

IX. PROGRAM-SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS FOR CORE PROGRAMS – VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION

(a) Input of State Rehabilitation Council

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The Florida Rehabilitation Council (FRC) is pleased to be a strategic partner with Vocational Rehabilitation. The FRC promotes high standards and expectations for every area of service delivery by recommending best practices in policies using data-driven recommendations and by sharing each council member's unique perspective from the constituency they represent.

The FRC is equally concerned, as is the agency, with staff retention and turnover. The current high level of turnover has serious and significant impacts on the clients being served as well as staff. For Florida to have a state-of-the-art program of services for individuals with disabilities, actions should be taken to, at minimum, achieve parity with national salaries. Action is needed by policymakers who can approve budgetary authority so that VR can be competitive in recruiting, hiring and retaining staff.

The FRC appreciates the vision that the leadership of VR continues to bring to the agency. The FRC is ready to meet the challenges with VR as a partner.

State Rehabilitation Council Recommendations

The FRC offers the following recommendations to enhance service delivery and career achievement by individuals with disabilities.

Recommendation 1. Deaf and Hard of Hearing

- Focus on retention and recruitment of qualified American Sign Language interpreters to meet the ongoing need of customers who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Agency Response:

- VR agrees with this assessment and recommendation and will continue to report on progress.

In recent years, VR has:

- Elevated deaf, hard of hearing and deaf-blind services to a specific unit, rather than as part of the general VR policy team.
- Moved Deaf, Hard of Hearing and Deaf-blind Business Unit to the Bureau of Field Services to strengthen the connection between the technical assistance and coordination services the unit provides and the field staff who deliver the services, thus increasing the capacity of all field staff.
- Recognizing that one of the main barriers to serving individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing or deaf-blind is the lack of qualified sign language interpreters, and the difficulty in retaining staff interpreters, VR maintains a contract with ServiceSource to increase the number of staff interpreters who are available. This contract initially added nine interpreters in geographic areas of need identified by field staff. Since implementation, the number of interpreters has increased to 11, in recognition of the need across the state. VR staff members who are qualified interpreters are eligible for salary enhancements during the hiring process or if they obtain

credentials while employed by VR. To the extent this has not been sufficient, the ServiceSource contract continues to expand capacity further.

Recommendation 2. Counselor Recruitment, Retention

- The FRC strongly recommends consideration of additional, immediate pay increases/incentives and non-pay incentives to meet or exceed the national average for Certified Rehabilitation Counselors currently hired or working to attain the credential and upon recruitment of Certified Rehabilitation Counselors. The FRC believes this is a critical need to stabilize the VR workforce.

Agency Response:

- VR agrees with all aspects of the Counselor Recruitment and Retention recommendation and remains committed to stabilizing the VR workforce.

Recommendation 3. Transition

- Continue to promote early contact and assistance to all students with disabilities under an Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) or a 504 Plan.
- Continue to expand and offer career paths to include vocational exploration, technical training, apprenticeships and post-secondary options for transition students.
- Continue to emphasize peer mentoring in Florida, especially to underserved groups who are deaf and/or hard of hearing. Assure that there is a network of proficient providers and supports for those providers, including those working with individuals who are deaf.
- FRC encourages VR to create collaborative partnerships with state and community colleges to share resources that create access points to help potential and current customers to find and access resources.

Agency Response:

- VR has many pilot projects and initiatives anticipated to create additional training and employment opportunities for students and youth. There are 35 public school districts and 15 charter schools currently participating in the Work-Based Learning Experience (WBLE) as a provider for VR.
- The current caseload of VR customers is 51% youth aged 14-21. This demonstrates the intentional focus the agency has on the youth population.

Recommendation 4. Job Placement Strategies

- Continue to analyze and identify any trends in services provided under the rehabilitation engineering service category by service type and VR area.
- Continue strengthening efforts with business leaders to improve employment opportunities and meaningful careers, including increasing partnerships with local Chambers of Commerce.
- Remain focused on customer strengths and develop tools to communicate effectively and succinctly to potential employers.
- Continue to evaluate the effectiveness of the Abilities Work Help Desk and provide regular reports to the FRC.
- Further build capacity for job customization and innovation and expansion projects to include unserved and underserved populations.
- Evaluate self-employment services across the board to include the evaluation of the Certified Business Technical Assistance Consultant model. Consider ways to streamline and expedite the provision of self-employment services.
- Monitor and support the new partnership between the Able Trust and Small Business Development Centers to enhance engagement with individuals with disabilities.

Agency Response:

- VR will continue to provide rehabilitation technology service data to FRC and will provide regular updates.
- VR will continue to evaluate self-employment services and the current Certified Business Technical Assistance Consultant model.
- VR has made great efforts to increase the number of providers for Discovery, Customized Employment. VR will continue to provide frequent training to increase the number of providers certified to offer these services.
- VR will continue to strengthen efforts with business leaders to improve employment opportunities and meaningful careers, including increasing partnerships with local Chambers of Commerce.

Recommendation 5. Rights and Conflict Resolution

- Continue to promote advocacy and a Disability Rights curriculum for clients, staff and providers as a core principle. Collaborative discussions enhance informed choices.
- Continue to implement strategies to improve satisfaction survey results on client knowledge of all levels of rights to resolve any difficulties with VR.
- Create an award to empower VR staff by recognizing their innovative use of conflict resolution.
- Make sure all VR staff and clients are aware of their options and of the services of Disability Rights Florida, the Client Assistance Program and the VR Ombudsman's Office provided through increased collaboration and additional engagement.

Agency Response:

- VR agrees with FRC in the importance of Disability Rights education, which is included in the training required of all VR staff. VR requires staff to complete training on confidentiality procedures, the Americans with Disabilities Act, the Client Assistance Program, and Disability Etiquette and Auxiliary Aids. VR implemented an on-demand, virtual orientation process to ensure focus on customer rights and responsibilities within the rehabilitation process. VR also included a removable wallet card with the Disability Rights Florida, Client Assistance Program and VR Ombudsman's Office contact information in the VR Handbook of Services.

Recommendation 6. Public Awareness of VR

- In collaboration with the Florida Department of Education, develop and implement rebranding and messaging targeted to businesses and potential customers to promote public awareness of VR.
- Implement an online application system.
- Continue to engage businesses and mandated partners.

Agency Response:

- VR agrees with the recommendation of an accessible, online application process, but at this time, resources are not available for this project. As VR replaces the current case management system with Aware, opportunities for customer portals and other opportunities for streamlining and simplifying access to services are being pursued.
- VR agrees with up-to-date modernization of our marketing tools, including updated brochures and informational packets.

Customer Satisfaction Survey

The FRC is required to review and analyze the effectiveness of and consumer satisfaction with VR agency functions, rehabilitation services and employment outcomes achieved by eligible individuals, including

the availability of health and other employment benefits. The FRC and VR contract with Market Decisions to obtain this information. The wealth of data is being used effectively by the FRC and VR to focus on specific areas of excellence for recognition, as well as specific opportunities for improvement. Annual highlights from the SFY 2019-2020 survey results are below:

VR customers satisfied with Florida’s VR program.....	83%
VR customers satisfied with the services provided by VR.....	82%
VR customers satisfied with their involvement in their VR experience.....	85%
VR customers who say VR staff treated them with dignity and respect.....	94%
VR customers satisfied with their choice of vocational goal.....	83%
VR customers who say VR staff were helpful in achieving their job goal.....	91%
VR customers who say the VR services they received helped them become more independent.....	87%
VR customers who say the VR services they received helped them become more financially independent.....	80%
VR customers satisfied with what they are doing at their current job.....	75%
VR customers who would tell their friends with disabilities to go to VR.....	92%

Request for Waiver of Statewideness

VR does not request a waiver of statewideness due to the fact all services are available on a statewide basis. Intentional focus has been given to rural areas where limited providers were available. This effort has expanded services to all 67 counties.

Cooperation with Agencies Not Under the Workforce System

VR maintains agreements with agencies and other entities not carrying out activities under the Workforce Investment System. A description of current VR partners and agreements is below.

The Able Trust

The Able Trust, also known as the Florida Endowment Foundation for Vocational Rehabilitation, is a 501(c)(3) public-private partnership foundation established by the Florida Legislature in 1990. Its mission is to be a key leader in providing Floridians with disabilities opportunities for successful employment. The Able Trust assists community organizations throughout the state to help thousands of Floridians with disabilities enter the workforce. The Able Trust accomplishes this by administering grants as well as supporting educational and public awareness programs.

The Able Trust youth programs provide career development and transition to many students with disabilities annually, helping to reduce the dropout rate and prepare young adults for life beyond high school. The Able Trust submits its budget, annual report, audit and any changes to the Articles of Incorporation or by-laws to the Vocational Rehabilitation director annually for review, and VR provides necessary approval, as required.

Agency for Persons with Disabilities

The agreement between the Agency for Persons with Disabilities (APD), Agency for Health Care Administration and VR contains a detailed and specific focus on collaborative planning and funding of Supported Employment services for individuals with significant disabilities. Specifically, the purpose of the agreement is to provide improved, competitive and integrated employment

outcomes for individuals with significant disabilities. In addition, the agreement seeks to improve interagency communication and increase efficiencies by establishing a data sharing and tracking process that demonstrates the progress of mutual customers served. This should increase the opportunity to provide a seamless transition of services. The agreement includes local strategies and joint obligations for both agencies. The agencies have a common goal of assisting eligible individuals to achieve greater independence through employment. The specific goal of this agreement is to coordinate support and services throughout the state, maintaining maximum customer satisfaction and informed choice. This agreement was updated and executed in February 2021.

Florida Alliance for Assistive Services and Technology, Inc.

VR and the Florida Alliance for Assistive Services and Technology, Inc. agree to share specific information about their customers to optimize service delivery. Both agree to specific procedures that facilitate the delivery of services to their respective and mutual customers. Florida Alliance for Assistive Services and Technology offers an Alternative Financing Program for the purchase of assistive technology to all residents of Florida who have disabilities

Florida Independent Living Council, Inc.

VR coordinates with Florida Independent Living Council, Inc., (FILC) and the Centers for Independent Living throughout the state. Through memoranda of agreement with each of the 16 Centers, VR provides funding, outlines roles and responsibilities and ensures cooperative planning.

Florida School for the Deaf and the Blind

VR and the Florida School for the Deaf and the Blind agree to cooperate in serving students and customers who are deaf or hard of hearing and in establishing transition meetings. Activities are implemented to increase public awareness of programs serving these customers and to improve the transition between the school and local counselors.

The Lower Muscogee Creek Tribe

The Lower Muscogee Creek Tribe, located in southern Georgia, is the recipient of the Federal Section 121 Grant under Title I of the Rehabilitation Act, as amended. There is not a 121 program in Florida. However, VR and the Lower Muscogee Creek Tribe have a Memorandum of Understanding to coordinate services for eligible Native Americans with disabilities residing on or near the Lower Muscogee Creek Tribe Tama Reservation within a 150-mile radius. The agreement outlines the responsibilities of both groups, including services for joint customers and technical assistance.

Mental Health Program, Florida Department of Children and Families

VR coordinates with the state mental health authority to assist customers who have mental illnesses. This includes participation on the Florida Assertive Community Treatment Team, a community-based, outreach-oriented method of delivering services to individuals with mental illnesses coordinated by the Mental Health Program. VR provides staff liaisons with many of these teams to help serve this group of customers in a comprehensive manner. VR is an active member of the State Mental Health Planning Council of Florida. The cooperative agreement promotes coordination so that appropriate services can be delivered to maximize customer choice and satisfaction. This agreement is currently being updated to ensure compliance with new WIOA regulations.

Division of Blind Services (DBS), Florida Department of Education

Both VR and DBS serve individuals with visual impairments. This agreement specifies the roles and

responsibilities of each division, including those for individuals with one-eye pathology, bilateral visual impairment, multiple disabilities, and for individuals who are deaf-blind.

Bureau of Exceptional Student Education (BESE), Florida Department of Education; Division of Blind Services; Florida Department of Health; Department of Economic Opportunity

The Florida Interagency Agreement for the Transfer of Assistive Technology, signed in 2006, establishes a framework for an efficient transition of technology as individuals with disabilities move through the continuum from educational services to employment. Specifically, the agreement ensures children and youth with disabilities and their families, educators and employers are informed about the continued use and transfer of assistive technology devices. These devices may remain with the person as he or she moves from home to school and to post-school activities to assist in meeting transition needs. The agreement outlines the conditions for coordination, the authority for transfer of property by local education agencies, financial responsibilities and other topics.

Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs, Employment Standards Administration

Both agencies agree to further the common goal of providing equal employment opportunities and protecting against discrimination. VR will provide expertise on matters relating to disability issues and employment and cross-referral of individuals with disabilities and will participate in interagency training programs, staff meetings and conferences. Both agencies agree to a coordinated public outreach effort.

Prison Rehabilitative Industries and Diversified Enterprises, Inc. (PRIDE)

VR uses the services and manufactured items produced in correctional work programs through PRIDE. PRIDE is a Florida corporation that provides these goods and services as a state-use contracting program. A similar product or service of comparable price and quality, found necessary for use by a state agency, may not be purchased from a source other than PRIDE. Contracts between VR and any private vendor require all items be purchased through PRIDE. This is consistent with Section 946.515, Florida Statutes.

Rehabilitation Foundation of Northwest Florida

The purpose of this agreement is to maximize funding of vocational rehabilitation services for individuals with physical disabilities residing in northwest Florida. The Foundation contributes \$25,000 to VR toward meeting its non-federal funding requirements. In turn, VR will allocate an additional \$92,371 in federal funds to match the Foundation's contribution for vocational rehabilitation services in the following northwest Florida counties: Escambia, Santa Rosa, Okaloosa and Walton.

The intent of these cooperative efforts is to increase the services leading to high quality competitive, integrated employment outcomes that are responsive to the strengths, resources, interests and capabilities of individuals with disabilities residing in northwest Florida. VR agrees to provide quarterly reports of expenditures to the Foundation's trustees. Each report will include the number of individuals served and a description of services provided under the terms of the agreement.

Employment Networks

One of VR's ongoing objectives for the Ticket to Work Program is to increase the number of partnerships with Employment Networks (Employment and Rehabilitation Service Providers). VR

hopes to expand the resources available to customers to meet the current and future levels of demand. It is also the goal of VR to ensure customers have a choice in service providers available within their communities.

VR has also implemented an Employment Network Referral Partnership that creates more opportunities to develop partnerships with Employment Networks. The partnership features a transitional approach by assisting Social Security Administration customers in their efforts to achieve self-sufficiency through core VR services followed by ongoing support services from employment networks. VR will continue to monitor the agreement's effectiveness in meeting its goal.

United States Department of Veterans Affairs

The need to serve Florida veterans who have disabilities led to the development of an agreement between the United States Department of Veterans Affairs and VR. The agreement outlines the roles and responsibilities of VR and the Department of Veterans Affairs. It clarifies which agency can provide specific services and includes information about shared planning, joint activities and coordination.

Coordination with Education Officials

(1) Plans, Policies and Procedures for Coordination with Education Officials

VR entered into a formal agreement in August 2018 to coordinate transition services with state education officials based on new procedures required for the implementation of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. It is a state-level agreement, including agencies charged with providing transition services to students leaving high school and going to postsecondary education, training and/or employment, as well as providing Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) to students with disabilities aged 14-21.

The educational agencies listed below agree to meet regularly to share information, ideas and current initiatives; collaborate on training and special projects; cooperate in planning and budgeting and generally support any areas of work that are mutually beneficial. The parties to the agreement within the Florida Department of Education are:

- Division of Public Schools
- Bureau of Exceptional Student Education
- Division of Vocational Rehabilitation
- Division of Blind Services

This formal interagency agreement serves as a transition services model for improved collaboration, communication, coordination and cooperation among local education agencies and local offices of VR and DBS. VR also collaborates with the Division of Career and Adult Education to improve transitions to WIOA partner programs.

The interagency agreement informs the DBS, state and local education agencies that they cannot enter into an arrangement with an entity holding a special wage certificate under section 14(c) of the Fair Labor Standards Act to operate a program under which a student or youth with a disability

is compensated for work at subminimum wage, in accordance with Section 511 of 34 CFR § 397.31. In addition, employers holding a 14(c) special wage certificate are prohibited from employing a youth with a disability 24 years of age or younger at subminimum wage, unless the individual has received documentation from DBS or VR verifying their completion of the required activities, which includes participation in Pre-ETS or Transition Services under IDEA, application for VR services and completion of the Career Counseling Information and Referral Service. VR ensures compliance through policy and standard operating procedures that require VR staff to record the completion of these activities and supply this documentation to the youth or student with a disability who is seeking subminimum wage employment.

