & DHS staff who will ensure that training and mentoring services are available for MNCE students and auditors. The agreement also makes plain how funding generated from the training will be split between the two agencies. The funds generated by the training are intended to only cover the costs of the MN CE Trainers and Mentors.

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

The Minnesota STAR (System of Technology to Achieve Results) Program: The STAR Program, a program within the Minnesota Department of Administration, is funded by the Department of Health and Human Services in accordance with the Assistive Technology Act of 1998, as amended. Vocational Rehabilitation often refers people to STAR for a device demonstration. This allows consumers to compare benefits and features of a particular device or category of devices. Once a decision on a device is made, the person can borrow the device for 30 days to make sure it meets their needs before VR purchases the item. VR also maintains an agreement with STAR to provide VR assistive technology specialists with commonly used devices for use in doing assessments with consumers.

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

There currently is no formalized working relationship between the Department of Agriculture and Vocational Rehabilitation Services. Historically, a Memorandum of Understanding existed between the USDA's AgrAbility Project and Vocational Rehabilitation Services field offices under which consumers accessed programs funded by USDA Rural Development in support of their employment plans. However, the provider which held that grant did not get refunded and have closed down. The Minnesota USDA Rural Development Office does use technical economic and forecasting information provided by DEED to develop and market its services.

4. Non-educational agencies serving out-of-school youth; and

The designated state unit maintains a close working relationship with the local Workforce Development Boards' Youth Programs, including the Youth Disability Employment Initiative. One of the service providers has become an Employment Networks so they can continue benefits planning and job retention services after WIOA services have ended.

VECTOR Youth Project for Deaf/DeafBlind: VRS managed state funding provides support for enhanced transition services to youth who are deaf, hard-of-hearing, or DeafBlind in Minnesota. Enhanced services include work readiness classes, college preparation classes, driver's education, community-based work experiences, and paid internships in competitive employment. For students who transition to college, high school instructors work with the college for the first semester to make sure all needed accommodations are in place and students are supported.

5. State use contracting programs.

Since the mid-1990s, Minnesota state agencies have been legislatively encouraged to purchase goods and services from small businesses operated by individuals with disabilities. In 2007, the Legislature enacted a set-aside program, providing that 19 percent of the total value of all state janitorial contracts be awarded to community rehabilitation organizations approved by VRS as service providers under the VRS Extended Employment Program. During the 2010 legislative session, the set-aside program was expanded to include document imaging, document shredding, mailing, collating, and sorting services. Further, the amount of each contract awarded under this section may exceed the estimated fair market price for the same goods and services by up to 6 percent.

d. Coordination with Education Officials

Describe:

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

Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VRS), State Services for the Blind (SSB), and MDE have a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to achieve better coordination between schools and VR services and create a bridge from the school to VRS or SSB prior to school exit. The intent of the agreement is to:

- Provide consultation and technical assistance to Local Education Agencies (LEA)s in planning for the transition of students with disabilities from school to post-school activities including

postsecondary education, training, competitive integrated employment and independent living.

- Provide secondary transition planning by personnel of DEED's VRS alongside secondary special education and career and college readiness staff through the delivery of pre-employment transition services and vocational rehabilitation services under the Rehabilitation Act and transition services under the IDEA.
- Define the roles and responsibilities, including financial responsibilities, of each agency, including provisions for pre-employment transition services, vocational rehabilitation services and IDEA transition services.
- Designate procedures for outreach to and identification of students with disabilities who are in need of pre-employment transition services and/or vocational rehabilitation services. Outreach to students should occur as early as age 14.
- Outline services and documentation requirements set forth in section 511 of the Rehabilitation Act, as added by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), with regard to youth with disabilities who are seeking subminimum wage employment.
- Provide assurance that neither the SEA nor the LEA will enter into an arrangement with an entity holding a special wage certificate under section 14(c) of the Fair Labor Standards Act for the purpose of operating a program under which a youth with a disability is engaged in work at a subminimum wage.

A. COORDINATED SERVICES FOR YOUTH IN SPECIAL EDUCATION

Minnesota law mandates a coordinated system of services for youth, birth to 21, who are involved in special education. The Minnesota System for Interagency Collaboration (MnSIC) was formed to develop and implement this system. VRS is represented on MnSIC, and VRS staff participate on subcommittees that develop service strategies for students and recommendations for governance and coordination of state and local collaborative efforts.

B. PERSONAL LEARNING PLANS (PLPS)

Minnesota statute 120B.125, "Planning for Students' Successful Transition to Postsecondary Education and Employment" requires Minnesota school districts to assist all students by no later than age 14 to explore their educational, college, and career interests, aptitudes, and aspirations and develop a plan for a smooth and successful transition to postsecondary education or employment. VRS staff work with students and schools to ensure that VRS pre-employment transition services and transition services align with and contribute to each student's Personal Learning Plan.

C. COMMUNITY TRANSITION INTERAGENCY COMMITTEE (CTIC)

CTICs promote statewide interagency coordination to remove system barriers and expand community services. CTICs are regional groups that include parents, students, advocacy groups, local businesses, county government, postsecondary education, vocational education, community education, corrections, SSA health care, and other local service providers. VRS staff serve on all CTICs, thereby helping to improve and expand vocational services that result in employment outcomes.

D. REHABILITATION COUNSELORS ASSIGNED TO HIGH SCHOOLS

VR counselors are assigned to all public, private, and charter high schools in Minnesota. They are active participants on transition planning teams so that each VR eligible student with a disability can access VR and Pre-Employment Transition services and establish a written VR plan before leaving school. Outreach efforts include working with school nurses, guidance counselors, case managers, principals, social workers, 504 personnel, community agencies and work experience coordinators to identify students with disabilities who are not in special education programs. Referrals of students with disabilities that might benefit from VR is sought as soon as possible so that employment services can begin well before the student leaves school.

E. PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION SERVICES REHABILITATION REPRESENTATIVES ASSIGNED TO HIGH SCHOOLS

There is one Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) Rehabilitation Representative assigned to each of VRS' 23 teams. Their role is to provide outreach and Pre-ETS to potentially eligible students in all schools within their team's geographic area. Their outreach is similar to what is explained in the counselor's outreach described above. They provide Pre-ETS to students with disabilities age 14 through age 21.

F. INTERAGENCY AGREEMENT TO PURCHASE USED ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY DEVICES

When a student with a disability transitions into a work environment or postsecondary program, VRS may purchase any assistive technology device that the student's former school district purchased on his or her behalf.

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

A. Consultation and technical assistance to assist educational agencies in planning for the transition of students with disabilities from school to post-school activities, including VR services;

- DEED's VRS and MDE's Special Education and Career and College Success Divisions will work together to ensure that consultation and

technical assistance, which could include video conferences and conference calls, is provided to LEA staff in planning for the transition of students with disabilities to post-school activities. This includes implementing a structure for ensuring pre-employment transition services and vocational rehabilitation services are made available statewide for those who need these services.

- DEED's VRS and MDE's Special Education and Career and College Success Divisions will collaborate and promote transition to adult services through participation in existing councils, committees, and other work groups within respective agencies.
- DEED's VRS will ensure that a counselor(s) is assigned to each school district and charter school in the state who will provide consultation and technical assistance to LEA staff on an as-needed basis related to the transition of students with disabilities from school to post-school activities.
- MDE's Special Education and Career and College Success Divisions in consultation with DEED's VRS will develop training and communication tools for the LEA staff regarding WIOA and how it intersects with IDEA and the schools.

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

1. DEED's VRS and SSB and MDE's Special Education and Career and College Success staff will provide technical assistance and consultation regarding these five required pre-employment transition services made available to students with disabilities who need them, ages 14 through age 21 statewide:

- Job exploration counseling to assist students with disabilities in understanding their work-related strengths and interests and what career possibilities there are;
- Work-based learning experiences, which may include in-school or after school opportunities, or experience outside the traditional school setting (including internships), that is provided in an integrated environment in the community to the maximum extent possible;
- Counseling on opportunities for enrollment in comprehensive transition or postsecondary educational programs at institutions of higher education;
- Workplace readiness training to develop social skills and independent living; and

- Instruction in self-advocacy (including instruction in person-centered planning), which may include peer mentoring (including peer mentoring from individuals with disabilities working in competitive integrated employment).

2. DEED's VRS counselors will attend meetings for the development of Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) when invited. Counselors will use the IEPs with students to assist in developing the individualized plans for employment (IPE).

- DEED's VRS and MDE's Special Education and Career and College Success Divisions agree to share responsibility for ensuring that schools are aware of and how to use the tools to support students with disabilities to receive current information about their strengths, interests and preferences in order to make informed choices about competitive integrated employment prior to leaving school.
- DEED's VRS and MDE's Special Education and Career and College Success Divisions agree to share responsibility for ensuring that schools which serve students with disabilities receive information about the benefits of providing career information.

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

DEED's VRS assists students with disabilities in making informed choices to prepare for, obtain, maintain, advance in, or regain competitive integrated employment. Services include the provision of pre-employment transition services for students who are eligible or potentially eligible for VR services. They also include assessing an individual's VR needs, developing and implementing an IPE, and assisting in the achievement of the employment goals for the individuals that have applied for VR services, have been found eligible and are in an open priority category.

MDE's Special Education Division is responsible for ensuring that local education agencies provide special education and related services as documented in students' IEPs.

DEED's VRS and MDE's Special Education and Career and College Success Division are responsible for coordination necessary to satisfy documentation requirements set forth in WIOA and 34 CFR 397.10 (b)(i) and (ii) with regard to students and youth with disabilities who are seeking subminimum wage employment.

DEED's VRS and MDE's Special Education and Career and College Success Divisions are financially responsible for the services they provide under their own laws and rules. Nothing will be construed to reduce the obligation under IDEA of a local educational agency or any other agency to provide or pay for any transition services that are also considered special

education or related services and that are necessary for ensuring a free appropriate public education to children with disabilities within Minnesota.

DEED's VRS and MDE's Special Education and Career and College Success Divisions are responsible to ensure that neither the LEA nor VR agencies may shift the burden for providing a service, for which it otherwise would be responsible, to the other entity. Decisions related to which entity will be responsible for providing transition, pre-employment transition services or vocational rehabilitation services that can be considered both a special education and a VR service will be made at the state and local level as part of the collaboration between the VR agencies, SEAs, and LEAs.

Considerations in making funding decisions could include:

- The purpose of the service: Is it related to outcomes for employment or education?
- Which agency customarily provides the service?
- Is the student eligible for transition services under the IDEA and/ or pre-employment transition services or vocational rehabilitation services under the Rehabilitation Act?

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

Outreach and Identification:

1. DEED's VRS and MDE's Special Education and Career and College Success Divisions will work together to develop outreach tools related to competitive integrated employment for students with disabilities, parents or representatives of students with disabilities, school personnel, and other community agencies. Materials will include a description of the purpose of the VR programs, application procedures, eligibility requirements, priority for services, and scope of services that may be provided to eligible individuals.

2. DEED's VRS and MDE's Special Education and Career and College Success will work together with LEAs to ensure that outreach and identification of students in need of/ who could benefit from pre-employment transition services takes place statewide.

3. To provide information to students and their families/guardians about pre-employment transition services and/or vocational rehabilitation services, DEED's VRS will be allowed to receive "directory information" from LEAs. In accordance with Minnesota (M.S. 13.32) and federal (20 U.S.C.A. 1232g (5)(A)) laws, "directory information" is defined, in part, as the student's name, address, telephone listing, and date of birth.

4. DEED's VRS and MDE's Special Education and Career and College Success will work together with LEAs to ensure outreach to: students

receiving special education services under IDEA; students receiving accommodations under section 504; students receiving school psychological, health, nursing, or social work services; and other students who have disabilities as defined in Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, but who do not receive IDEA services nor have a 504 plan.

5. DEED's VRS will provide outreach to the following school staff to identify students in need of pre-employment transition services and/ or vocational rehabilitation services: teachers/case managers, work coordinators, guidance counselors, school nurses, 504 coordinators, school social workers, alternative learning center staff, principals, school mental health coordinators, and school psychologists.

Coordination and documentation requirements under WIOA Section 511 and 34 CFR 397, Limitations on use of subminimum wage

1. DEED's VRS, in collaboration with MDE's Special Education and Career and College Success Divisions will work together with LEAs to ensure that students with disabilities have meaningful opportunities to prepare for, obtain, maintain, advance in, or regain competitive integrated employment, including supported or customized employment.

2. DEED's VRS and MDE's Special Education and Career and College Success Divisions will work together with LEAs to ensure that outreach and identification of students with disabilities who are seeking subminimum wage employment in order for them to receive counseling and information and referral related to competitive integrated employment.

3. DEED's VRS will ensure, as appropriate, that students with disabilities who are seeking subminimum wage employment and who have applied for VR services are determined eligible or ineligible for VR services; have an approved IPE; receive pre-employment transition services; and receive appropriate reasonable accommodations and appropriate supports and services, including supported and customized employment services, that assist in obtaining and maintaining a competitive integrated employment outcome.

4. DEED's VRS and MDE's Special Education and Career and College Success Divisions will provide LEAs the required processes and forms to document the required actions specified under WIOA for all students with disabilities who are seeking subminimum wage employment.

5. MDE's Special Education and Career and College Success Divisions will work with LEAs to ensure that documentation of completed IDEA transition services is provided to DEED's VRS within 30 calendar days of the completion of the IDEA transition services for students who are seeking subminimum wage employment and have applied for VR services.

6. DEED's VRS and MDE's Special Education and Career and College Success Divisions will work together with LEAs to ensure that in the event a

student with a disability or, as applicable, the youth's parent or guardian, refuses, through informed choice, to participate in the actions required under WIOA, the refusal is documented. LEA staff will provide this documentation to VRS or within 5 calendar days of the refusal and VRS or staff will provide the documentation to students within 10 calendar days of the refusal.

7. DEED's VRS will ensure that all students with disabilities who are seeking subminimum wage employment receive documentation of the required actions specified under WIOA within 45 calendar days of completion of the required actions.

Assurance related to WIOA Section 511 and 34 CFR 397, Limitations on use of subminimum wage

In accordance with 34 CFR 397.31, MDE's Special Education and Career and College Success Divisions, through the MDE Career Technical Education Program approval and expense approval process, will ensure that neither the SEA nor LEAs enter into a contract with an entity, as defined in WIOA 34 CFR 397.5(d) for the purpose of operating a program under which a student with a disability is engaged in work compensated at a subminimum wage.

e. Cooperative Agreements with Private Nonprofit Organizations

Describe the manner in which the designated State agency establishes cooperative agreements with private non-profit VR service providers.

VRS purchases services such as vocational evaluation, skill training, internships, job development and job placement, on-the-job training, and time-limited job coaching. Services must be consistent with an employment plan developed between counselor and customer, based on the consumer's informed choices and offered in integrated settings.

1. Written Assurances

Providers must provide written assurances about their organizational missions, operations (including audits and lines of authority), staff development and qualifications, services, fees, populations served, standards of professional practice, and adherence to customers' employment plans. They must also provide written assurance regarding vendor compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, Minnesota Human Rights Act and other employment law on individual rights, accessibility, occupational health and safety, and data privacy.

2. Two Categories of Providers

Minnesota distinguishes between two categories of vendor: the limited use provider and the unlimited use community rehabilitation program (CRP). This arrangement permits wide selection of services and system flexibility and

emphasizes the use of providers accredited by the national Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF). CRPs include providers who are 245D licensed to deliver Medicaid funded services.

