

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION

Program-Specific Requirements for State Vocational Rehabilitation Services Program

The Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Services Portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan must include the following descriptions and estimates, as required by sections 101(a) and 606 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended by title IV of WIOA.

(a) State Rehabilitation Council. All VR agencies, except for those that have an independent consumer-controlled commission, must have a State Rehabilitation Council (Council or SRC) that meets the criteria in section 105 of the Rehabilitation Act. The designated State agency or designated State unit, as applicable, has (select A or B):

[check box] (A) is an independent State commission.

[check box] (B) has established a State Rehabilitation Council.

In accordance with Assurance 3(b), please provide information on the current composition of the Council by representative type, including the term number of the representative, as applicable, and any vacancies, as well as the beginning dates of each representative's term.

Council Representative	Current Term Number/ Vacant	Beginning Date of Term Mo./Yr.
Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC)	2	8/2021
Parent Training and Information Center	1	6/2021
Client Assistance Program	Unlimited	8/2021
Qualified Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Counselor (Ex Officio if Employed by the VR Agency)	1	8/2023
Community Rehabilitation Program Service Provider	1	7/2021
Business, Industry, and Labor	1	8/2023
Business, Industry, and Labor	Vacant	
Business, Industry, and Labor	Vacant	
Business, Industry, and Labor	Vacant	
Disability Advocacy Groups	2	8/2023
Disability Advocacy Groups	1	8/2023
Current or Former Applicants for, or Recipients of, VR services	1	8/2023
Section 121 Project Directors in the State (as applicable)	Unlimited	7/2023 7/2021
State Educational Agency Responsible for Students with Disabilities Eligible to Receive Services under Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)	Vacant	
State Workforce Development Board	1	8/2023
VR Agency Director (Ex Officio)	1	8/2023

If the SRC is not meeting the composition requirements in section 105(b) of the Rehabilitation Act and/or is not meeting quarterly as required in section 105(f) of the Rehabilitation Act, provide the steps that the VR agency is taking to ensure it meets those requirements.

The SRC has membership spots open as a result of term expirations and/or member resignations. As a result, SRC is actively recruiting new members and working closely with the governor's office to complete timely approvals for council membership. SRC maintains a quorum, and has meetings quarterly as required.

In accordance with the requirements in section 101(a)(21)(A)(ii)(III) of the Rehabilitation Act, include a summary of the Council's input (including how it was obtained) into the State Plan and any State Plan revisions, including recommendations from the Council's annual reports, the review and analysis of consumer satisfaction and other Council reports.

SRC Recommendations for 2023

Using the Consumer Satisfaction Report results of and considering input from consumers and council members, the SRC established the following recommendations for NMDVR for calendar year 2023. This list was developed during the regular September SRC meeting:

1. The SRC recommends that NMDVR staff and leadership focus attention on enhancing communication with consumers to ensure that they understand where they are in the eligibility determination process as well as their status when receiving services under the IPE. Consistency and clarity of communication were clearly highlighted as areas for improvement under the Consumer Satisfaction survey done in 2021, and the SRC would recommend that NMDVR continue to update their communication plan to address this consumer concern and to track their progress in addressing the existing gaps.
2. The SRC recommends that training on assistive technology needs and uses be emphasized with agency job coaches and employers. The council further recommends that additional emphasis be given to educating consumers on AT costs, resources, and accessibility so that they can more easily transition when, for example, school-provided tools are no longer available, or a reasonable accommodation needs to be requested.
3. The SRC recommends that all NMDVR services maintain a disability focus, and all hires at NMDVR should participate in comprehensive training on topics including disability awareness and sensitivity, vocational rehabilitation services, assistive technology, and the needs of specific disability populations. The SRC had previously noted that with the change in federal and state hiring requirements regarding minimum qualifications for VR Counselors, new agency hires can lack a foundation in vocational rehabilitation and the framework of rehabilitation service delivery. The SRC acknowledges that NMDVR did make progress in addressing this issue in 2021 with the VR Boot Camp facilitated in partnership with Western New Mexico University. However, based on consumer responses to the 2021 Consumer satisfaction survey, continued focus on this area is required to ensure well trained vocational rehabilitation staff who work closely with consumers to identify appropriate vocational placements taking individualized needs into consideration.
4. The SRC recommends that NMDVR begin a discussion on trauma-informed care for VR field staff due to the impact of COVID-19 and other traumatic effects that individuals may have

experienced. It is the council's belief that this would help the agency staff better assist consumers, better address employment-related issues now occurring due to COVID-19, and to better support their own service team by creating additional natural supports.

5. The SRC continues to recommend that NMDVR maintain adequate budget and staffing needed in order to allow the agency to move out from Order of Selection. The status of Order of Selection for the agency has essentially created a situation where community perception is that no new consumers are receiving services due to systemic issues of lack of funding and Order of Selection restrictions. The SRC recommends that NMDVR take steps to better advertise the work done to reduce the wait list and move consumers into services in order to address this perception.
6. The SRC recommends that NMDVR pay attention to retention of staff to increase the number of counselors and techs achieving a 3-year benchmark for employment. This would enhance consistency and communication as well as confidence in services.
7. The SRC recommends that NMDVR continue to increase the number and quality of employment outcomes by providing vocational rehabilitation training and counseling that is designed to enhance and improve job-seeking skills of NMDVR participants. The SRC further recommends that the agency continue to track and report this data to reflect the true impact of agency services.
8. The SRC recommends that NMDVR continue to improve the number and quality of employment outcomes for participants that are "job ready" by following the "informed choice" provisions of the Rehabilitation Act, thereby maximizing the opportunity for successful placements in the consumer's chosen career field.
9. The SRC recommends that NMDVR continue to explore expanding Pre-ETS services utilizing Project Hope (Jemez VR/NMDVR partnership) as a model.
10. The SRC recommends that NMDVR continue to participate in outreach events statewide to promote agency services and to engage potential consumers—especially in rural areas of the state.

Provide the VR agency's response to the Council's input and recommendations, including an explanation for the rejection of any input and recommendations.

1. *NMDVR continues to prioritize training of staff to ensure enhanced and effective communication techniques through all steps of the vocational rehabilitation process. In the coming year the agency will continue to emphasize individualized communication that best meets the consumer's needs. The Rehabilitation Services Unit (RSU) has a Program Policy Instruction (PPI) on Case and Caseload Management where field staff are instructed to maintain contact with each individual on a caseload at least monthly. This is reinforced through the case review process where program managers audit random cases on each caseload each month to ensure proper follow-up is occurring throughout the entire VR process. Finally, RSU has partnered with technical assistance centers including Vocational Rehabilitation Technical Assistance Center for Quality Management (VRTAC-QM) and Vocational Rehabilitation Technical Assistance Center for Quality Employment Outcomes*

(VRTAC-QE) to provide training to management and field staff on how to succeed in transitioning from the “employment outcome” focus of the Workforce Investment Act to the “career pathway” paradigm required under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act.

- 2. NMDVR will educate consumers, job coaches/developers, and employers on AT costs, resources, accessibility, and reasonable accommodations. NMDVR will continue to foster the agency’s relationship with the NM Technology Assistance Program (NMTAP) and utilize its services as a valuable resource. RSU has identified staff in each of the nine areas across the state to specialize their knowledge and professional development in assistive technology. These staff members are designated “AT liaisons,” which means they are the point of contact in their area for all things AT. They are charged with sharing AT information and resources with their fellow field staff, and at a basic level, provide guidance to VRCs and participants when making AT purchase decisions. These AT liaisons typically attend the annual NMTAP conference to stay in-the-know on latest AT trends and resources. NMDVR will continue to support RSU staff to attend the NMTAP conference each year.*
- 3. NMDVR has created and anticipates hiring a Staff Development Coordinator in 2023. This position will coordinate the Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD) for NMDVR, ensuring that personnel have a 21st-century understanding of the evolving labor force and the needs of individuals with disabilities. NMDVR personnel will then have the specialized training and experience enabling them to assist individuals with disabilities in achieving competitive integrated employment and to work effectively with employers who hire such individuals. NMDVR has invested in the subscription to YESLMS. This learning management system is developed from the VR Development Group. These trainings are created by professionals in the vocational rehabilitation industry to include PhDs and experts in vocational rehabilitation with content created from various universities and Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR) staff. The learning management platform provides a library of training including a five-part series on medical aspects of disability, encompassing mental health, body systems, and disorders. This resource provides an immediacy to training, learning, and understanding concepts in vocational rehabilitation for new and existing VR Counselors.*
- 4. NMDVR will explore options for staff training on trauma-informed care to better address employment-related issues now occurring due to COVID-19 and other traumatic effects individuals may have experienced. NMDVR has, during the past several years, provided staff access to training resources through the pandemic. The vocational rehabilitation industry has created and provided numerous valuable training courses to support VR professionals. These resources have focused curriculum on many aspects around the Covid-19 pandemic, including professional self-care for VR professionals. NMDVR utilizes many of these trainings through VRTAC-QE, National Clearinghouse of Rehabilitation Counseling, VRTAC-QM, as well as the YESLMS platform and others.*
- 5. NMDVR has successfully eliminated the waitlist for services in 2022. NMDVR will continue to remain on Order of Selection—with all categories open—to ensure a strong foundation is built related to budget and staffing through Program Year 2023.*
- 6. NMDVR will strongly consider and explore options for retention pay for all staff to enhance consistency and communication as well as confidence in services. NMDVR will also explore a mentorship program where senior staff are paired up with new staff to provide guidance and relationship as new staff onboard. This will cultivate a sense of “belonging” and encourage staff to stay at NMDVR as they are building long-lasting relationships.*