In addition to the State Education Agency Agreement, in collaboration with DBS and BESE, VR has implemented the Local Education Agency Agreement template. This template operationalizes the SEA Agreement at the local level to improve the communication, collaboration and coordination of services to students among local VR Offices, DBS and schools.

VR has increased staffing to two dedicated state-level administrators for VR Transition Youth programs and Pre-ETS. The administrators serve as liaisons to all 67 school districts and a deaf and hard of hearing administrator provides additional liaison support for the Florida School for the Deaf and the Blind.

Administrators coordinate and plan for effective transition services delivery with VR staff and external stakeholders statewide. The VR Transition Youth program is responsible for training internal employees and making presentations about VR transition services at conferences statewide to increase understanding and awareness of the agency's role in assisting eligible students with disabilities.

The VR Transition Youth program provides transition and Pre-ETS-related technical assistance to the Florida Rehabilitation Council. Both administrators serve jointly as representatives on the State Secondary Transition Interagency Committee and work closely with the regional representatives of Project 10: the Transition Education Network. Project 10 is funded through a grant from BESE to the University of South Florida, St. Petersburg. Project 10 helps Florida school districts and stakeholders increase their ability to provide secondary transition services to students with disabilities in order to improve their academic success and postsecondary outcomes. Project 10 helps implement secondary transition services, interagency collaboration, transition legislation and policy on student development and outcomes. VR counselors serving transition students participate in each area's local interagency councils. The interagency councils are a collaborative effort between VR and Department of Education partners, public high schools, adult service agencies, workforce programs, parents, students, advocates and employers working together to meet the transition needs of students with disabilities.

The VR director or designee serves on the State Advisory Committee (SAC) for the Education of Exceptional Students. This committee is administered by BESE. The SAC includes parents of children with disabilities, individuals with disabilities, educators and administrators from secondary and postsecondary institutions as well as foster care and juvenile justice representatives. The SAC also includes representatives of various state agencies that provide transition and other services to children, youth and young adults with disabilities. The committee advises the state education agency on what children with disabilities need and helps develop corrective action plans to address findings in related federal monitoring reports. The committee also helps the state education agency develop evaluations and policies, implement policies and report data. The committee may comment publicly on rules and regulations proposed by the state on the coordination of services

for children with disabilities.

VR services delivered under WIOA do not supplant, reduce or change the school district's responsibility to deliver a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) for students served under the auspices of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. VR services supplement, but do not supplant, services delivered through the school districts.

The VR Transition Youth program collaborates with education officials and partners to offer youth with disabilities opportunities to gain work experiences that help them prepare for successful employment. Collaborations such as Project SEARCH and Inclusive Postsecondary Education (IPSE) programs engage youth in experiences that blend academics with career and technical education. They also provide hands-on career exploration and preparation activities where learned skills, attitudes and behaviors can be applied. These evidence-based applications of learning, which include internships and community-based work experiences, often lead to successful employment. For some students, these programs include earning postsecondary credentials which allow them to explore professional jobs that may lead to higher-wage careers. VR involvement in these collaborations provides funding for participants to receive needed services and other supports. This shared support helps partner programs serve more youth. VR partnerships deliver career development and employment options through direct services to youth who would not otherwise have access to these opportunities.

Provisions for Development and Approval of Individualized Plans for Employment for Students with Disabilities

VR encourages early referral and application for transition students during high school so that they may receive Pre-ETS and better coordinate with local education agencies. Pre-ETS includes Career Exploration and Counseling, Work Readiness Training, Work Experiences, Postsecondary Educational Counseling and Self-Advocacy Training, including Peer Mentoring. Students with disabilities may receive Pre-ETS through the WIOA potentially-eligible process without the need to apply or to be determined eligible. Students who require additional VR services or supports may still obtain Pre-ETS while applying to VR. VR brochures describe how students and families can access Pre-ETS or other VR services beginning at age 14 and beyond. Students with disabilities who are at high risk for dropping out of school may be referred to VR. This early referral process allows the counselor to develop a rapport with the transition student and family, explore vocational options and comparable benefits and begin necessary guidance and counseling.

The Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE), Supported Employment IPE, Individual Support Plan and/or Care Coordination Plans are completed or updated as early as possible prior to graduation or leaving school to allow a seamless transition to a student's desired postsecondary outcome.

VR counselors, with assistance from VR technicians, serve as representatives to work with public and private high schools across the state. They provide outreach and vocational rehabilitation orientation services to students, school officials, parents and others involved in transition services. The counselor works collaboratively with key stakeholders and family to develop the Individualized Plan for Employment prior to completion of secondary school to assist with a seamless transition to post-secondary training, education or job placement.

(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;

Employment First

As an employment leader, VR strongly encourages partner agencies, organizations and employers to promote competitive integrated employment in the community as the first and preferred option for individuals with disabilities. People with disabilities who are employed experience enhanced independence and quality of life. They are also contributing to the rich diversity of the workforce so the entire community benefits. VR was a founding partner in the state's Employment First movement. As a result of the partners working together, the Employment First Act is now in statute. The Act identifies the responsibilities of the partners to improve and increase employment opportunities for all Florida's citizens. The Employment First Committee submits a report to the Governor annually, describing the coordination of participating agencies to advance the Employment First philosophy as a way of work throughout Florida.

Technical Assistance and Consultation

Local education agencies are strongly encouraged to have written agreements with VR and DBS, including other agencies that offer supports or services during student transition. The agreements address consultation, coordination and providing technical assistance to each other, as well as to students and their families/ guardians/surrogates, to plan for the transition from high school to postsecondary activities and becoming part of the adult community.

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

Local education agencies work collaboratively with VR, DBS, APD, Children's Medical Services and Mental Health Services in the Transition Individual Educational Plan process. Local education agencies that are considering transition services during the Individual Educational Plan meeting will invite representatives from other agencies responsible for providing or paying for transition services after obtaining permission from the parent, guardian, or age-of-majority student. If the agency representative is not available to attend the meeting, the school will invite another representative. If the agency representative cannot attend the meeting, the school will then look for alternative ways to provide for the student's transition needs. The local education agency must reconvene the Transition Individual Educational Plan team to identify alternative strategies for providing a student's transition needs if an agency fails to do so. To plan effective transition services for students with disabilities, it is essential that all invited partner agencies encourage and support participation in the Transition IEP process.

VR invests 35-40 percent of its statewide staffing resources in transition services to serve students with disabilities in Florida's 67 school districts and the Florida School for the Deaf and the Blind. Additional improvements to the rehabilitation information management and billing systems are being implemented to improve the collection and analysis of transition student data. Several of these additional data enhancements were implemented to simultaneously meet WIOA requirements. The enhancements will enable VR to conduct differential analysis to better evaluate agency performance and identify how to best improve service delivery and outcomes for students with disabilities.

(C) Roles and responsibilities, including financial responsibilities, of each agency,

including provisions for determining state lead agencies and qualified personnel responsible for transition services;

Roles and Responsibilities

The roles and responsibilities for each partner agency as required by federal and state regulations are as follows:

1. Local education agencies provide a free and appropriate public education for students with disabilities, including preparation for transition from school to work or other postsecondary activities.
2. VR assists with student transition from secondary school to work through postsecondary training, education or direct placement services necessary to achieve a successful employment outcome.
3. The Agency for Persons with Disabilities focuses on reducing the use of sheltered workshops and other non-competitive employment day activities and promotes opportunities for gainful employment for persons with developmental disabilities who choose to seek such employment (Chapter 393, Florida Statutes). Additionally, to promote independence and productivity, the agency shall provide support and services, within available resources, to assist customers enrolled in Medicaid waivers who choose to pursue gainful employment. If an individual is eligible for APD waiver services and employment is a needed service, then this service must be provided to meet standards as outlined in Florida rule.
4. Children's Medical Services ensures a smooth and successful transition process to adult healthcare services and providers for youth and young adults with special healthcare needs.
5. Mental Health Services, in partnership with families and the community, provides a system of care that enables children and adults with mental health or emotional disabilities to live successfully in the community, become self-sufficient or attain self-sufficiency in adulthood and realize their full potential. Mental health support and services enable adults and transitioning students to participate in community activities such as employment and other valued community roles.

Specific Purpose

Specific intent of the interagency agreement is to:

1. Provide guidance to the local education agencies, VR, DBS, APD, Children's Medical Services and Mental Health Services' front-line employees when serving students transitioning from school to work or postsecondary activities.
2. Provide information to parents/students so they know what they can expect from the local education agencies, VR, DBS, APD, Children's Medical Services and Mental Health Services during the transition process.
3. Provide parameters to the local education agencies, VR, DBS, APD, Children's Medical Services and Mental Health Services' administrators/managers/nursing supervisors when developing, negotiating and implementing local cooperative agreements.

4. Encourage and support the participation of all agency personnel in the IEP process at the local level through the development of guidelines, policies and/or procedures.

Financial Responsibilities

The Department of Education, VR, DBS, APD, Children's Medical Services and Mental Health Services are committed to meeting financial responsibilities as required by law. Agency/division heads for the organizations will periodically identify areas for improved programmatic and financial efficiencies and develop strategies to meet financial responsibilities, including joint appropriations requests from the state legislature and negotiations with federal agencies. Each party is financially responsible for the services it provides under its own laws and rules.

Conditions and Terms of Reimbursement

If a non-education agency fails to provide or pay for services for which they are responsible, and which are also considered special education and related services, the local education agency (or state agency) responsible for developing the student's IEP shall provide or pay for these services to the student in a timely manner. The local education agency or state agency may then claim reimbursement for the services from the non-education agency that was responsible for the provision of the services and failed to provide or pay for these services and that agency shall reimburse the local education agency or state agency in accordance with the terms of this agreement.

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

Outreach and Identification of Students

Local education agencies are strongly encouraged to enter into written agreements with VR, DBS, APD, Children's Medical Services and Mental Health Services employees on the outreach methods used to inform students with disabilities who may need and could benefit from these agencies.

Brochures, flyers, website resources, presentations, transition fairs or informational letters are available to the local education agency, students and their parents or guardians to explain the role that VR and other agencies play in the transition process and the agencies' referral/application policies and procedures.

VR transitioned 32 participating school districts from Work-Based Learning Experience contract-based services to a fee-for-service model as registered VR Pre-ETS Providers who can deliver all five of the Pre-ETS. In addition, 15 private charter schools became registered Pre-ETS providers. All school districts, public and private, have the opportunity to become Pre-ETS providers with VR. WBLE is a Pre-ETS that uses real work experiences to provide students with disabilities the knowledge and skills that will help them connect school experiences to future career options. Participating students with disabilities develop appropriate work and interpersonal skills, including soft skills, behaviors and work tolerance needed to achieve successful employment after high school.

Cooperative Agreements with Private Nonprofit Organizations

VR has a variety of relationships and agreements with private nonprofit organizations. These include fee-based services purchased through registered vendors, contracts and other cooperative, non-financial agreements.

All new vendors/providers, whether through a contractual or vendor relationship, must go through a registration and approval process. VR reviews the qualifications of vendors providing services to its customers to ensure the quality of these services as well as the safety of the public. In addition to approving and registering vendor/provider services, VR conducts employment verifications on customer placements facilitated by vendors/contract providers.

VR policy ensures customers have a choice of qualified service providers to select. Customers are also informed if the provider has employees experienced in working with special disability populations, foreign languages and other communication skills. Customers have a choice of necessary services, service providers and settings in which to receive the services included in the Individualized Plan for Employment.

Currently, VR has approximately 377 registered Employment Services Providers that deliver employment, supported employment, On-the-Job Training (OJT), WBLE, Pre-ETS and other related services on a fee-for-service basis. Additionally, VR maintains the following contracts and/or agreements:

- 16 agreements with the Centers for Independent Living located throughout the state to provide independent living services;
- Additional contracts with agencies for services such as delegable VR services, interpreting services, rehabilitation technology, assistive technology and special projects.

VR has collaborative, non-contractual arrangements and agreements with nonprofit organizations that provide referrals, other vocational rehabilitation services and comparable benefits. Through coordination with Centers for Independent Living, individuals with disabilities receive life skills training, employability skills training and support such as transportation, clothing and emergency funds.

Relationships with organizations that serve customers with hearing impairments provide opportunities for support groups, sign language classes and placement assistance.

Throughout the state, many VR employees serve as liaisons with specific groups and organizations. Individuals are referred to those groups if it is determined that they can benefit from their services. Services are coordinated with numerous nonprofit hospitals and clinics for referrals and medical assistance. Foundations and associations such as the Easter Seals Society, Muscular Dystrophy Association, National Kidney Foundation, Brain Injury Association of Florida, Epilepsy Foundation, Family Network on Disability of Florida and others provide individual and family support groups and disability education to mutual customers.

Cooperative Agreements for the Provision of Supported Employment Services

VR has executed a new Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with the Agency for Persons with Disabilities and the Agency for Healthcare Administration (AHCA), the state agency responsible for administering the State Medicaid Plan. The revised agreement will establish a framework, including terms and conditions, which will guide the partners' collaborative efforts to advance the development, improvement and expansion of opportunities for competitive integrated employment as the first and preferred option for individuals with significant disabilities. This MOA also includes a data sharing

agreement to assist agencies in sharing information needed to provide effective services to mutual customers and to identify the financial requirements for providing Supported Employment Services.

VR continues to be an active partner with other state agencies and organizations in implementing Employment First, a national effort to assure individuals with disabilities are offered employment as the first and preferred option in planning their lives. Employment First is consistent with VR's belief that individuals with disabilities, even significant disabilities, can achieve meaningful employment when provided with appropriate supports.

Executive Order 13-284 (Reaffirming Commitment to Employment for Floridians with Disabilities) was signed by the Governor of Florida in October 2013. The order mandates that an Interagency Cooperative Agreement be developed and requires nine agencies/organizations to participate in the agreement. This order is now law in Florida.

- The Department of Education-Division of Blind Services (DBS)
- The Department of Education-Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR)
- The Department of Education-Bureau of Exceptional Student Education
- The Agency for Persons with Disabilities
- The Department of Children and Families-Mental Health and Substance Abuse
- The Department of Economic Opportunity
- CareerSource Florida
- The Florida Developmental Disabilities Council
- RESPECT of Florida

Six broad-based objectives govern the Employment First Interagency Agreement. VR works closely with the partners to continue to make progress on these objectives.

1. Continue to develop and enhance Supported Employment for persons with significant disabilities. The state system for the provision of Supported Employment reflects: (a) mutually agreeable definitions of the services to be provided; (b) administrative responsibility of the intensive component of Supported Employment services to eligible individuals as the primary responsibility of VR for individuals with significant disabilities; and (c) administrative responsibility of the extended services component as the primary responsibility of other stakeholders, including APD and the Department of Children and Families' Mental Health and Substance Abuse Programs.
2. Continue to improve the statewide management of Supported Employment programs by avoiding duplication of effort and funding while ensuring accountability. This process will provide a coordinated system of program development for SE services.
3. Maximize the quality-of-service delivery ensuring a comprehensive, continuous, efficient and effective referral process, individual program planning, coordination of intensive vocational services with extended services, information collection and dissemination, confidentiality and technical assistance.
4. Identify issues, policies and practices that present systemic barriers to effective participation of individuals with significant disabilities and develop appropriate resolutions

to remove such barriers.

5. Continue to implement an interagency planning process for budget coordination which defines and projects the number of people in need of intensive and extended services for each fiscal year and facilitates program and fiscal planning.
6. Support the belief that all individuals with disabilities can work if provided appropriate services and supports and that a team approach is needed to facilitate quality and appropriate services.

Supported Employment Services

VR is responsible for the first phase of Supported Employment services. VR provides intensive vocational services until the individual and employer are satisfied with the Supported Employment placement, and then the individual transitions to a plan for extended services. Supported Employment services consist of intensive, time-limited vocational rehabilitation services (the responsibility of VR) and extended services, also known as the second phase. Funding for the second phase of services is provided by other sources that may include, but are not limited to, APD, the Department of Children and Families' Mental Health and Substance Abuse Programs, natural supports or other identified funding sources.