3. Limited Use Providers

Limited use providers (those without CARF accreditation) introduce competition to the rehabilitation marketplace and provide an entry point for new providers in response to an unmet or emerging service need. They are typically small organizations with small caseloads, limited to a narrow range of specialized services such as intensive job placement or job coaching for individuals with a particular disability. Some are private, for-profit entities. VRS uses the services of 42 limited-use providers. Contracts are limited to \$20,000 annually or \$40,000 over two years for most limited-use vendor providers. The provider limit for a Center for Independent Living (authorized Under Title VII, Chapter I, Part C of the Rehabilitation Act, as amended by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) of 2014) or an entity that received a VRS Pre-ETS grant between 2017-2019 is \$150,000 per year, or \$300,000 over two years.

4. CARF-accredited CRPs

An unlimited use CRP must be accredited by CARF for the services they provide. Professional/Technical Contracts, detailing services and specific fee schedules, are negotiated, with the engagement of VRS area managers and their staff. VRS management reviews the agreement for approval or modification. VRS currently has 60 Professional/Technical Contracts with CRPs statewide. VRS employs a program specialist to help maintain a mutually supportive professional relationship and to negotiate modifications to agreements with CRPs. VRS and CRPs work together to promote mutually held goals, including:

1. Develop and maintain choices for consumers.
2. Meet workforce needs identified by the state's employers.
3. Ensure that services are provided in integrated settings.
4. Facilitate state-level planning and coordination of training needs of CRP staff.
5. Facilitate communication between VRS and CRP staff at the administrative level.
6. Increase CRP awareness of vocational rehabilitation issues at state and national levels.
7. Identify and provide training for CRP and VRS staff.

VRS has an active CRP Advisory Committee to assist in achievement of these common goals. Priority topics discussed in 2017 included discussion of Performance Based Agreement redesign and definitions for inclusion in DEED-VRS Professional and Technical Contracts, expanding Customized Employment capacity in Minnesota, Funding Customized Employment, Strategies for

continued system transformation, DHS new Waiver Services discussion, WIOA Section 511, Developing and Retaining Placement Professionals.

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

Describe the designated State agency's efforts to identify and make arrangements, including entering into cooperative agreements, with other State agencies and other appropriate entities in order to provide supported employment services and extended employment services, as applicable, to individuals with the most significant disabilities, including youth with the most significant disabilities.

1. Statewide Collaboration

VRS collaborates with MDE, DHS, and county and local service providers to offer statewide supported employment services. VRS is a partner in several state-level agreements that provide long-term supports. During development of an employment plan, VRS counselors and other service team members help consumers to select supported employment services that meet their needs. They identify which services will be provided by VRS, as well as the source of long-term supports in the community. VRS provides time-limited supports for up to 24 months, but an employment plan may be amended if additional time is needed to achieve job stability. The primary funding resources for long-term supports in the community following VRS case closure are county case managers, the VRS Extended Employment Program, DHS Medicaid-waiver funded services, and the Social Security Administration's Impairment-Related Work Expense exclusions and Ticket to Work funding for persons on SSI and/or SSDI.

2. State-funded VRS Extended Employment Program

Minnesota's Extended Employment Program, administered by VRS, provides ongoing employment support services for individuals to maintain and advance in employment. The direct services are delivered by CARF-accredited CRPs under performance-based contracts with VRS-EE. These collaborations contribute significantly to the quality, scope, and effectiveness of the state's supported employment efforts.

The VRS Extended Employment Program augments Minnesota's supported employment resources. It provides a \$15.825 million a year to CRPs to provide ongoing employment support services. VRS coordinates both vocational rehabilitation and extended employment services to maximize the impact of both time-limited and extended services. In state fiscal year 2019, the VRS Extended Employment program provided ongoing work supports to about 4,000 individuals working in the community, about half of whom had previously received time-limited VR services. The Extended Employment Program is governed by state rule.

3. Individuals with Serious Mental Illness and Individuals Who Are Deaf or Hard-of-Hearing

Minnesota VR has been a leader in implementing the Evidence Based Practice of Supported Employment for persons with serious and persistent mental illness known as Individual Placement and Support (IPS). IPS receives \$2.55 million in dedicated state funding, which is used for grants to local partnerships of mental health programs and employment providers (Community Rehabilitation Programs). These funds provide ongoing supports to persons with serious mental illness who are receiving community mental health services. Minnesota's programs utilize the IPS fidelity scale (2008) to guide program development and implementation as well as program evaluation and outcome measurement. Another appropriation provides up to \$1,000,000 annually to provide long-term supported employment services for persons who are deaf, deaf blind or hard-of-hearing.

g. Coordination with Employers

Describe how the designated State unit will work with employers to identify competitive integrated employment and career exploration opportunities in order to facilitate the provision of:

1. VR Services; and

Excellence in job placement and retention services is fundamental to more fully living into DEED's vision statement of "a healthy economy, where all Minnesotans have or are on a path to meaningful employment and a family sustaining wage, and employers are able to fill their "in demand" jobs. Coordination with employers is also key to VRS' priority to embrace employers as key customers resulting in increased employment outcomes.

VRS has developed three updated strategic priorities and measures related to coordination with employers. These priorities replace the priorities listed under Goal 4: Employer Engagement in Section (P) Evaluation and Reports of Progress.

A. Develop and implement a VR client talent pool structural framework within the electronic case management system. The talent pool will be developed to gather and tap information to facilitate matching VRS clients to employment opportunities.

Metric: Secure approval and resources to develop the client talent pool structural framework as part of a larger rewrite of the case management system.

Minnesota's electronic case management system has capacity to identify talent pool. VRS staff input key talent pool identification data which greatly enhances the ability for Placement staff to identify pools of candidates based on employer needs. VRS staff will benefit from training to correctly utilize the talent pool refinement tools available in WF1.

B. Develop and implement low risk Hiring and Retention Options designed to increase employment outcomes and workforce diversity.

Metric: Track the VRS client participation and employment outcomes in low risk hiring and retention options on a quarterly basis. Options include On-the-Job Training, Job Try Outs, Internships, Connect 700 program and Schedule A hiring.

DEED-VRS updated the process, policies guidance and definitions for an array of low risk hiring and retention options which are referred to as On-the-Job Work & Training Options in Policy and Guidance Manuals. This information, along with the Connect 700 hiring initiative was shared with Community Rehabilitation Partners through statewide training to ensure consistency of understanding and application. VRS developed a series of new marketing materials for use by VRS and community partner providers to promote these programs with businesses (Internship, On-the-Job Training and Job Tryout brochures).

Metric: Create and deliver training to help employers identify, develop and sustain natural supports for employees with disabilities in the workplace.

C. VRS will lead and convene Placement Partnerships focused on meeting the needs of business by providing a talent pool of candidates that can meet the needs of business utilizing a Single Point of Contact (SPOC) coordinated approach with VRS, Community Rehabilitation Providers, and Special Education Work Coordinators.

Metric: WIOA Common Performance Measure 6 (effectiveness in serving employers) will be developed and addressed in an annual report. Following is a report of progress on the revised priorities:

1. The Disability Employment Resource (DER) was developed to support business engagement. The initiative helps businesses meet their workforce goals by employing people with disabilities in competitive integrated positions, while employment professionals learn more about how to align their placement goals with business needs. The DER curriculum improves business engagement by delivering information to bridge the gap between business and human services, dispelling myths that can prevent employers from considering people with disabilities, helping human service professionals understand the business perspective, providing tools for starting and building relationships, and connecting businesses with information and resources to help them succeed.

2. Minnesota continues to support Placement Partnerships throughout the state to provide a Single Point of Contact (SPOC) to meet the needs of business and to enhance the skills of placement professionals. Placement Partnerships reflect the needs of business representing urban, metro and rural areas of the state. In addition to supporting joint training to maintain qualified staff, the placement partnerships share job leads, plan events that connect job seekers to employers as well as other community events.

3. Placement 101 is a two-day training focused on Placement and Retention Services for Professionals serving VRS clients. VRS is partnering with the Minnesota Rehabilitation Association's (MRA) Job Placement and Development (JPD) staff who provide most of the training of Placement 101 going forward. VRS Placement Specialists worked closely with JPD staff to update Placement 101 Training, VRS developed Minnesota Customized Employment Training and are pursuing ACRE (Association for Community Rehabilitation Educators) certification for the training participants. This training will include hands on learning opportunities for Discovery Assessment and Job Development portions of Customized Employment. Each participant will also receive mentoring from VRS & CRP staff who are certified by one of the key CE training entities that provide certification. The goal of MNCE Training is to assist placement professionals develop an understanding of CE and demonstrate proficiency in providing Discovery and Job Development services. The training is also essential for Program Managers, Rehabilitation Area Managers who supervise staff who are providing CE services.

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

The need for Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) is assessed for all eligible students, age 14 through age 21, whom VRS serves. From there, the needed Pre-ETS are added to the employment plan and delivered either through one-on-one counseling sessions with the VRS counselor, the student's school, an internal VRS placement coordinator, or funds can be authorized to have them delivered via community rehabilitation programs, centers for independent living, etc. VRS staff work with local school districts to discuss how Pre-ETS are already available to students and where gaps are that VRS might be able to fill.

VRS also has Pre-ETS available statewide to students who are "potentially eligible" for VRS. There is one Pre-ETS Rehabilitation Representative assigned to each of VRS' 23 teams. Their role is to provide outreach and Pre-ETS to potentially eligible students in all schools within their team's geographic area. Once a student submits a signed application for Pre-Employment Transition Services, the Pre-ETS Representative meets with the student to assess their needs for Pre-ETS. From there, needed Pre-ETS are provided directly by the Pre-ETS Representative or through a DEED-VRS contracted provider.

VRS works with schools and contracted providers across the state to identify career exploration and competitive integrated employment opportunities to provide transition services, including pre-employment transition services, for students and youth with disabilities. This work is organized through regional Business Engagement Networks (BENs). BENs consist of VRS staff, contracted provider staff, and school work coordinators who work collaboratively to coordinate outreach and services to businesses on behalf of

the students, youth, and adults that we all serve. They designate one person who understands business needs and interests in job hires and work-based learning opportunities to be the single point of contact with businesses. That point of contact then shares this information with all members of the BEN so that student, youth, or adult matches can be made with appropriate businesses.

h. Interagency Cooperation

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

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

The State Medicaid plan under Title XIX of the Social Security Act; Medical Assistance, the state's Medicaid program, is administered by the DHS Disability Services Division (DHS-DSD). Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VRS) and State Services for the Blind (SSB) collaborate closely with DHS in the provision of services for individuals who are on home and community-based waivers.

In September 2019, DHS-DSD, VRS, and SSB signed a Memorandum of Understanding. The terms of the MOU are specific to individuals on a Medicaid waiver who want to pursue competitive, integrated employment. Employment First and Person-Centered principles form the basis of the shared vision for how our agencies can provide employment services for people with disabilities in a coordinated manner. The goal is to align systems so that common customers – those who receive home and community-based service disability waivers and vocational rehabilitation services from VRS or SSB – can get seamless and timely supports to make informed choices and meet their competitive integrated employment goals. The full implementation of the MOU is planned for January 2021 to allow time for communication, stakeholder involvement, and training.

Under the MOU, the following coordination of services occurs:

Payment of Services

DEED-VRS/SSB is the primary payer for job-related services (services supporting job development, placement and employment stability) for common customers. DHS-DSD may fund services offered by VRS/SSB only when DHS-DSD documents that those services are not available through VRS/SSB. Once employment stability is established, DHS-DSD will continue to pay for long-term supports to maintain employment for customers of all ages. DHS-DSD will also pay for services that assist people in making informed choices and developing informed employment goals.

Interagency Planning and Policy Development

DHS-DSD and VRS/SSB will use strategic planning, troubleshooting, consultation and technical assistance to ensure successful implementation of this agreement. Key areas include goal setting, systems development, coordination of services, quality assurance and stakeholder involvement. We will:

- Establish an interagency steering committee to provide MOU oversight, set goals, review program services and financing options, identify promising practices and resolve disputes
- Identify program liaisons from VRS/SSB and DHS-DSD to coordinate joint efforts in communication, quality assurance, training, and coordination of services, policies and procedures
- Create work groups as needed to provide advice and share expertise regarding practice enhancements
- Hold periodic staff meetings across agencies to ensure coordinated communication and address policy issues
- Establish an advisory committee that includes stakeholders from VRS/SSB, DHS-DSD, lead agency, and providers of both vocational rehabilitation services and waiver services to discuss progress and challenges with the MOU
- Jointly meet with stakeholders to collect feedback and identify areas for improvement
- Understand employment outcomes in our respective programs and develop a shared understanding of outcome measures and reporting procedures
- Promote the use of evidence-based practices and/or promising approaches to create a more closely aligned employment service system, increase quality and gather shared data on employment outcomes
- Identify common customers and practices that support positive employment outcomes

Eligibility, Referrals, and Customer Flow

We will establish a shared understanding of when and how eligibility will be determined by each agency and we will communicate eligibility requirements to stakeholders. This includes community rehabilitation partners, lead agency staff, waiver employment service providers, VRS/SSB staff, DHS-DSD staff, and the people served by our programs and their families.

We will develop a shared referral process and provide clear instructions for referrals between programs when 1) a person indicates an interest to explore

competitive, integrated employment through Minnesota's Career Counseling Information and Referral Conversation in accordance with the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA – 511 process), 2) a person receiving HCBS waiver services decides to pursue competitive, integrated employment and 3) when a person receiving vocational rehabilitation services achieves stable employment and needs supports to maintain employment.

We will define a benefits planning model, determine how and when the model will be embedded into provided services, develop and coordinate training, and coordinate implementation through designated agency staff and a community of practice.

We will develop guidance on how and when services may be provided as people move between programs and funding sources and when dual services are allowed. We agree that people may receive VRS/SSB and waiver services at the same time as long as those services are needed and not duplicative.

Service Provider Networks

We will work together to increase our statewide, shared network of employment service providers to improve access, support seamless transitions, and expand individuals' choices to high quality employment services. As part of this work, we agree to:

- Evaluate strategies for a common employment service provider pool. We will explore options for creating a shared job search service provider pool to support seamless service delivery and prevent unnecessary interruptions as people move between supports funded by VRS/SSB and supports funded by DHS-DSD.
- Encourage dual enrollment of employment service providers. While DHS and DEED will continue to maintain separate employment service provider licensure/accreditation standards, we will make it easier for providers to understand our respective standards and develop strategies to provide ongoing communication and technical assistance to those interested in enrolling.
- Align and streamline process and efforts. We will explore opportunities to better align and streamline each agency's business processes and requirements to create consistency and efficiencies for dually enrolled employment service providers.
- Coordinate communications and training. We will coordinate service provider communications and training to maintain consistent messaging and increase understanding of each agency's respective system and the shared customer flow outlined in this agreement.
- Measure and promote provider performance. We will explore methods to assess and provide information on service provider performance to

people with disabilities and their families to support informed selection of service providers.

- Develop new providers. We will analyze data, set goals and collaborate on the development of employment service providers in underserved populations and areas of the state.

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

The primary agency responsible for services for individuals with disabilities is DHS. In Minnesota, the Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities serves to advocate for all persons with developmental disabilities by carrying out activities in major areas of emphasis.

Minnesota's Olmstead Plan supports freedom of choice and provides a framework and a series of key activities that must be achieved to ensure Minnesotans with disabilities have the opportunity to live, learn, work, and enjoy life in the most integrated setting desired by the person. Former Governor Mark Dayton appointed an Olmstead Subcabinet to develop and implement this plan. The Subcabinet consists of representatives of the MnSIC agencies listed above, the Housing Finance Agency, the Department of Transportation, the ombudsman for mental health and developmental disabilities, and the executive director of the Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities.