7. *NMDVR has entered into technical assistance agreements with VRTAC-QM and VRTAC-QE to develop long-term training platforms. This will support an increase and better-quality in employment outcomes by training RSU staff and management how accurate and complete data correlates to quality employment outcomes for NMDVR participants. NMDVR will focus on data reporting and validation in 2023 with an emphasis on streamlining and improving processes.*
8. *NMDVR agrees with this recommendation and will improve the number of quality employment outcomes for consumers that are job ready by following the informed choice provision of the Rehabilitation Act.*
9. *NMDVR will again partner with Jemez VR to implement Pre-ETS services through Project Hope. This model will be explored for other areas of the state. Discussions with the Jemez VR have already begun in efforts to rebuild engagement by all vested parties after the pandemic. Other districts within the Jemez Valley have been contacted to inquire regarding their interest in start-up of the project structure.*
10. *NMDVR will work to expand its outreach by participating in more events around the state where the agency can promote its services and engage potential consumers. NMDVR will make an emphasis to conduct outreach to underserved populations and develop relationships within rural areas to increase access to vocational rehabilitation services. NMDVR will also continue to provide outreach by promoting services and events through its website, social media, traditional media, and other platforms.*

(b) Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA). Section 101(a)(15), (17), and (23) of the Rehabilitation Act require VR agencies to provide an assessment of:

- (1) The VR services needs of individuals with disabilities residing within the State, including:
 - (A) Individuals with the most significant disabilities and their need for Supported Employment;
 1. Transportation was by far the most common need cited by all groups for individuals with disabilities to prepare for, obtain and maintain employment. Public transportation in the rural areas is especially problematic and was characterized as nonexistent in most cases, and unreliable when it was available. The lack of transportation is a barrier to both employment and accessing DVR services.
 2. The lack of broadband Internet access was cited as a barrier. The shift to remote work and communication resulting from the pandemic magnified how important reliable Internet access is for all individuals, and the lack of access in many rural areas of New Mexico prevents individuals with disabilities from accessing information necessary for job search and remote employment opportunities.
 3. Assistive technology, job placement assistance, employment preparation services, work experience and behavioral health counseling were all cited repeatedly as rehabilitation needs of DVR customers.

4. Participants indicated that DVR serves a large population of individuals with behavioral health impairments including mental health impairments and substance use disorders. The available treatment for this population was noted as severely lacking, especially outside of Albuquerque and Santa Fe. Mental health counseling was noted as nearly non-existent in the rural areas of the State, which impacts the stability of individuals necessary for sustained employment.
5. Many DVR customers need supported employment (SE) services to maintain employment, but there are very few SE providers outside of the urban areas of the State. CRPs are experiencing high vacancy rates and there are almost no SE providers in the rural areas of the State.
6. The fear of benefit loss, especially medical benefits, is a barrier to SSA beneficiaries returning to work, or pursuing work at a self-sustaining level. Many DVR customers that are receiving either SSI or SSDI pursue employment at the part-time level so that they can augment their benefits, but not face losing them due to work. This results in many individuals working below their potential. DVR does provide benefits counseling, and this is helpful, but it has not made any significant impact on motivating beneficiaries to pursue employment at a level high enough for them to no longer need benefits.
7. Many Deaf customers have a need to develop their reading and language skills, but there are very few options for them in the State.
8. The need for affordable housing has become a major issue since the pandemic began in 2020. Interview participants in all groups indicated that the need to identify affordable housing options has become of paramount importance for DVR consumers.
9. Poverty is a significant concern for individuals with disabilities in New Mexico. The poverty rates in the State are consistently in the top three in the country according to the US Census Bureau, and the effect of poverty on individuals with disabilities is disproportionate according to several partners and staff interviewed.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are offered to DVR based on the results of the research in the Needs of Individuals with the Most Significant Disabilities, including their need for Supported Employment area:

1. DVR is encouraged to examine creative ways to address the transportation barrier in rural areas of the State. One possibility is to utilize ride-share services such as Uber or Lyft when available. Ride-share services also provides an opportunity for former or current consumers of VR to engage in part-time employment, so if they can be recruited and supported to be drivers, this strategy can act as a way to build capacity in the rural areas.
2. VR is encouraged to conduct connectivity assessments for all consumers that are engaged in the comprehensive assessment process for plan development. When needed, VR should purchase the necessary equipment and service to ensure their participants are able to effectively access and function in the digital world. This includes broadband internet where available and laptops, cell phones and hotspots in cellular service plans. One possibility for adaption is the BPD Technology Assessment Checklist created by the Technology Committee for the association of Baccalaureate Social Work Program Directors. The tool is available in **Appendix F**. VR should adapt the tool for their own needs if they decide to use it.

3. Because of the positive working relationship that DVR has with the Centers for Independent Living in the State, the agency is encouraged to identify CILs where partnership can be further developed and CILs can be recruited to become service providers. Increases in the ability to live independently are positively associated with successful employment outcomes, so enhancing IL services for consumers is an important goal for DVR.
4. DVR is encouraged to further its partnership with the Behavioral Health Services Division (BHSD) of the Human Services Department in New Mexico. BHSD offers an array of services and support that are helpful for DVR consumers.
5. The rate of consumers served by DVR that have either a primary or co-occurring disability of substance abuse necessitates that VR staff and partners increase collaboration and partnerships with other State and community organizations that serve youth and adults in recovery. DVR is encouraged to share expertise and resources with recovery programs and provide training to counselors and providers on ways to help consumers address the multiple dimensions of recovery that include:
 - a. Planning for physical and emotional health;
 - b. Helping the individual identify resources to ensure that they have a safe and supportive living environment;
 - c. Assist the individual to have hope, often as a result of a sense of purpose which can frequently be established through the pursuit of meaningful employment; and
 - d. Provide the individual with resources that can help establish a support network and build a sense of community.

The dimensions of recovery noted above are also applicable to individuals with mental health impairments and are recognized as a standard of effective counseling and treatment by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) found here: <https://www.samhsa.gov/>.

6. DVR is encouraged to work with Deaf advocates and service programs to further develop Deaf and HH services in the lower half of the State. In addition, DVR is encouraged to develop a communication and language skills training program for the Deaf in order to address the language development needs of this population throughout the State.
7. A large percentage of DVR consumers are SSA beneficiaries whose fear of benefit loss affects their return-to-work behavior. Although DVR has Benefits Advisors, it would be helpful for the agency to augment these services with training for staff and providers on strategies that contribute to the pursuit of work above the level of SGA, including self-sufficiency. These interventions and strategies include:
 - Establishing and reinforcing high expectations for the individual;
 - Identifying role models, or peer mentors that will model positive behavior and provide a positive “push” for the individual to achieve their maximum potential (in many instances, the positive push can come from the rehabilitation counselor if there are no family members, friends or mentors available);
 - Maximizing the individual’s ability to live and function independently;
 - Reinforcing the need for tenacity and persistence by the individual by helping them develop resiliencies, and then providing constant support and positive feedback;
 - Benefits planning that is ongoing and plans for overpayments when work occurs. Overpayments are planned for and the individual or the Benefits Planner is aware enough to calculate the effect of wages on benefits by themselves and set aside dollars that will likely occur as a result of overpayments for future payback to SSA;
 - Pursuit of higher education at the highest possible level for the individual; and
 - Work experience, internships or any exposure to work in the beneficiary’s field of choice.

8. DVR is encouraged to ensure that all of their staff have access to affordable housing resources for consumers. One option is found at https://www.hud.gov/states/new_mexico/renting.
 9. DVR is encouraged to help consumers address poverty concerns through short-term and long-term strategies such as assisting customers in obtaining “survival employment” while supporting long-term training for in-demand high-paying jobs.
- (B) Individuals with disabilities who are minorities and individuals with disabilities who have been unserved or underserved by the VR program;

The following themes emerged in the area of the needs of individuals with disabilities from different ethnic groups, including individuals who have been potentially unserved or underserved by DVR:

1. Native Americans with disabilities were cited the most frequently as a population of people that may be potentially underserved by DVR. This is in part due to the large number of tribes in the State. DVR does have a working relationship with the tribal VR programs in the State, but the depth of the relationship has been affected by the pandemic and the turnover of staff at both DVR at the TVR programs. The number of shared cases between the tribal programs and DVR was cited as very low and in need of growth over the next year as staffing patterns stabilize and liaisons assigned by DVR establish working relationships with each tribe.
2. The rural areas of the State were cited as underserved due to lack of access to transportation and other services. While the capacity to connect by distance increased during the pandemic, the lack of broadband access in rural areas means that they were not able to benefit from remote possibilities to the same extent as those living in urban areas.
3. Hispanic individuals were noted as being potentially underserved. This was noted as primarily occurring because of the lack of bilingual counselors in DVR.
4. Based on disability, the one group that was noted as possibly being underserved was Deaf individuals. This was related to the lack of counselors who can sign and the general lack of interpreters in the State.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are offered to DVR based on the results of the research in the Needs of Individuals with Disabilities from Different Ethnic Groups, including needs of Individuals who have been Unserved or Underserved by the VR Program area:

1. DVR is encouraged to establish regular and consistent meetings with tribal VR programs across the State. This helps establish and demonstrate a commitment to collaboration and should help to increase shared cases, increase communication, understanding, and awareness of each agency’s services.
2. As resources allow, DVR is encouraged to sponsor their staff that work with the 121 programs to attend the annual CANAR conference.
3. DVR and the 121 programs are encouraged to provide regular cross-training for staff from both agencies. This is especially important given the frequency of staff turnover on both sides.

4. DVR is encouraged to establish liaison relationships with community agencies serving Deaf individuals and Hispanic individuals in New Mexico as a way to develop awareness of DVR services and increase referrals. In addition, DVR is encouraged to recruit and hire bilingual staff in ASL and Spanish whenever they have an open position.