Extended Services

Funding for the second phase of services is provided by other sources that may include, but are not limited to, APD, the Department of Children and Families' Mental Health, Employer Supports and Substance Abuse Program, Natural Supports or other identified funding sources.

The purpose of extended services is to maintain the individual in SE that is competitive and integrated, enhance the individual's involvement in the workplace culture and provide supports for career advancement. The nature of services provided during the intensive and extended phases may be similar to the initial services provided by VR but will differ in intensity.

VR and its partners continuously seek alternative methods (e.g., Social Security incentives, natural supports, etc.) to provide extended services. VR has encouraged Supported Employment providers to focus on developing natural supports and to encourage employers to act in a support role since this will often occur naturally in the labor market.

VR is now authorized to fund extended services for youth with significant disabilities for a period of up to four years or until the youth reaches the age of 25, whichever occurs first, if other sources of funding for extended services are unavailable. Allowances would be made for individuals who, while receiving extended services, require additional intensive services through VR because they have destabilized on the job. When appropriate, VR will again assume the responsibility and cost of providing intensive vocational services, including necessary job-related support services.

Coordination with Employers

The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation's Business Relations program builds and sustains partnerships with business and industry through effective services that are driven by the needs of employers. These partnerships support business customers' disability inclusion efforts and lead to competitive integrated

employment and career exploration opportunities for VR participants.

Business Relations customizes employer services to assist employers with recruiting, hiring, promoting and retaining qualified individuals with disabilities. Strategic partnerships that support workforce needs are accomplished through networking with businesses and industry stakeholders and coordinating with core partners to align services to employers' needs. The program's goals, objectives and strategies are as follows:

Goal 1: Become the foremost recognized and trusted resource for employers' disability inclusion needs.

Objective: Increase the number of employers engaged as business partners.

Strategies:

1. Develop and use a standard business needs assessment.
2. Develop and use a business customer satisfaction tool.
3. Staff and train a team that is responsive to business. The team includes the program administrator; a senior VR consultant; a business projects specialist; and 11 business relations representatives located across the state in each of VR's seven administrative areas.
4. Implement a business customer relationship management tool.
5. Define the services offered to employers and customize them to meet business needs.
6. Create statewide consistency in business relations outreach and services.
7. Use targeted marketing to engage employers across multiple industries.
8. Participate in business-led organizations, such as Chambers of Commerce, Disability: IN, trade and sector -specific organizations, etc.
9. Create strategic practices that can be replicated across the state.
10. Align services with the Workforce Development Boards and other community partners.
11. Participate in the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation's National Employment Team (NET) and the NET-Southeast regional team to share referrals and best practices.
12. Engage with WIOA core partners to share best practices.

Goal 2: Become a top resource for employers in need of qualified employees.

Objective: Increase referrals of qualified applicants to business partners.

Strategies:

1. Facilitate direct access to qualified applicants through business relationships.
2. Market career opportunities internally to VR staff.
3. Use the AbilitiesWork Help Desk for applicant-matching services for employers.
4. Coordinate support services provided by VR contractors.
5. Provide a seamless connection to VR services and qualified applicants across a company's footprint locally, regionally, statewide and nationally through the NET.
6. Engage in local talent pool coordination with other agencies to meet businesses' workforce needs.
7. Participate with the NET and the Talent Acquisition Portal (TAP) to create increased opportunities for VR job seekers and employers recruiting VR job seekers.
8. Collaborate with businesses to create a pipeline of qualified candidates.

Goal 3: Expand career opportunities for VR candidates.

Objective: Prepare ready-to-work applicants for in-demand careers and jobs that are available now.

Strategies:

1. Meet with business and industry to assess workforce needs to better align training with those needs.
2. Communicate information from employers about business needs and qualification requirements to VR staff.
3. Engage in sector partnerships.
4. Provide information to VR staff about in-demand jobs and high-growth industries and sectors using labor market information.
5. Collaborate with business and education to determine industry recognized training opportunities and inform VR staff about them.
6. Collaborate with WIOA core partners to share resources and best practices.
7. Generate opportunities for worksite training, including Pre-ETS, with business partners.
8. Participate in career events with CareerSource, higher education institutions, and business and community partners

Florida VR is working in collaboration with the University of Massachusetts, Boston for technical assistance related to business engagement.

The Florida Legislature passed House Bill 1507, the Reimagining Education and Career Help (REACH) Act, in 2021 to create a more unified workforce education and economic development system to improve Floridians' lives. The new law seeks increased collaboration and cooperation among state workforce and education agencies and aims to address fundamental gaps in access to quality training. The Florida Department of Education's Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, Division of Blind Services and Division of Career and Adult Education share this vision, holding all learners and populations at the center in view of outcomes that promote full participation in the workforce and higher credentialing attainment wherever possible.

The REACH Act seeks to expand the state's talent pipeline through attainment of credentials of value and acquisition of postsecondary certification, industry-recognized credentials and degrees. In addition, the legislation enhances integrated service delivery, integrated case management, requires a customer self-service portal, and strengthens equity and access for individuals with disabilities to workforce education and training.

Interagency Cooperation

VR has developed a new and updated Memorandum of Agreement with the state agency responsible for administering the State Medicaid Plan (AHCA) and the agency primarily responsible for providing services to persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities (APD). This agreement will specifically focus on Supported Employment services and the roles and responsibilities for coordinating these services on a statewide basis.

The purpose of the agreement is to establish a framework, including terms and conditions that will

guide collaborative efforts to advance the development, improvement and expansion of opportunities for competitive integrated employment as the first and preferred option for persons with significant disabilities.

The agreement will formalize the collaborative processes that have been implemented to improve employment outcomes for mutual customers. It will focus on coordinating efforts in interagency planning, referrals, informed choice, cross and joint training, as well as the provision of technical assistance.

The agreement endorses a shared philosophy with a common set of guiding principles. These principles include but are not limited to the following:

- All programs, projects and activities will be person-centered and include respect for individual dignity, self-determination, the pursuit of meaningful careers and informed choice.
- Reliance on and pursuit of evidence-based best, promising and emerging practices.
- The use of qualified staff to facilitate the achievement of competitive integrated employment.
- Establishment of a referral process for mutual customers.
- To clearly define and clarify boundaries between the VR and APD programs to ensure the complimentary provision of employment services and promote timely access for persons with the most significant disabilities.

VR is working closely with APD to develop competitive integrated employment alternatives for individuals receiving services in a segregated setting. VR will provide technical assistance and support as APD expands these program options. Under WIOA requirements, VR will provide or coordinate information and education for individuals receiving services in sheltered workshops receiving subminimum wages.

VR provides Career Counseling Information and Referral Services (CCIR) to approximately 3,000 people this year. Most of these individuals are in programs that APD supports such as Sheltered Workshops and other Adult Day Training programs that pay subminimum wages.

CCIR services introduces the many services and options available through VR, including Competitive Integrated Employment as well as training opportunities to expand opportunities. This training opportunity is required by the Department of Labor and is a WIOA requirement.

The MOA between VR, Agency for Health Care Administration and the Agency for Persons with Disabilities provides opportunities for collaboration to ensure that youth and adults with Developmental Disabilities have access to all the services that VR offers to its customers.

VR collaborates with the Florida Department of Children and Families', Mental Health and Substance Abuse Programs to improve and increase employment opportunities for people with mental illness. Part of this collaborative work is conducted through a formalized Employment First agreement, while other coordination occurs during a customer's transition from the initial and intense phase of Supported Employment to the ongoing and extended service phase of Supported Employment services.

Additionally, VR is working closely with the Department of Children and Families Office of Substance Abuse and Mental Health to expand access to evidence-based models of supported employment for individuals with mental health conditions (i.e., Individual Placement and Support). VR has piloted the Individual Placement and Support (IPS) national model and will be expanding services to assist with the

employment and treatment of individuals with persistent and severe mental illness. This initiative is in line with the Administration's priorities to improve employment and services for individuals with mental health disorders.

VR and the Office of Substance Abuse and Mental Health have also partnered to participate in the ASPIRE (Advancing State Policy Integration for Recovery and Employment) initiative through the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy. As one of 7 states selected to participate in this initiative, Florida will receive assistance to align policies and practices across state agencies in support of competitive integrated employment for people with mental health conditions. The key state agencies involved in the initiative are VR, Department of Children and Families, Agency for Health Care Administration and Career Source. Florida's specific goals are to improve interagency collaboration, increase access to IPS services, optimize funding in support of IPS services, align data collection elements and practices and ensure equal and equitable participation in employment services

VR also works in partnership with local education agencies and partners to offer youth with the most significant disabilities opportunities to gain work experiences that help them prepare for successful employment. Collaborations such as High School/ High Tech (HSHT), Project SEARCH programs engage youth in experiences that blend academics with career and technical education. They provide hands-on career exploration and preparation activities where learned skills, attitudes and behaviors can be applied. These evidence-based applications of learning, including internships and other work experiences, often lead to successful employment with appropriate supports.

For some students, these programs include earning postsecondary credentials which allow them to explore professional jobs that may lead to higher-wage careers. VR involvement in these collaborations provides funding for participants to receive services and other supports needed to prepare for and maintain employment. This shared support helps partner programs serve more youth. VR partnerships deliver career development and employment options through direct services to youth who would not otherwise have access to these services.

Comprehensive System of Personnel Development

Data System on Personnel and Personnel Development

Assurance of an adequate supply of qualified rehabilitation professionals and paraprofessional personnel is the major driver for the Florida Division of Vocational Rehabilitation's (VR) Human Resource Development Section. Data from numerous sources is used to determine current and projected needs, as well as VR's progress toward meeting them. The table below includes VR personnel and turnover data for SFY 2020-2021 and projected staffing requirements for SFY 2020-2023. It should be noted that positions are vacated for many reasons, including termination, promotion, lateral position transfers, resignation or retirement. VR continues to employ strategies to address turnover as well as develop and prepare staff for advancement opportunities.

**Figure 9.01
VR Personnel and Projected Staffing Needs**

Personnel Category*	Number of Personnel,	Turnover Rate for SFY 2019-20	**Projected Staffing Needs for
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	as of 9/22/21		SFY 2021-23
Counselor Staff	394	30%	111
Staff Supporting Counselor Activities	335	10%	37
Administrative Staff	158	7%	10
Total Full-time Equivalents	884		
Contracted Counselor Staff	77		
Total Contracted Field Staff	145		

*Categories are based on RSA-2 Report definitions and positions included in each category.

**This number is an annual average derived by multiplying the number of positions for the job category by the percentage of vacated positions.

Staffing needs for Transition Youth Program counselors remains consistent with overall counselor staffing projections. When factoring in population growth, the projected five-year staffing needs are slightly higher than noted above but would require that VR be provided with additional FTEs.

The state's automated People First personnel system maintains employment histories to help project human resource needs. The state continues to make available a deferred retirement option program (DROP) that allows individuals to continue working for the state for five years beyond their original retirement date. Because it is impossible to anticipate how many individuals will accept the deferral option, projecting future employment needs is difficult. However, it is known that there are currently 52 individuals in DROP, 33 individuals with 30 or more years of service and 53 individuals over the age of 62.

VR uses People First and RIMS data, as well as internal reports, to obtain:

- The number and classification of authorized positions for each local unit and state headquarters in relation to the number of individuals served;
- The number and classification of personnel currently needed by the state agency to provide vocational rehabilitation services;
- The projected number and classification of personnel who will be needed in five years to provide vocational rehabilitation services
- The state institutions of higher education that are preparing vocational rehabilitation professionals, by program type; and
- The number of students in each of these institutions, by program type
- The number of students graduating from each program and the credentials they have received

To ensure the continuity of quality rehabilitation services and to address employee vacancies and turnover in particularly difficult to fill geographic areas, VR has contracted for employees. The contracts ensure that qualified personnel are hired to provide necessary rehabilitation services. A VR counselor/analyst reviews each case and performs/ authorizes administrative activities that federal regulations (34 CFR 361.13) specify are the responsibility of VR and cannot be delegated to private providers. These activities include:

- All decisions affecting eligibility for VR, the nature and scope of available services and the provision of these services and the suspension, reduction and termination of these services;
- The determination to close the records of services of an individual who has achieved an employment outcome
- Policy formulation and implementation;
- Allocation and expenditure of VR funds; and
- Participation as a partner in the CareerSource Florida service delivery system

Described in the following table is information from institutions of higher education in Florida that prepare vocational rehabilitation professionals, categorized by institution and type of program.

**Figure 9.02
Program Data for Institutions of Higher Education**

Institution, Program Type and Degree	Students Currently Enrolled	VR/RSA Sponsored Employees	VR/RSA Sponsored Graduates	Previous Year Graduates
Florida Atlantic University Graduate-level Rehabilitation Training Program; MEd and PhD	MEd- 44 PhD- 1	MEd- 4 PhD- 0	MEd- 26 PhD- 0	MEd- 42 PhD- 1
Florida International University Rehabilitation Counseling Program; MS in Counselor Education	MS- 15	MS- 3	MS- 3	MS- 5

Plan for Recruitment, Preparation and Retention of Qualified Personnel

VR maintains close relationships with universities including minority institutions such as Historically Black Colleges and Universities and disability-specific organizations. VR employees collaborate with universities in securing grant funding, invite university employees to help with training and education activities and provide practicum and internship slots for students.

VR acknowledges that it will not be able to recruit an adequate number of qualified rehabilitation counselors to replace those retiring and departing for other reasons. VR is currently engaged in the activities indicated below to address recruitment, preparation and retention of counselors.

Personnel Standards

There is not a state-approved or recognized certification, licensure, or registration of Vocational Rehabilitation counselors. VR, in conjunction with the Florida Rehabilitation Council, established the Certified Rehabilitation Counselor (CRC) educational eligibility requirement as its standard.

Efforts are made to recruit and hire counselors who meet the CRC educational eligibility status. If VR is unsuccessful in finding enough qualified applicants, it will accept those who meet the minimal initial standard for providing counseling and guidance services. The individual(s) must have a bachelor's degree from an accredited university and one year of experience counseling individuals with disabilities. Alternative majors other than social, behavioral, or rehabilitative science may be considered along with the minimum qualification requirements for the position.

When evaluating the suitability of alternative majors, the hiring authority should consider the major area of study's applicability to the required knowledge, skills and abilities. A master's degree from an accredited university in social, behavioral, or rehabilitative science can substitute for the year of required experience.

The State of Florida allows employees to use a tuition waiver to enroll in six hours (or less) of courses per semester on a space-available basis at public universities. Florida has three CACREP-accredited programs (Florida Atlantic University, the University of South Florida and the Florida International University) offering Rehabilitation Counseling degrees. There are several other Florida universities that offer degrees and courses in related fields, including two sign language interpreting programs.

VR employees are encouraged to use the State of Florida Tuition Waiver program as much as possible, since it represents a significant savings to VR.

In addition to the Florida public universities referenced above, VR uses the resources of Auburn University, Virginia Commonwealth University, the University of Kentucky, the University of Arkansas-Little Rock, the University of West Virginia, the University of Alabama, University of North Texas, UMass Online, Thomas University, Emporia State University, Troy State University and the University of Wisconsin-Stout, all of whom provide online Masters-level rehabilitation programs. VR will continue to use additional programs, as appropriate.

Personnel Development

VR's Learning and Development Office (LDO) efforts will continue to be oriented toward appropriate and adequate training for all employees, with available resources allocated to the CSPD effort. Although the in-service training grant was the primary funding source for these activities, it was not the only resource used to fund staff development and training activities. Supplemental funds were provided from other budget resources.

Although there has been an emphasis on helping counselors meet the CSPD standard and developing the technical, managerial and leadership skills of supervisors and managers, VR provides staff development opportunities to employees at every level. Examples include the Counselor Training Program:

- Webinars on over 20 topics annually are available for new and existing staff and many are being developed in direct response to recommendations from participants.
- Developed Welcome Packets for new counselors. This packet includes information about how to prepare for new counselor training, professional development, the mentorship program and a big book of first that describes unique situations a counselor may encounter.
- Focused training on field-level supervisors to expand the support and guidance provided to vocational rehabilitation counselors. Efforts will include identifying areas to reduce administrative burdens while maintaining a high level of quality assurance and fiscal

responsibility.