VRS is involved in the following joint projects with the above agencies:

A. Minnesota Customized Employment Training:

Customized Employment (CE) is an evidenced-based alternative for helping people with significant disabilities to become successfully employed. At the foundation of CE is Discovery, which is a process for uncovering a person's strengths, interests and the conditions under which they will be successful in employment. DEED-VRS and DHS-Minnesota State Operated Community Services developed an Association of Community Rehabilitation Educator (ACRE) certified Customized Employment curriculum and training. It also includes mentoring supports to DEED, Community Rehabilitation Partner, School District staff to learn how to deliver Customized Employment Services that is sustainable, ongoing and cost effective for the state disability employment system.

B. SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) Employment and Training

The Departments of Human Services and Employment and Economic Development are currently studying opportunities to blend SNAP funds with other anti-poverty funding to help move more people out of poverty.

3. The State agency responsible for providing mental health services.

DHS is responsible for coordinating mental health services for adults and youth.

Minnesota's Mental Health system is a state mandated, county operated system. The State Mental Health Authority is responsible for ensuring that Minnesota's 87 counties, the local mental health authority, provide an array of community mental health services including: Basic clinical services, community services and supports, hospitalization and residential treatment. Funding for Minnesota's mental health system comes from health care insurance, including Medicaid, private Insurance and MinnesotaCare as well as county local tax levy funds, state mental health funds and Federal Block grant funds.

Minnesota's Mental Health and Drug and Alcohol Divisions are merging to provide a combined state administration for adult and children's mental health and alcohol and drug abuse. The emphasis is on moving to integrated care approaches.

The Minnesota-General program has a long history of innovative collaboration with the State Mental Health Authority. This includes VR representation on the State Mental Health Planning Council and the newly formed State Behavioral Advisory Council.

The two agencies have also collaborated to implement, sustain and expand the evidence-based practice of supported employment, Individual Placement and Support. Starting with 4 local partnerships between mental health and employment providers in 2006, the IPS provider network in Minnesota, funded in part with state appropriations dedicated to IPS, has expanded to 29 IPS programs (partnerships between mental health agencies and employment services agencies) in 47 of Minnesota's 87 counties. Minnesota VR and Mental Health agencies are partners in the National IPS Learning Community.

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

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

1. System on Personnel and Personnel Development

A. Qualified Personnel Needs

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

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

In Program Year 2018, VRS served 16,151 consumers and ended the year with an active caseload of 10,411 individuals. In Program Year 2017, we served 16,680 consumers, ending the year with an active caseload of 10,954; an average case load for counselors of 67. U.S. Census Bureau data on the geographic distribution of Minnesotans with disabilities has been used to determine the distribution of staff. The metro region has 133 field positions, the northern region has 98 field positions, and the southern region has 107 field positions.

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

The Vocational Rehabilitation Services leadership team consists of a director and nine managers.

Direct supervision of field staff is provided by rehabilitation area managers and supervisors. Rehabilitation specialists and other administrative specialists support the work of both administrative and field staff by providing technical assistance, training, and consultation.

Direct service to VR consumers is provided by rehabilitation counselors, augmented by rehabilitation representatives, job placement coordinators, community liaison representatives, and Occupational Communication Specialists (sign language interpreters); vocational rehabilitation technicians and clerical staff provide support to both field and administrative offices.

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

VRS had 9 retirements in calendar year 2019. There were 5 voluntary resignations. The number of voluntary resignations has remained consistent (between 2-3%) over the past five years. Between 2019 and 2024, 20% of VRS staff, 14% of counselors and 25% of managers and supervisors will be eligible to retire.

VRS program director/managers (Admin)

- Total filled positions: 10

- Current vacancies: 1
- Projected vacancies over the next 5 years: 3

Rehabilitation Area Managers/supervisors (field)

- Total filled positions: 23
- Current vacancies: 0
- Projected vacancies over the next 5 years: 5

Rehabilitation Specialists

- Total filled positions: 26
- Current vacancies: 1
- Projected vacancies over the next 5 years: 6

Rehabilitation Counselors

- Total filled positions: 157
- Current vacancies: 6
- Projected vacancies over the next 5 years: 20

Rehabilitation Representatives

- Total filled positions: 41
- Current vacancies: 2
- Projected vacancies over the next 5 years: 0

Job Placement/Business Services

- Total filled positions: 28
- Current vacancies: 2
- Projected vacancies over the next 5 years: 2

Vocational Rehabilitation Technicians

- Total filled positions: 60
- Current vacancies: 3
- Projected vacancies over the next 5 years: 19

Clerical Support

- Total filled positions: 18
- Current vacancies: 2
- Projected vacancies over the next 5 years: 4

Other Admin/Field

- Total filled positions: 8
- Current vacancies: 2
- Projected vacancies over the next 5 years: 5

TOTAL

- Total filled positions: 371
- Current vacancies: 19
- Projected vacancies over the next 5 years: 64

B. Personnel Development

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

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

Three area graduate programs award master's degrees that prepare individuals to work as vocational rehabilitation counselors:

- Minnesota State University at Mankato. This program, however, will be closing once the current classes are complete.
- St. Cloud State University
- University of Wisconsin – Stout. This program will only be offering virtual courses going forward.

VRS maintains a collegial relationship with these programs, recruiting for internships and filling counselor positions from among graduates. The section below displays current enrollment and the number of rehabilitation counseling graduates available through these programs.

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

Minnesota State University - Mankato

- Students enrolled: 16
- Employees sponsored by agency and/or RSA: 1
- Graduates sponsored by agency and/or RSA: 0
- Graduates from the previous year: 5

St. Cloud State University

- Students enrolled: 40
- Employees sponsored by agency and/or RSA: 1
- Graduates sponsored by agency and/or RSA: 13
- Graduates from the previous year: 19

University of Wisconsin - Stout

- Students enrolled: 69
- Employees sponsored by agency and/or RSA: 4
- Graduates sponsored by agency and/or RSA: 17
- Graduates from the previous year: 23

iii. The number of students who graduated during the prior year from each of those institutions with certification or licensure, or with the credentials for certification or licensure, broken down by the personnel category for which they have received, or have the credentials to receive, certification or licensure.

Five graduates from Mankato State University and two graduates from University of Wisconsin-Stout received master's degrees in Rehabilitation Counseling. Ten graduates from St. Cloud State received master's degrees in Rehabilitation Counseling Education and nine received master's degrees in Rehabilitation and Addiction Counseling.

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

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

Internships commonly lead to permanent counseling positions. The staff development manager/specialist devotes approximately 5% time as the point of contact for managers, professors, interns, supervising counselors, and Human Resources to coordinate intern placement and supervision, and for counselor recruitment. Other activities include presentations to students and informing university personnel of counselor vacancies.

The VRS staff development manager is an active member of graduate counseling advisory committees at the University of Wisconsin - Stout and Minnesota State University and communicates regularly with counseling program directors.

VRS provides tuition support for staff pursuing graduate degrees in rehabilitation counseling. Employees in the St. Cloud program and UW - Stout online program also had access to RSA stipends to assist with some tuition costs.

Media advertisement: VRS posts its vacancies at the State of Minnesota personnel openings website and the MinnesotaWorks.net job bank, as well as online job sites.

Minnesota post retirement option: The post retirement option, which permits a state retiree to work up to half time without losing insurance or retirement benefits, is a component of VRS retention and succession planning strategies.

As a key strategy for staff retention, VRS pays close attention to organizational vitality and staff morale. VRS works to maintain a high level of employee engagement through statewide staff communication about the vision, mission, values, strategic goals and agency achievements, and a robust training and development program. VRS completed an Organizational Vitality survey in fall 2018. Survey response rate was 78% this year. Findings indicate strong employee engagement on the key indicators measured. For example, 93% agreed that the VRS mission makes them feel their job is important, 80% agreed that they have the necessary training to do their job well, and 78% agreed that they were informed of decisions and issues that affect them and their work. Staff also provided suggestions for specific changes that would increase job satisfaction; response themes included enhancing organization communications, re-implementing external training opportunities, increasing recognition and feedback, and workload adjustment. VRS plans to repeat the survey annually as a measure of employee engagement and as a tool to identify needed improvements in organizational effectiveness.

Counselors and other staff are recruited and hired under Minnesota's competitive civil service system, including affirmative action to recruit and hire individuals with disabilities and members of the state's diverse cultural and ethnic populations. Voluntary disclosure of ethnic and cultural status provides the following PY 2018 data: 10% of VRS employees identify themselves as American Indian, Asian, Black or Hispanic/Latino, 87% identify themselves as White, and 3% are non-specified or undisclosed. At present, 18% of VRS employees voluntarily disclose a disability. This is up 3% since 2017.

The New Americans team, based in the Twin Cities, offer vocational rehabilitation services to refugees who recently immigrated to Minnesota from countries such as Somalia, Ethiopia, Jamaica, Turkey, Congo, Guyana, Iraq, Nigeria, Egypt, Pakistan, Sudan and Eritrea. The New Americans team consists of a lead rehabilitation counselor and two community liaison representatives. They are themselves refugees from East African countries. Each member of the New Americans team is multi-lingual and provides

intensive supports from application through employment closure to the VRS consumers they serve.

Coordination with professional associations: VRS staff serve on the board of the Minnesota Rehabilitation Association (MRA) and serve on MRA conference planning committees. A significant number of staff attend MRA conferences each year. VRS encourages staff membership in professional associations, and many serve as officers and work on association committees.

3. Personnel Standards

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

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

Vocational rehabilitation counselors and other professional staff are hired through competitive examination under the Minnesota civil service system. The current rehabilitation counselor candidate examination was developed by a work group that comprises staff from VRS, State Services for the Blind, and the department's Office of Human Resources.

Qualifications for counselors are based on both educational preparation and professional work experience. The academic degree standard for Rehabilitation Counselors is the Master's Degree in Rehabilitation Counseling or a Master's Degree in a closely related field and evidence of completion of a graduate level course in counseling theories/techniques.

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

Rehabilitation Counselors

- Master's degree in Rehabilitation Counseling; or
- A degree in a closely related field with evidence of completion of graduate level coursework in counseling theory/techniques.
- All of the agency's vocational rehabilitation counselors meet the state's standard.

Rehabilitation Representative

- Bachelor's degree in rehabilitation counseling or in a related social services field; or
- Bachelor's degree in any field, plus two years of experience providing employment related services for persons with disabilities.

Placement Coordinator

- One year professional experience in which the primary focus was the provision of vocational services to persons with disabilities; or
- Master's degree in behavioral science, counseling, vocational evaluation, job placement, vocational rehabilitation, or a closely related degree; or
- Three years of paraprofessional experience in which the primary focus was the provision of vocational services to persons with disabilities. A Bachelor's degree substitutes for half of the experience requirement.

Vocational Rehabilitation Technician

- A minimum of one year of experience in an organization whose mission includes the provision of services to persons who are injured or disabled so that an understanding and sensitivity toward people with disabilities has been obtained
- Customer service skills sufficient to perform intake, assist with forms, and to develop positive relationships with the consumers
- Keyboarding skills sufficient to create documents and complete data entry, and
- English sufficient to interview consumers and employers, present job-seeking skills training, and to draft correspondence or complete forms.

4. Staff Development

Describe the State agency's policies, procedures, and activities to ensure that, consistent with section 101(a)(7)(C) of the Rehabilitation Act, all personnel employed by the designated State unit receive appropriate and adequate training in terms of:

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

The staff development director is a member of the VRS management team and one of his direct reports is responsible for the Comprehensive System of Personnel Development. The staff development team coordinates training, develops training programs to meet identified needs, and coordinates internships and other recruitment activities.

Staff development and training needs are assessed through interviews with field staff, reports from area managers and recommendations from staff groups and committees. Case review yields training needs information. Staff Development and field managers meet regularly, as does the Policy Learning Team, to develop and guide staff development activity.

The comprehensive staff training and development plan describes core training curriculum for staff, identifies competencies required of each VRS position along with training strategies and resource information for each competency, and identifies specialized competencies for serving transition age youth. Annual performance reviews between supervisor and employee include a review of training and development needs of the employee.

2020 Training Plan

Required training for new employees includes: VRS New Employee Orientation (2 day training including an VRS Orientation and Person Centered Foundations, 2 times per year), Data Practices eLearning course, VRS Data Security eLearning course, Mandated Reporting eLearning course, Ethics eLearning course, VRS Process in MN eLearning course, Appeals eLearning course, Violence and Behavior Policy eLearning course, New Counselor Training (with a mentor), Motivational Interviewing Introduction, Transition 101 (for Transition Counselors), Ethics Training for VRS, Vocational Assessment Services (VAS) Interpretation, Psychometrist Training for VAS, Mental Health First Aid, Various Policy trainings, Introduction to WF1 (Case Management and Reports Portal), VRS Purchasing Training, DB101 (Disability Benefits, Labor Market Resources and Updates, and Creative Job Search. Our Purchasing staff also are required to participate in specific State and DEED Procurement Training and a Diversity and Inclusion training.

Other L&D Training (in addition to those above)

- Employee Onboarding (training provided through first 3-6 months of employment)
- Putting It All Together (part of and a follow up to Onboarding)
- Person Centered Practices Refresher
- Basics of Assistive Technology
- Autism 101
- MI Managers Training

- MI Refresher
- Customized Employment
- Safe Space Training
- Pre-ETS Flexibilities
- Professional and Technical (P/T) Contract Providers Pre-ETS Webinar
- Regional Pre-ETS Rep and RAM Meeting/Training
- Statewide All Transition Staff Meetings/Training
- Caddie U
- VirtualJobShadow.com
- MCIS
- eTrac
- Microsoft OneDrive and Teams
- Microsoft OneNote
- Charting the LifeCourse
- Psychiatric Disabilities eLearning
- Placement and Retention Services
- ADA and Employing People with Disabilities
- On the Job Work and Training Options
- CareerScope
- Caseload Management

Policy

- Case Note Fundamentals
- Supportive Employment
- Credential and MSG Review
- Closures and Exits
- Data Points
- MN Statute 16A.15
- Data Practices

2021 Training Plan

Required training for new employees includes: VRS New Employee Orientation (2 day training including an VRS Orientation and Person Centered Foundations, 2 times per year), Data Practices eLearning course, VRS Data Security eLearning course, Mandated Reporting eLearning course, Ethics eLearning course, VRS Process in MN eLearning course, Appeals eLearning course, Violence and Behavior Policy eLearning course, New Counselor Training (with a mentor), Motivational Interviewing Introduction, Transition 101 (for Transition Counselors), Ethics Training for VRS, Vocational Assessment Services (VAS) Interpretation, Psychometrist Training for VAS, Mental Health First Aid, Various Policy trainings, Introduction to WF1 (Case Management and Reports Portal), VRS Purchasing Training, DB101 (Disability Benefits, Labor Market Resources and Updates, and Creative Job Search. Our Purchasing staff also are required to participate in specific State and DEED Procurement Training and a Diversity and Inclusion training.