- (C) Individuals with disabilities served through other components of the workforce development system; and

The following information was gathered from the individuals interviewed for this assessment in the area of the needs of individuals with disabilities served through other components of the Statewide Workforce Development System:

1. DVR consumers are frequently referred to the New Mexico Workforce Connection (Titles I and III) centers for job search assistance and resume writing workshops. The workshops are helpful for consumers, but job development services were described as self-initiated and online, so were less impactful on individuals with disabilities needing one-on-one assistance.
2. While the workshops are helpful, the relationship between DVR and the Workforce Connection centers is one of referral primarily. There are few cases where funding for training is shared between agencies.
3. Co-location of DVR within the Workforce Connection offices was described as beneficial to the relationship between the two agencies and staff felt that it helped with ensuring that individuals with disabilities were quickly connected to the services and supports they need.
4. Workforce Connection staff need training on how to work with individuals with disabilities and they need working and up-to-date assistive technology for job seekers that need this technology to access programs. Deaf interpreters were also cited as needed in the Workforce Connection offices.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The following recommendations are offered to DVR based on the results of the research in the Needs of Individuals with Disabilities served through other Components of the Statewide Workforce Development System area:

1. DVR should identify and share examples of shared funding of cases throughout the State to encourage replication of these cases.
2. DVR is encouraged to work with the Workforce Connection staff to develop apprenticeships and customized training programs in high demand occupations that include individuals with disabilities.
3. DVR and the Workforce Connection center staff should provide regular and consistent cross-training to staff in order to improve the number of individuals with disabilities that are effectively accessing and benefitting from services at the centers.
4. DVR is encouraged to strengthen its relationship with the Title I Youth program to provide training and placement opportunities for students and youth with disabilities.

- (D) Youth with disabilities, including students with disabilities and their need for pre-employment transition services. Include an assessment of the needs of individuals with disabilities for transition career services and pre-employment transition services, and the extent to which such services are coordinated with transition services provided under IDEA.

The following recurring themes emerged related to the needs of youth with disabilities in transition:

1. The needs of youth and students with disabilities were similar to adults served by DVR except that youth were noted as needing more work experience and soft skills.
2. DVR has transition counselors, which has helped to develop their relationship with schools and increase pre-employment transition services.
3. Project Search sites were applauded for their impact on students, especially because the projects provide work experience for students and youth, which was identified as an important need.
4. The relationship between DVR and the schools across the State varies in intensity. Some schools are very involved with the agency and services are coordinated and working well, and in others, DVR does not go into the school and VR services are not getting to students until they are close to graduation or after. The pandemic stalled the progress in the relationship between DVR and schools, especially in those areas where there has been turnover of DVR staff and school staff. As staff are hired and relationships reestablished, progress has picked up and services are increasing.
5. All of the five required pre-employment transition services were noted as important and helpful for students with disabilities. Work-based learning opportunities were identified by all as the most important of the five required services and DVR has worked to increase the availability of these WBLE's across the State.
6. Youth succeed at higher rates when parents are engaged in the process. Lack of parent engagement can result in youth not accessing services early or "falling through the cracks." Parents were described as essential to the transition process, to helping youth to understand their disability and to developing realistic vocational expectations. Focus group and interview participants indicated that there was a need to work to engage with parents and keep them involved in transition efforts.
7. Parents of youth that receive SSI were often characterized as fearful of their children losing benefits and this adversely affects the motivation of the youth to work. In addition, if the youth does attempt to work, the parents may not be supportive, which can lead to an unsuccessful work attempt.
8. DVR has good working relationships with community colleges and universities throughout the State. These positive relationships result in a smoother transition from secondary to postsecondary education, reasonable accommodation needs being met, and increased rates of persistence and success for youth and students with disabilities. Although the overall number of individuals with disabilities in postsecondary education training dropped as a result of the pandemic from PY 2020-21, the numbers increased again in PY 2022 as schools reopened.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are provided to DVR related to the needs of youth with disabilities in transition:

1. DVR is encouraged to establish more work-based learning opportunities as part of their expansion of pre-employment transition services across the State. The agency has been working closely with CRPs and schools to expand these opportunities and should continue these efforts as resources and capacity of CRPs allow.
2. DVR is encouraged to replicate Project Search programs as resources allow. DVR staff and community partner agencies indicated that these programs are innovative and significantly impact the employability of participants.
3. DVR is encouraged to continue to work with the NTACT:C and VRTAC-QM to increase and improve relationship with schools and improve tracking and reporting of pre-employment transition services.
4. As the number of transition counselors increase through future hiring, DVR is encouraged to expand their outreach and education of families of students that are receiving SSI in order to help assuage the fear of benefit loss and encourage the work-seeking behavior of these youth.

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

The following themes were recurring from the individuals interviewed for this assessment in the area of the need to establish, develop or improve community rehabilitation programs serving individuals with disabilities in New Mexico:

1. The pandemic significantly impacted staffing at service providers agencies, with shortages noted in most geographic areas and services. Consequently, the wait for services has increased and the need to establish and develop services offered by CRPs is pervasive.
2. There is a need to establish all VR services and service providers in the rural areas of the State.
3. There is a significant need for SE providers throughout the State.
4. There is a need for DVR to examine its current rate structure for purchased services. Partners indicate that the current fee schedule is insufficient to meet their needs for service provision.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendation is offered to DVR based on the results of the research in the Need to Establish, Develop or Improve Community Rehabilitation Programs in New Mexico:

1. DVR should examine their current rates for purchased services and the past methodology for how these rates were established to determine if rate revisions are needed and if the methodology is adequate given the changing landscape of staffing and service delivery since the pandemic. The agency is encouraged to work with the fiscal team at the VRTAC-QM as needed for technical assistance in this area.

2. DVR is encouraged to consider using the Establishment Authority to help establish SE and other service providers over the course of the next State Plan cycle. The need for these services is clearly evident from all staff and partners interviewed for this CSNA.
3. DVR is encouraged to establish a provider network meeting at least semi-annually to share information, increase communication, and enhance the partnership between DVR and service providers.
4. If VR services are unable to be developed, then DVR is encouraged to consider bringing services in-house by hiring individuals with specialized skills in the given area (e.g. job placement, assessment, supported employment).

(c) Goals, Priorities, and Strategies. Section 101(a)(15) and (23) of the Rehabilitation Act require VR agencies to describe the goals and priorities of the State in carrying out the VR and Supported Employment programs. The goals and priorities are based on (1) the most recent CSNA, including any updates; (2) the State's performance under the performance accountability measures of section 116 of WIOA; and (3) other available information on the operation and effectiveness of the VR program, including any reports received from the SRC and findings and recommendations from monitoring activities conducted under section 107 of the Rehabilitation Act. VR agencies must—

- (1) Describe how the SRC and the VR agency jointly developed and agreed to the goals and priorities and any revisions; and

The State Rehabilitation Council was actively involved with development of the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA). The overall major themes identified as a result of the CSNA include, the impact of the pandemic and increasing applications; NMDVR staff consistently characterized as caring and committed to helping individuals with disabilities in NM to prepare for and obtain employment despite, staff shortages; New Mexico passing all of their WIOA Performance Measures for PY22; difficulty with recruitment of VR staff based on low wages; a need for increased community awareness of NMDVR and its services; a need for more staff development opportunities especially related to behavioral health and criminal backgrounds; the need for an increase in use of self-employment due to the ruralness of the state; and the loss of individuals after application prior to plan. Finally, NMDVR in combination with the New Mexico Commission for the Blind received monitoring under Section 107 for failure to expend the 15% reserve requirement in Federal Fiscal Year 20 for Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS).

Goal 1: NMDVR will prioritize the CSNA major themes over the next three years. To date several items have been and will continue to be addressed including, training staff on data validation and supporting documentation; improved data reporting for WIOA Performance Measures; appropriate salary placement for all positions located in the Rehabilitation Services Unit (RSU); creating and hiring two dedicated Staff Development Coordinators to provide training to RSU Staff; artificial intelligence (AI) technology has been demonstrated to field staff with the intent of piloting the SARA program in calendar year 2024; development of a marketing campaign to increase applicants; implementation of rapid and continuous engagement; implementing program manager review, and monthly caseload reviews and individualized case audits to ensure required activities are taking place prior to closure. NMDVR and NM Commission for the Blind are partnering to address monitoring on the Section 107 Corrective Action Plan.

Goal 2: NMDVR will continue to provide customized employment training, through the UCEDD, to new hires for NMDVR and CRP staff to have trained, qualified job developers and job coaches. Each year, there will be at least 15 NMDVR staff and at least 25 staff from CRPs and other vendors.

Goal 3: New Mexico has a limited number of long-term support providers statewide. DDS has several waiver programs, and each is its own department. NMDVR is in an MOU with the Developmental Disabilities (DD) Waiver program. DDS has created a waiver entitled Mi Via (My Way). The Mi Via waiver is a self-directed waiver. Mi Via allows the participant/guardian to hire whomever they want for services. This includes on-going job coaching. NMDVR is in discussions to see how the agency can coordinate services with the Mi Via program. Discussions are focused on the smooth transition for the participant from NMDVR to the Mi Via waiver service provider. Topics include, but are not limited to, NMDVR contracting with the same job coaches for a smoother transition from short-term to long-term funding, background checks, customized employment training for these service providers, and standardized hourly rates for job coaching services. NMDVR hopes to initiate an MOU by the end of SFY 24.

Goal 4: NMDVR is discussing setting up a new Project SEARCH site that mainly focuses on out-of-school youth who were on the DD waitlist and have recently come off. NMDVR would like to offer training and employment opportunities to those individuals who did not have the opportunity to attend a program like Project SEARCH while in school. If this is approved, the goal is to have a site up and ready for training by 2026. NMDVR will continue to explore opportunities for additional Project SEARCH sites in New Mexico. The program has been extremely well received by the New Mexico Legislative Education Study Committee (LESC) who asked for an informational presentation in Program Year 2023.

Goal 5: NMDVR is working with the New Mexico Behavioral Planning Council and the Behavioral Health Collaborative to change the state's Medicaid regulation to allow the use of Supported Employment funds for persons with mental health diagnoses. Once the change occurs, it will take approximately 10 months for the funding to be available. The goal is for the regulation to change by March 2025, with the regulation being initiated in January 2026.

Goal 6: When NM Medicaid changes the regulation, NMDVR, the Behavioral Health Services Department (BHSD), and a local mental health provider would like to start an Individualized Placement and Support (IPS) program. It is anticipated that this will start in 2025.