Additional Personnel Development Activities

The Organization and Employee Support Team (OES) recently designed a new human resource information site, available through VR's SharePoint application. Using SharePoint increases the level of support and customer service provided to VR's employees, volunteers, contracted staff, supervisors and personnel liaisons. The intent is to provide user-friendly experiences for new and existing employees.

The OES Homepage provides job opportunity announcements, access to more than 900 HR forms, procedures and policies and a calendar of upcoming important HR dates and events.

In carrying out its staff development and training program, VR addresses several topics in its training curricula. The training curricula include (but are not limited to) modules on the following: Disability Disclosure, Highly Effective Technicians, Working with Customers Impacted by the Justice System, Introduction to Rehabilitation Engineering and the Services They Provide, Job Placement, How to Partner with Veterans Affairs VR Program, Counseling & Guidance for Informed Choice, School to Work Transition, Working with Customers with a Mental Health Diagnosis, Vocational Assessments and Time Management.

VR places emphasis on the professional development of unit supervisors, area supervisors and area directors. Topics are selected based on policy or procedure changes, new initiatives, audit and review findings and general professional development.

Counseling and non-counseling employees, including administrative employees, will continue to receive training in core subjects through distance and onsite learning. As caseloads and customer needs continue to grow more complex, the role of the paraprofessional technician becomes more and more critical to the effective management of caseloads. All counseling staff will continue to work toward CRC eligibility and/or degrees in rehabilitation or counseling through tuition waivers and other mechanisms.

Center for Assistive, Rehabilitation & Robotics Technology, contracted through the University of South Florida, provides evaluations and assessments to identify and recommend technologies that will be useful accommodations for our customers.

State labor market information, as well as national data, provides information on the employment and advancement of qualified individuals with disabilities. Job announcements are published online through the People First website, providing access to all state jobs through one internet portal.

Manuals related to policy and rehabilitation information management are available online. Employees can find more information about medical and psychological conditions, rehabilitation technology, federal and state plans, legislation and regulations and employment-related information.

Onboarding

Onboarding helps new personnel successfully assimilate into their new position, with a quicker ramp-up to productivity. VR wants to help all personnel be successful in their new job, get up-and-running with their new duties quickly and smoothly, and contribute to VR's success. Since VR personnel includes career service, selected exempt service/senior management service and OPS employees, as well as volunteers and contracted staff, all with differing onboarding needs, it became apparent that a one-size-fits-all approach to onboarding was not sufficient.

Based on that, OES created onboarding resource sites specific to the needs of VR's career service,

selected exempt service/senior management service and OPS employees, as well as sites specific to VR's volunteers and contracted staff. Each site provides onboarding information for the specific personnel category, such as New Hire Paperwork that provides the new employee with all of the required hiring forms and related policies, VR Mentorship Program information, TED training, education and development links and resources, and the human resources page.

VR's Mentorship Program

A major reason why newly-hired employees struggle and ultimately leave is failure to establish connections and build strong interpersonal relationships within the organization. Understanding that new employees need connection, a sense of belonging, a sense of their potential, and a need to feel valued, OES worked with various sections within VR to create a Mentorship Program.

Mentors often play an important role in making new employees feel valued, developing coworker relationships, and helping new employees feel comfortable during the first few months of employment. Each new employee or protégé will be assigned to a mentor for a period of up to a year. No mentor will be assigned to more than two active protégés at any one time.

The Mentorship Program is composed of two parts. The first is a comprehensive information resource site delivered through SharePoint. The site has information specific to mentors, protégés, subject matter experts (SMEs) and supervisors. The second component is the Individualized Mentoring Action Plan, or (IMAP). The IMAP is a software application designed specifically for the mentorship program. In the IMAP, mentors and SMEs create personalized profiles. The profiles are used to assist with assigning mentors and SMEs to appropriate protégés. The software is designed to quickly sort through hundreds of mentor and SME profiles that match the needs identified in the protégé's profile.

Human Resources Page

The human resources page is a one-stop information resource for VR personnel. The human resources page consists of six functional groups, which are further divided into subject groups, specific categories and detailed information pages. Topics include employee rights, benefits and responsibilities, resources such as forms, procedures, policies and useful information about VR and state government. Most pages have embedded links to either an internal portion of the VR intranet or to an outside website. Each employee can then bookmark any page for easy access.

Needs Assessment and Evaluation

A bi-annual training needs assessment is conducted using information from a number of sources. These include a formal needs assessment instrument, performance evaluation data, training evaluation sheets obtained from every sponsored program, exit interviews and supervisory input. The needs assessment data determines program development and modification.

Annual performance evaluations are conducted on each employee, with intermittent evaluation, if indicated. Performance is evaluated according to standards and goals established at the beginning of the evaluation period. Employees are evaluated in the context of their knowledge, skills and abilities within the field of rehabilitation, and on policy about the priority of service to individuals with the most-significant disabilities. If circumstances change, training and professional development activities are provided to help the employee meet his/her goal in support of VR's mission.

In carrying out its staff development and training program, VR addresses several topics in its training curricula. The training curricula include (but are not limited to) modules on the following: preliminary assessment, eligibility determination, assessment, IPE development, vocational counseling (within the modules on eligibility determination and individualized plan for employment development), job placement, rehabilitation technology, cultural competence, ethics, supported employment, transition from school to work, medical and psychological issues, caseload management and special programs.

VR places emphasis on the professional development of unit supervisors, area supervisors, and area directors. Topics are selected based on policy or procedure changes, new initiatives, audit and review findings, and general professional development.

Counseling and non-counseling employees, including administrative employees, will continue to receive training in core subjects through distance and on-site learning. As caseloads and customer needs continue to grow more complex, the role of the paraprofessional technician becomes more and more critical to the effective management of caseloads. All counseling staff will continue to work toward CRC eligibility and/or degrees in rehabilitation or counseling through tuition waivers and other mechanisms.

Engineers from the Rehabilitation Technology Engineering Program, contracted through the University of South Florida, provide training on rehabilitation technology and engineering. The contract ensures that rehabilitation technology engineers are available statewide.

State labor market information, as well as national data, provides information on the employment and advancement of qualified individuals with disabilities. Job announcements are published online through the People First website, providing access to all state jobs through one internet portal.

Manuals related to policy and rehabilitation information management are available online. Employees can access the internet to find information about medical and psychological conditions, rehabilitation technology, Federal/State Plan, legislation and regulations, and employment-related information.

Coordination of Personnel Development under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

Presenters provide orientation and training for employees serving transition students with disabilities from VR, the Bureau of Exceptional Student Education and community partners. Cross-training between BESE and VR staff is emphasized through interagency agreements as presented in Section (d) of this plan portion. The Department of Education's State Education Agency (SEA) and Local Education Agencies (LEAs) profiles are used to gather important statistical information on graduation rates, dropout rates, Individual Educational Plan compliance and postsecondary outcomes for students with disabilities. BESE and VR continue to share and analyze student data to identify students with Individual Education Plans or 504 Plans who can benefit from VR services and any potential gaps in service

VR strives to help LEAs meet the mandates of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004. VR support includes offering an early VR referral and application process beginning at age 14, VR Transition Liaisons Contact List, VR Transition Brochures and coordination of the Individual Education Plan with the Individualized Plan for Employment when served by both agencies. VR endorses evidence-based LEA services that benefit students with disabilities, including educating students in the least restrictive environment with their non-disabled peers and having access to the original curricula. VR counselors continue to attend regular in-service training that specifically targets transition youth issues and helps meet the requirements of the CSPD.

VR and community partners continue to make presentations and participate in annual transition conferences at the national, state and local level to better serve students with disabilities. These events

allow for agency updates, contributing information on promising initiatives and sharing evidence-based best practices. When VR employees and local educators are assigned to teams at events, they use this time to discuss issues and learn from one another about effective transition practices. This information is often incorporated into VR staff trainings.

Statewide transition training and resources are provided continually throughout the year. New counselors receive training, which includes resources from the VR Transition Youth Program. Transition Administrators deliver training to school staff, ESE Directors and VR staff at the beginning of every school year. VR employees have access to the “Effective Practices for Working with the School System” and the “Outreach for the School System” presentations developed to improve collaboration between VR and the LEAs. At the local level, VR employees participate in interagency groups with a transition focus to improve local coordination and services to students, families, schools, employers and agency partners. Additionally, local VR Transition Liaisons meet twice a year with the state-level VR Transition Administrator to discuss their progress and technical assistance needs on Local Education Agency Agreements.

Personnel to Address Individual Communication Needs

VR employees need to be able to work with Florida’s diverse population. One way VR does this is to actively recruit counselors and support employees who have diverse backgrounds. VR places advertisements in newspapers that reach diverse groups of people and collaborates with local civic and social service groups. VR also provides a five percent pay increase to bilingual staff, for positions where this is beneficial to the agency. Bilingual individuals are on staff, but qualified interpreters or translators will continue to be used when a counselor is unable to communicate directly with a customer in his/her preferred language. VR will continue to partner with local vendors to offer this service.

American Sign Language interpreting needs for customers who are Deaf or Deaf blind are met using either staff interpreters (including those hired via the contract with Service Source) or arrangements with qualified local interpreter service providers. When either staff interpreters or local interpreters are not available, VR will reschedule appointments or use available text communication devices with customers. VR also has assistive listening devices available in most offices for VR employees to communicate with individuals who are hard of hearing or late-deafened and do not know sign-language.

In addition, VR complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act and Rehabilitation Act Section 508 by providing materials in alternative formats as requested by the customer.

Further, VR provides for an initial increase in a starting salary for individuals who are fluent in Spanish, Creole or Haitian. Staff also arranges for bilingual spoken language interpreters/translators if a bilingual staff is not available. Training and technical assistance to VR staff on the provision of interpreters/translators are ongoing.

Statewide Assessment

In February 2019, VR, in collaboration with the Florida Rehabilitation Council (FRC), completed its three-year comprehensive statewide needs assessment (CSNA). The CSNA was conducted by the San Diego State University Interwork Institute. They worked closely with VR, FRC and VR’s stakeholder groups to describe the rehabilitation needs of individuals with disabilities in Florida. The CSNA consisted of the following components: analysis of existing data sources, key informant and focus group interviews, surveys of individuals with disabilities, partner surveys, VR staff surveys and business surveys. Findings and recommendations from the CSNA will guide agency planning and development of state plans for

federal fiscal years 2020 - 2023.

The CSNA contains information in seven general sections and identifies recurring themes. This information is being used to inform the VR strategic plan for 2020- 2023.

Section One: Overall Performance of VR

- VR staff are characterized as committed and caring individuals that strive to do their best for consumers.
- The high turnover of staff has been a challenge for the organization in multiple areas and is related to the pay scale for staff.
- There is a lack of community awareness about VR and a need to increase communication about VR to the public.

Section Two: The needs of individuals with the most significant disabilities, including their need for supported employment

- Transportation remains the most significant need of consumers served by VR, and this is especially true in rural areas.
- The most frequently cited vocational rehabilitation needs of individuals with the most significant disabilities included all types of training, work skills, increased education, work experience and social skills development.
- Employer misconceptions about the ability of individuals with disabilities is a significant barrier to employment and becomes more significant with the increase in the significance of the disability.
- There is an ever-increasing percentage of individuals being served by VR that have significant mental health impairments. VR staff and service providers need training to ensure they are aware of how to best serve this population.
- There is a reduction in the number of individuals working in subminimum wage employment in Florida, and VR and their network of providers need to be sure that they have the capacity to serve these individuals through further developing their capacity to provide supported and customized employment.
- Self-advocacy training for individuals with disabilities is an essential rehabilitation need.

Section Three: The needs of individuals with disabilities from different ethnic groups, including needs of individuals who have been unserved or underserved by the VR program

- Individuals with disabilities living in the rural areas of Florida were the most frequently mentioned underserved group. The lack of public transportation and the distance that has to be traveled to get to the VR offices or to work was the primary reason noted for being underserved
- The need for work skills, education, training and rehabilitation professionals that speak their language were the most frequently noted needs of individuals from diverse cultures.
- Deaf individuals were characterized as potentially underserved because there is a shortage of qualified interpreters in many parts of the State.

Section Four: The needs of youth and students with disabilities in transition

Recurring themes in this area include:

- All of the five required pre-employment transition services represent significant rehabilitation needs of students with disabilities in Florida, with work-based learning experiences being the most significant and important need.
- Transportation is a major barrier for students and their ability to experience work.

- The primary rehabilitation needs of youth with disabilities in Florida are work skills, soft skills, education, training and transportation.
- Youth with disabilities in Florida need to develop the ability to advocate for themselves to ensure they have access to the same opportunities as their peers without disabilities.

Section Five: The needs of individuals with disabilities served through other components of the statewide Workforce Development System

Recurring themes in this area include:

- The relationship of the CareerSource Centers with VR remains one primarily of referral rather than co-enrollment and braiding of funding.
- The CareerSource Centers were characterized as being ineffective in their service to individuals with disabilities in Florida, though there are areas that do better than others.
- Ongoing consistent cross-training between the core partners is a need so that staff is aware of how each other's programs function and what limitations in service exist.
- CareerSource Center staff need to receive ongoing training on how to effectively work with individuals with disabilities, especially those with mental health impairments.

Section Six: The need to establish, develop or improve Community Rehabilitation Programs in Florida

- The need to develop service providers is greatest in rural areas, especially providers for supported and customized employment.
- There is a need for service providers that are skilled in working with individuals with mental health impairments and other most significant disabilities.
- There is a need to develop providers that can sign and have experience working with Deaf individuals.

Section Seven: The needs of businesses

- The most frequent feedback received from participants across all groups regarding employers was the need to educate them and reduce the biases held about the abilities of individuals with disabilities. Employers were frequently characterized as fearful about hiring individuals with disabilities and about their capacity to perform the essential functions of many jobs.
- In order to improve their effectiveness in serving employers, VR will need to increase the number of their Business Relations Representatives.
- There is an opportunity for BRRs to expand the partnership with their Title I counterparts to increase the number of employers they can reach. While this partnership was active in some areas, it was not consistent.

The CSNA made several recommendations related to the needs of individuals with disabilities for transition career service and Pre-ETS.

1. VR should develop a program in partnership with secondary and postsecondary schools throughout Florida that ensures that students with disabilities that will be pursuing postsecondary education get connected to the Disabled Student Services programs at the colleges prior to the first day of college classes. This will ensure that any reasonable accommodation needs are met prior to the start of course work and will maximize the potential for student success.
2. VR should recruit Pre-ETS providers that will provide training in self-advocacy to help address the apparent shortage of these services. In addition, VR should consider partnering with the Centers for Independent Living in Florida as a way to address this service gap.
3. VR is encouraged to consult with the Youth Technical Assistance Center (Y-TAC) to develop an

intensive technical assistance agreement aimed at improving services to Juvenile Justice and Foster Care Youth. The Y-TAC can help VR conduct process mapping of the Juvenile Justice and Foster Care systems and develop procedures that facilitate access to VR services for these youth. The Y-TAC may be able to help VR establish partnerships with the Title I Youth programs to help increase services to out-of-school youth in Florida.

4. Continue to develop opportunities for work experiences in the community, but also consider the impact of time-limited experiences on participants. Create a supportive pathway for students that may want permanent employment.
5. VR should work with schools to identify and refer students receiving services under a 504 plan and encourage schools to refer these students to VR earlier than their senior year.
6. Examine strategies to enhance parent involvement in the planning and delivery of transition services. VR may wish to consult with the PROMISE programs in California and Wisconsin to identify successful family engagement strategies. Information about the California PROMISE program can be found here: <https://www.capromise.org/> . Information about the Wisconsin PROMISE program can be found here: <https://promisewi.com/> .
7. VR should actively recruit Pre-ETS providers that can communicate using sign language and that have experience working with deaf individuals. In addition, VR should identify peer mentors for the youth with deafness that will help them develop self-advocacy skills and help them develop high expectations.

VR is pursuing technical assistance to address these recommendations through a variety of initiatives, including major revisions to our fee-for-service model, expanding opportunities for school districts to be providers of Pre-ETS, and streamlining the case management process for students who are potentially eligible.

VR continues to address the needs identified in the 2019 CSNA. VR has also begun the process to engage San Diego State University to conduct CSNA for the 2023 – 2027 plan.

Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment Addendum

The Florida Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) is engaged in a five-year plan to reduce and consolidate service delivery locations across the state. The plan takes advantage of new opportunities for telework, virtual meetings and community-based service delivery. The plan also maximizes opportunities for co-location with WIOA partners, including CareerSource Florida.

Implementation of the plan may result in the need to engage in “the remodeling or alteration of an existing building” to improve infrastructure and accessibility of the publicly owned locations in order to ensure the continuity of services. If specific projects are identified, VR must ensure that all alternative funding mechanisms are exhausted before seeking approval to pursue such modifications under the provisions of the “Establishment of a facility for a public or nonprofit community rehabilitation program” under state and federal law. Florida VR has not identified a need to establish a nonprofit community rehabilitation program, and implementation of this addendum relates only to remodeling or altering publicly owned property.

(b) Annual Estimates

Number of Individuals in the State Who are Eligible for Services under this State Plan

From October 1, 2021 to September 30, 2022, VR anticipates that approximately 45,210 Floridians will be eligible for VR services.

Annual Estimates of Individuals to be Served and Cost of Services with Funds Provided under Part B of Title I and Part B of Title VI of the Act

From October 1, 2021 to September 30, 2022, VR anticipates a workload of 45,210 individuals. Because of limited resources, VR has determined that vocational rehabilitation services cannot be provided to all individuals with disabilities in the state who apply for services. The following projections for Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2021-22 are based on case management and budget projection models. The projected number of eligible individuals to receive vocational rehabilitation services by priority category and cost of services per category are as follows:

Figure 9.03
Projected Number of Eligible Individuals to Receive VR Services

Priority Category	Projected Number Served	Projected Service Cost
Category 1	25,761	\$55,387,063
Category 2	18,572	\$40,275,125
Category 3	877	\$2,781,625
Total	45,210	\$98,443,813

The estimated number of customers to be served in Supported Employment (Part B of Title VI of the Act) is 10,201.

Total projected costs for IPE services are \$98,443,813. Additionally, the cost for assessment services is projected at \$18,431,188. The total projected revenue needed for IPE and assessment services for FFY 2021 is \$116,790,000. The revenue available for IPE and assessment services is estimated to be \$116,875,000.

Some expenditures associated with WIOA initiatives such as Pre-ETS and Job Retention Services (discretionary services under Order of Selection) have not been factored into these projections. Until these costs are fully realized and included in service and cost projections, VR will continue its current management of wait list categories under Order of Selection.

(I) State Goals and Priorities

VR Vision

To become the first-place people with disabilities turn when seeking employment and a top resource for employers in need of qualified employees.

VR Mission

To help people with disabilities find and maintain advance in employment and enhance their independence.

Strategic Goals and Priorities

During FFY 2018-2019, VR, in collaboration with the Florida Rehabilitation Council, completed its three-year comprehensive statewide needs assessment. Information obtained from the needs assessment, management reports and feedback from VR employees, stakeholders and customers were used to

evaluate current goals, objectives and projects and establish new strategic priorities.

Following the previously established planning process, the Senior Executive Leadership Team regularly reviews progress and updates strategies as needed. Annually, the Senior Executive Leadership Team completed a thorough review of the strategic plan and then held a planning meeting to determine which projects to include in the updated strategic plan. Strategy updates are provided quarterly and reported out to VR Leadership and stakeholders.

Overall, the number of individuals seeking VR services fell beginning in March of 2020 with the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. Although VR continued to provide services without interruption throughout the pandemic, fewer customers were seeking the services. VR has engaged in outreach activities and the impact of the pandemic has been mitigated by public health initiatives; however, VR has not recovered from the initial impact. For instance, there were approximately 25 percent fewer applications in September of 2021 than in September of 2019.

Current Goals, Objectives and Strategies

Goal 1. Enhance employment opportunities through individualized services to meet workforce demands and improve the lives of individuals with disabilities.

Objective 1.1 Expand service delivery options.

Strategy 1.1.1 Enhance services for individuals with the most significant disabilities to assist them to avoid, or transition from, subminimum wage employment, by expanding service delivery options with the goal of competitive, integrated employment, such as supported employment, CCIR, customized employment and Discovery.

Strategy 1.1.2 Enhance services for individuals with severe psychiatric disabilities by expanding Individual Placement and Support to additional areas via strengthened partnerships.

Strategy 1.1.3 Strengthen the Business Relations program, including implementation of technical assistance provided by WINTAC.

Measure of Success:

- Customer satisfaction survey results
- Increased employment outcomes
- Increased business engagement and retention

Objective 1.2 Improve communication with customers.

Strategy 1.2.1 Update publications and brochures to be more informative and user-friendly.

Strategy 1.2.2 Revise VR's website for ease of use, clarity of information and accessibility.

Strategy 1.2.3. Implement a data-driven case review process to verify that contact timeframes are adhered to.

Measure of Success:

- Improved customer satisfaction survey results
- Reduced number of "no contact" closures
- Increased employment outcomes

- Reduced number of valid communication complaints made to the Ombudsman Unit

Goal 2. Increase organizational effectiveness by reducing complexity, streamlining processes, and encouraging a flexible, supportive workplace culture.

Objective 2.1 Streamline internal systems/processes.

Strategy 2.1.1 Simplify service delivery by creating a new electronic referral system that manages referrals to providers, documentation of services provided, and payment processes.

Strategy 2.1.2 Implement a new case management system that streamlines case documentation, accountability and reporting.

Measure of Success:

- Reduced turnover rates
- Improved Climate Survey results
- Increased employment outcomes

Objective 2.2 Enhance availability and use of data.

Strategy 2.2.1 Improve data integrity by continuing to incorporate internal controls for data collection and reporting.

Strategy 2.2.2 Continue to improve ease of access to data to facilitate data-driven decision-making.

Measure of Success:

- Increased compliance with statutory requirements
- Reduced number of errors in data collection and reporting

Goal 3. Stabilize the VR workforce through improved quality of life for staff.

Objective 3.1 Develop the capacity of existing resources.

Strategy 3.1.1 Increase the availability and quality of training for all staff and all positions.

Strategy 3.1.2. Evaluate positions, roles and organization of staff to maximize effectiveness and efficiency, including simplifying responsibilities via technical assistance from WINTAC.

Measure of Success:

- Reduced turnover rates
- Improved Climate Survey results
- Improved employment outcomes

Objective 3.2 Incentivize high-quality performance.

Strategy 3.2.1. Explore options for improving compensation for staff members.

Measure of Success:

- Reduced turnover rates
- Improved Climate Survey results
- Increased employment outcomes

Goal 4. Maximize engagement with partners to enhance access to services for improved service delivery.

Objective 4.1 Document and implement partnerships.

Strategy 4.1.1. Continue to facilitate effective partnerships with CareerSource Florida and its local

boards, by collaborating on and implementing memorandums of understanding and infrastructure funding agreements to streamline services for job seekers and businesses.

Strategy 4.1.2. Continue to facilitate effective partnerships with state agencies that serve individuals with developmental and/or mental health disabilities by collaborating on and implementing mechanisms to streamline services for students with disabilities.

Measure of Success:

- Increased number of individuals served via partnerships
- Increased employment outcomes

Objective 4.2 Enhance the effectiveness of partnerships.

Strategy 4.2.1 Increase the availability and quality of training for partner organizations.

Measure of Success:

- Increased capacity of partners
- Increased employment outcomes

(m) Order of Selection

Justification for the Order of Selection

VR determined that sufficient resources were not available to provide rehabilitation services to all individuals with disabilities who apply. Consequently, VR established an Order of Selection (OOS) within the state to ensure that individuals with the most significant disabilities are selected first for vocational rehabilitation services, those with significant disabilities second and all other eligible individuals selected last. This decision was based on the use of funds in the preceding years, projected funding, projected number and types of referrals, number of eligible individuals and counselor caseloads.

The OOS remains in effect statewide and does not select one type of disability over another. The OOS is not established based on age, sex, marital status, religion, race, color, national origin, or political affiliation, and is not based on the vocational goal of the individual with a disability. Elements that relate to the significance of disability are the only factors used in OOS. In accordance with Section 412 of WIOA, VR has elected to provide Job Retention Services (discretionary services to eligible individuals regardless the of order of selection, who require specific services or equipment to maintain employment).

Each month, the Executive Leadership Team looks at expenditure and revenue projections, numbers of individuals in each OOS category, numbers of individuals on the waitlist for services and staff capacity, to determine whether to release individuals from the waitlist. Based on the available data, VR periodically releases individuals from the waitlist into service. The number of potentially eligible students with disabilities receiving Pre-ETS is also a consideration.

**Figure 9.04
Projected Outcome and Service Goals and Time Frames
for Federal Fiscal Year 2021-22**

Priority Category	Projected Number Served	Projected Service Cost	Projected Successful Closures	Projected Unsuccessful Closures	Months to Complete

Category 1	25,761	\$55,387,063	2,334	4,492	24.0
Category 2	18,572	\$40,275,125	2,329	3,514	16.0
Category 3	877	\$2,781,625	392	64	7.0

Service Costs for FFY 2020-23

Total projected costs for IPE services are \$137,500,000. Additionally, the cost for assessment services is projected at \$18,431,188. Total projected revenue needed for IPE and assessment services for FFY 2021 is \$116,875,000. The revenue available for IPE and assessment services is estimated to be \$137.5 million.

Some expenditures associated with WIOA initiatives such as Pre-ETS, and Job Retention Services (discretionary services under Order of Selection) have not been factored into these projections. Until these costs are fully realized and included in service and cost projections, VR will continue its current management of wait list categories under the Order of Selection

Order of Selection Policies

Individuals needing Supported Employment services are assessed as having a most significant disability. Additionally, individuals receiving Supplemental Security Income or Social Security Disability Insurance benefits as a result of being determined to be disabled or blind are assessed as having at least a significant disability and are evaluated to determine whether they meet the criteria for individuals with most significant disabilities.

After an individual is found eligible for VR services, an OOS determination is completed. Additional evaluations or assessments to make this determination may be needed. The VR counselor and individual jointly determine the individual’s OOS priority category by evaluating his or her functional limitations, anticipated services needed and the duration of the services.

This policy does not affect an individual who began to receive services under an approved individualized plan for employment prior to the implementation date of OOS, or those individuals who are in need of post-employment services.

VR officially notifies all individuals of their individual OOS determination. Individuals not immediately activated for the development of an employment plan are offered Information and Referral services and the option to be placed on a waiting list until employment plan development services can be initiated. Individuals on the waiting list are contacted annually to determine if additional information is available. As resources become available, those with the most significant disabilities are selected first for vocational rehabilitation services, those with significant disabilities second and all other eligible individuals selected last.

Order of Selection Priority Category Description

Individuals with Most Significant Disabilities (Priority Category 1)

An eligible individual with a disability which:

1. Seriously limits three or more functional capacities in terms of an employment outcome;
2. Requires three or more primary services;
3. Requires services which must be provided over an extended period (at least 12 months);

and

4. Requires services that are not likely to be corrected through surgical intervention and/or other treatment modes.

Individuals with Significant Disabilities (Priority Category 2)

An eligible individual with a disability which:

1. Seriously limits one or two functional capacities, in terms of an employment outcome;
2. Requires two or more primary services;
3. Requires services which must be provided over an extended period (at least six months); OR
4. The individual is a recipient of Social Security Disability Insurance benefits (SSDI) or Supplemental Security Income (SSI) as a result of disability or blindness.

Other Eligible Individuals (Priority Category 3)

An eligible individual with a disability which:

1. Limits one or more major life activities; and/or
2. Services are expected to last less than six months.

VR provides Job Retention Services (discretionary services to eligible individuals regardless of order of selection, who require specific services or equipment to maintain employment).

(n) Goals and Plans for Distribution of Title VI, Part B Funds

To meet the needs of individuals with the most significant disabilities, VR collaborates and contracts with community partners to provide Supported Employment services. For FFY 2019-20, Supported Employment services were funded by Title I funding and Title VI-B funding. These funds are available on a statewide basis. Florida VR uses the majority of its Supported Employment expenditures on allowable services to youth.

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act presents VR with the opportunity to provide a wide array of services with a focus on youth. Additional opportunities available include the provision of Extended Services to youth for up to four years or until the youth turns 25 years of age, whichever occurs first or another funding source is identified. VR is now also authorized to provide supported employment services up to 24 months and may extend this time period if necessary.

VR has focused on youth services and has expanded several options designed to help youth achieve employment outcomes. These options allow youth to gain a variety of skills and exposure to multiple career options and are designed to provide skills and direction for youth so that when they are ready for Supported Employment services they have skills and knowledge to help their efforts be successful.

Goal 1: Increase the number of individuals with most significant disabilities who receive Supported Employment services.

VR will:

Continue to provide supported employment services on a statewide basis through Title I funds. Statewide allocation of funds allows for equal delivery of services throughout Florida. Individuals may receive supported employment services using a combination of Title I funds and revenues generated from Social Security reimbursements, community rehabilitation partners, or other state program

revenues.

Provide a variety of training and awareness programs designed to increase the awareness of supported employment as a vocational service for individuals with the most significant disabilities. VR Senior Program Consultants have increased outreach activities with a focus on state and local education partnerships. The VR consultants have provided trainings with a focus on sharing information to assist youth, adults and families in their consideration of pursuing Supported Employment Services.

Review pilot and innovative employment practices and assess the feasibility of replicating programs with successful strategies.

VR has initiated Discovery Services, a person-centered planning tool as a way to increase the number of individuals with significant and complex disabilities receiving supported employment services. Discovery provides an opportunity for individuals to move seamlessly from this person-centered assessment and planning to Supported Employment Services.

VR has initiated a Supported Employment Customized Placement Benchmark to incentives providers to work with individuals who will need more intense supports and assistance to become successfully employed. Training opportunities were developed for providers and VR staff on this customized employment strategy.

Goal 2: Use Title VI, Part B funds for Supported Employment services to achieve the maximum number of quality employment outcomes for individuals with most significant disabilities with a focus on youth.

- Use Title I funds, supplemented with VI, Part B funds, to provide supported employment services as specified in the Individualized Plan for Employment for youth.
- Purchase supported employment services based upon established performance benchmarks. The contract for supported employment focuses on performance and reinforces the focus on successful outcomes for individuals served.
- Funds may also be used for related customized employment strategies of Supported Self-Employment services.
- Provide up to four years of extended services for youth 24 and under when appropriate.
- VR Consultants have provided extensive outreach to educators, community providers, individuals, families, community partners, VR staff to promote Supported Employment as an opportunity for youth to become successful in becoming employed and developing a career path.
- VR works closely with the Statewide Employment First Interagency Committee. This group focuses on promoting competitive integrated employment as a first choice for youth and adults with disabilities in Florida.
- The Bureau of Field Services Employment Programs Unit provides technical assistance and support to a wide variety of stakeholders.
- VR has provided youth receiving subminimum wage employment training opportunities to encourage their consideration of competitive integrated employment opportunities. VR offers a four-hour course focused on self-advocacy, communication, employment options in local communities, how to obtain supports and services and other related topics.

Goal 3: Increase Supported Employment training opportunities for VR Counselors, Community Rehabilitation service staff, families and individuals.

VR will:

- Increase supported employment training opportunities for VR counselors, providers, families and individuals.
- Participate in the development of a consortium of providers designed to identify, share and promote innovative employment practices.
- Promote awareness of social security benefits planning as a way to fund extended services.
- Continue to provide joint training opportunities for VR employees and APD.
- Provide funding to support collaboration between VR and other community resources through networking and leadership activities.
- Participate as an advisory member on a variety of grants from the Florida Developmental Disabilities Council that provide training and collaborative activities for providers, counselors and other agency employees.

Goal 4: Leverage resources for extended ongoing support services.