Other L&D Training (in addition to those above)

- Employee Onboarding (training provided through first 3-6 months of employment)
- Putting It All Together (part of and a follow up to Onboarding)
- Charting the LifeCourse
- EQ Training
- Autism 101
- MCIS
- Basics of Assistive Technology
- MI Managers Training
- MI Refresher
- Customized Employment
- Ongoing Pre-ETS Trainings
- Psychiatric Disabilities eLearning
- ADA and Disclosure
- CareerScope

Policy

- Mandated Reporter Review
- Eligibility
- Priority For Services

- Post Secondary Policy
- Small Business
- Credential and MSG Updates

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

- Autism 101 training is planned on mental health diagnosis, what strengths and limitations individuals might demonstrate; behavioral aspects of autism and strategies for addressing the needs of individuals with autism.
- Assistive Technology - the basics of principles and practice is being developed by a work group lead by an Assistive Technology Specialist.
- Cyber Security – develop an eLearning module training on common data breaches and actions that minimize the risk of a data breach, handling suspicious emails, retaining and sending private data, proper laptop transporting and where to report a data breach.
- Facilitation skills - develop training for both field and admin staff to build skills for conversational processes to facilitate and host space to bring out ideas and perspectives, to positively engage and invite individuals to step in and take charge of the challenges facing them, build consensus and reach a shared agreement.
- Person-Centered Practices - strengthen field leaders and staff ability to use Person–Centered practices. Understand and embed person-centeredness into all policy, guidance and training. Draw out values-based work and instill a culture of continuous improvement to our services. Be connected to the U of M Institute on Community Integration expertise as well as community partners on their journey to become person-centered organizations.
- Psychiatric Disabilities eLearning - continue to develop eLearning courses specific to VR and Individual Placement and Support (IPS) services, and navigating the Minnesota Mental Health system.
- Vocational Assessment Usage and Interpretation: A survey was completed with VRS staff to indicate their use and understanding of the Assessment tools currently available to them. Training will be determined from the findings of the survey.

5. Personnel to Address Individual Communication Needs

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

VRS ensures that personnel and methods are available so that staff may communicate with consumers in a preferred language or other means of communication. Substantial numbers of VRS consumers use languages other than English, including: Cambodian, Lao, Vietnamese, Somali, Spanish, and American Sign Language. Translation of forms, information brochures and the ready availability of purchased interpreter services or a multilingual staff member ensures effective communication statewide.

Deaf and Hard of Hearing services are provided by highly qualified VRS staff including one State Coordinator for Deaf Services and 24 staff who are conversationally competent in American Sign Language. To be exact, we have three VRS managers/supervisors, fifteen counselors, three placement specialists, two VR technicians, a Rehabilitation Representative, an Office and Administrative Specialist, and two Occupational Communication Specialists (who are also certified sign language interpreters). Deaf and hard of hearing specialists in ten locations are using a video remote interpreting platform called Stratus VRI to supplement the use of onsite interpreting services and provide more options for accessibility. Counselors are also using videophones, FaceTime, Microsoft Lync and texting to communicate with people and providers who use our services.

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

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

Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act VRS has a collaborative agreement with MDE, Minnesota's secondary education system. This is augmented by MDE representation on the State Rehabilitation Council and VRS participation on the Minnesota State Interagency Coordinating Team, with staff support by VRS program specialists for transition services and services for people with autism.

j. Statewide Assessment

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

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

The most recent Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment was completed with SRC input and submitted to RSA in 2017. The information below is based on that assessment with updated data which shows a continuation of trends. VRS is currently working on a new CSNA, which will be submitted by the end of the Program Year.

The American Community Survey estimates that 615,846 non-institutionalized Minnesotans, or 11.2% of the state's population, has a disability. This compares to 12.7% nationally. Males are slightly more likely to have a disability than females (11.6% versus 10.7%). Cognitive and ambulatory disabilities are the two most common types of disability.

The availability of long-term supports continues to be an issue, especially supported employment services for individuals with serious mental illness, traumatic brain injury, autism spectrum disorder and deaf/hard of hearing. In addition to traditional long-term supports, consumers and supported employment providers identified a need for additional support services including personal support for life issues, how to disclose a disability if not done at time of hire, how to quit a job, how to make yourself visible and promotion-worthy within a company and understanding the job appraisal purpose and process.

B. Who are minorities;

According to the American Community Survey, individuals who are Black/African American represent 5.5% of the state population, compared with 13.1% of VR participants accepted for service. Individuals who are Hispanic/Latino represent 5.0% of the state population, and 5.8% of VR participants accepted for service. American Indians represent 1.0% of the state population, and 3.7% of VR participants accepted for service. Asians represent 4.4% of the state population, and 4.8% of VR participants accepted for service. Research suggests blacks and American Indians experience disability at a significantly higher rate than other cultural/ethnic groups. VRS needs to continue active outreach to people of color and indigenous people to assure equal access to the benefits of VR services.

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

Several underserved populations have been identified. According to the Minnesota Labor Market Information Office, the share of Minnesotans 65 and older in the workforce has increased nearly 63 percent since 2003. Many of these people have disabilities.

Ex-offenders constitute a growing population. According to a special report on Disabilities Among Prison and Jail Inmates, 2011-12, released in December 2015 by the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the prevalence of inmates reported at least one of six disability types: hearing, vision, cognitive, ambulatory, self-care, and independent living. When compared to the general population, jail inmates were about 2.5 times more likely to report an ambulatory and independent living disability, more than 3 times

more likely to report a visual and hearing disability, and 6.5 times more likely to report a cognitive disability. VRS currently provides training to VR offices and community partners on best practices in working with ex-offenders as well as maintaining resources for ex-offenders on the state's Career One Stop web page, but additional work is needed on how to develop soft skills needed for employment.

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

People with disabilities are served in all components of the workforce development system, both as universal customers and in eligibility-based programs. The Governor's Workforce Development Board has established a Disability Equity Committee to address any disparities for individuals with disabilities in training and employment, with an emphasis on people on the VRS Waiting List.

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

The most recent data from MDE (2019) shows that there were 44,015 students age 14-21 (the age for transition services in Minnesota) who received special education. (Note that there are not accurate numbers for those that receive 504 accommodations or have a 504 plan).

The need for Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) is assessed for all students, age 14 through age 21, that VRS serves. From there, the needed Pre-ETS are added to the employment plan and delivered either through one-on-one counseling sessions with the VRS counselor, the student's school, an internal VRS placement coordinator, or funds can be authorized to have them delivered via community rehabilitation programs, centers for independent living, etc. VRS staff discuss with local school districts how Pre-ETS are already available to students and where gaps are that VRS might be able to fill.

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

The largest unmet need has been finding transportation options for people working in individual sites in the community. Many of the existing options provide transportation between group homes and center-based programs or enclaves, but there are very limited options for transportation to and from individual integrated worksites. We also identified the need for more funding for ongoing employment supports. As a part of providing technical assistance to the state's two tribal VR programs, there is limited culturally appropriate services available on the reservations. Services in neighboring cities are difficult to access and services are not culturally specific.

This is consistent with the most recent CSNA, submitted in 2017, and prior approval requests.

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

MDE, several local school districts, the Title 1 Youth programs, and VRS are currently assessing how to provide cost effective coordinated transition career services and pre-employment transition services. The pilot activities are described in the section on youth with disabilities (g.2.).

k. Annual Estimates

Describe:

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

There are approximately 296,481 Minnesotans between the ages of 18 and 64 with one or more long-lasting disabilities (2018 American Community survey summary tables).

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

A. The VR Program;

Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VRS) anticipates serving about 6,200 individuals in FFY2020 and 15,320 individuals in FFY2021 under Title I of the Rehabilitation Act, all of whom will be individuals with either a significant disability or a most significant disability under Minnesota's administrative rule for vocational rehabilitation.

It is estimated that about 15,876 (98 percent) in FFY2020 and 15,013 in FFY2021 will be persons who have a most significant disability, and about 324 (2 percent) in FFY 2020 and 306 in FFY2021 will be persons with a significant disability.

B. The Supported Employment Program; and

It is estimated that 430 individuals will receive employment supports in FFY 2021 under Title VI Part B, Supported Employment Services Program. The approximate cost of purchased services for these individuals will be \$450,000. Under the administrative rule enacted to establish Minnesota's order of selection, all persons receiving supported employment services must be found to have three or more serious functional limitations (priority category one).

C. Each priority category, if under an order of selection.

In FFY 2021, it is estimated that about 15,000 persons with serious limitations in three or more functional areas (priority category one) will be served at an approximate case service cost of \$17.9 million; about 280 persons will be served who have serious limitations in two functional areas (priority category two) at an approximate case service cost of \$311,000; and about 40 persons will be served who have a serious limitation in one functional area (priority category three) at an approximate case service cost of \$27,000.

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

As of October 1, 2019, the total waiting list under the current order of selection is 1,426 people. Vocational Rehabilitation Services has four categories under the order of selection. Category One (three or more substantial functional limitations) is currently open. Category Two (two substantial functional limitations) is closed with a waiting list of 983 people. Category Three (one functional limitation) is closed with a waiting list of 491 people, and Category Four (no identified substantial functional limitations) has a waiting list of 28 people.

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

In FFY 2021, approximately 2,900 individuals will obtain an integrated competitive outcome that is approved by the U.S. Secretary of Education. All of these will be individuals with significant or most significant disabilities.

Priority Category One: Open

- Estimated Funds: \$17,989,000
- Estimated Number to be Served: 15,000
- Average Cost of Services: \$1,199

Priority Category Two: Closed

- Estimated Funds: \$311,000
- Estimated Number to be Served: 280
- Average Cost of Services: \$1,109

Priority Category Three: Closed

- Estimated Funds: \$27,000

- Estimated Number to be Served: 40
- Average Cost of Services: \$683

Priority Category Four: Closed

- Estimated Funds: \$0
- Estimated Number to be Served: 0
- Average Cost of Services: \$0

Totals

- Estimated Funds: \$18,327,000
- Estimated Number to be Served: 15,320
- Average Cost of Services: \$1,196

I. State Goals and Priorities

The designated State unit must:

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

VRS and the State Rehabilitation Council have jointly developed the following Goals and Priorities to promote the continuous improvement of the VR program.

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

GOAL 1. PROVIDE QUALITY SERVICES TO YOUTH AND ADULTS WITH DISABILITIES FOR EXPLORATION, DEVELOPMENT AND ADVANCEMENT IN CAREERS

Objectives:

A. Quality pre-employment transition services are provided to potentially eligible students

Key Results:

1. Pre-ETS Representative data reports demonstrate that outreach is provided to every school district/charter school in Minnesota
2. Students and families are satisfied with the services they receive
3. Baseline is established and annual goals are established and met for numbers of students served

B. Annual goals for numbers of students served are established Quality VR Services are provided to eligible participants

Key Results:

1. Compliance standards are established/defined via case reviews
2. Participants are satisfied with the services they receive
3. Baseline is established and annual goals set for post-secondary education/training and obtainment of measurable skills gains
4. A system for measuring career advancement is established and annual goals are established and met
5. Goals are established and met for statewide employment outcomes and job retention

C. Quality services are provided to participants of state appropriated programs (State Extended Employment program, Individual Placement and Supports grants, Centers for Independent Living grants, Deaf and Hard of Hearing grants)

Key Results:

Satisfaction criteria are established and annual goals are established and met

GOAL 2. STRENGTHEN BUSINESS ENGAGEMENT

Objectives:

A. Connect VRS participants to competitive integrated employment

Key Results:

1. Increased competitive integrated employment outcomes

B. Connect students with disabilities to work experiences

Key Results:

1. A mechanism for tracking work-based experiences is established and baseline data is collected.

C. Develop and facilitate a disability employment collaborative to meet the needs of businesses

Key Results:

1. Competitive work-based learning opportunities for students with disabilities
2. Increased awareness about the benefits of hiring people with disabilities

GOAL 3. BUILD A HEALTHY ORGANIZATION IN ORDER TO ACHIEVE OUR MISSION

Objectives:

A. Fiscal stability

Key Results:

1. Reduction in purchasing violations (MS16)
2. Fiscal dashboards created and monitored to make decisions
3. Full 15% of Federal award is spent on Pre-ETS
4. Actual spending reasonably tracks budgeted amounts

B. Employee Engagement

Key Results:

1. Staff burden is reduced through technology development
2. Staff are trained in conflict resolution

C. Build collaboration within VRS and across DEED

Key Results:

1. A project management tool (Monday.com) is used to track and report progress on projects to enable collaboration between units

D. Build human resource capital

Key Results:

1. Plan developed to expand recruitment of qualified staff
2. Reduction in staff turnover
3. Counselors have effective and professional counseling skills
4. Counselors are proficient in aspects of disabilities for frequently served populations

GOAL 4. STRENGTHEN COLLABORATION THROUGH PARTNER ENGAGEMENT

Objectives:

A. Coordinate and align services

Key Results:

1. Map of providers and services
2. Referral and funding decision tree (who should pay for the service)

B. Timely and relevant communication and training

Key Results:

1. Fewer contract related inquiries and issues
2. More resources (FAQs, etc.) available to partners
3. Partners are trained in delivering Pre-Employment Transition Services and report satisfaction

C. Engage State Rehabilitation Council for input and feedback

Key Result:

1. Input and feedback provided to VRS leadership after each meeting for dissemination to VRS staff as needed.
2. VRS regularly reports back to the SRC on how the council's feedback is utilized

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

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

The goals and priorities are based on an analysis of the most recent comprehensive statewide assessment (completed December 2017), feedback from community partners, and public forums.

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

Vocational Rehabilitation Services continues to review and revise goals to align with the updated performance accountability measures of Section 116 of WIOA. VRS updated the goals and priorities in early 2020 and will continue to refine annually.

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

VRS and the State Rehabilitation Council considered Goals and Priorities established by other public VR agencies, and input from the State Council on Disability and people with disabilities.

m. Order of Selection

Describe:

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

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

Eligibility for VR Services

A person is eligible for vocational rehabilitation services from the general VR agency when they have a physical or mental impairment that constitutes or results in a substantial impediment to employment, and they require vocational rehabilitation services to prepare for, secure, retain, or regain employment.

Qualifications for VR Services

A person is qualified for vocational rehabilitation services from the General VR agency when they are eligible and found to have serious functional limitations due to a severe impairment and wish to obtain, retain, or regain employment.

Service Priority Categories

Persons are served according to their priority category. When priority categories must be closed, lower priority categories are closed before higher categories. Persons leave their waiting list according to the priority of their category and their date of application for VR services.

- Priority Category One (first priority for service) includes all individuals with a most significant disability, that is, persons whose condition results in serious limitations in three or more functional areas.
- Priority Category Two (second priority for service) includes all individuals with a significant disability that results in serious functional limitations in two functional areas.
- Priority Category Three (third priority for service) includes all individuals with a significant disability that results in a serious functional limitation in one functional area.
- Priority Category Four (fourth priority for service) includes all other eligible customers. These customers have a disability that makes them eligible for service but they do not have a serious limitation in a functional area. This category has essentially been closed since 1993.

Waiting List

When annual program resources are insufficient to serve qualified new applicants and to serve all current customers through the end of the fiscal year, a priority category may be closed. New applicants who qualify in a closed category are then placed on a statewide waiting list for that category. Closing a category slows the rate of increase in the number of

persons being served. It conserves resources so that obligations to persons who are already being served may continue to be met.

Functional Areas

Serious limitations in life skills in one or more of the following areas, as defined:

- **Communication:** the ability to effectively give and receive information through words or concepts, such as reading, writing, speaking, listening, sign language, or other adaptive methods
- **Interpersonal skills:** the ability to establish and maintain personal, family, and community relationships as it affects, or is likely to affect, job performance and security.
- **Mobility:** the physical and psychological ability to move about from place to place inside and outside the home, including travel to and from usual destinations in the community for activities of daily living, training, or work.
- **Self-care:** the skills needed to manage self or living environment, such as eating, toileting, grooming, dressing, money management, and management of special health or safety needs, including medication management, as they affect an individual's ability to participate in training or work—related activities.
- **Self-direction:** the ability to independently plan, initiate, organize, or carry out goal-directed activities or solve problems related to working.
- **Work skills:** (1) the ability to do specific tasks required to carry out job functions; and (2) the capacity to benefit from training in how to perform tasks required to carry out job functions.
- **Work tolerance:** the capacity or endurance to effectively and efficiently perform jobs requiring various levels of physical demands, psychological demands, or both.