Goal 7: NMDVR will continue working with Carlsbad ARC (CARC) on the 511 annual meetings and provide individuals earning a sub-minimum wage the opportunity to apply for NMDVR services and obtain competitive integrated employment.

Goal 8: NMDVR will investigate the use of Workforce Connection apprenticeship programs for training opportunities for all participants, including the individuals with a most significant disability and for those who require Supported Employment.

Goal 9: DDS has initiated the Want-to-Work (W2W) program for those on the DD Waiver. During their monthly meetings, DDS case managers ask their clients if they want to work. Those who do are reported to the DDS administration. DDS and NMDVR track how many are referred and how many open a case with NMDVR. The two agencies are actively trying to remove barriers prohibiting a case from opening, such as guardians not responding, contact information provided is for a group home rather than guardians or case managers, the release of information provided at referral, etc. The goal is to also replicate this with the Mi Via program by July 2024. NMDVR will continue to work closely with DDS to increase provider network, monitor appropriate rates and rapidly engage individuals who want to work.

Goal 10: NMDVR will explore options for increasing transportation and work options, including access to the internet, remote work and self-employment, for those who experience transportation barriers.

Goal 11: NMDVR has placed a focus on unserved or underserved ethnic groups. In the last year we have focused on developing Tribal Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor positions. Three Memorandums of Understanding were completed in program year 2023 with the three American Indian Vocational Rehabilitation Programs (AIVRP), Navajo Nation Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services (NNOSERS), Jemez Vocational Rehabilitation (JVR), and Laguna Acoma Connections (LAC). Quarterly meetings are being held with all 3 programs. Each of the AIVRPs is represented on the State Rehabilitation Council and training opportunities are offered to their staff. NMDVR will prioritize support for NMDVR staff to attend the Annual Consortia of Administrators for Native American Rehabilitation (CANAR) Conference. NMDVR has also agreed to partner with Interwork Institute, Sand Diego State University Research Foundation to participate in the Activities for Underserved Populations grant.

Goal 12: NMDVR will continue to explore options for increasing services to students with disabilities by partnering with the New Mexico Public Education Department (PED) and Department of Workforce Solutions (DWS). Two staff from the Career and Technical Education (CTE) as well as a staff person from DWS traveled with the NMDVR Director to attend the Counsel of State Administrators for Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR) Fall Conference. In addition, the PED CTE Director has been recommended to represent PED on the SRC. DWS staff who attended CSAVR also represent that agency on the SRC. NMDVR is working closely with PED and DWS along with Centers for Independent Living (CILs) to implement a Disability Innovation Fund Grant that PED applied for and received. PED also has a newly created state Office of Special Education. NMDVR is working to ensure partnership between the Office of Special Education, NMDVR and NTACTION in implementation of the Intensive Technical Assistance Agreement that has been signed by both agencies. NMDVR has increased the number of dedicated Transition Staff to thirteen and elevated the program to a stand alone department under the RSU.

Goal 13: In an effort to increase business engagement four positions were identified in program year 2022 to create Business Outreach Coordinators. Business Outreach Coordinators are meeting with staff from other states to identify their approach to business engagement, developing training and technical assistance for employers on the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), inclusion and tax credits, and are also developing resources for internal staff use. The Business Outreach Team is working closely with the Department of Workforce Solutions and participates in their employer engagement activities to ensure maximization of each program and minimizing duplication of effort. Business Outreach Coordinators are also active on a national level participating in the National Employment Team (NET) and NET Summit.

(2) Identify measurable goals and priorities in carrying out the VR and Supported Employment programs and the basis for selecting the goals and priorities (e.g., CSNA, performance accountability measures, SRC recommendations, monitoring, other information). As required in section 101(a)(15)(D), (18), and (23), describe under each goal or priority, the strategies or methods used to achieve the goal or priority, including as applicable, description of strategies or methods that—

(A) Support innovation and expansion activities;

Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes by providing appropriate vocational rehabilitation services to the growing population of older workers, many of whom will be unable to retrain work in a field different from current occupations.

Agency Response: The agency is committed to serving the increasing population of older workers. The aging population has resulted in an aging workforce with workers who report to continue working beyond age 65. In addition, workers in population do not plan on retiring. These older workers will require intensive training to remain employed.

Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes of youth and students with disabilities by focusing on appropriate vocational rehabilitation services aimed at youth and students with disabilities. Youth and students with disabilities will be able to gain, retain, and maintain suitable employment with enhanced educational training and support.

(B) Overcome barriers to accessing VR and supported employment services;

Barrier: Limited number of CRPs and independent job developers and job coaches.

Strategies:

- a. Increase the use of assistive technology to reduce the need for long-term job coaching; work with CRPs to expand to areas outside of the major metropolitan areas; recruit former CRP employees, school personnel, social workers, retired VR staff, etc. to become self-employed and a vendor of NMDVR.
- b. Increase the contract rates to CRPs for job development and job coaching services to enable them to pay more than minimum wage and create an income source that is not leaving the CRP to operate at a deficit.
- c. Collaborate with Medicaid's Community Benefits Programs vendors to coordinate the two programs and services for dual participants.
- d. Work with the DDS Mi Via Program to train and certify the participants' chosen providers and to determine whether NMDVR can work with them to expand and create either a CRP or a small business to be an independent vendor.

Barrier: No funding for supported employment services for individuals who have a mental health diagnosis.

Strategies:

- e. Work with the New Mexico State Legislature, Department of Health, Behavioral Health Services Division of the Human Services Department, Behavioral Health Collaborative, and Behavioral Health Planning Council to amend the NM Medicaid statute.
- f. Upon changing the Medicaid statute, work with behavioral health agencies to institute cooperative agreements and initiate using the Individualized Placement and Support (IPS) program.

(C) Improve and expand VR services for students with disabilities, including the coordination of services designed to facilitate the transition of such students from school to postsecondary life (including the receipt of VR services, post secondary education, employment, and pre-employment transition services); and

Measurement Goal 1: Maintain requirements and annual reporting for PED MOU. Report on progress of Intensive Technical Assistance Agreement with PED.

Measurement Goal 2: Partner with NM Commission for the Blind to provide regular Section 107 Corrective Action Plan updates and spending of the 15% Pre-Employment Transition Services reserve requirement.

Measurement Goal 3: Explore additional areas in New Mexico for Project SEARCH sites. Report areas explored and outcomes of exploration.

- (D) Improve the performance of the VR and Supported Employment programs in assisting individuals with disabilities to achieve quality employment outcomes.

Measurement Goal 1: Continued meeting or exceeding WIOA Performance indicators,

Provide standardized internal training opportunities for NMDVR Staff via internal training team, report on number of staff by title that complete standardized internal training.

Partner with VRTAC-QE to offer staff training on specialized training needs including behavioral health, criminal background, and self-employment, report on number of staff by title that complete specialized training.

Measurement Goal 2: Explore options for alternative transportation including ride share services. Report number of individuals receiving support for transportation, remote work and self-employment.

Measurement Goal 3: Maintain requirements and quarterly reporting for AIVRP MOUS. Report by title attendee(s) to the annual CANAR Conference. Share findings from participation in Interwork Institute, Sand Diego State University Research Foundation to participate in the Activities for Underserved Populations grant.

Measurement Goal 4: Report number and title of training created by Business Outreach Coordinators. Report by title attendee(s) to the annual NET Summit. Provide updates on activities that support maximization of each program's services and minimizing duplication. Develop a methodology for tracking employer engagement and outcomes.

Transition and Supported Employment

Measurement Goal 1: Report 15 NMDVR staff by title and 25 CRP staff by title that have complete customized employment training each program year via the UCEDD.

Measurement Goal 2: Update and initiate MOU with DDS Waiver including Mi Via Waiver.

Measurement Goal 3: Continue to serve on the New Mexico Behavioral Planning Council and the Behavioral Health Collaborative. Participate in supportive activities to encourage the use of Medicaid funds to support long term services. Report on progress of initiative.

Measurement Goal 4: Upon change of Medicaid regulation provide support to the Behavioral Health Services Division to implement an Individualized Placement and Support (IPS) Program. Report on progress of IPS program.

Measurement Goal 5: Report on number of individuals receiving 511 counseling.

Measurement Goal 6: Report on number of apprenticeship and training programs utilized by individuals with the most significant disabilities or those who require supported employment.

Measurement Goal 7: Report number of referrals from DDS and number of open cases with NMDVR via the DDS Want-to-Work program. Replicate this reporting when program is initiated in Mi Via Waiver program.

(d) Evaluation and Reports of Progress: VR and Supported Employment Goals. For the most recently completed program year, provide an evaluation and report of progress for the goals or priorities, including progress on the strategies under each goal or priority, applicable to that program year. Sections 101(a)(15) and 101(a)(23) of the Rehabilitation Act require VR agencies to describe—

(1) Progress in achieving the goals and priorities identified for the VR and Supported Employment Programs;

state plan modifications 2022 submission:

- DVR is currently co-located at the Albuquerque one-stop office and is fully integrated in the one-stop's daily operations. DVR plans to co-locate in the Farmington and Santa Fe one-stop offices by the end of SFY20.

2024 Update: Completed. NMDVR offices in both Farmington, NM and Santa Fe, NM are now co-located with the one-stop office.

- Enable businesses and employers to easily identify and hire skilled workers and access other human resource assistance including Skill-to-Work programs, pre-screening applicants, offering rooms for job fairs and interviewing, and consultant services, which are Agency specific such as ADA Training and disability etiquette training for existing employees.-

2024 Update: Ongoing activity. The Business Outreach Unit will be providing training and education in the areas identified. This unit was recently developed and will provide regional supports to employers across the state.

- Expand workforce services for individuals at all levels and skill of experience.

2024 Update: Ongoing activity. Rehabilitation Services Unit continues to work with participants to support competitive integrated employment and careers that will provide longevity with employers. Efforts to coordinate with workforce partners, colleges, community resources will support the efforts of integrating a support system to skill up VR participants and prepare them for employment.

- Train one-stop staff on the basic eligibility requirements for DVR throughout the state.