VR will:

- Participate as a key member of the Employment First Interagency Committee. This committee is composed of nine agencies/organizations. The focus is on competitive integrated employment as a preferred option for youth and adults. The group also works on a statewide level to leverage and collaborate on the use of resources to benefit all individuals served by the agencies. This includes mutual training, technical assistance, advocacy and other mutually beneficial activities.
- Continue to work with APD to make sure that referred customers know about the extended service resources they can get through Medicaid Waiver Funding and/or general revenue funding.
- Continue to work with a network of providers to provide technical assistance and support of innovative projects that promote employment for individuals with the most significant disabilities.
- Provide training on the availability of funding ongoing support through Ticket to Work-Employment Network partnerships, natural supports and Social Security Work Incentives as possible resources for ongoing supports.
- Encourage the use of employer and natural supports.
- Enhance relationships with businesses and employers to let them know that on-the-job supports for individuals in supported employment are available. VR will continue efforts to strengthen community partnerships to increase access to appropriate employment services.
- Use the Business Relations Team to provide training and technical assistance to employers interested in working with VR customers. They will also develop positive relationships with employers to increase employment opportunities.
- Use the Abilities Work Help Desk as a resource to link employers to qualified job seekers with disabilities. VR is a partner in the development of and administers the Abilities Work Help Desk, a collaboration between the state's Workforce system, DBS and APD.

VR continues to work closely with the Agency for Persons (APD) with Disabilities to assist VR customers in receiving seamless ongoing support services. VR and APD staff are working together to identify

mutual customers and coordinate the services needed. VR, APD and the AHCA have recently signed and implemented a Memorandum of Agreement. This agreement will help in the planning for services needed for mutual customers. The joint will work together to help identify the appropriate extended services.

VR continues to expand its services to include Discovery and Customized Placement services to help individuals with the most significant disabilities become employed. Discovery improves the quality of the placements, increases the success of the job placements, and reduces the need for intense follow up support. Concentrated efforts are in place to continue to increase capacity across the state.

VR and APD consultants work together to provide training for VR counselors, waiver support coordinators; and APD field staff on best practices in Supported Employment and the roles and responsibilities of all partners. Training included a focus on all the possible extended service options.

VR may offer youth extended services for up to four years, as necessary.

The Supported Employment administrator provides training to field staff on the multiple options available for extended services. The development of natural and employer supports available on the jobsite has been a specific focus of VR efforts.

VR also continues to work with the Department of Children and Families' Office of Substance Abuse and Mental Health to expand access to funding for supported employment extended services for individuals with serious and persistent mental illness.

(o) State's Strategies

In an effort to address Executive Order 19-31, VR continues to provide support and services that lead to advance knowledge and skills to find meaningful work and productive careers. Specifically, VR provides support for students with disabilities and collaborates with customers in the areas of post-secondary vocational training and education, as well, job training and work- based learning to help individuals move into competitive integrated employment. During the State Fiscal Year (SFY) 20/21, VR assisted businesses and employers with their workforce needs by connecting the talents, skills and abilities of 5,055 customers with disabilities. We maintained the number of hours worked for those closures (29 hours) and the average weekly salary (\$380 from \$370). Our Return on Investment for each dollar spent increased to \$8.73 from \$8.34 the previous year.

The legislation that authorizes VR, The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act prioritizes youth transition so that youth with a disability are ready to excel in the workplace. VR has shown its commitment to this vision by increasing the number of individuals we support to achieve a high school diploma or a GED by 7%.

Below are some example training programs that assist individuals with disabilities to prepare for 21st century careers:

- Comprehensive Transition Programs include career and technical schools
- High School High-Tech

- BRICK Program
- Agritourist Collaboration
- Career Camps
- Hands on Education
- Project Search
- Industry Readiness Training
- Self-Employment Program

VR Business Representatives will continue to stay current and abreast of the labor market needs to align training and employment opportunities with sector strategies and targeted industries. This leads to pathways that are in high-skill, high-wage and high-demand careers and occupations. VR collaborates with career and technical education, career source, college systems, schools, businesses and the Department of Economic Opportunity, to provide informed choices on career pathways into the 21st labor market.

To reinforce the critical importance of VR in our state's emerging efforts to support the workforce, VR is currently updating its policy related to serving individuals with disabilities who have substance use disorders to ensure access to vocational rehabilitation services to help them achieve employment success. Also, VR is collaborating with Agency for Persons with Disabilities to identify and serve individuals with the most significant disabilities to provide opportunities for workforce inclusion. VR is a partner in the Employment First initiative along with ten other agencies to ensure the long-term commitment to improving employment outcomes for persons with disabilities. Additionally, VR is working to expand its current Individual Placement Support Program, which is designed to assist individuals with significant mental health disorders obtain employment.

With regard to the state's investment in Apprenticeship and computer science opportunities, VR will continue to partner with Deloitte and Specialisterne to strengthen its efforts towards building an Autism at Work program, which recruits college graduates with autism into full-time positions in Science, Technology Engineer and Math (STEM) careers including cyber security, information management systems, computer science, engineering and other IT-related fields. Also, VR partners with targeted industries to deliver work-based learning experiences for youth and adults. For example, Project Search. Project Search is a nationally recognized and trademark internship program for students with the most significant disabilities, providing opportunities to complete job rotations in industries, such as healthcare, universities, hospitality and retail.

Moreover, VR will continue to partner with the Brevard Internship in Construction Knowledge (BRICK) program which is a partnership with the Home Builders and Contractor Associations of Brevard and the Northeast Home Builders Association, which offer Work-Base Learning Experiences in construction and trades. Also, we will strengthen collaboration with the Federal Aviation Administration to recruit individuals with disabilities into their Air Traffic Controller Training Program. VR partnered with Aerospace that resulted in a networking and career event with seven business partners to include Lockheed Martin, Collins Aerospace, Bevilacqua Research Corporation (BRC), Lockheed Martin, Jacobs, Micro Systems, Inc., Raytheon, Zel Technologies, VT Mobile Aerospace Engineering, Inc. (ST Engineering), Your TEK Professionals which created multiple on the job training opportunities and employment.

Use of Innovation and Expansion Funds

VR recognizes Innovation and Expansion projects as beneficial and complementary to WIOA-related initiatives. Following a formal procurement process, VR will renew contracts for two Innovation and

Expansion projects, described below. Contracts for the projects run through SFY 2022.

1. The Arc-2-Work: a work-skills training program - Operated by Arc of Alachua County. The Arc-2-Work program is providing pre-employment training and participation in volunteering positions to high school students and clients of the Arc that will foster employment placement for individuals with unique abilities in Alachua County.
2. The Industry Readiness Training (IRT) Program - Operated by Brevard Achievement Center. The IRT Program is providing pre-employment training and participation in volunteering positions that will foster employment placement for individuals with unique abilities in Brevard County.

Rehabilitation Technology

Rehabilitation Technology is provided through a contractual agreement with the Center for Assistive, Rehabilitation and Robotics Technologies at the University of South Florida. The program provides rehabilitation technology assessment and evaluation services for VR customers across all stages of the rehabilitation process. Rehabilitation technology includes a range of services and devices that supplement and enhance individual functions. It includes services like job redesign or worksite modifications that improve the work environment.

Assistive Technology Services and Devices

VR sponsors the Alliance for Assistive Services and Technology Project that is directed by the Assistive Technology Advisory Council in accordance with Section 413.407, Florida Statutes. The project provides for the coordination and delivery of appropriate, cost-effective, state-of-the-art assistive technology services and devices on a statewide basis. The Florida Alliance for Assistive Services and Technology, Inc. (FAAST), is a not-for-profit corporation for which the Assistive Technology Advisory Council acts as the board of directors, manages the project and provides administrative and technical support to the council.

FAAST is responsible for administering a low-interest loan authority that provides funding to individuals with disabilities who may be unable to qualify for traditional loans and bank financing to purchase assistive technology devices.

Assistive technology includes both devices and services. A device is any item or piece of equipment used to maintain or improve the functional capabilities of a person with a disability. Many high-tech and low-tech devices are available to help people with disabilities in daily living tasks, communication, education, work and recreation.

Expansion and Improvement of Services

Results gained through the Innovation and Expansion projects described above will contribute to increased employment opportunities for VR customers. In addition to the innovation and expansion projects, VR's strategic plan contains the following initiatives anticipated to expand and improve services to individuals with disabilities:

- Develop and implement all components of the VR Business Relations Program.
- Redesign and implement pre-employment services for transition-age customers.
- Design and implement a program about service alternatives for customers to use in making an informed choice prior to entering subminimum wage employment.
- Design and implement enhancements to the Vendor Profile document for customer use in

making informed choices regarding employment providers.

Outreach to Individuals with Disabilities who are Minorities and/or who have been Unserved or Underserved

VR continues to assess its services to individuals with the most significant disabilities and individuals who may be unserved or underserved, as well as those with the most significant disabilities who may be from minority populations. VR will be completing its next CSNA during FFY2021-22, which will further identify unserved and/ or underserved groups, as well as recommendations for how to better serve these groups. Strategic projects and local-level outreach activities to ensure services to minorities and unserved/ underserved groups include the following:

- Implement all components of the VR Business Relationship Program.
- Redesign and implement pre-employment services for transition-age customers.
- Design and implement a program about service alternatives for customers to use in making an informed choice prior to entering subminimum wage employment.
- Design and implement enhancements to the Vendor Profile document for customer use in making informed choices regarding employment providers.
- Continue to explore partnership opportunities with community/faith-based organizations. Develop contact lists of faith-based and other diverse programs as resources for partnership opportunities.
- Continue to identify outreach activities conducted by VR area offices for underrepresented populations. Conduct outreach in local communities to promote VR as an agency and help individuals with disabilities who are minorities or who may be unserved or underserved to return or remain in the workplace.
- Continue to conduct outreach to migrant and seasonal farmworkers and their families through contracts with community-based organizations and other partners.

Continue to implement activities outlined in the Memorandum of Understanding with the Lower Muscogee Creek Tribe. VR currently collaborates with the Department of Juvenile Justice and Foster Care to ensure access to pre-employment transition services for students with disabilities in institutional settings. VR is in partnership with the Department of Corrections to collaborate on the Adult Re-entry and Employment Strategic Planning Program Grant to identify strategies for connecting re-entry citizens to employment.

Improving and Expanding VR Services for Students with Disabilities

WIOA provides great opportunities for VR to increase transition services and opportunities for youth with disabilities. Increased information and referral to transition age youth is built into WIOA and VR has already begun providing more transition service-related information to youth. Strategies noted below are anticipated to increase opportunities for students with disabilities.

- Continue to offer Work-Based Learning Experiences to all school districts annually. Although VR approaches and offers WBLE partnerships to all school districts in Florida, the partnership is dependent on the individual district's decision to participate. VR has recently hired another transition administrator to ensure that information is provided consistently to all school districts and to coordinate and monitor active and potential WBLE partnerships.
- Continue to provide activities for youth and students designed to assist in developing a concept of work, navigating the community and obtaining work experience during high school. Pre-ETS

include job exploration counseling, work-based learning experiences, career guidance and counseling, work readiness and self-advocacy training and experiential activities such as community-based work experience. Support services include assistive technology and services, transportation and uniforms. Intensive services are designed for those who need additional support with appropriate work behavior, require repetition to acquire skills, build endurance to work and identify the right fit or environment for work. These services include Discovery, Youth Peer Mentoring, Project SEARCH, services provided under Work-Based Learning Experiences with school districts and tuition, books and supplies for postsecondary education programs.

- Additional initiatives are under-way to increase provider capacity and offer more opportunities to youth. These include approval of CareerSource Florida to provide pre-placement services, revision of Certified Business and Technical Assistance Consultants (CBTAC) recertification procedures and increase in CBTAC and Discovery providers. VR partners with Volunteer Florida, Centers for Independent Living, Florida ARC and High School High Tech to offer more OJT and community work experiences.

Improving Community Rehabilitation Programs

VR assesses its business processes and organizational capacity on an ongoing basis to make consistent improvements. Results of the FFY 2018-19 Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA) indicate a need to develop service providers in the rural areas of the state, particularly providers for supported and customized employment, as well as providers that are skilled in working with individuals with the most significant disabilities. The CSNA also identified a need to develop providers that can sign and have experience working with Deaf individuals.

VR has increased its number of registered CRPs from 154 in 2017 to 342, as of January 2021. Each new provider went through stringent vetting, including background screening, and attended mandatory onboarding before being approved to deliver services. VR's Bureau of Vendor and Contracted Services continues to engage service providers on a quarterly basis through face-to-face meetings, area-wide provider trainings and Provider Engagement Conference Calls.

Recognizing the need to develop a service delivery model that would allow the flexibility and creativity necessary to better serve our customers, a cross-functional team of VR staff worked together to develop a new service delivery model and rate structure. This new structure incentivizes better outcomes, such as higher pay; allows for payment sooner in the process; incorporates Individual Placement Services; and creates distinct Pre-ETS benchmarks. The new model has been shared with stakeholders, including all current service providers. The response has been overwhelmingly positive.

VR is also in the process of developing an e-referral system that will allow service providers to receive referrals and bill for services electronically. The new system will replace multiple standalone systems, thereby streamlining the process and relieving some of the undue administrative burden currently felt by our providers. VR implemented the new e-referral system in February 2021.

Strategies to Improve the Performance Related to Goals, Priorities and Performance Indicators

Figure 9.05
Federal Standards and Indicators

Federal Performance Indicators and Targets	Actual Performance (PY 20)	Previous (PY 19)
Indicator 1.1: Change in Employment Outcomes (RSA Target: Increase over prior year)	-335	+265
Indicator 1.2: Percent of Employment Outcomes (RSA Target: 55.8%)	38.54%	37.9%
Indicator 1.3: Competitive Employment Outcome (Primary) (RSA Target: 72.6%)	73.35%	96.94%
Indicator 1.4: Significance of Disability (Primary) (RSA Target: 62.4%)	90.07%	92.56%
Indicator 1.5: Earnings Ratio (Primary) (RSA Target: 52%)	57.75%	55%
Indicator 1.6: Self-Support (RSA Target: 53%)	47.80%	54.53%
Indicator 2.1: Ratio of Minority to Non-Minority Service Rate (RSA Target: 80%)	97.95%	94%

VR collaborates with partners at the state and local levels to maximize employment services for people with disabilities. VR anticipates that the following projects will have a positive impact on program performance.

- Support employers and community partnerships through the Business Relations program.
- Expand the Youth Peer Mentoring pilot to all VR areas.
- Provide Career Counseling / Information and Referral services to individuals participating in subminimum wage employment. Due to the positive response to CCIR services, VR is developing an orientation and follow-up process for CCIR service recipients who expressed interest in VR services.
- Assist customers in making informed choices about employment providers through the use of the Service Provider Choice Directory.
- Redesign and implement pre-employment services for transition-age customers.
- Implement additional mental health training for counselors and develop transitional employment, Individual Placement and Support and peer specialist models to improve success with individuals with severe and persistent mental illness.
- Expand the capacity for providing Discovery and Customized Employment services.
- Establish additional casework quality assurance review practices to validate data entry.
- Continue data validation practices to detect errors prior to reporting.
- Expand the use of Benefits Planning services for Social Security recipients that will promote self-support. Purchase these services when not available from SSA.
- Expand data validation practices to decrease the number of cases reported as enrolled in an education or training program.
- Perform quality assurance reviews to increase the number of skill gains recorded in case files.
- Conduct staff training that focuses on thorough evaluation of cases before reporting enrollment

along with diligent follow-up and consistent case documentation practices.

- Improve case management system architecture to increase data quality surrounding enrollments in education and training programs.

Strategies for the Statewide Workforce Investment System to Assist Individuals with Disabilities

WIOA presents requirements and opportunities for VR to strengthen its partnership with entities of the Statewide Workforce Development System. In addition to requirements outlined in WIOA, the following strategies will increase partnerships with the statewide workforce development system to further help job seekers with disabilities.

- Continue implementation of WIOA with other core programs, including the design of the one-stop career center system and integrated performance accountability system.
- Collaborate with and offer training to CareerSource Florida and Employment Networks to provide services.
- Continue area directors' and representatives' participation on the local Workforce Boards.
- Continue to promote VR's presence in CareerSource Florida through co-location of VR units in One-Stop Career Centers, employees being out-stationed and/or through regular visits by VR employees to One-Stop Career Centers.
- Develop a network of qualified benefits planners to augment the SSA contracts for Work Incentives Planning and Assistance (WIPA) program services. SSA contracted networks are insufficient in quantity and they have reprioritized their service population so that ticketholders, youth and SSI/ SSDI beneficiaries who are not yet working or ready to work are in last place. VR believes benefits planning must be provided early to families and youth and will purchase these services when not available through SSA capacity.

Equitable Access

Since 2013, VR has made great progress in accommodation and access to services for individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing. Specific accomplishments include completion of revised best practices guides for services and communication, as well as hiring a specialized consultant in the field of deaf-blindness to develop best practices, provide consultation, training and advocacy with stakeholders involved in these cases.