Serious Limitation

A serious limitation in a functional area means that, due to a severe physical or mental impairment, the individual's functional capacities in the specific area are restricted to the degree that they require services or accommodations not typically made for other individuals in order to prepare for, enter, engage in, or retain employment. Accommodations are defined as special working conditions, job re-engineering, rehabilitation technology, or substantial support and/or supervision.

List of Physical or Mental Disabilities

Physical or mental disabilities resulting from amputation, arthritis, autism, blindness, burn injury, cancer, cerebral palsy, cystic fibrosis, deafness, head injury, heart disease, hemiplegia, hemophilia, respiratory or pulmonary dysfunction, intellectual disabilities, mental illness, multiple sclerosis, muscular dystrophy, musculoskeletal disorders, neurological disorders including stroke and epilepsy, paraplegia, quadriplegia, and other spinal cord conditions, sickle cell anemia, specific learning disability, and end-stage renal disease, or another disability or combination of disabilities determined on the basis of an assessment for determining eligibility and priority for services to cause comparable serious functional limitation.

B. The justification for the order

Minnesota Vocational Rehabilitation Services implemented an Order of Selection in 1993, setting forth who will be served first when the program cannot serve all eligible individuals. Determination of eligibility and qualification for service is based on the applicable Minnesota administrative rule and the Minnesota Vocational Rehabilitation Policy and Procedure Manual.

Annual State and Federal resources allocated for Minnesota's Vocational Rehabilitation Services program continue to not be sufficient to serve all Minnesotans who are eligible for services. Conclusions regarding capacity of the Minnesota vocational rehabilitation program in any given year are based on:

- An analysis of resources available for annual operation of the vocational rehabilitation program,
- expenditures required to implement employment plans approved prior to commencement of the fiscal year,
- the anticipated costs for determining eligibility and qualification for service of new applicants during the fiscal year,
- the anticipated costs of implementing approved vocational rehabilitation plans for new applicants during the fiscal year, and
- reasonable and necessary costs related to administration of the vocational rehabilitation services program.

Program expenditures have for several years exceeded annual program resources, requiring the agency to use carryover funds from previous years to meet all financial obligations. The budget forecast for FFYs 2020 and 2021 indicate a continuing trend in deficit spending. This fiscal situation has required the agency to implement several budget reduction measures, including the closing of Priority Categories Two and Three (which have been closed since October 14, 2013). Priority Category Four (individuals who have a disability that makes them eligible

for service but do not have a serious limitation in a functional area) has been closed since 1993.

The State Rehabilitation Council continues to receive monthly updates on the budget situation.

As of October 1, 2019, there were 1,426 individuals on the waiting list: 28 on Priority Category Four, 491 on Priority Category Three, and 983 on Priority Category Two. We anticipate being able to start taking some individuals off the waiting list during calendar year 2020, beginning with those in Category Two who have been on the list the longest. We do not anticipate being able to re-open any of the currently closed categories. Individuals on the waiting list are provided information and referral to other programs that may meet the person's needs.

C. The service and outcome goals

In FFY2021, under the order of selection currently in effect, approximately 15,320 individuals will be served.

Approximately 2,900 individuals will achieve employment outcomes in FFY2021.

(Although Category 1 is the only priority for service category currently open, a small number of individuals in Categories 2 and 3 were enrolled and receiving services from the VR program prior to closing those categories. Individuals who were identified in Categories 2 and 3 prior to closure continue to have open case files and are receiving services. Their numbers are reflected in the estimates below.)

D. Time within which these goals may be achieved for individuals in each priority category within the order; and

Category 1

- Number of individuals to be served: 15,000
- Estimated number of individuals who will exit with employment: 2,800
- Estimated number of individuals who will exit without employment: 2,300
- Estimated time within which goals may be achieved: 20 months
- Cost of Services: \$17,989,000

Category 2

- Number of individuals to be served: 280
- Estimated number of individuals who will exit with employment: 55

- Estimated number of individuals who will exit without employment: 40
- Time within which goals are to be achieved: 30 months
- Cost of services: \$311,000

Category 3

- Number of individuals to be served: 40
- Estimated number of individuals who will exit with employment: 8
- Estimated number of individuals who will exit without employment: 5
- Time within which goals are to be achieved: 48 months
- Cost of services: \$27,000

Category 4

- Number of individuals to be served: 0
- Estimated number of individuals who will exit with employment: 0
- Estimated number of individuals who will exit without employment: 0
- Time within which goals are to be achieved: 0
- Cost of services: 0

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

Service Priority: The order of selection establishes service priority based on the number of functional areas in which a person has significant limitations to employment. Persons with limitations in more functional areas are deemed to have more significant disability. It is intended by the order of selection that persons with the most significant disabilities will be served first when all persons who are eligible cannot be served.

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

Vocational Rehabilitation Services has elected to not exempt individuals who require specific services or equipment to maintain employment from the Order of Selection.

n. Goals and Plans for Distribution of title VI Funds

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

Estimate of the Number of Persons to Be Served

During Program Year 2019, about 2,560 individuals will be served with Title VI, Part B funds supplemented by Title I funds, at a purchased service cost of about \$450,000. Under the administrative rule that sets forth Minnesota's priority-for-service categories, all persons receiving supported employment have three or more serious functional limitations.

The Contribution of State Funding

Title VI B funds are used to provide supports after placement and before closure. The VRS Extended Employment Program (VRS-EE) provides ongoing employment supports using state funding of \$15.825 million annually that flows to community rehabilitation programs. More than 80 percent of this state funding provides extended services for persons in competitive employment with supports. The VRS-EE program serves all disability groups. An additional state appropriation of \$2,555,000 is dedicated to extended supported employment services for persons with serious mental illness since it has been historically difficult to obtain ongoing support services for this population. Another appropriation provides \$1,000,000 annually to provide long-term supported employment services for persons who are deaf, deaf blind or hard-of-hearing.

System Complexity and Limited Capacity

Funding for supported employment, within which Title VI Part B funds play a relatively small part, is governed by myriad federal and state laws and rules covering many categories of services. For example, a network of private, not-for-profit organizations, licensed by the DHS Disability Services Division, provides day training and habilitation services that may include supported employment. People with mental illness may receive work-related support through the State Comprehensive Mental Health Act. In these instances, each county determines the level of service that will be provided.

Title VI B supported employment funds are distributed on a fee-for-service basis under fee schedules developed with service providers. VRS collaborates with the Departments of Education and Human Services and county and local service providers to facilitate access to other funding and service resources. During development of a vocational rehabilitation employment plan, the vocational rehabilitation participant and the service team design a supported employment framework that best meets the participant's needs. Planning for eventual long-term supports in the community is a crucial part of planning during VRS' time-limited period of service

Strategic Goal for Effective Partnerships

In Program Year 2019, under the designated state unit's strategic goal for effective partnerships, VRS will expand our collaboration with other employment and disability services system partners to better coordinate and align services and assist business partners in building inclusive workplaces and developing best practices for recruitment and retention for individuals with disabilities requiring workplace supports.

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

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

Extended services means ongoing support services, including customized employment, and other appropriate services that are needed to support and maintain an individual with a most significant disability, including a youth with a most significant disability in supported employment, organized or made available, singly or in combination, in such a way as to assist an individual in maintaining supported employment, based on the needs of an eligible individual, as specified in the Supported Employment Plan, provided by a private nonprofit organization, employer, or any other appropriate resource, after an individual has made the transition from time limited support from Vocational Rehabilitation Services, provided to a youth with a most significant disability by Vocational Rehabilitation Services for a period not to exceed four years or at such time that a youth reaches age 25 and no longer meets the definition of a youth with a disability, whichever occurs first. Vocational Rehabilitation Services must not provide extended services to an individual with a most significant disability who is not a youth with a most significant disability.

Extended services can be provided by any appropriate qualified resource, including natural supports, but must be funded by a source other than Vocational Rehabilitation Services funds except in limited circumstances where VRS funds are necessary to fill a funding gap for extended services required by a youth with a most significant disability to maintain competitive integrated employment. For example, a funding gap can occur when a youth with a most significant disability is in the process of applying for waived services through the DHS to cover costs for extended services and there are no county funds available to fill the gap. In this circumstance, VRS can provide funding for the extended services to fill the "gap" while the application for waived services is in process. In this example, VRS funding for extended services must end when waived services funding is in place, when the person turns 25 or when VRS has funded extended services for four years, whichever occurs first.

B. How the State will leverage other public and private funds to increase resources for extended services and expanded supported

employment opportunities for youth with the most significant disabilities.

VRS has promulgated changes to the State rule governing the Extended Employment program, ending employment supports to individuals in non-integrated and sub-minimum wage jobs, capping employment supports to individuals in other non-integrated employment and prioritizing this state funding for employment supports to individuals in competitive, integrated employment.

o. State's Strategies

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

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

Innovation and Expansion activities are developed in response to needs identified in the Comprehensive Statewide Assessment of Need, with a focus on ensuring equal access to services regardless of specific disability, impediment to employment, economic status, public assistance status, race, national origin, gender, sexual orientation or age.

This activity specifically addresses program access, and adherence to the employment non-discrimination principles requirements of Section 427 of the General Education Provisions Act. VRS seeks partnerships with other public and private entities to increase access to vocational rehabilitation services and other employment services.

The State Rehabilitation Council plays a crucial role in identifying the needs of citizens with disabilities. The council conducts 10 meetings annually, along with public forums and numerous committee meetings to carry out its consultative and participative roles in the work of Vocational Rehabilitation Services. In 2019, the council participated in discussions about updating the comprehensive needs assessment, engaged in strategic planning, reviewed the policies and practices that guide the delivery of VRS services, and assisted in identifying program evaluation needs.

The employment section of the Olmstead Plan, approved by the U.S. District Court on September 29, 2015, establishes two goals: 1) Increase the employment rate for people with disabilities so that it is comparable to the employment rate of people without disabilities, and 2) increase the earnings of people with disabilities so that it is comparable to people without disabilities.

There are three specific strategies that VRS played or will play an active role in:

- Promulgated changes to the State Rule governing Extended Employment, ending admissions to non-integrated and sub-minimum wage programs and shifting the state funding to integrated employment;
- Provide technical assistance to non-integrated employment programs to design new business models that lead to competitive employment in the most integrated setting; and
- Provide information about effective employment strategies, such as supported and customized employment, that make competitive employment possible for individuals with complex and significant disabilities.

VRS continues to clarify policy to ensure that all vocational rehabilitation services are provided in the most integrated setting appropriate for the person.

In Program Year 2018, VRS utilized \$1,744,003 in funding for innovation and expansion activities. This includes funding for the State Rehabilitation Council, salaries for rehabilitation specialists focused on service innovation and program evaluation, and state funds for the Minnesota Employment Center for Individuals who are Deaf/Hard of Hearing.

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

A rehabilitation technology specialist provides onsite assistive technology assistance to staff and consumers. He also coordinates with MDE to promote inclusion of assistive technology in transition plans. The specialist is supported by three regional liaisons and a local liaison on each VR team. Placement coordinators assist employers in using rehabilitation technology to resolve employment barriers. The VRS website has an assistive technology page with links to nationally recognized websites. VRS coordinates closely with the STAR Program which operates an equipment loan program that allows consumers to try the assistive technology for 30 days before VRS purchases the equipment.

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

VRS continues to expand services to people of color and indigenous people. The New Americans VRS office in St. Paul employs multi-lingual staff of East

African descent to provide outreach and services to recent immigrants, primarily from Somalia, who are not fluent in English. Other VRS offices hire bilingual staff as opportunities arise.

The current estimate is that 5.4 percent of the Minnesota adult population, or at least 203,540 adults, have serious mental illness. VRS collaborates with the DHS Adult Mental Health Division and with community partners to build supports and services for persons with serious mental illness (SMI), who in PY2018 comprised 30.7 % of the VR caseload and 36.8 % of employment outcomes. Individual Placement and Support (IPS) is the evidenced based practice of supported employment for persons with serious mental illness. IPS helps people in community mental health treatment services to become part of the competitive labor market. Research indicates that IPS is nearly three times more effective than other vocational approaches in helping people with mental illness to work competitively. Research also shows that people who obtain competitive employment through IPS have increased income, improved self-esteem, improved quality of life and reduced symptoms. Approximately half of the people who enroll in IPS become steady workers and remain competitively employed a decade later.

Historically, VRS provided state funding to the Minnesota Employment Center (MEC) for Individuals who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing, using an annual pass-through appropriation. VRS time limited services and MEC supported employment services have been closely coordinated to enhance employment opportunities for people who are deaf or have significant hearing loss. However, a legislative change in 2013 redirected the direct appropriation into a competitive grant pool. MEC has successfully competed for the available \$1,000,000 funding.

About 39 percent of VRS applicants receive SSA benefits. VRS worked closely with DHS to develop a Benefits Coaching Training and certification which focuses on providing essential, accurate information to VRS clients receiving SSI/SSDI benefits so they can make informed choices about their employment goals. DEED-VRS philosophy is deeply rooted in Employment First and that work will almost always financially benefit the person receiving SSA benefits AND that offering benefits coaching or planning prior to employment plan development as well as during the course of the individual's time working with VRS can result in individuals charting a course to get off of SSA benefits and earn a family sustaining wage.

SSA, VRS and State Services for the Blind have attended periodic meetings of the Employment Networks. In addition to providing in-service training, the meetings provide an opportunity to learn more about the services offered by each Employment Network to assist consumers make informed choices when selecting a vendor for employment services and/or on-going job retention services. The current focus of this group is to expand the use of Ticket to Work funding to provide ongoing job retention supports, to promote the use of

PASS Plans, and to ensure the continuation of benefits planning services as people transition from VRS services to job retention services.

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

VRS has a counselor assigned to each high school in the state to provide outreach and services to students who are eligible for the program. Starting the 2019-20 school year VRS changed its model for providing outreach and services to students who are potentially eligible from having contracted community agencies to now having internal Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) Rehabilitation Representatives who are assigned to each high school to ensure that Pre-ETS are available statewide. Counselors and Pre-ETS Representatives go into schools together to explain the two types of services available. Both counselors and Pre-ETS Representatives authorize for VR and/or Pre-ETS to be provided to students by agencies that contract with VRS, as needed.

Strategies to improve and expand services include the following:

- VRS will be monitoring the successes and challenges of the new Pre-ETS Representatives in order to provide enhancements as needed. Monthly meetings with the Pre-ETS Representatives and their managers will assist in sharing best practices and keeping a pulse on how things are progressing.
- VRS collaborates with MDE and DHS on a Minnesota Olmstead Plan strategy called the Employment Capacity Building Cohort (ECBC). In 2019-20 there are 25 school districts (along with their local VRS and county partners) participating. One goal is to improve competitive integrated employment outcomes for students with Developmental Cognitive Disabilities who are between the ages of 19-21. Another goal this year is to choose among one of the four strategies aimed at improving outcomes for all students with disabilities:
 - Quality transition planning within the Individualized Education Program (IEP) process
 - Family Engagement through Person Centered Planning processes
 - Embedding Customized Employment strategies into schools
 - Improving interagency business engagement strategies

The hope is to expand to more communities in the coming years.

- The Minnesota State Interagency Council (MnSIC) Interagency Person-Centered IEP pilot project focuses on coordinating the VRS employment plan and other interagency service providers' plans with the IEP in three school districts. A fidelity model is being tested with the hope to also expand this initiative to other communities in the coming years.