2024 Update: Ongoing activity. NMDVR training staff have provided several training courses to the one-stop centers in educating employees about the services offered through VR. These trainings have been provided in the onboarding process for Department of Workforce Solutions managers, presentations to NM Works program, SL Start and other core partners. Training efforts will continue with one-stop staff as requested.

- Utilize the integrated nature of one-stop centers to increase customer participation and engage, support local businesses, and strengthen partnerships.-

2024 Update: This continues to be a goal of the agency and ongoing activity. Many of the one-stops centers have now returned to providing a full scope of services after the pandemic. This will allow for more involvement by VR participants and staff.

- Continue to work with local one-stop centers to obtain physical and programmatic accessibility assessments to ensure each center is meeting modern accessibility standards to individuals of all skills levels and abilities as required in Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act as well as Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act.-

2024 Update: This is an on-going activity, but progress has been made. Several of the one-stop centers have sought out accessibility assessments to identify deficits and or limitations to access both physical and assistive technology.

- Work collaboratively with State and Local Workforce Development Boards to establish and maintain the one-stop delivery system. This includes jointly funding the one-stop infrastructure costs through partner contributions. DVR has Agency representatives on each of the four Workforce Development Boards.

2024 Update: Completed. NMDVR has established co-location in several locations with the one-stop, but also provides support to costs associated with the required partner contributions.

- Goals for continued Service to Students and Youth with Disabilities and Supported Employment: New Mexico Division Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) has implemented several intergovernmental agreements (IGAs) and/or Memoranda of Agreement (MOU) in cooperation with other state agencies including the Department of Health (DOH), Developmental Disabilities Support Division (DDSD), Center for Development and Disabilities (CDD), New Mexico Public Education (PED), and Central Regional Educational Cooperative (CREC) agencies. These cooperative agreements aid in facilitating transition services for Transition individuals and youth who are eligible for Supported Employment services across the state.

2024 Update: On-going activity. Although many of these IGA's, MOU's are established annual review of them occur via meetings with the entities to amend and evaluate as necessary to sustain and expand efforts.

- DVR continues to work in collaboration with the Center for Development and Disability toward the implementation and sustainability of Supported Employment programs across the state. Services that are provided at Center for Development and Disability include education, advocacy, and outreach in the field of Supported Employment. Services are available through Project Search and Partners for Employment to participants and their families, community providers, job developers, job coaches, employers, as well as, Local Educational agencies (LEA). VR continues to collaborate with the Social Security Administration (SSA) to provide information on SSA benefits and Ticket to Work.

2024 Update: On-going activity. The collaboration efforts with these entities continues through regular monthly meetings, reporting and contract monitoring. The annual review of the contracts allow for comprehensive planning to amend and evaluate as necessary to sustain and expand efforts.

- (2) Performance on the performance accountability indicators under section 116 of WIOA for the most recently completed program year, reflecting actual and negotiated levels of performance. Explain any discrepancies in the actual and negotiated levels; and

PY2022 July 1, 2022-June 30, 2023	Employment Rate 2 nd Quarter	Employment Rate 4 th Quarter	Median Earnings	Credential Rate	Measurable Skill Gains
Negotiated	40%	35%	\$4500	26%	32.5%
Actual	41.3%	40.8%	\$5,033	37.6%	52.9%

NMDVR in partnership with NM Commission for the Blind was able to exceed all WIOA performance indicators for Program Year 2022.

- (3) The use of funds reserved for innovation and expansion activities (sections 101(a)(18) and 101(a)(23) of the Rehabilitation Act) (e.g., SRC, SILC).
None

(e) Supported Employment Services, Distribution of Title VI Funds, and Arrangements and Cooperative Agreements for the Provision of Supported Employment Services.

- (1) Acceptance of title VI funds:

(A) VR agency requests to receive title VI funds.

(B) VR agency does NOT elect to receive title VI funds and understands that supported employment services must still be provided under title I.

- (2) If the VR agency has elected to receive title VI funds, Section 606(b)(3) of the Rehabilitation Act requires VR agencies to include specific goals and priorities with respect to the distribution of title VI funds received under section 603 of the Rehabilitation Act for the provision of supported employment services. Describe the use of title VI funds and how they will be used in meeting the goals and priorities of the Supported Employment program.

[text box]

- (3) Supported employment services may be provided with title 1 or title VI funds following placement of individuals with the most significant disabilities in employment. In accordance with section 101(a)(22) and section 606(b)(3) of the Rehabilitation Act, describe the quality, scope, and extent of supported employment services to be provided to individuals with the most significant disabilities, including youth with the most significant disabilities; and the timing of transition to extended services.

NMDVR is taking significant steps to enhance the employment opportunities for individuals with the most significant disabilities, particularly focusing on youth. Utilizing Title 1 funds, NMDVR is committed to providing comprehensive, supported employment services. These services are crucial in assisting individuals with the most significant disabilities in not only securing employment but also ensuring their success and growth in their chosen fields.

NMDVR recognizes the unique challenges faced by youth with significant disabilities. To address this, extended support is offered for up to 24 months, ensuring that youth have ample time and resources to establish themselves in their employment. This period is critical as it allows for adjustment, skill development, and the formation of a stable work routine.

In a bid to offer more inclusive support, NMDVR extends these employment services for youth, with no other forms of support, for up to 48 months or until they reach the age of 25. This extended timeframe is significant as it encompasses a critical transition period from youth to early adulthood, providing continuous support during a phase where they are most vulnerable to employment challenges. Recognizing that individuals with the most significant disabilities require ongoing support regardless of age, NMDVR also offers services for up to 24 months for those who are 25 years or older. This ensures that age does not become a barrier to receiving necessary employment support.

Historically, NMDVR has spent less than \$200,000 annually on supported employment supports for youth and adults. This amount reflects a focused yet modest investment in this area, highlighting the need for careful allocation and management of resources.

The recent increase in Title 1 funds provides an increase in financial capacity enabling NMDVR to continue to provide these critical services without interruption. The additional funds provides an opportunity for an expansion of services, more comprehensive support programs, and the ability to serve a larger number of individuals.

- (4) Sections 101(a)(22) and 606(b)(4) of the Rehabilitation Act require the VR agency to describe efforts to identify and arrange, including entering into cooperative agreements, with other State agencies and other appropriate entities in order to provide supported employment services. The description must include extended services, as applicable, to individuals with the most significant disabilities, including the provision of extended services to youth with the most significant disabilities in accordance with 34 CFR 363.4(a) and 34 CFR 361.5(c)(19)(v).

I NMDVR has implemented a comprehensive strategy to enhance its service provision, especially in response to the challenges posed by COVID-19. This approach focused on several key areas:

NMDVR has placed a Supported Employment Specialist in each of its nine areas across the state. This expansion ensures that specialized support is readily available in different regions, enhancing the reach and effectiveness of services.

In collaboration with the Developmental Disabilities Supports Division (DDSD) and the New Mexico University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (NM UCEDD), NMDVR is actively involved in training job developers and coaches. This training includes assistance in obtaining credentials like ACRE (Association of Community Rehabilitation Educators) and CESP (Certified Employment Support Professional), which are vital for providing high-quality services. This initiative also addresses the shortage of professionals in this field, which became more acute during the pandemic.

Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors and Vocational Rehabilitation Technicians are directly involved in job development and placement activities. This hands-on approach helps in understanding the current job market and developing more effective employment strategies.

NMDVR staff are receiving training from NM UCEDD and are working towards obtaining ACRE credentialing. This enhances their skills and knowledge, enabling them to provide better support to their participants.

Recognizing the importance of a supportive network, NMDVR is working closely with families and community agencies to identify more job coaches. This is particularly important as the DDSD's Mi Via program currently lacks long-term support vendors.

NMDVR is increasing its collaboration with various entities like DDSD Case Managers, Medicaid's Community Benefit Program's consultants, and the Aging and Long-Term Services' community benefits consultants. Such collaborations are crucial for a holistic approach to vocational rehabilitation and employment services.

To further expand its capacity, NMDVR is entering into contracts with external vendors for job development and placement services. This step not only extends the range of services offered but also brings in additional expertise and resources.

Overall, NMDVR's actions reflect a multi-faceted approach to increasing employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities. By focusing on training, collaboration, and direct involvement in job placement, NMDVR is enhancing its ability to meet the diverse needs of its participants and adapt to the changing employment landscape.

(f) Annual Estimates. Sections 101(a)(15) and 101(a)(23) of the Rehabilitation Act require all VR agencies to annually conduct a full assessment of their resources and ability to serve all eligible individuals before the start of the Federal fiscal year. In accordance with 34 CFR § 361.29(b), annual estimates must include the following projections:

(1) Estimates for next Federal fiscal year—

(A) VR Program; and

Priority Category (if applicable)	No. of Individuals Eligible for Services	No. of Eligible Individuals Expected to Receive Services under VR Program	Costs of Services using Title I Funds	No. of Eligible Individuals Not Receiving Services (if applicable)
	1333	3000		

(B) Supported Employment Program.

Priority Category (if applicable)	No. of Individuals Eligible for Services	No. of Eligible Individuals Expected to Receive Services under Supported Employment Program	Costs of Services using Title I and Title VI Funds	No. of Eligible Individuals Not Receiving Services (if applicable)
	502	450		

(g) Order of Selection.

The VR agency is **not** implementing an order of selection and all eligible individuals will be served.

The VR agency is implementing an order of selection with one or more categories closed.

* VR agencies may maintain an order of selection policy and priority of eligible individuals without implementing or continuing to implement an order of selection.

Pursuant to section 101(a)(5) of the Rehabilitation Act, this description must be amended when the VR agency determines, based on the annual estimates described in description (f), that VR services cannot be provided to all eligible individuals with disabilities in the State who apply for and are determined eligible for services.