Key administrators from VR and DBS held monthly meetings to revise and update the Memorandum of Agreement, develop strategies, discuss training needs, create informational guides needed by both agencies for this population and provide case consultation. Additional VR strategies and activities to increase equal access to individuals requesting services are as follows:

- Develop a comprehensive safety plan for monitoring VR facilities statewide. Specific components include a process for reporting defective/unsafe working conditions, safety and facilities management training for area staff, a move manual, a statewide safety manual, statewide first aid information, furniture inspection instructions and a facility security/building access policy at HQ.
- Continue to use interpreters and translators and VR's online resources as well as the websites of other partners and stakeholders (where permitted) to reach underserved populations and increase communication with customers.
- Offer reasonable accommodations to give equal access to services and make sure materials and other program information are available in English, Spanish and Haitian-Creole for various agencies, employers, churches, community leaders, health clinics and other settings.
- Continue to assign counselors and consultants to serve specialized populations, such as the deaf

and hard-of-hearing, transition students, mental health customers and brain and spinal cord injury customers.

- Collaborate with CareerSource Florida and other One-stop system partners to implement universal design principles into the workforce development system's facilities and operations, with the intent to include universal design as a separate component of the One-stop career center certification process.

(p) Evaluation and Reports of Progress

VR, in collaboration with the Florida Rehabilitation Council (FRC), established four strategic goals for FFY 2019. These goals and priorities were developed based on an analysis of VR's performance on the federal standards and indicators, the preliminary results of the statewide needs assessment and input from customers, providers and other stakeholders.

The following section provides VR's evaluation and report of progress towards achieving its strategic goals.

Review of Current Goals, Objectives and Strategies

Goal 1. Enhance employment opportunities through individualized services to meet workforce demands and improve the lives of individuals with disabilities.

Objective 1.1 Expand service delivery options.

Strategy 1.1.1 Enhance services for individuals with the most significant disabilities to assist them to avoid, or transition from, subminimum wage employment, by expanding service delivery options with the goal of competitive, integrated employment, such as supported employment, CCIR, customized employment and Discovery.

Strategy 1.1.2 Enhance services for individuals with severe psychiatric disabilities by expanding Individual Placement and Support to additional areas via strengthened partnerships.

Strategy 1.1.3 Strengthen the Business Relations program, including implementation of technical assistance provided by WINTAC.

Performance Measures

- Customer satisfaction survey results
- Increased employment outcomes
- Increased business engagement and retention

Actual Performance:

Measure of Success : Customer Satisfaction Survey Results

Measure	PY 18 - 19	PY 19 - 20
Overall satisfaction with VR	82.0%	81.4%
Overall satisfaction - closed successfully	89.6%	90.9%
Overall satisfaction - closed unsuccessfully	68.9%	70.4%
Satisfaction with services	82.0%	81.3%

Satisfaction with services - closed successfully	87.9%	88.9%
Satisfaction with services - closed unsuccessfully	63.2%	66.7%
Choice of services	85.0%	84.1%
Choice of services - closed successfully	91.4%	88.9%
Choice of services - closed unsuccessfully	77.7%	75.3%
Choice of service providers	83.1%	82.2%
Choice of service providers - closed successfully	88.0%	89.3%
Choice of service providers - closed unsuccessfully	73.6%	72.2%
Information about choices	84.8%	83.2%
Information about choices - closed successfully	89.6%	90.1%
Information about choices - closed unsuccessfully	73.6%	76.7%

Measure of Success : Increased employment outcomes.

Measure	PY 18 - 19	PY 19 - 20	PY 20 - 21
Second quarter employment rate	47%	53.8%	48.6%
Median monthly earnings	\$3,459	\$3,626	\$3,750
Measurable skill rate	3.6%	15.7%	28.2%
Number of employment outcomes	5,924	5,389	5,055

Measure of Success: Increased provider capacity

Measure	PY 18 - 19	PY 19 - 20	PY 20-21
Discovery/Customized Employment	135	126	110
CBTAC	36	37	44
Project SEARCH	36	38	46
Schools doing WBLE	32	32	47
Schools in STAR	64	73	73
Peer Mentoring	36	43	43
Supported Employment	249	251	251

Objective 1.2 Improve communication with customers.

Strategy 1.2.1 Update publications and brochures to be more informative and user-friendly.

Strategy 1.2.2 Revise VR's website for ease of use, clarity of information and accessibility.

Strategy 1.2.3. Implement a data-driven case review process to verify that contact timeframes are adhered to.

Performance Measures:

- Improved customer satisfaction survey results
- Reduced number of "no contact" closures
- Increased employment outcomes
- Reduced number of valid communication complaints made to the Ombudsman Unit

Actual Performance:

Measure of Success: Improved Customer Satisfaction Survey Results

Measure	PY 18-19	PY 19-20
Time for VRC to respond	78.1%	77.9%
Time for VRC to respond - closed successfully	86.1%	85.2%
Time for VRC to respond - closed unsuccessfully	68.9%	70.6%
Problems with communication	51.5%	no data
Problems with communication - closed successfully	47.7%	no data
Problems with communication - closed unsuccessfully	58.6%	
Ease of contacting VRC	82.9%	82.5%
Ease of contacting VRC - closed successfully	88.3%	86.2%
Ease of contacting VRC - closed unsuccessfully	73.0%	77.6%
Customer believes case was closed because of lack of communication	24.0%	28%

PY 18 - 19 PY 19 - 20

Measure of Success : Reduced number of “no contact” closures

Measure	PY 18 - 19	PY 19 - 20	PY 2021
“No contact” closures	31.0%	28.3%	30%

Goal 2. Increase organizational effectiveness by reducing complexity, streamlining processes and encouraging a flexible, supportive workplace culture.

Objective 2.1 Streamline internal systems/processes.

Strategy 2.1.1 Simplify service delivery by creating a new electronic referral system that manages referrals to providers, documentation of services provided and payment processes.

Strategy 2.1.2 Implement a new case management system that streamlines case documentation, accountability and reporting.

Performance Measures:

- Reduced turnover rates
- Improved Climate Survey results
- Increased employment outcomes

Actual Performance:

Measure of Success : Reduced Turnover Rate

Measure	PY 18 - 19	PY 19 - 20	PY 20-21
Turnover rate	34.8%	29.9%	23%

Measure of Success : Improved Climate Survey Results

Measure	PY 18 - 19	PY 20-21
Workload is manageable	64.8%	67.29%

Measure of Success : Increased employment outcomes.

Measure	PY 18 - 19	PY 19 - 20	PY 20 - 21
Second quarter employment rate	47%	53.8%	48.6%
Median monthly earnings	\$3,459	\$3,626	\$3,750
Measurable skill rate	3.6%	15.7%	28.2%
Number of employment outcomes	5,924	5,389	5,055

Objective 2.2 Enhance availability and use of data.

Strategy 2.2.1 Improve data integrity by continuing to incorporate internal controls for data collection and reporting.

Strategy 2.2.2 Continue to improve ease of access to data to facilitate data-driven decision-making.

Performance Measures:

- Increased compliance with statutory requirements
- Reduced number of errors in data collection and reporting

Actual Performance:

Measure of Success : Increased compliance with statutory requirements

Measure	PY 18 - 19	PY 19 - 20	PY 20-
21			
Compliance rate with 60 days	97%	98.6%	98.92%
Compliance rate with 90 days	93%	97.3%	98.8%

Goal 3. Stabilize the VR workforce through improved quality of life for staff.

Objective 3.1 Develop the capacity of existing resources.

Strategy 3.1.1 Increase the availability and quality of training for all staff and all positions.

Strategy 3.1.2 Evaluate positions, roles and organization of staff to maximize effectiveness and efficiency, including simplifying responsibilities via technical assistance from WINTAC.

Performance Measures:

- Reduced turnover rates
- Improved Climate Survey results
- Improved employment outcomes

Actual Performance:

Measure of Success: Reduced Turnover Rate

Measure	PY 18 - 19	PY 19 - 20	PY 20-21
Turnover rate	34.8%	29.9%	23%

Improved Climate Survey Results

Measure	PY 18 - 19	PY 20-21
Satisfied with in-house training.	72.06%	70.39%
Someone at work encourages my development.	83.8%	82.64%
I am provided with opportunities for growth and development.	71.5%	73.64%

Measure of Success: Increased employment outcomes.

Measure	PY 18 - 19	PY 19 - 20	PY 20 - 21
Second quarter employment rate	47%	53.8%	48.6%
Median monthly earnings	\$3,459	\$3,626	\$3,750
Measurable skill rate	3.6%	15.7%	28.2%
Number of employment outcomes	5,924	5,389	5,055

Objective 3.2 Incentivize high quality performance.

Strategy 3.2.1. Explore options for improving compensation for staff members.

Performance Measures:

- Reduced turnover rates
- Improved Climate Survey results

Actual Performance:

Measure of Success: Reduced Turnover Rate

Measure	PY 18 - 19	PY 19 - 20	PY 20-21
Turnover rate	34.8%	29.9%	23%

Measure of Success : Improved Climate Survey Results

Measure	PY 18 - 19	PY 20-21
I work a second job for additional income to support family or pay off debt.	87.5%	88.30%
The salary and benefits I receive are fair compensation for my job duties.	33.3%	32.25%

Goal 4. Maximize engagement with partners to enhance access to services for improved service delivery.

Objective 4.1 Document and implement partnerships.

Strategy 4.1.1. Continue to facilitate effective partnerships with CareerSource Florida, and its local boards, by collaborating on and implementing memorandums of understanding and infrastructure funding agreements to streamline services for job seekers and businesses.

Strategy 4.1.2. Continue to facilitate effective partnerships with state and local education agencies by collaborating on and implementing mechanisms to streamline services for students with disabilities.

Strategy 4.1.2. Continue to facilitate effective partnerships with state agencies that serve individuals with developmental and/or mental health disabilities by collaborating on and implementing mechanisms to streamline services for students with disabilities.

Performance Measures:

- Increased number of individuals served via partnerships
- Increased employment outcomes

Actual Performance:

Measure of Success : Increased employment outcomes.

Measure	PY 18 - 19	PY 19 - 20	PY 20 - 21
Second quarter employment rate	47%	53.8%	48.6%
Median monthly earnings	\$3,459	\$3,626	\$3,750
Measurable skill rate	3.6%	15.7%	28.2%
Number of employment outcomes	5,924	5,389	5,055

Measure of Success : Increased number of individuals served via partnerships.

Measure	PY 18 - 19	PY 19 – 20	PY 20-21
# receiving Job Exploration Counseling	7,234	6,557	2,378
# receiving WBLE	2,533	3,431	4,643
# receiving Workplace Readiness Training	1,326	1,514	3,258

# receiving Instruction in Self-Advocacy	478	1,078	2,301
# receiving Graduate College/ University Training	29	20	30
# receiving Four-Year College or University Training	3,057	3,108	2,918
# receiving Junior or Community College Training	1,593	1,440	1,098
# receiving Occupational or Vocational Training	1,097	850	612
# receiving On-the-Job Training	1,762	2,483	1,931
# receiving Basic Remedial/ Literacy Training	147	113	69
# receiving Job Readiness Training	35	71	69
# receiving Miscellaneous Training	1,155	1,509	601
# receiving Job Search Assistance	3,019	3,393	2,606
# receiving Job Placement Assistance	4,100	3,973	3,292
# receiving Short Term Job Supports	64	68	77
# receiving Supported Employment Services	2,013	2,069	1,800
# receiving Benefits Counseling	2,542	2,719	1,310
# receiving Customized Employment Services	4,748	4,121	3,242
# receiving Transportation	5,390	4,837	1,378
# of customers receiving Rehabilitation Technology	2,291	2,050	1,879
# of customers receiving Technical Assistance	168	140	140
# of customers receiving Interpreter Services	1,338	1,239	825
# of units that are adjacent to CSF	6	6	8
# of CSF offices that have VR presence	6	6/3	6
# of units that are co-located at CSF	3	2	3

Objective 4.2 Enhance the effectiveness of partnerships.

Strategy 4.2.1 Increase the availability and quality of training for partner organizations.

Performance Measures:

- Increased capacity of partners
- Increased employment outcomes

Actual Performance:

Measure of Success : Increased employment outcomes.

Measure	PY 18 - 19	PY 19 - 20	PY 20 -
21			
Second quarter employment rate	47%	53.8%	48.6%

Median monthly earnings	\$3,459	\$3,626	\$3,750
Measurable skill rate	3.6%	15.7%	28.2%
Number of employment outcomes	5,924	5,389	5,055

Explanation of Performance:

Strategies that contributed to achievement of goals and priorities

Following the previously established planning process, VR Senior Leaders regularly review progress and update strategies as needed. Annually, the Senior Leadership Team completed a thorough review of the strategic plan, and then held a planning meeting to determine which projects to include in the updated strategic plan. Strategy updates are provided quarterly and reported out to VR Leadership and stakeholders.

The Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) completed its monitoring visit with VR in April 2017. In addition, VR completed its Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA), which informed agency planning in FFYs 2020-23. VR updated its strategic goals and priorities after receipt of the RSA Monitoring Report and completion of the CSNA. Currently, VR agency priorities are to ensure IT systems are fully capable of collecting data required for federal reporting, and to refine its service delivery procedures to meet Pre-ETS budget requirements while continuing to meet the needs of other customers.

The smooth operation of the strategic planning process is in part due to VR senior leaders’ commitment to providing all support necessary for project teams to be successful. Senior leaders also realize the value of feedback received from VR customers, personnel, stakeholders and concerned citizens. Arrangements are in place so that anyone can provide feedback on the state plan, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, using a dedicated email address on the Florida VR website, rehabworks.org/plans.shtml. The email address is vrplan@vr.fldoe.org. A concerted effort has also been made to standardize and streamline VR operational processes and procedures, such as staff development, planning, IT governance and development schedules and business intelligence functions.

Barriers that impeded achievement of goals and priorities

Despite obstacles such as changes to waitlist management, fiscal strains, global pandemic impacts, preparing for and implementing WIOA, staff turnover and rising caseload sizes, VR made great progress towards achieving its strategic projects and agency priorities. When waitlist categories were closed due to fiscal and human resource deficits, field staff used this time to reconnect and engage customers, as well as close cases for customers no longer interested in services. Budget and caseload projection models were also developed during this time and have allowed VR to better manage and plan. Preparing for WIOA implementation forced VR to reexamine its business processes and organizational structure, which has resulted in more efficient and standardized operations. It allows VR to develop true partnerships and connections with other employment-focused entities. These improvements, borne out of necessity, have increased VR’s ability to plan, as well as to be flexible when barriers are encountered.

**Figure 9.06
WIOA PERFORMANCE INDICATORS**

	Vocational Rehabilitation Program			
	Program Year: 2019	Program Year 2020	Program Year: 2022	Program Year: 2023

	Actual Level	Negotiated Level	Actual Level	Expected Level	Negotiated Level	Expected Level	Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter after Exit)	53.8%	NA	48.6%	48.6%	N/A	48.6%	N/A
Employment (Fourth Quarter after Exit)	50.7%	NA	47.9	47.9%	N/A	47.9%	N/A
Median Earnings (Second Quarter after Exit)	\$3,626	NA	\$3,750	\$3,750	N/A	\$3,750	N/A
Credential Attainment Rate	6.4%	NA	9.0%	9.0%	N/A	9.0%	N/A
Measurable Skill Gains	15.7%	16%	28.2%	28.2%	N/A	28.2%	N/A

Explanation of Performance:

VR has made a concerted effort to improve performance on Measurable Skill Gains, including refining internal controls and providing intensive training and guidance to staff to ensure that the data reported is accurate and indicative of the progress VR customers are making.

Use of Title I Funds for Innovation and Expansion Activities

VR continues to use funds designated under this section to support the functions of the FRC and Florida Independent Living Council and to support opportunities for improving the efficiency of service delivery.

Actual Performance:

VR continues to support and collaborate with the FRC and FILC as required in the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended. In SFY 2020-21, a total of 12,717 independent living plans were developed, and 14,797 independent living goals were set through the network of 16 Centers for Independent Living (CIL). CILs served a total of 14,791 individuals with significant disabilities. Information and Referral services were provided to approximately 18,724 individuals and Community Transition Assistance was provided to 29 individuals.