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

Program access to CRPs is monitored by reviewing compliance with CARF policies on program access, and by continuously monitoring the geographical coverage provided by the network of 60 CRPs. VRS has an active CRP Advisory Committee to assist in achievement of common goals. The Advisory Committee is also engaged in defining CRP quality measures that will support VRS' goals and priorities.

Minnesota Customized Employment: Beginning in 2018, VRS collaborated with community partners to develop a Customized Employment training curriculum that meets the training needs of Minnesota's disability employment professionals. Utilizing "The Essential Elements of Customized Employment" as its foundation, the MN-CE curriculum provides a framework of training and mentoring support offering students the opportunity to become competent practitioners of Customized Employment services following the conclusion of the MN-CE training. Additionally, the training provides clear, consistent information about CE to auditors, typically CE referral sources such as VRS Counselors, county case managers or families which is also key to the support and adoption of Customized Employment practices and demand. The training is person centered, consistent, and continuously available throughout the state. The goal is to help transform the disability employment system to support individuals with significant disabilities plan for a future that includes competitive, integrated employment. MN-CE curriculum is nationally accredited through the Association of Community Rehabilitation Educators (ACRE) and is the first CE curriculum approved by ACRE. It is also the first CE training that has been developed by a government entity.

Students: VRS continues to be a leader in Minnesota in promoting competitive, integrated employment for students with disabilities. Given the new role of providing pre-employment transition services to students, Minnesota has partnered on the state level with the Minnesota Department of Education and at the local level with local school districts to provide more students with access to the tools needed to be successful in competitive, integrated employment.

Community Partners: VRS continues to provide resources to community partners to improve their ability to provide supported employment services to students and individuals who may not have considered competitive, integrated employment in the past. Providing services and supports to these individuals

requires new and innovative approaches. Minnesota VRS continues to seek out and share those new and innovative approaches.

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

Performance, five-year trends, and specific strategies utilized to improve the agency's performance in meeting the evaluation standards and performance indicators, are included in Section (P).

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

CareerForce locations serve a significant number of people with disabilities beyond the customers served by VRS and SSB. However, the CareerForce locations need to articulate and better disseminate information about their program access. VRS provides consultation to the CareerForce Disability Employment Initiative (DEI) federal grant to serve youth in transition and adults.

The Governor's Workforce Development Board has established a committee to explore how the CareerForce locations can best serve individuals on the VRS waiting list.

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

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

Need for long-term supports:

DEED-VRS is actively working with the Medicaid Agency on ensuring that individuals on waivers receive long-term employment supports paid via the waiver. The Minnesota VR & Medicaid Waiver interagency work plan will make very clear to DEED-VRS staff, Lead Agency staff (Counties) and Community Rehabilitation Partners (Providers) that individuals on Medicaid Waivers get long-term supports and is funded via the Medicaid waiver. For individuals who do not have waivers, Extended Employment services are available to employees with disabilities with three functional limitations or more. Additionally, DEED-VRS will develop updated Supported Employment Training for staff to ensure that there is understanding regarding long-term employment funding supports. The training will make clear that if the VRS client requires long-term employment supports and they are unavailable, DEED-VRS will not proceed with writing an employment plan.

Need for active outreach to people of color and indigenous people to assure equal access:

Specific activities currently planned and already underway include:

- The New Americans Project: a team based in St. Paul consisting of multi-lingual immigrant staff whose mission is to provide employment related VR services to recent immigrants and refugees with disabilities. This project continues to grow and expand its reach every year since its inception in 2007.
- Creation of a new statewide American Indian Liaison position in 2020 specifically to do outreach and address the VR needs of Minnesota's large American Indian population – a population that has been historically underserved by VRS.
- Make all VRS informational materials (both in print and online) available in multiple languages to reach the growing population of Minnesotans with disabilities who use languages other than English.

Reaching underserved populations:

Individuals 65 and older:

VRS has seen a significant increase in the number of individuals 65 and older who are applying for and receiving VR services. There is no need to do additional outreach at this time.

Ex-offenders:

VRS has an Ex-Offender expert who serves as a single point of contact for VRS staff. He provides Ex-Offender Training on varying relevant topics to VRS teams, Business Engagement Networks, and to Community Rehabilitation Providers in the metro and greater Minnesota. Proposed activities to expand awareness of DEED-VRS services to Ex-Offenders could include the following:

1) Transition Coalition: Sponsored by Department of Corrections, this coalition meets on a monthly basis regionally (Metro, South, West and North) to share resources, training and create opportunities for ex-offenders transitioning from prison to the community.

2) Partner with "New Leaf" Career Force Presentations (Luis Brown Pena) to introduce DEED-VRS services for individuals accessing New Leaf training.

Serving individuals served through other components of the statewide workforce development system:

Serving Youth:

VRS is working to ensure that Pre-ETS are available statewide to students who are "potentially eligible" for services. VRS has a counselor assigned to each high school in the state to provide outreach and services to students who are eligible for the program. Starting the 2019-20 school year, VRS

changed its model for providing outreach and services to students who are potentially eligible from having contracted community agencies to now having internal Pre-ETS Rehabilitation Representatives who are assigned to each high school to ensure that Pre-ETS are available statewide. Counselors and Pre-ETS Representatives go into schools together to explain the two types of services available. Both counselors and Pre-ETS Representatives authorize for VR and/or Pre-ETS to be provided to students by agencies that contract with VRS, as needed.

B. Support innovation and expansion activities; and

Individual Placement and Supports: Minnesota has a state-funded appropriation which provides for Individual Placement and Support (IPS) programs for persons with serious and persistent mental illness. VRS and the DHS Mental Health Division collaborate on IPS projects to promote innovation in service delivery, including supported employment services, for this population.

Minnesota Customized Employment: Beginning in 2018, VRS collaborated with community partners to develop a nationally accredited Customized Employment Curriculum. It is the first CE training that has been developed by a government entity and accredited through the Association of Community Rehabilitation Educators (ACRE). The training is person centered, consistent, and continuously available throughout the state. The goal is to help transform the disability employment system to support individuals with significant disabilities plan for a future that includes competitive, integrated employment.

Virtual and Remote Services: VRS has begun to explore virtual and remote ways of interacting and providing services to VR participants outside of the traditional office setting. Online platforms for virtual meetings, social media platforms, and protocols for after-hours and non-office meetings are being developed, tested, and employed with promising results.

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

As a division within the Minnesota designated state agency, the Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED), VRS adheres to the DSA's equity goals. One of DEED's department-wide objectives in its strategic plan is to "reduce the disparities faced by populations with barriers to employment." To get there, DEED has created annual equity goals for every program area across DEED, focused on reducing disparities based on 1) race, 2) ability level, or 3) geography.

As the DSU, VRS has the following as its primary objective: Broaden the representation among applicants to VRS to ensure underrepresented Minnesotans with disabilities have access to VRS services. Key Result:

Increase the proportion of applicants to VRS from People of Color and Indigenous communities by 5% over last year.

Specific activities currently planned and already underway include:

- The New Americans Project: a team based in St. Paul consisting of multi-lingual immigrant staff whose mission is to provide employment related VR services to recent immigrants and refugees with disabilities. This project continues to grow and expand its reach every year since its inception in 2007.
- Creation of a new statewide American Indian Liaison position in 2020 specifically to do outreach and address the VR needs of Minnesota's large American Indian population – a population that has been historically underserved by VRS.
- Make all VRS informational materials (both in print and online) available in multiple languages to reach the growing population of Minnesotans with disabilities who use languages other than English.

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

Describe:

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

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

The State Rehabilitation Council and VRS are committed to a disciplined process for making decisions that shape and guide VRS as an organization. Consumers, stakeholders and VRS staff contributed insights over many months to the planning process, resulting in the five goals. A strategic planning process is never finished. Changing consumer needs, as reflected by the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment, program evaluation and ever-changing social, legal and economic circumstances, prompts an annual review of the goals and progress measures.

Goal 1: Increasing the number of Minnesotans with the most significant disabilities working in competitive, integrated employment

VRS and the VR community are committed to expanding job opportunities and improving employment outcomes for Minnesotans with the most significant disabilities.

Strategic Priorities

A. Increase consumer engagement and satisfaction

Action: Survey customer engagement and satisfaction after plan development and at case closure

Action: Conduct customer focus groups on an annual basis

Progress achieved: To increase consumer engagement and satisfaction, we have implemented statewide person-centered training and strategies.

To fully implement the WIOA mandated Pre-employment transition services statewide, VRS has significantly increased our staffing in the schools to engage potentially eligible students. This has enabled VR to engage students at a younger age and students with disabilities who would not have otherwise received services.

In 2017, DEED administered a randomized statewide participant satisfaction survey of Vocational Rehabilitation Services participants who had completed an individualized employment plan as part of their program activities. Funding did not allow for annual administration of the survey, which has high associated costs. We have also had significant turnover in our data unit and haven't had an opportunity to build out the department, which has delayed the ability to measure engagement and satisfaction.

B. Increase the number of employment outcomes

Metric: The number of successful employment outcomes per federal fiscal year

Progress achieved:

In Program year 2018, 2,605 VR participants obtained employment. Despite efforts, employment outcomes have decreased steadily since PY2015. Since the passage of WIOA, specifically the implementation of Section 511 requirements, individuals referred to VR have more significantly impacting disabilities. Individuals who may have previously been "tracked" into subminimum wage situations are now seeking competitive integrated employment through VR services. Minnesota continues to have three of four service categories closed on its order of selection.

C. Increase education, credentials, and skill gains

Action: Establish baselines for secondary and postsecondary credentials and for measurable skill gains

Metric: WIOA Common Performance Measure 4: The percentage of participants who obtained a recognized postsecondary credential or a

secondary school diploma, or its recognized equivalent during participation in or within 1 year after exit from the program

Metric: WIOA Common Performance Measure 5: The percentage of participants who are in an education or training program that leads to a recognized postsecondary credential or employment and who are achieving measurable skill gains

Progress achieved: The agency continues to develop strategies for measuring and recording credentials and skill gains. The case management system to record credentials and skill gains has been updated, and staff training to capture the data accurately has recently been completed.

D. Increase job retention

Action: Establish a job retention baseline

Metric: WIOA Common Performance Measure 1: The percentage of participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the second quarter after exit from the program

Metric: WIOA Common Performance Measure 2: The percentage of participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the fourth quarter after exit from the program

Metric: WIOA Common Performance Measure 3: Median earnings of participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the second quarter after exit from the program

Progress achieved: Data Element 392, Retention with the Same Employer in the Second Quarter and the Fourth Quarter – Fourth Quarter After Exit Quarter will become available for our review in PY19, as it is the first year that this data element is fully reportable in the RSA 911.

Goal 2: Increasing Pre-Employment Transition Services: VRS, schools, and the VR community will focus on increasing vocational exploration and work-based learning experiences for high school students with disabilities.

Strategic Priorities

A. Develop strategies to implement the Pre-ETS requirements stipulated in WIOA

Action: Track required and authorized services and monitor expenditures and fiscal impact

Progress achieved: VRS has delivered pre-employment transition services (Pre-ETS) through counseling staff (VR eligible persons) and

contracts (VR potentially eligible persons). An Employment Plan is developed, and services are tracked.

In 2019, VRS also hired Pre-ETS Rehabilitation Representatives, assigned to each of the 23 VRS teams, whose roles are to arrange for and provide Pre-ETS for students with disabilities who may be “potentially eligible.” Specifically, they conduct outreach to schools and recruit students for Pre-ETS services; identify student needs and provide Pre-ETS services to students; refer students to Pre-ETS contractors for Pre-ETS services, as needed; refer students for VR intensive services, as needed; implement Pre-ETS Coordination Services; and provide follow up with students, as needed.

B. Increase VRS outreach on the responsibilities under WIOA to provide pre-employment transition services for students with disabilities

Action: Develop and implement a WIOA pre-employment transition services communication and outreach plan designed for school staff.

Action: Track the number of schools with VRS time and expenditures devoted to WIOA required and authorized pre-employment transition services.

Progress achieved: Counseling staff have been assigned to every school district in the state, including private schools. Time spent providing Pre-ETS services is tracked through the statewide payroll accounting system. Within the statewide accounting system, there are designated account codes for Pre-ETS expenses. In addition, separate project codes are required to differentiate work hours between required activities and coordinating activities. VRS is currently not spending funds on authorized services.

Each month, program accounting staff run a budget report to determine the percentage of federal funds that have been spent on Pre-ETS activities.

C. Increase the number of work-based learning experiences prior to graduation for VR eligible students in high school

Action: Establish a baseline and track the number of VR students with paid and unpaid work-based learning experience prior to graduation.

Progress achieved: Service codes have been developed and implemented to track Pre-ETS purchased services.

Goal 3: Enhancing Organizational Vitality VRS will hire, develop and retain staff who will provide the best possible services to Minnesotans with the most significant disabilities.

Strategic Priorities

A. Develop staff skills and competencies in serving Minnesotans with the most significant disabilities

Action: Provide relevant training for VRS staff, including training on person-centered thinking and planning

Progress achieved: Person-Centered Thinking and Person-Centered Planning has been a top strategic goal since 2017. Staff are all trained in client centered practices. To further knowledge, skills and abilities in Person-Centered practices, a Community of Practice consisting of VRS staff was formed to create a culture of continuous improvement, construct processes, policy and guidance that are person-centered, and utilize online coursework available through the University of Minnesota for ongoing training.

Additional trainings provided to staff in the past two years included:

- Assessment of VR Needs Part 1
- Collaborative Discussions
- Common Performance Measures with a focus on Credentials
- Customized Employment Competency Review
- Disability Waiver 101
- Employment Plan
- Enhancing Everyday Resilience for Admin Staff
- Ethics
- Initial Interview
- Measurable Skills Gains
- Mental Health First Aid
- MI for Managers
- MN Customized Employment Training
- Motivational Interviewing (Intro and Refresher)
- Pre-ETS 511 Update
- Pre-ETS Modules
- Pre-ETS Reps Kick Off
- Purchasing Training
- Social Security Presumption and Verification
- Transition 101

- Understanding Autism and Autism 101
- Vehicle Modifications
- WF1 and Purchasing for Pre-ETS Reps
- The following trainings are in development:
- Case Documentation (January 2020)
- Common Performance Measures Review
- Data Practices
- Supported Employment
- Trial Work Review

B. Maintain a leadership development program for current and emerging leaders

Action: VRS will conduct a leadership development program for approximately 10-15 current and emerging leaders on a biannual basis

Action: VRS will evaluate the participant experience in the leadership development program to inform program design

Progress achieved: WIOA priorities have and still are driving our staff development initiatives.

C. Develop strategies for increasing the diversity and cultural competence of VRS staff

Action: Provide cultural competence training for VRS staff

Action: Develop strategies to increase diversity in staff hiring and retention

Progress achieved: All managers and supervisors completed training on Building an Inclusive Workplace offered through the Minnesota State Enterprise Learning Management office. DEED has implemented a monthly Diversity Spotlight series as part of the Governor's and DEED's initiative to create a more diverse and inclusive workforce, ODEO is hosting sessions on a variety of diversity topics that directly affect how we treat employees in the workplace and how we serve our customers through our programs.

In 2019, VRS finalized Day Two New Employee Orientation, Person-Centered Foundations with cultural competence components, and launched quarterly Warm Up Exercises for field staff. This is a series of exercises for managers to lead at each month's team meetings. There is a diversity exercise option in each quarter's exercises.

D. Strengthen organizational communication internally and with system partners

Action: Provide monthly VRS organizational updates to staff

Action: Communicate rationale for major policy and practice decisions internally and/or with system partners

Progress achieved: VRS utilizes a regularly featured communication on the internal SharePoint site to highlight changes to policy and practice, messages from the VRS Leadership Team, updates on training and staff development opportunities, and team profiles, etc.