(1) For VR agencies that have defined priority categories describe—

(A) The justification for the order;
[text box]

(B) The order (priority categories) to be followed in selecting eligible individuals to be provided VR services ensuring that individuals with the most significant disabilities are selected for services before all other individuals with disabilities; and
[text box]

(C) The VR agency’s goals for serving individuals in each priority category, including how the agency will assist eligible individuals assigned to closed priority categories with information and referral, the method in which the VR agency will manage waiting lists, and the projected

timelines for opening priority categories. NOTE: Priority categories are considered open when all individuals in the priority category may be served.
[text box]

- (2) Has the VR agency elected to serve eligible individuals outside of the order of selection who require specific services or equipment to maintain employment?
[check box] Yes
[check box] No

(h) Waiver of Statewidness. The State plan shall be in effect in all political subdivisions of the State, however, the Commissioner of the Rehabilitation Services Administration (Commissioner) may waive compliance with this requirement in accordance with section 101(a)(4) of the Rehabilitation Act and the implementing regulations in 34 CFR 361.26. If the VR agency is requesting a waiver of statewidness or has a previously approved waiver of statewidness, describe the types of services and the local entities providing such services under the waiver of statewidness and how the agency has complied with the requirements in 34 CFR 361.26. If the VR agency is not requesting or does not have an approved waiver of statewidness, please indicate “not applicable.”

Not applicable

(i) Comprehensive System of Personnel Development. In accordance with the requirements in section 101(a)(7) of the Rehabilitation Act, the VR agency must develop and maintain annually a description (consistent with the purposes of the Rehabilitation Act) of the VR agency’s comprehensive system of personnel development, which shall include a description of the procedures and activities the VR agency will undertake to ensure it has an adequate supply of qualified State rehabilitation professionals and paraprofessionals that provides the following:

- (1) Analysis of current personnel and projected personnel needs including—
- (A) The number and type of personnel that are employed by the VR agency in the provision of vocational rehabilitation services: including ratios of qualified vocational rehabilitation counselors to clients;
Central Office Staff:
 - (B) The number of personnel currently needed by the VR agency to provide VR services, broken down by personnel category; and
 - (C) Projections of the number of personnel, broken down by personnel category, who will be needed by the VR agency to provide VR services in 5 years based on projections of the number of individuals to be served, including individuals with significant disabilities, the number of personnel expected to retire or leave the field and other relevant factors.

Personnel Category	No. of Personnel Employed	No. of Personnel Currently Needed	Projected No. of Personnel Needed in 5 Years

Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor (including Transition Counselors)	56	75	96
VR Supervisors	8	0	9
VR Technicians	42	47	55
Program Managers	11	0	13
Administrative Assistants	9	0	11
Field Operation Directors	4	0	5
Business Outreach Specialists	2	4	7
RSU Assistant Deputy Director	0	0	1

(D) Ratio of qualified VR counselors to clients:

72 Caseloads to service 336,557 Individuals with Disabilities in New Mexico (*NIDILRR 2023 Compendium*)

1 Counselor to 4,674 Individuals with Disabilities in NM.

(E) Projected number of individuals to be served in 5 years:

NMDVR monitors staffing for consideration to meet the needs of individuals with disabilities across the state. In addition, the need to meet pre-employment service demand to potentially eligible and students with disabilities continues to grow.

Additionally, the State of New Mexico has made great strides in serving individuals who were waiting for waiver services. As those individuals are removed from the waitlist, there is an increased demand for VR services and expertise in supported employment.

NMDVR training staff is responsible for providing updated training information to include licensures, certifications, and various training completions relevant to their positions. Staff participation in training is monitored in databases, which are routinely reviewed to ensure the information is accurate.

The rate of attrition for NMDVR averages between 20-23.7%. As a result, the agency is expected to require additional personnel within the next 5 years as follows:

21 Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors (including Transition Counselors)

1 Vocational Rehabilitation Supervisors

8 Vocational Rehabilitation Technicians

2 Program Managers

2 Administrative Assistants

2 Field Operation Directors

3 Business Outreach Specialists

1 RSU Assistant Deputy Director

(2) Data and information on personnel preparation and development, recruitment and retention, and staff development, including the following:

NMDVR General State Plan 2024-2027 DRAFT 1.3.2024-VR Portion Only

- (A) A list of the institutions of higher education in the State that are preparing VR professionals, by type of program; the number of students enrolled at each of those institutions, broken down by type of program; and the number of students who graduated during the prior year from each of those institutions with certification or licensure, or with the credentials for certification or licensure, broken down by the personnel category for which they have received, or have the credentials to receive, certification or licensure.

Institute of Higher Education	Type of Program	No. of Students Enrolled	No. of Prior Year Graduates
New Mexico Highlands University	Clinical Mental Health	121	
New Mexico Highlands University	Clinical Rehabilitation Counseling	12	0
New Mexico Highlands University	Rehabilitation Counseling	14	5
New Mexico Highlands University	School Counseling	55	7
Western New Mexico University	Bachelor of Applied Science in Rehabilitation Services	25	8
Western New Mexico University	Clinical Rehabilitation Counseling	8	1

- (B) The VR agency’s plan for recruitment, preparation and retention of qualified personnel, which addresses the current and projected needs for qualified personnel; and the coordination and facilitation of efforts between the VR agency and institutions of higher education and professional associations to recruit, prepare, and retain personnel who are qualified, including personnel from minority backgrounds and personnel who are individuals with disabilities.

NMDVR has implemented many avenues to recruit qualified personnel. In 2022, NMDVR worked closely with the Public Education Department to update the state rule on licensure for Rehabilitation Counselors in the education system in New Mexico. This has allowed NMDVR to expand the pool of qualified individuals to serve as Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor. Recruitment efforts have included updates to job postings to ensure accuracy in qualifications for employment and expansion of job postings to national platforms such as LinkedIn and Indeed. Additionally, NMDVR has activated its social media platforms and posts open positions on those sites routinely. NMDVR has made internal efforts to better educate current staff on the open positions within the agency by utilizing the SharePoint intranet and monthly employee newsletter for internal recruitment.

In 2022, the New Mexico State Personnel office worked to review pay bands and adjusted those pay ranges to make the agency a more competitive employer. As a result, NMDVR began the process of aligning in-band pay adjustments for all positions. This project has provided the opportunity to increase pay, as appropriate, based on qualifications, education, and experience to ensure appropriate monetary compensation is provided for employees in the Vocational Rehabilitation program.

The agency uses the State Personnel automated data system to account for the number of employees, status of individual employees as probationary, permanent, temporary, or term; and related information such as salary, earned leave balance, etc. Vacancies are reported on a routine basis and used to monitor hiring activities. All new hires, promotions, and transfers require the approval of the Director.

The NMDVR HR team is currently working to review all agency positions to ensure pay for employees is in alignment with educational and work experiences. This project has been extensive and provides the agency an opportunity to ensure staff are compensated competitively for the skill sets necessary to work in vocational rehabilitation.

Employees of the agency are covered by the State Personnel Act:

- The agency has committed to hiring and compensating staff at competitive salaries (appropriate placement). The agency is also making strides to offer opportunities for internal advancement based on educational accomplishments. The agency is currently working to complete a classification study to the assigned pay bands for the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor to ensure the pay band is appropriate based on the unique credentials, education, and knowledge to do the work.
- State of New Mexico employees are offered a competitive employment benefits package, including premium health care coverage, pension (75% of average of top three years' salary), and the option to retire with 25 years of service for staff hired before 2012 and 30 years of service thereafter.
- State Personnel Board rules allow for VR Counselors to be paid a supervisory differential for assuming supervisory responsibilities inclusive of training staff in effective case management and best practices.
- Paid Parental Leave is provided to eligible staff.
- The agency offers training and continuing education opportunities not available with other state agencies.
- The State of New Mexico has implemented an Alternative Work Schedule Policy. This allows staff to request to change from the Normal Work Schedule (NWS) to an Alternative Work Schedule (AWS) with prior written approval of the employee's immediate supervisor and NMDVR Director. The purpose of this policy is to provide employees with more options in work schedules, while adhering to Federal and State statutes and regulations. The added flexibility in creating alternative work schedules also provides new opportunities for efficiency and expanded hours of customer service.
- The State of New Mexico has also implemented a Fitness and Wellness Policy. Employees may request modified work schedules that permit the employee two hours of leave time per week for fitness and wellness activities. The purpose of this policy is to support NMDVR employees in pursuing a healthy lifestyle, potentially leading to improved job performance, increased work satisfaction, and reduced health care and insurance costs. NMDVR recognizes the benefits of employee health and wellness and supports time for fitness and wellness activities. NMDVR also recognizes such activities are mutually beneficial to the agency and its employees because they improve productivity, work performance, and morale while reducing absenteeism, turnover, and health care costs.

On-boarding and training: NMDVR promotes a thorough on-boarding process to help new employees integrate successfully into their new work environments. Furthermore, the Rehabilitation Services Unit (RSU) provides specific training to the various roles in the field serving participants. This training ensures staff members have the necessary training to work at high performance levels and work effectively with participants of the program. This training includes virtual courses as well as an in-agency Rehabilitation and Support Staff academy.

Recognition and Awards: NMDVR has a Positive Organizational Climate Committee that encourages acknowledgement of employees and highlights achievements. This committee accepts nominations for various awards and acknowledges these awards in the employee newsletter and in the 'Round the Roundhouse newspaper (print and online) for state employees.

(C) Description of staff development policies, procedures, and activities that ensure all personnel employed by the VR agency receive appropriate and adequate training and continuing education for professionals and paraprofessionals:

- i. Particularly with respect to assessment, vocational counseling, job placement, and rehabilitation technology, including training implemented in coordination with entities carrying out State programs under section 4 of the Assistive Technology Act of 1998; and
- ii. Procedures for the acquisition and dissemination of significant knowledge from research and other sources to VR agency professionals and paraprofessionals and for providing training regarding the amendments to the Rehabilitation Act made by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act.

In 2022, the New Mexico Vocational Rehabilitation program requested a state rule change to the New Mexico Administrative Code for Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors. The update aligned WIOA professional degrees and credentials with New Mexico state licensing for Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors. This yearlong process was completed in September 2022 and the amendment to the NM Administrative Code is now published.