Explanation of Performance:

These collaborative efforts helped strengthen leadership and improve services, which led to increased employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities. It is anticipated that the new Innovation and Expansion projects will contribute positively to VR’s rehabilitation rate and provide more informed customer choice and options.

Evaluation of Supported Employment Program

Review of Section (n) Goals and Plans for Distribution of Title VI-B Funds in 2020-21

VR is committed to providing quality Supported Employment services to individuals with the most significant disabilities. VR collaborates and contracts with community rehabilitation providers across the state of Florida. VR has focused this year on increasing the quality and capacity of the employment

providers. VR may now provide Supported Employment services for up to 24 months, if necessary.

VR has also focused on expanding services to Transition Youth. The Career Exploration, Workplace Readiness, Community-Based Work Experiences, Self-Advocacy, Youth Peer Mentoring and Postsecondary Educational Counseling are all services that were expanded to assist youth in their eventual pursuit of employment.

VR may also offer youth extended services for up to four years, as necessary and as funds permit.

- VR continues to provide Supported Employment Services on a statewide basis through Title VI- B funds, and with Title I funds when Title VI-B funds are expended.
- Fully expend Title VI-B funds for the provision of Supported Employment services after reserving no more than 2.5% for program administration.
- Provide a variety of training and outreach programs designed to increase the awareness of Supported Employment as an appropriate vocational program for individuals with most significant disabilities.
- Review pilot and innovative employment practices and assess the feasibility of replicating programs using successful strategies.

Supported Employment services were provided to adults and youth who required these services on a statewide basis. Supported Employment funds were used to pay for Placement, Stabilization, Transition, and placement for successful Employment Outcomes. Funds were fully expended on services. Five percent or less was used to support program administration.

VR increased training opportunities for individuals, youth, counselors, providers and other stakeholders to promote Supported Employment services as a first and preferred service option. Transition Youth services were expanded to offer an array of services that would support youth in pursuing competitive integrated employment opportunities. Fifty percent of the Title VI B funding was expended on youth 24 and under.

VR developed and implemented a Career Counseling Information and Referral Course for individuals participating in subminimum wage employment in 14 (C) entities as required under the Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act. This course provides information that allows individuals to make an informed choice about current and future employment opportunities. Approximately 3,000 individuals participated in this training opportunity. Individuals who stated an interest in pursuing VR services will be provided the information and support needed to apply for VR services.

VR staff have worked with Employment First Partners, Agency for Persons with Disabilities, Project 10 staff, local Education Agencies and other partners to increase Third Party Cooperative Arrangements, Project SEARCH programs and other work experience programs that provide training opportunities that lead to employment.

VR staff have also collaborated with the Florida Association for Rehabilitation Facilities and the ARC of Florida to develop a package of VR services that would assist individuals with the most significant disabilities to pursue competitive integrated employment opportunities.

VR worked with National Project SEARCH, Florida Developmental Disabilities Council, Florida Association of Rehabilitation Facilities (FARF), the University of Wisconsin/Whitewater to develop an Adult Project

SEARCH model. This model is designed to encourage and support individuals to transition from sheltered work or provide another option for young adults. It is anticipated that if the project is a success, it will be expanded to other areas of the state. It has been initiated in three areas of the state.

Goal 2: Use Title VI, Part B funds to achieve the maximum number of quality employment outcomes for individuals with the most significant disabilities

- Use Title I funds, supplemented with Title VI B funds to provide Supported Employment services as specified in the individual plan for employment.
- Purchase Supported Employment services based upon established performance benchmarks. The contracts for Supported Employment focuses on performance and reinforces the focus on successful outcomes.
- Funds may also be used for related customized employment strategies and supported self-employment services.

VR provided Supported Employment services to individuals with the most significant disabilities who requested these services. Data below represents VR's performance in serving Supported Employment customers.

SFY 2020-2021 Supported Employment Performance Data

- Number of active cases: 10,453
- Number of Individualized Plans for Employment: 2,236
- Number of Employment Outcomes: 930

VR has increased the number of Supported Employment Providers throughout Florida. Additional training and support have been provided to new employment providers. VR has also added a Customized Job Placement benchmark to support individuals with the most significant disabilities who may need a customized employment option.

VR has also added a Customized Job Placement benchmark to support individuals with most significant disabilities who may need a customized employment option.

Discovery has also expanded the number of providers eligible to provide this service.

The Supported Employment service was redesigned with additional benchmarks and deliverables to support the long-term success of customers receiving this service.

Goal 3: Increase Supported Employment training opportunities for VR Counselors, Community Rehabilitation Providers, families and individuals.

- Increase Supported Employment training opportunities for VR counselors, providers, families and individuals.
- Participate in the development of a consortium of providers designed to identify, share and promote innovative employment practices.
- Promote awareness of social security benefits planning as a way to fund extended services.
- Continue to provide joint training opportunities for VR employees and APD.
- Provide funding to support collaboration between VR and other community resources through

networking and leadership activities.

Participate as an advisory member on a variety of grants from the Florida Developmental Disabilities Council that provide training and collaborative activities for providers, counselors and other agency employees.

The Supported Employment Senior Consultant continues to provide training on service delivery for individuals with the most significant disabilities to new counselors, as well as follow-up trainings and technical assistance to seasoned counselors and supervisors at conferences, meetings and workshops.

VR Consultants provided training to families and members in the community as requested. These sessions are designed to provide information and a vision that Supported Employment services are designed for individuals with the most significant disabilities. They provide families and customers with the information they need to become successfully employed. The sessions were provided to the groups and organizations listed below. Additional presentations are made throughout the year to local stakeholder groups.

Florida Developmental Disability Council

- Florida Association of Rehabilitation Facilities
- Florida ARC Membership
- Florida Rehabilitation Council
- Florida Project SEARCH Sites
- Certified Business and Technical Assistance Consultant Area Trainings
- Standing Transition Committees throughout Florida
- Individualized Technical Assistance and Trainings as requested
- Florida Department of Education - Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services
- Family Café Participants
- Visions Conference Attendees
- Healthy Minds Healthy Futures Conference attendees
- Recovery Oriented System of Care Work Group

VR Program Administrators provide technical assistance and consultations on individual cases as requested by supervisors, family members, VR staff and individual customers.

Several strategies were used to support collaboration between VR and other community resources through networking and leadership activities listed below.

- Representation on the Florida Developmental Disabilities Council and Employment Task Force. This included helping develop pilot projects on a wide array of employment topics. Administrators were involved as task force members, on advisory committees, and as monitors of projects. The projects complemented and supported VR's mission of helping individuals prepare for, get or keep a job.
- Presentations on Supported Employment at conferences around the state. Audiences included professionals, families and students regarding employment options.
- Participation as a board member for the Florida Association of People Supporting Employment First (APSE).
- Representation on the Statewide Employment First Initiative by VR's Supported Employment

and Transition Consultants.

- The VR Program Administrator coordinated and developed training for providers and staff on Discovery and Customized Employment Services.
- Participation in the National Supported Employment Community of Practice (CoP).
- Participation in the National Customized Employment CoP.
- Participation in the National Self-Employment CoP.
- Representation on the Interagency State Review Team, a partnership of the major youth-serving agencies in the state of Florida. The team coordinates services and support for children/youth in Florida and collaborates on developing necessary local and statewide resources for children/youth being served by multiple agencies.
- Participation on the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Block Grant Advisory Council. The council advises the Department of Children and Families on the allocation of services and creating a plan that supports the treatments and supports for recovery and life in the community.
- Participation in the International Individual Placement and Support Learning Community and local (Broward County, FL) IPS Learning Community.
- Participation in the ASPIRE (Advancing State Policy Integration for Recovery and Employment) to promote alignment of policies and practices across state agencies in support of competitive integrated employment for individuals with mental health conditions.

VR initiated and implemented training opportunities for adults who were participating in subminimum wage employment. This service was provided in collaboration with 14 (C) employers and community providers.

Three thousand individuals received Career Counseling Information and Referral Services during the first year of the program. This course is designed to promote competitive integrated employment opportunities.

Goal 4: Leverage resources for extended ongoing support services

- Continue to work with APD to make sure that referred customers know about the resources for extended service they can get through Medicaid Waiver Funding and/or general revenue funding.
- Continue to work with a network of providers to provide technical assistance and support of innovative projects that promote employment for individuals with the most significant disabilities.
- Provide training on the availability of funding extended services through Ticket to Work-Employment Network partnerships, natural supports and Social Security Work Incentives.
- Encourage the use of employer and natural supports as a resource for extended services.
- Enhance relationships with businesses and employers to let them know that on-the-job supports for individuals in Supported Employment are available. VR will continue efforts to strengthen community partnerships to increase access to appropriate employment services.
- Use the Business Relations Team to provide training and technical assistance to employers interested in working with VR customers. They will also develop positive relationships with employers to increase employment opportunities.
- Use the Abilities Work Help Desk as a resource to link employers to qualified job seekers with disabilities. VR is a partner in the development of and administers the Abilities Work Help Desk,

a collaboration between the state's Workforce system, DBS and APD.

VR continues to work closely with the Agency for Persons (APD) with Disabilities to assist VR customers in receiving seamless ongoing support services. VR and APD staff are working together to identify mutual customers and coordinate the needed services.

VR continues to expand its services to include Discovery and Customized Placement services to help individuals with the most significant disabilities become employed. Discovery improves the quality of the placements, increases the success of the job placements, and reduces the need for intense follow up supports. Concentrated efforts are in place to continue to increase capacity across the state.

VR and APD consultants work together to provide training for VR counselors, waiver support coordinators and APD field staff on best practices in Supported Employment and the roles and responsibilities of all partners. Training included a focus on all of the possible extended service options.

VR may offer youth extended services for up to four years, as necessary.

The Supported Employment administrator provides training to field staff on the multiple options available for extended services. The development of natural and employer supports available on the jobsite has been a specific focus of VR efforts.

VR also continues to work with the Department of Children and Families' Office of Substance Abuse and Mental Health to expand access to funding for supported employment extended services for individuals with serious and persistent mental illness.

(q) Quality, Scope and Extent of Supported Employment Services

Quality

VR is committed to providing quality Supported Employment services to individuals with the most significant disabilities. VR supports the individual in making employment choices consistent with their strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities and interests. The scope of services varies based on the amount, intensity and support needed by each individual.

VR counselors work in partnership with the individual when developing the Individualized Plan for Employment. This plan guides the services and supports that are needed for that individual. The IPE is evaluated throughout the process and updated as needed.

The quality of Supported Employment outcomes is assessed individually. Each individual receives services that are determined based on the specific needs of that person. A key component of evaluating the service is the individual satisfaction with the services and supports, as well as a successful employment outcome.

VR makes every effort to provide opportunities for individuals to provide their feedback on the services they received from VR. This feedback is useful information in adjusting and improving VR services to better meet their needs. There are formal service surveys, public hearings and satisfaction surveys. The VR counselor has regular communications with the individual and the Supported Employment provider to monitor, provide counseling and assist the individual, as needed.

VR recognizes that it is important to get feedback from the employer and provider's perspectives to

determine the quality of service and make necessary improvements. They are also encouraged to let VR know at any point if support is needed.

Scope

The scope of Supported Employment services varies based on the amount, intensity and type of support each person may need to obtain and maintain a job. VR provides the intensive initial services needed to help an individual with a most significant disability obtain and maintain a job of his/her choice.

Supported Employment makes possible competitive integrated employment for individuals with the most significant disabilities and for whom competitive employment has not traditionally occurred, and because of the severity of their disability, need ongoing support services in order to maintain their jobs.

Service limits have recently been increased from 18 months to 24 months. Under special circumstances, the customer and VR counselor may jointly agree in writing to extend the time, when doing so will achieve the employment outcome identified in the IPE.

Services are individually designed around the needs and desires of the individual and may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Initial placement
- Stabilization in the workplace
- Job coaching
- Assistive technology
- Specialized Job Training
- Social Skills Training
- Discovery
- Establishing formal and informal worksite-related expectations (e.g., time and attendance, dress, communication)
- Supported Self-Employment
- Customized Job Placement

VR has added Discovery as a service option to its array of Supported Employment services. It offers a more thorough person-centered planning approach for those individuals with the most significant and complex disabilities who may need a more customized approach to employment.

VR has also added a customized job placement option for individuals in Supported Employment who may need a more individualized job development process. Individuals receiving Supported Employment services will have access to this service as needed.

Post-Employment supports and services may be provided when an intensive need arises during the provision of ongoing extended services. This may occur when job duties substantially change, the work environment is altered or the impact of the individual's disability increases.

Extent

VR will continue to expand Supported Employment services by educating community members, providers, and relevant stakeholders on the need and advantages that Supported Employment provides for individuals and employers.

Supported Employment services are available for individuals with the most significant needs who meet the criteria for VR services and supports.

VR has increased its focus on youth and expanded its Transition Youth services to begin at age 14. In addition, VR has increased several initiatives designed for youth with the most significant disabilities.

The following experiences are anticipated to help youth in their desire to have a successful career.

- High School High Tech
- Project Search
- Inclusive Postsecondary Education programs
- Third Party Cooperative Transition Agreements

Pre-Employment Transition Services

The VR Transition Youth program collaborates with education officials and partners to offer youth with the most significant disabilities opportunities to gain work experiences that help them prepare for successful employment. These evidence-based applications of learning, which include internships and other work experiences, often lead to successful employment.

VR also provides the opportunity for youth to receive up to four years of extended services funded through VR, when necessary. This is the only situation where VR is permitted to provide extended services.

VR will continue to actively engage and partner in order to:

- Develop a collaborative agreement with APD specific to Supported Employment and removing or reducing barriers for employment for individuals with significant disabilities.
- Implement the Interagency Employment First Agreement between the nine signatory parties. Continue to implement the agreements at the local and state level with appropriate stakeholders.
- Maximize the quality-of-service delivery ensuring an efficient and effective referral process, individual program planning, and coordination of intensive vocational services with extended services available for youth and adults.
- Expand available services through youth-related initiatives.
- Seek additional resources for extended services through collaborations with agency partners, including APD, Agency for Healthcare Administration, Florida Developmental Disabilities Council, Department of Education agencies and other stakeholders.
- Collaborate with community organizations, employers, families and support groups to develop natural supports for Supported Employment extended services.
- Distribute information and train counselors about Social Security Work Incentives. Increase awareness of using a Plan for Achieving Self-Sufficiency or other work incentives as an option for funding extended services. Include training on the new Able Act as a potential way for individuals to fund their own services.
- Provide opportunities for counselors, providers and support coordinators to receive training on innovative employment strategies designed to promote employment success for individuals.

Extended Services

VR's approach for Supported Employment uses the nationally accepted "best practices" models of Supported Employment services and has added new customized strategies as well. The key to the approach is an emphasis on person-centered planning and the facilitation of natural supports. Individualized job development is conducted and based on job-matching assessments, informed choice, strengths, interests and skills. Individuals are assisted with employment planning and placement by selected providers. Job skills training is provided at the job site either by job coaches or through natural supports of existing resources.

Transition to Extended Services occurs when an individual has sufficient time to learn the tasks and is comfortable in the work culture, has had the supports addressed and is satisfied with the type of work and work hours. At the time of transition, the counselor, providers, individual and others, as applicable, will have agreed that the individual is stable in their employment and expected to succeed. VR counselors confirm this information with the individual, provider and employer. They will continue to monitor the case until the person reaches a successful employment outcome of a minimum of 90 days of stabilized employment after transitioning to extended services.

VR continues to:

- Collaborate with community organizations, families and support groups to develop natural supports as an option for assisting customers on the job site.
- Participate on interagency committees to expand initiatives and increase employment outcomes.
- Seek additional resources for extended services in collaboration with VR partners.
- Emphasize providing services to all racial/ethnic minorities.
- Distribute and provide technical assistance to counselors on the use of Social Security Work Incentives to help with funding extended services.

Extended services are provided and/or funded by sources other than VR. VR works collaboratively with other state agencies and organizations to ensure that extended support services, identified on the individualized plan as needed for employment, are available for as long as the customer needs them. A program administrator serves as a statewide coordinator who monitors Supported Employment issues that arise in the field and serves as a resource person to field staff. The coordinator also assists leadership when implementing programmatic policies in accordance with federal mandates, developing effective programs, recommending training for Supported Employment staff and other liaison duties, objective as requested.