Goal 4: Leveraging Partnerships

VRS will provide leadership in convening and strengthening system-wide collaborative partnerships that expand and fully use resources to serve Minnesotans with the most significant disabilities.

Strategic Priorities

A. Engage the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) for input and feedback on the vocational rehabilitation service delivery model for Minnesota

Action: The SRC works in partnership with the DSU to develop and review state goals and priorities and assists with the development of the State Plan and Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment

Action: The SRC produces an annual report, conducts public forums, and coordinates its activities with other councils

Action: The SRC provides input on substantive VR policy changes

Action: The SRC works collaboratively with the designated state agency to measure customer satisfaction

Progress achieved: The State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) provides ongoing input and recommendations to VRS.

B. Maintain and build our partnerships with community-based rehabilitation providers and advocacy organizations

Action: Continue to convene and leverage the VRS CRP Advisory Committee

Action: Convene statewide meetings of community partners on an annual basis

Action: Maintain collaborative agreements with the Centers for Independent Living (CILs)

Action: Collaborate with advocacy organizations to advance mutual agendas

Progress achieved: 2019 included discussions of service provider contracts and processing, strategies for providing pre-employment transition services, adapting to the changing VR landscape, Strategies for continued system transformation, DHS new Waiver Services discussion, WIOA Section 511, Developing and Retaining Placement Professionals

C. Expand our collaboration with other system partners to better align and fulfill the requirements of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and Minnesota's Olmstead Plan

Action: Expansion of key partnership work with DHS, MDE, the Olmstead Plan interagency efforts, counties, local school districts, and CareerForce Center System partners

Progress achieved: The Department of Employment and Economic Development is active on the Governor's subcabinet to implement the Olmstead Plan that was approved by the U.S. District Court on September 29, 2015. VRS has developed a memorandum of understanding with DHS and MDE on how to better coordinate WIOA services and to develop a federal waiver request to use Medicaid funding for long-term supports.

D. Expand access to ongoing employment supports through county, state and federal programs

Action: Partner with DHS, counties, and Medicaid providers to increase resources for support of integrated, competitive employment

Action: Partner with VRS Extended Employment (EE) providers to transition and increase state resources for support of integrated, competitive employment

Progress achieved: VRS worked closely with DHS to develop a federal waiver request to use Medicaid funding for long-term supports. Additionally, the Extended Employment program rewrote the EE rule to shift funding from segregated employment to competitive integrated employment with supports. The new rule took effect in February 2019.

Goal 5: Engaging Employers

VRS and the VR community will continue to embrace employers as key customers, resulting in increased employment outcomes for Minnesotans with disabilities

Strategic Priorities

A. Develop a robust system to assist VRS staff in matching qualified VR job seekers with competitive, integrated employment opportunities. Leverage the Workforce One case management and/or Minnesota's internet-based labor exchange system rewrite initiatives to fund, develop, and implement the system

Action: Secure approval and resources for a VR client talent pool structural framework as part of future application development priorities for the WorkForce One system and/or other Minnesota systems

Progress achieved: Minnesota's electronic case management system now includes Talent Pool search tools. VRS counselors and placement staff can input key information that can be used to identify job seekers looking for work in specific sectors or regions in the state and the specific training they have that employers are seeking.

B. Develop and implement Low Risk Hiring and Retention options designed to increase employment outcomes and workforce diversity

Action: Track participation and employment outcomes in low risk hiring and retention options on a quarterly basis. Options are anticipated to include On the Job Training, Job Try Outs, Internships, Connect 700 Program, and Schedule A hiring

Action: Create and deliver training designed to help employers identify, develop and sustain natural workplace supports for employees with disabilities

Progress achieved: DEED-VRS has policy and guidance, including definitions, for On the Job Work & Training Options. These options include Job Shadows, Employer Tours, Internship, On the Job Training, and Job Try Out. Policy, Guidance and Training for the On the Job Work and Training Options have been provided to VRS staff and webinars will support the training of Community Partners.

C. VRS will lead and convene Placement Partnerships focused on developing, maintaining and strengthening relationships among VRS, VR Community Partners and Employers

Action: The VRS Placement Specialist team will develop and disseminate a quarterly report on the major activities and outcomes for active placement partnerships

Action: Work with partners to implement WIOA Common Performance Measure 6 focused on effectiveness in serving employers

Progress achieved: Minnesota has developed Business Engagement Networks throughout the state to provide a single point of contact for employers and to enhance the skills of placement professionals. In addition to the single point of contact approach for employers, Business Engagement Networks host opportunities to connect employers and qualified job seekers and reflect employer needs and interests from urban, metro and rural areas. In addition to supporting joint training to maintain qualified staff, the placement partnerships share job leads, host job fairs and other community events.

Minnesota Customized Employment training is developed and is now ACRE certified. This training includes hands-on learning opportunities for Discovery Assessment and Job Development portions of Customized Employment. Each participant also receives mentoring from VRS & CRP staff who are certified by one of the key CE training entities that provide certification. The goal of this Customized Employment Training is to assist placement professionals to develop an understanding of CE and demonstrate proficiency in providing Discovery and Job Development. The training is also essential for Program Managers and Rehabilitation Area Managers who supervise staff who are providing CE services.

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

Significant progress was made on most of the goals and priorities from the most recently approved State Plan. The strategic goals were updated in April 2018 but not submitted to RSA as an amendment to the State Plan. Uncertain funding was a contributing factor in completing all of the goals. We also had to reconsider some of the regulations because of early misunderstanding or misinterpretation. VRS leadership transitions between fall 2018 and fall 2019 were also factors that impeded the achievement of the goals and priorities.

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

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

Goal: Under the designated state unit's strategic goal for effective partnerships, VRS will continue to facilitate a statewide planning collaboration to better understand Minnesota's supported employment needs, revise the VRS-EE State Rule to shift more state dollars to integrated competitive supported employment work sites, address current service capacity and gaps, particularly those related to the development needs of community rehabilitation programs, the needs of transition-age youths, and the needs of underserved populations

VRS and DHS continue to work collaboratively to sequence VR, Extended Employment, Medicaid waiver and County dollars to serve more people in need of long-term supports.

The Memorandum of Understanding developed between VRS and the Medicaid agency made clear that LEAs and VRS are responsible for providing services while students are still in school.

Minnesota revised the rule that governs the Extended Employment program in Minnesota to prioritize providing supports to individuals working in competitive, integrated employment. The primary strategy used to make this successful was to engage stakeholders in developing the transition to the new model. An advisory committee including individuals representing DEED, Community Rehabilitation Providers (CRPs), advocacy organizations for individuals with disabilities, DHS, and counties was established to identify and consider policy issues and opportunities impacting individuals who receive EE services and EE providers.

VRS has provided clear revised guidance and policy, along with training, so counselors can utilize the option to provide extended services to youth, per requirements under 363.4(2).

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

There were challenges at the state level in trying to carry out conflicting Federal regulations between VR and the Medicaid agency. Changes in agency leadership also contributed to loss of momentum and focus.

Beginning more than 20 years ago, Minnesota built an ecosystem of day treatment and habilitation (DT&H) centers, which use sub-minimum wage as their business model. Very few of these agencies have transformed, resulting in a great deal of resistance from providers and family members in the transition from sub-minimum wage environments to competitive integrated employment.

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

The following performance accountability factors are based on Program Year 2018 and includes only employment that was reported to Minnesota Wage Detail. VRS does not currently have access to wage detail for people employed by the federal government, placed in employment in other states, or individuals employed by employers not required to report wages.

- The percentage of program participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the second quarter after exit from the program: 55.8%
- The percentage of program participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the fourth quarter after exit from the program: This measure is based on Q4, or 1 year after exit and will be reported in PY19 per federal guidelines.
- The median earnings of program participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the second quarter after exit from the program: Quarterly median earnings was \$3,079.

- The percentage of program participants who obtain a recognized postsecondary credential, or a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent, during participation in or within 1 year after exit from the program: This measure is based on Q4, or 1 year after exit and will be reported in PY19 per federal guidelines.
- The percentage of program participants who, during a program year, are in an education or training program that leads to a recognized postsecondary credential or employment and who are achieving measurable skill gains toward such credential or employment: Counselors work with each person to develop a plan that includes individualized services of which postsecondary and vocational training services are provided when needed. Training can include traditional degree programs such as AA, BA, BS, etc. and also may include other training opportunities such as OJT, continuing education, apprenticeships, etc. In PY18, the MSG rate was 35%.
- The indicators of effectiveness in serving employers: VRS reports to our Title I and III partners who are responsible for the joint report on Effectiveness Serving Employers to USDOL. Joint state measures include “Retention with the Same Employer” and “Employer Penetration Rate”.

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

About 3.5 percent of Minnesota’s VR appropriation in Program Year 2018 (\$1,764,003) was used for innovation and expansion activities to improve and increase services to historically underserved populations with the most severe disabilities. These activities represent program response to identified need.

Minnesota Customized Employment: Beginning in 2018, VRS collaborated with community partners to develop a Customized Employment training curriculum that meets the training needs of Minnesota’s disability employment professionals. Utilizing “The Essential Elements of Customized Employment” as its foundation, the MN-CE curriculum provides a framework of training and mentoring support offering students the opportunity to become competent practitioners of Customized Employment services following the conclusion of the MN-CE training. Additionally, the training provides clear, consistent information about CE to auditors, typically CE referral sources such as VRS Counselors, county case managers or families which is also key to the support and adoption of Customized Employment practices and demand. The training is person centered, consistent, and continuously available throughout the state. The goal is to help transform the disability employment system to support individuals with significant disabilities plan for a future that includes competitive, integrated employment. MN-CE curriculum is nationally accredited through the Association of Community Rehabilitation Educators

(ACRE) and is the first CE curriculum approved by ACRE. It is also the first CE training that has been developed by a government entity.

State Rehabilitation Council: Ten monthly meetings of the SRC, committee meetings, and public forums are where council members carry out their consultative and participative roles in the work of VRS. Primary contributions are annual participation in development of the VR Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment and State Plan; study of consumer satisfaction, VRS strategic planning, and review of the policies and practices that guide the delivery of services.

Statewide Independent Living Council: VRS staff provide support for SILC activities, VR funding supports communications, printing, postage, etc. for SILC operations and activities.

Persons with Mental Illness: Collaborative activity at state and local levels between VRS, DHS Mental Health Division, and community partners continues to build supports and services for persons with serious mental illness (SMI), who in Program Year 2018 comprised 32% percent of the VR program's total caseload and 33.5 percent of employment outcomes. Innovative projects developed with dedicated state funds are increasing the quality of services and outcomes for this population in urban and rural Minnesota.

SSDI and SSI Beneficiaries: Ticket-to-Work funding is used to supplement Supported Employment funding or to provide continued job retention services beyond the 90 days VRS typically provides.

Rehabilitation Technology: Rehabilitation technology, also referred to as assistive technology, enhances employment outcomes, leading to better employment outcomes including higher paying jobs. VRS continues to provide training and coaching to increase the use of rehabilitation technology by both experienced and new staff. Implementation of the VR Rehabilitation Technology Services Plan has involved widespread staff participation, brought focus to rehabilitation technology activity, and honored the work of VR program counselors serving as a technology liaison to their own VR teams.

Minorities with Most Significant Disabilities: State demographic data indicates Minnesota's populations of people of color are growing at a much higher rate than the white, non-Hispanic population. Minnesota has the largest Somali refugee population in the United States. The New Americans office in St. Paul specializes in addressing the needs of Somali and other East African immigrants who lack fluency in English. Since its inception in 2007, the New Americans Project has served over 240 participants.

VECTOR Youth Project for Deaf/Deaf Blind: Enhanced transition services for youth who are deaf, hard of hearing, or deaf blind in Minnesota supported primarily by school district funding and supplemented with \$315,000 in VRS managed state funding. Enhanced services include work readiness classes, college preparation classes, driver's education, community-based work

experiences, and paid internships in competitive employment. For students who transition to college, high school instructors work with the college for the first semester to make sure all needed accommodations are in place and the person is making adequate progress. Ninety percent of VECTOR students are either working or enrolled in college at time of high school graduation.

Minnesota Employment Center (MEC): a unique collaborative program that is supported by two Community Rehabilitation Programs, provides ongoing supported employment services statewide. These services are funded through a grant supported by state legislative dollars and are offered only to people who are deaf, hard of hearing or deaf blind. Currently housed in five different cities and staffed by people fluent in American Sign Language (ASL), this program has provided services for over twenty years. Services aim to help people who are deaf, hard of hearing or deaf blind retain their jobs and secure advancement in competitive employment settings. MEC also provides education and training for employers in how to support their employees who are deaf, hard of hearing or deaf blind.

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

Include the following:

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

Supported employment services promote the integration of people with the most significant disabilities into the Minnesota workplace. The use of funds from Title VI Part B of the Rehabilitation Act initially allowed for expansion of supported employment services and outcomes. Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VRS) continues to work cooperatively with consumers, family members, advocates, employers, service providers and State, county, and local agencies to improve and expand the use of supported employment services statewide.

The state's major challenge regarding supported employment is one of consumer access to extended ongoing supports when they are needed. Agency structures and funding systems for extended support are governed by myriad federal and State laws and rules, each governing a specific piece of the categorical funding available to people with disabilities.

The agency's coordination of vocational rehabilitation services with its extended employment services contributes significantly to the quality, scope, and effectiveness of the State's overall Supported Employment efforts. When developing a customer's employment plan, the consumer and VR counselor

identify the time-limited services to be provided by VRS, the expected ongoing supports needed, and the source of those supports. This may include natural supports. VRS is a partner in several state level agreements that facilitate provision of these services.

Vocational Rehabilitation Supported Employment

Minnesota's PY 2018 award for Title VI, Part B Supported Employment was \$246,000. VRS uses all federal funds authorized under Title VI, Part B in addition to Title I funds to purchase services for supported employment for individuals on a fee for service basis. Approximately 2,750 vocational rehabilitation consumers were served in PY 2018 with both Title I and Title VI, Part B funds. Local Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors purchase needed services for those consumers with a vocational goal that requires ongoing supports. Supported employment expenditures are administered and tracked separately in accordance with federal requirements.

Minnesota's Medicaid Agency

DEED-VRS/SSB has entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the DHS Disability Services Division (DHS-DSD) as of September 23, 2019. As part of the MOU, DHS-DSD is the primary payer for ongoing supports to maintain employment.

As highlighted in the MOU, DEED & DHS have agreed to "work together to align our systems so that common customers who receive home and community-based service (HCBS) disability waivers and vocational rehabilitation services (VRS) from DEED-VRS or SSB get seamless and timely supports to make informed choices and meet competitive integrated employment goals." DEED & DHS have developed a work plan that will guide our work in preparing for MOU implementation which is due to occur July, 2021. In advance of MOU implementation, DEED & DHS utilize DHS' Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) Waiver for Employment Services Interim Guidance. In regards to Supported Employment funding, the Interim Guidance states: IDEA and VRS/SSB do not provide ongoing support services beyond job stabilization services. The lead agency can authorize employment support services for people on a waiver who need ongoing supports to maintain employment."

Minnesota's Extended Employment Program

Minnesota has a unique state-only funding appropriation to providing ongoing employment supports to individuals with disabilities called the Extended Employment program. VRS, through this state-funded Extended Employment program, provides ongoing work supports to approximately 3,500 individuals.. Many of these individuals received time-limited vocational rehabilitation services prior to entering supported employment.