As a result of the new NMAC, a one-year mentorship plan is required to ensure NMDVR provides a full year of direct work experience encompassing exposure to the many aspects of vocational rehabilitation. Upon completion of the one-year work experience under the mentorship program, the VRC will then be eligible to apply for Level 1 Rehabilitation Counselor licensure issued by the New Mexico Public Education Department.

NMDVR requires all Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors to have applied for licensure and clear a background check. It should be noted that new counselors have 90 days from their start date to apply for their license. All applications are monitored for compliance. Initial VR Counselor licenses must be renewed after three years. VR Counselors need to apply for renewal at the expiration of state licensure. State licensure is identified in policy as top priority and required for continued employment. Identified documents to be submitted in the credentials package for licensure include:

- Official college transcripts of all degrees received
- Copy of Certified Rehabilitation Counselor certification, if applicable
- Work history in a rehabilitation field
- Copies of course syllabi related to counseling and guidance, vocational counseling, disability, psychosocial or psycho-cultural aspects of disability, case management in rehabilitation counseling, and placement aspects in rehabilitation counseling
- Criminal background information

NMDVR follows the state personnel minimum qualification standards in hiring for the variety of positions in Vocational Rehabilitation program. In addition, NMDVR supports professional development and continuous learning to ensure the staff possess and maintain the necessary skills for 21st century understanding of the workforce and needs of individuals with disabilities

NMDVR Rehabilitation Services provides extensive training to professionals and paraprofessionals. This includes a comprehensive rehabilitation academy—three full weeks of training upon new hire involving webinars, in-person, and virtual sessions. It encompasses topics from introduction into vocational rehabilitation, history of the VR program, comprehensive assessments, eligibility, case load and case management, case management system training, counseling theories, and modalities to job development, placement, assistive technology, and writing IPEs. The agency also coordinates a week of training to include state partners' presentations acclimating the staff on a variety of service collaboration and supports including, independent living centers, technology assistance programs, 121 grants, pre-

employment transition services, performance indicator training, and core state partners. NMDVR also has all new Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors and Technicians participate in ACRE and CESP training. The agency works with University of New Mexico Center for Development and Disability to provide these intensive 12-week trainings to support the systemic strategy to skill-up providers in the state.

NMDVR subscribes to the YESLMS platform, which provides a library of over 60 vocational rehabilitation-dedicated trainings which expands a variety of trainings for all staff to access with immediacy and ease. The training is mandated to Rehabilitation Services Staff, and all other agency employees are encouraged to utilize the offered trainings.

Additionally, Program Managers can request targeted training to the Training Team based on performance trends and as needed. The Training Team continually develops curriculum and distribution of content. Annually, the Training Team will submit the RSU Training plan for the year outlining all training requirements for the year.

Assistive Technology collaborative efforts include NMDVR's identified AT liaisons who participate to support the annual statewide Assistive Technology conference. Assistive Technology training for staff is offered throughout the year in coordinating presentations for staff. The New Mexico Technology Assistance Program (NMTAP) offers hands-on access to equipment for staff to learn and utilize for gaining knowledge regarding the variety of available equipment for participants. NMTAP participates in NMDVR Rehabilitation Academy, providing a valuable learning experience.

NMDVR has expanded its presence in national community of practice groups, including participation with the Council for State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR) conferences and with national technical assistance teams. NMDVR has developed several internal teams to address specific content with VR technical assistance programs to expand knowledge areas even further. These work groups participate in monthly meetings, webinars, and conferences. Learned information is shared and disseminated through the agency.

The agency has an internal training request system that allows employees to request various courses offered by external parties. This is an expanded opportunity to continue to increase staff knowledge supported by NMDVR.

NMDVR also supports CRC-related training and certification. Staff holding a CRC are supported to participate in the necessary continuing education requirements to maintain their national certification.

Information regarding training and skills development are disseminated to the rehabilitation services unit via the RSU Training unit. This team of 3 staff is tasked with maintaining the hub of information to share with staff for the purpose of professional development. The training team participates in national community of practice for trainers. Additionally, receives ongoing communication via listservs from many training providers on VR specific initiatives to ensure staff are provided opportunities for training in the various aspects of vocational rehabilitation. Many of the training is available on demand. NMDVR also has a subscription to YESLMS which provides a library of VR training topics produced by VR professionals.

- (3) Description of VR agency policies and procedures for the establishment and maintenance of personnel standards consistent with section 101(a)(7)(B) to ensure that VR agency professional and paraprofessional personnel are adequately trained and prepared, including—

- (A) Standards that are consistent with any national or State-approved or -recognized certification, licensing, registration, or other comparable requirements that apply to the profession or discipline in which such personnel are providing VR services; and
- (B) The establishment and maintenance of education and experience requirements, in accordance with section 101(a)(7)(B)(ii) of the Rehabilitation Act, to ensure that the personnel have a 21st century understanding of the evolving labor force and the needs of individuals with disabilities.

In 2022, the New Mexico Vocational Rehabilitation program requested a state rule change to the New Mexico Administrative Code for Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors. The update aligned WIOA professional degrees and credentials with New Mexico state licensing for Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors. This yearlong process was completed in September 2022 and the amendment to the NM Administrative Code is now published.

The NMDVR program requires all Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors to apply for and maintain licensure through New Mexico Public Education Department.

The agency will continue to provide training to all staff interested in improving their job skills. The RSU Training team works with leadership to implement agency initiatives and provide valuable internal training, enhancing knowledge, skills, and abilities in various agency positions. The RSU Training team will continue to collaborate with internal staff identified as experienced in their respective positions to support the training of new employees in their various areas. RSU Leadership will collaborate to identify options for implementation of a mentorship modality to be adopted by the agency, providing an expansion of quality training and hands-on support for new staff. The agency is aware of the need to hire and retain well-qualified staff. NMDVR is proactively working toward the future in terms of career development and succession planning. With the expanded application pool based on WIOA educational standards for VRC positions, there is an obvious increased need for training new staff in specific VR topics.

As a result of the new NMAC, a one-year mentorship plan is required to ensure NMDVR provides a full year of direct work experience encompassing exposure to the many aspects of vocational rehabilitation. Upon completion of the one-year work experience under the mentorship program, the VRC will then be eligible to apply for Level 1 Rehabilitation Counselor licensure issued by the New Mexico Public Education Department.

NMDVR requires all Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors to have applied for licensure and clear a background check. It should be noted that new counselors have 90 days from their start date to apply for their license. All applications are monitored for compliance. Initial VR Counselor licenses must be renewed after three years. VR Counselors need to apply for renewal at the expiration of state licensure. State licensure is identified in policy as top priority and required for continued employment. Identified documents to be submitted in the credentials package for licensure include:

- Official college transcripts of all degrees received
- Copy of Certified Rehabilitation Counselor certification, if applicable
- Work history in a rehabilitation field
- Copies of course syllabi related to counseling and guidance, vocational counseling, disability, psychosocial or psycho-cultural aspects of disability, case management in rehabilitation counseling, and placement aspects in rehabilitation counseling
- Criminal background information

NMDVR follows the state personnel minimum qualification standards in hiring for the variety of positions in Vocational Rehabilitation program. In addition, NMDVR supports professional development and continuous learning to ensure the staff possess and maintain the necessary skills for 21st century understanding of the workforce and needs of individuals with disabilities.

- (4) Method(s) the VR agency uses to ensure that personnel are able to communicate in appropriate modes of communication with or in the native language of applicants or eligible individuals who have limited English speaking ability.

NMDVR's goals are to ensure that all individuals with disabilities have access to be fully successful in the VR process. This includes assurance that communication needs are assessed and provided. NMDVR will collect communication details at the time of application to ensure that the VR team is prepared for appointments with participants in their preferred language.

The state has a high need for Spanish speakers and NMDVR employs many staff members who can communicate in Spanish. Additionally, NMDVR also employs several American Sign Language (ASL) staff to provide specialized caseloads to meet the communication needs of individuals who are Deaf. NMDVR also holds several contracts to provide certified ASL interpretation services to participants and employees. There are a wide range of languages spoken in New Mexico and multiple resources are available to assist the VR team in communications. NMDVR provides a pay differential for staff who are able to communicate in various languages including Spanish and Sign Language.

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

The Public Education Department(PED) through their Special Education Unit administers state services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The NMDVR Transition Director serves as a liaison between the two agencies to ensure communication is consistent, the programs compliment one another to achieve successful outcomes and strengthen relationships and collaboration. Yearly training is conducted between NMDVR and local Education Agencies regarding IDEA. These efforts are coordinated between the NMDVR Transition Director and the Special Education Unit to provide a mechanism of training to strengthen and inform all interested personnel regarding IDEA, statewide initiatives and resources. In 2023, NMDVR and PED provided collaborative trainings in an 8-week series promoting understanding of the various aspects of education in New Mexico, from graduation requirements and pathways, to the VR program which covered areas of supported employment, writing and understanding Individualized Education plans (IEP). The training events were extremely educational and a benefit to the state system. This collaboration will continue into the upcoming academic years.

Furthermore, the NMDVR Transition Director internally hosts several trainings for personnel within the year to provide IDEA training as well as other aspects related to serving students in New Mexico.

NM DVR counseling staff obtain Licensure through the Public Education Department which provides a coordinated mechanism for Vocational Rehabilitation Staff to access students in providing Pre-Employment Transition Services. This allows for ease of access in working with school districts, accessing students and coordinating events and activities for Transition services.

NMDVR will assign a staff member to the IDEA Advisory Committee to represent vocational rehabilitation. Additionally, there will be Vocational Rehabilitation representation at the School to Work Transition Teams and continue to support Regional Education Cooperatives in the state.

The DVR Transition Director will continue to work with PED to identify innovative and engaging ways to further support professional development in New Mexico.