Minnesota's Funding for Individual Placement and Support Projects

Minnesota also has a separate state-only funding appropriation which provides for Individual Placement and Support programs for persons with serious and persistent mental illness. VRS and the DHS Mental Health Division collaborate on Individual Placement and Support (IPS) projects to promote innovation in service delivery, including supported employment services, for this population. The projects are designed to provide functional assessment, individualized career planning, job skill acquisition, job placement, job development, and non-time-limited supports necessary to maintain and advance in employment. All recipients of grants under these projects are required to demonstrate collaboration with counties, the local community support program, VRS, and providers of employment services such as CRPs, regional treatment centers, and community mental health centers.

2. The timing of transition to extended services

The timing of the transition to extended services is highly individualized based on the needs of the person. The need for extended services is usually identified during the assessment of VR needs, and the consumer makes an informed choice of vendor for long term supports as a part of Individualized Plan for Employment development. However, the need can be identified at any point in time, and the plan can be amended. The consumer will frequently select the same vendor to serve as their placement provider and extended services provider to reduce the stress of changing providers.

The transition to extended services typically starts when training is completed and the person has stabilized on the job for 60 days. Both VR and the Extended Services provider provides joint services for at least 30 days to ensure the transition has been successful. As needed, VR can continue supports for a period of up to 24 months for individuals with the most significant disabilities eligible for supported employment services, and extended services may be funded for youth with the most significant disabilities for a period of up to four years or until the youth turns 25 years old following the provision of supported employment services (34 C.F.R. § 361.5(c)(18) and 34 C.F.R. § 363.4(a)(2)). If the person becomes ready for job promotion VR may re-engage to provide additional training to ensure the person's success in their career-laddering efforts.

Vocational Rehabilitation (Combined or General) Certifications

States must provide written and signed certifications that:

- 1. The (enter the name of designated State agency or designated State unit, as appropriate,) is authorized to submit the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan under title I of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Rehabilitation Act), as**

amended by WIOA[14], and its supplement under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act[15];

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

Department of Employment and Economic Development, DEED

- 2. As a condition for the receipt of Federal funds under title I of the Rehabilitation Act for the provision of VR services, the (enter the name of designated State agency)[16] agrees to operate and administer the State VR Services Program in accordance with the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan[17] , the Rehabilitation Act, and all applicable regulations[18] , policies, and procedures established by the Secretary of Education. Funds made available under section 111 of the Rehabilitation Act are used solely for the provision of VR services and the administration of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan;**

Enter the name of designated State agency

Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VRS)

- 3. As a condition for the receipt of Federal funds under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act for supported employment services, the designated State agency agrees to operate and administer the State Supported Employment Services Program in accordance with the supplement to the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan[19] , the Rehabilitation Act, and all applicable regulations[20] , policies, and procedures established by the Secretary of Education. Funds made available under title VI are used solely for the provision of supported employment services and the administration of the supplement to the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan;**
- 4. The designated State agency and/or the designated State unit has the authority under State law to perform the functions of the State regarding the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement;**

- 5. The State legally may carry out each provision of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement.**
- 6. All provisions of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement are consistent with State law.**
- 7. The (enter the name of authorized representative below) has the authority under State law to receive, hold, and disburse Federal funds made available under the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement;**

Enter the name of authorized representative below

Dee Torgerson

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

Enter the title of authorized representative below

Director, Vocational Rehabilitation Services

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

Footnotes

[14] Public Law 113-128.

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

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

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

[18] Applicable regulations, in part, include the Education Department General Administrative Regulations (EDGAR) in 34 CFR parts 76, 77, 79, 81, and 82; 2 CFR

part 200 as adopted by 2 CFR part 3474; and the State VR Services program regulations.

[19] No funds under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act may be awarded without an approved supported employment supplement to the VR services portion of

the Unified or Combined State Plan in accordance with section 606(a) of the Rehabilitation Act.

[20] Applicable regulations, in part, include the citations in footnote 6.

Certification Signature

Signatory information	TEST
Name of Signatory	Dee Torgerson
Title of Signatory	Director, Vocational Rehabilitation Services
Date Signed	2/25/2020

Assurances

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

The State Plan must include	Include
1. Public Comment on Policies and Procedures: The designated State agency assures it will comply with all statutory and regulatory requirements for public participation in the VR Services Portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan, as required by section 101(a)(16)(A) of the Rehabilitation Act.	
2. Submission of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and Its Supplement: The designated State unit assures it will comply with all requirements pertaining to the submission and revisions of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement for the State Supported Employment Services program, as required by sections 101(a)(1), (22), (23), and 606(a) of the Rehabilitation Act; section 102 of WIOA in the case of the submission of a unified plan; section 103 of WIOA in the case of a submission of a Combined State Plan; 34 CFR 76.140.	
3. The designated State agency or designated State unit, as appropriate, assures it will comply with the requirements related to: Administration of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan:	
3.a. The establishment of the designated State agency and designated State unit, as required by section 101(a)(2) of the Rehabilitation Act	
3.b. The establishment of either a State independent commission or State Rehabilitation Council, as required by section 101(a)(21) of the Rehabilitation Act. The designated State agency or designated State unit, as applicable (A or B must be selected):	
3.b.(A) "is an independent State commission" (Yes/No)	No
3.b.(B) "has established a State Rehabilitation Council" (Yes/No)	Yes
3.c. Consultations regarding the administration of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan, in accordance with section 101(a)(16)(B) of the Rehabilitation Act	
3.d. The financial participation by the State, or if the State so elects, by the State and local agencies, to provide the amount of the non-Federal share of the cost of carrying out the VR program in accordance with section 101(a)(3)	
3.e. The local administration of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan, in accordance with section 101(a)(2)(A) of the Rehabilitation Act. Select yes or no, as appropriate, to identify if the designated State agency allows for the local administration of VR funds (Yes/No)	No

3.f. The shared funding and administration of joint programs, in accordance with section 101(a)(2)(A)(ii) of the Rehabilitation Act. Select yes or no, as appropriate, to identify if the designated State agency allows for the shared funding and administration of joint programs (Yes/No)	No
3.g. Statewideness and waivers of statewideness requirements, as set forth in section 101(a)(4) of the Rehabilitation Act. Is the designated State agency requesting or maintaining a waiver of statewideness for one or more services provided under the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan? (Yes/No) See Section 2 of this VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan	No
3.h. The descriptions for cooperation, collaboration, and coordination, as required by sections 101(a)(11) and (24)(B); and 606(b) of the Rehabilitation Act	
3.i. All required methods of administration, as required by section 101(a)(6) of the Rehabilitation Act	
3.j. The requirements for the comprehensive system of personnel development, as set forth in section 101(a)(7) of the Rehabilitation Act	
3.k. The compilation and submission to the Commissioner of statewide assessments, estimates, State goals and priorities, strategies, and progress reports, as appropriate, and as required by sections 101(a)(15), 105(c)(2), and 606(b)(8) of the Rehabilitation Act	
3.l. The reservation and use of a portion of the funds allotted to the State under section 110 of the Rehabilitation Act for the development and implementation of innovative approaches to expand and improve the provision of VR services to individuals with disabilities, particularly individuals with the most significant disabilities	
3.m. The submission of reports as required by section 101(a)(10) of the Rehabilitation Act	
4. Administration of the Provision of VR Services: The designated State agency, or designated State unit, as appropriate, assures that it will:	
4.a. Comply with all requirements regarding information and referral services in accordance with sections 101(a)(5)(D) and (20) of the Rehabilitation Act	
4.b. Impose no duration of residence requirement as part of determining an individual's eligibility for VR services or that excludes from services under the plan any individual who is present in the State in accordance with section 101(a)(12) of the Rehabilitation Act	
4.c. Provide the full range of services listed in section 103(a) of the Rehabilitation Act as appropriate, to all eligible individuals with disabilities in the State who apply for services in accordance with section 101(a)(5) of the Rehabilitation Act? (Yes/No)	No
4.d. Determine whether comparable services and benefits are available to the individual in accordance with section 101(a)(8) of the Rehabilitation Act	
4.e. Comply with requirements regarding the provisions of informed choice for all applicants and eligible individuals in accordance with section 102(d) of the Rehabilitation Act	
4.f. Comply with requirements regarding the provisions of informed choice for all applicants and eligible individuals in accordance with section 102(d) of the Rehabilitation Act	
4.g. Provide vocational rehabilitation services to American Indians who are individuals with disabilities residing in the State, in accordance with section 101(a)(13) of the Rehabilitation Act	
4.h. Comply with the requirements for the conduct of semiannual or annual reviews, as appropriate, for individuals employed either in an extended employment setting in a community rehabilitation program or any other employment under section 14(c) of the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, as required by section 101(a)(14) of the Rehabilitation Act	
4.i. Meet the requirements in sections 101(a)(17) and 103(b)(2) of the Rehabilitation Act if the State elects to construct, under special circumstances, facilities for community rehabilitation programs	
4.j. With respect to students with disabilities, the State,	
4.j.i. Has developed and will implement,	
4.j.i.I. Strategies to address the needs identified in the assessments; and	
4.j.i.II. Strategies to achieve the goals and priorities identified by the State, to improve and expand vocational rehabilitation services for students with disabilities on a statewide basis; and	

4.j.ii. Has developed and will implement strategies to provide pre-employment transition services (sections 101(a)(15) and 101(a)(25))	
5. Program Administration for the Supported Employment Title VI Supplement:	
5.a. The designated State unit assures that it will include in the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan all information required by section 606 of the Rehabilitation Act	
5.b. The designated State agency assures that it will submit reports in such form and in accordance with such procedures as the Commissioner may require and collects the information required by section 101(a)(10) of the Rehabilitation Act separately for individuals receiving supported employment services under title I and individuals receiving supported employment services under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act	
5.c. The designated state unit will coordinate activities with any other State agency that is functioning as an employment network under the Ticket to Work and Self-Sufficiency program under Section 1148 of the Social Security Act	
6. Financial Administration of the Supported Employment Program:	
6.a. The designated State agency assures that it will expend no more than 2.5 percent of the State's allotment under title VI for administrative costs of carrying out this program; and, the designated State agency or agencies will provide, directly or indirectly through public or private entities, non-Federal contributions in an amount that is not less than 10 percent of the costs of carrying out supported employment services provided to youth with the most significant disabilities with the funds reserved for such purpose under section 603(d) of the Rehabilitation Act, in accordance with section 606(b)(7)(G) and (H) of the Rehabilitation Act	
6.b. The designated State agency assures that it will use funds made available under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act only to provide supported employment services to individuals with the most significant disabilities, including extended services to youth with the most significant disabilities, who are eligible to receive such services; and, that such funds are used only to supplement and not supplant the funds provided under Title I of the Rehabilitation Act, when providing supported employment services specified in the individualized plan for employment, in accordance with section 606(b)(7)(A) and (D), of the Rehabilitation Act	
7. Provision of Supported Employment Services:	Yes
7.a. The Designated State Agency Assures That it Will Provide Supported Employment Services as Defined in Section 7(39) of the Rehabilitation Act	
7.b. The designated State agency assures that:	
7.b.i. The comprehensive assessment of individuals with significant disabilities conducted under section 102(b)(1) of the Rehabilitation Act and funded under title I of the Rehabilitation Act includes consideration of supported employment as an appropriate employment outcome, in accordance with the requirements of section 606(b)(7)(B) of the Rehabilitation Act	
7.b.ii. An individualized plan for employment that meets the requirements of section 102(b) of the Rehabilitation Act, which is developed and updated with title I funds, in accordance with sections 102(b)(3)(F) and 606(b)(6)(C) and (E) of the Rehabilitation Act	

Vocational Rehabilitation Program (Combined or General) Performance Indicators

Performance Goals for the Core Programs

Each state submitting a Unified or Combined State Plan is required to identify expected levels of performance for each of the primary indicators of performance for the first two years covered by the plan. The state is required to reach agreement with the Secretary of Labor, in conjunction with the Secretary of Education, on state-negotiated levels of performance for the indicators for each of the first two years of the plan.

For Program Year (PY) 2016-2019 plans, the Departments used the transition authority under section 503(a) of WIOA to designate certain primary indicators of performance as “baseline” indicators to ensure an orderly transition from the requirements of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 to those under WIOA. A “baseline” indicator was one for which states did not propose an expected level of performance and did not come to agreement with the Departments on negotiated levels of performance because sufficient data was not available to establish such performance levels. As a result, “baseline” indicators were not used in the end of the year adjustment of performance levels and were not used to determine failure to meet adjusted levels of performance for purposes of sanctions. The Departments designated indicators as “baseline” based on the likelihood of a State having insufficient data with which to make a reasonable determination of an expected level of performance.

For PYs 2020-2023 Plans, Title I programs (Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth) and the Title II program (Adult Education and Family Literacy Act) will have two full years of data available to make reasonable determinations of expected levels of performance for the following indicators for PY 2020 and PY 2021:

- Employment (Second Quarter after Exit);
- Employment (Fourth Quarter after Exit);
- Median Earnings (Second Quarter after Exit);
- Credential Attainment Rate; and
- Measurable Skill Gains

The Wagner-Peyser Act Employment Service program, authorized under the Wagner-Peyser Act, as amended by title III of WIOA, will have two full years of data available to make a reasonable determination of expected levels of performance for the following indicators for PY 2020 and PY 2021:

- Employment (Second Quarter after Exit);
- Employment (Fourth Quarter after Exit); and
- Median Earnings (Second Quarter after Exit)

The Credential Attainment Rate and Measurable Skill Gains indicators do not apply to the Wagner-Peyser Act Employment Service program; therefore, this program will not submit expected levels of performance for these indicators.

For the first two years of PYs 2020-2023 Plans, the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program, authorized under title I of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended by title IV of WIOA, will have two full years of data available for the Measurable Skill Gains indicator only. Therefore, the Departments will designate the following indicators as “baseline” for the VR program for PY 2020 and PY 2021:

- Employment (Second Quarter after Exit);

- Employment (Fourth Quarter after Exit);
- Median Earnings (Second Quarter after Exit); and
- Credential Attainment Rate

VR agencies must continue to collect and report on all indicators, including those that have been designated as “baseline, pursuant to section 116(d) of WIOA.” The actual performance data reported by these programs for indicators designated as “baseline” for PY 2020 and PY 2021 will serve as baseline data in future years. The Departments will require VR agencies to submit expected levels of performance for these indicators for PY 2022 and PY 2023.

The Departments determined that the Effectiveness in Serving Employers indicator will be measured as a shared outcome across all six core programs within each state to ensure a holistic approach to serving employers. The Departments will continue piloting approaches for measuring this indicator for the first two years of PY 2020-2023 plans. Therefore, states are not required to submit an expected level of performance for the Effectiveness in Serving Employers indicator for PY 2020 and PY 2021. However, core programs are expected to collect data and report on this indicator for PY 2020 and PY 2021 as they did for PYs 2016-2019 plans.

Each core program must submit an expected level of performance for all of the other indicators, as applicable, with the exception of the four indicators designated as “baseline” for the VR program in PY 2020 and PY 2021. The Departments will work with states during the negotiation process to establish negotiated levels of performance for each of the primary indicators for the core programs not listed as “baseline.” Each state must update its plan to include the agreed-upon negotiated levels of performance before the Departments approve a state’s plan.

States may identify additional indicators in the plan, including additional approaches to measuring Effectiveness in Serving Employers, and may establish levels of performance for each of the state indicators. Please identify any such state indicators under Additional Indicators of Performance.

Performance Indicators	PY 2020 Expected Level	PY 2020 Negotiated Level	PY 2021 Expected Level	PY 2021 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline
Credential Attainment Rate	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline
Measurable Skill Gains	30.0%	30.0%	31.0%	31.0%
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹

“Effectiveness in Serving Employers” is still being piloted and this data will not be entered for 2020 State Plans.