COOPERATION, COLLABORATION, AND COORDINATION (Section 101(a)(11) of the Rehabilitation Act)

(j) Coordination with Education Officials. In accordance with the requirements in section 101(a)(11)(D) of the Rehabilitation Act—

- (1) Describe plans, policies, and procedures for coordination between the designated State agency and education officials responsible for the public education of students with disabilities, that are designed to facilitate the transition of the students with disabilities from the receipt of educational services in school to the receipt of vocational rehabilitation services, including pre-employment transition services.

The Public Education Department (PED), of which NMDVR is a division, is the State Education Agency (SEA) for New Mexico. The MOA with PED serves to facilitate the integration and coordination of services to eligible secondary education students in providing a continuum of services that will meet the needs of all served by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The integrated continuum of services is to be flexible enough to meet the needs of all IDEA-eligible students to qualify for NMDVR services within the available resources, maximize opportunity for students, and eliminate limitations and obstacles.

NMDVR and PED leadership meet annually to review the established MOA and address necessary updates, edits, additions, or deletion of content.

NMDVR works closely with PED to assure facilitation of Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) of students by utilizing the established agreements, assessing local education agency needs, and through extensive collaboration efforts.

The PED Special Education Division and Region 9 Education Cooperative (REC 9), based in Ruidoso, are collaborating with other state partners, including NMDVR, to present a Secondary Transition Training series. The eight sessions are provided monthly through a virtual environment in which NMDVR has provided several presentations to educate special education staff across the state.

In 2022, NMDVR and PED signed an intensive technical assistance agreement with the National Technical Assistance Center on Transition. This agreement has provided an opportunity for the two state programs to align transition efforts across the state and identify goals and areas of priority with guidance from the technical assistance team. PED and NMDVR are currently in several project developments through this initiative.

- (2) Describe the current status and scope of the formal interagency agreement between the VR agency and the State educational agency. Consistent with the requirements of the formal interagency agreement pursuant to 34 CFR 361.22(b), provide, at a minimum, the following information about the agreement:
 - (A) Consultation and technical assistance, which may be provided using alternative means for meeting participation (such as video conferences and conference calls), to assist educational agencies in planning for the transition of students with disabilities from school to post-school activities, including pre-employment transition services and other vocational rehabilitation services;
 - (B) Transition planning by personnel of the designated State agency and educational agency personnel for students with disabilities that facilitates the development and implementation of their individualized education programs (IEPs) under section 614(d) of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act;
 - (C) The roles and responsibilities, including financial responsibilities, of each agency, including provisions for determining State lead agencies and qualified personnel responsible for transition services and pre-employment transition services;
 - (D) Procedures for outreach to and identification of students with disabilities who need transition services and pre-employment transition services. Outreach to these students should occur as early as possible during the transition planning process and must include, at a minimum, a description of the purpose of the vocational rehabilitation program, eligibility requirements, application procedures, and scope of services that may be provided to eligible individuals;
 - (E) Coordination necessary to satisfy documentation requirements set forth in 34 CFR part 397

regarding students and youth with disabilities who are seeking subminimum wage employment; and

- (F) Assurance that, in accordance with 34 CFR 397.31, neither the SEA nor the local educational agency will enter into a contract or other arrangement with an entity, as defined in 34 CFR 397.5(d), for the purpose of operating a program under which youth with a disability is engaged in work compensated at a subminimum wage.

Methods of coordination will facilitate the development and implementation of Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) under section 614(d) of the IDEA, and the development and coordination of Individualized Plans for Employment (IPEs), as early as possible. This begins during the transition planning process with student, family, school personnel, and Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor(s), but not later than the time a student with a disability is determined to be eligible or potentially eligible for NMDVR services.

The IPE is addressed within 90 days from the date of eligibility determination for the VR program as required by 34 C.F.R. §§ 361.22(b) and 361.45(e). NMDVR may develop IPEs with projected post-school employment outcomes for students with disabilities (34 C.F.R. § 361.46(a)(1)).

Pursuant to 34 C.F.R. § 361.22(b)(1), NMDVR provides consultation and technical assistance to local education agencies (LEAs) to help them plan for the transition of students with disabilities from school to post-school activities, including Pre-ETS and other vocational rehabilitation services. NMDVR also provides consultation and technical assistance to LEAs, charter schools, the New Mexico School for the Blind and Visually Impaired, and the New Mexico School for the Deaf (collectively referred to as “educational agencies”). Consultation and technical assistance may be provided using alternative means (e.g., video conferences and conference calls).

NMDVR will expand pre-ETS activities by incorporating authorized activities in the coming years. Authorized activities are those pre-employment transition services that may be provided only after a state has determined sufficient funds remain available to provide the required and coordinated activities. Incorporating allowable authorized activities will expand exposure to students with disabilities across the state to valuable community resources and realistic work settings, and increase independent living skills, inclusion in communities, while expanding training and instruction opportunities for vocational rehabilitation staff.

NMDVR provides outreach to these students—which should occur as early as possible during the transition planning process—to include, at a minimum, a description of the purpose of the VR program, eligibility requirements, application procedures, and scope of services that may be provided to eligible individuals.

NMDVR will assign at least one Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor or Transition Rehabilitation Counselor to each public high school in the state.

NMDVR will utilize a Pre-Employment Consent Form, signed by student and parent/guardian for potentially eligible students to receive Pre-ETS. This consent form provides verification of a student with a disability confirmed by certified school personnel or Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor.

NMDVR staff will meet annually with LEAs to assess school needs (via a Needs Assessment Form) and establish a Collaboration Agreement Form to identify services to be implemented throughout the school year.

Services may include Pre-ETS to potential or current VR students with disabilities, scheduling orientations, attending and conducting transition fairs, and making referrals to VR.

NMDVR and PED are responsible for their own costs incurred in carrying out the provisions of services to students with disabilities. NMDVR will coordinate with LEAs to ensure services are not duplicated, and that services provided by NMDVR do not supplant existing LEA services.

NMDVR dedicates the following qualified staff who are responsible to ensure the coordination and delivery of Pre-ETS across New Mexico:

Statewide Transition Director
Field Operation Director(s)
Transition Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors
Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors
Transition Unit Specialist

NMDVR ensures that its staff entering the schools have obtained clearances on background checks obtained for Federal Bureau of Investigation records, and otherwise meet requirements detailed in 34 C.F.R. § 361.18(c) or other applicable laws. Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors maintain a state issued Public Education Department Rehabilitation Counselor license.

NMDVR does not contract with any program with a subminimum wage certificate for the purpose of operating a program for youth under which the work is compensated at a subminimum wage. NMDVR does have a process in place for youth (16-24) who are exiting or graduating from high school and want to work in a sheltered workshop earning subminimum wage. To wit:

- 1) Transition services under the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) and/or pre-employment transition services under section 113 of the Rehab Act.
- 2) Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program, as follows:
 - a) The youth applied for VR services and was found ineligible OR
 - b) The youth applied for VR services and was found eligible AND
 - i) had an IPE AND
 - ii) worked toward an IPE employment outcome for a reasonable period without success AND
 - iii) the VR case was closed
- 3) Career counseling is provided which includes information and referrals to Federal and State programs and other resources in the employer's geographic area.

NMDVR provides individuals with documentation of services provided should the individual still be interested in working for a sheltered workshop at subminimum wage.

(k) Coordination with Employers. In accordance with the requirements in section 101(a)(11)(E) of the Rehabilitation Act, describe how the VR agency will work with employers to identify competitive integrated employment and career exploration opportunities in order to facilitate the provision of VR services; and transition services for youth and students with disabilities, including pre-employment transition services for students with disabilities.

The NMDVR has a newly expanded unit of Business Outreach specialists who will be tasked with the responsibility of engaging with Employers. The Unit will conduct outreach efforts to employers while promoting the services offered through the VR program. This will include coordinated efforts to seek and identify workforce demands. Employers will be surveyed to gather information on state and regional employers. Ultimately this information will provide guidance to the services the VR program will provide employers to assist to meet their needs. The NMDVR Business Outreach unit will focus on providing training and education to Employers on hiring individuals with disabilities. It is the goal of the NMDVR program to become a valuable and reliable resource to employers as this service becomes promoted across the state of New Mexico.

As an additional support to employers the goal of the Business Outreach Unit is to develop relationships that will result in employment opportunities for VR participants. These opportunities will be advertised

to staff so that potential applicants are notified promptly. The Business Outreach team will work with Counselors to also identify areas of job interest of participants.

Expansion of On-the-Job training opportunities will also be explored through multiple avenues. The Transition Director and the Transition team work directly with local schools and employers to seek potential employment opportunities for students. This has been successful through the development of direct contracts with the schools to provide an onsite opportunity at the school site with school personnel instructing and training students on multiple jobs tasks. Throughout the state Program Managers have coordinated summer based on the job training for students with disabilities. These efforts have resulted in expanded opportunities each summer, with the coordination of multiple entities participating and sharing the responsibility of training students.

(I) Interagency Cooperation with Other Agencies. In accordance with the requirements in section 101(a)(11)(C) and (K), describe interagency cooperation with and utilization of the services and facilities of agencies and programs that are **not** carrying out activities through the statewide workforce development system to develop opportunities for community-based employment in integrated settings, to the greatest extent practicable for the following:

- (1) State programs (designate lead agency(ies) and implementing entity(ies)) carried out under section 4 of the Assistive Technology Act of 1998;

Assistive Technology (AT) tools and accessibility to services, when selected and used appropriately, can help individuals with disabilities achieve positive outcomes and be successful at school, at home, in the community, and ultimately, in the workplace. The potential for individuals with disabilities is enormous. AT interventions increase overall development and access to everyday lives, so it is important to combine the intellectual capital of all stakeholders involved to expand understanding and access. A cross-pollination of knowledge between state and local leaders, school administrators, practitioners, parents, state AT experts, and vocational rehabilitation professionals can provide access to current, relevant and reliable information to make decisions on the selection of appropriate technologies, services, and evidence-based interventions.

The New Mexico Technology Assistance Program (NMTAP) is housed in the Governor's Commission on Disability (GCD). NMTAP provides information and access to AT for individuals with disabilities statewide for all ages. Services are available to all levels of education and workforce assistance entities which apply to vocational rehabilitation. Operating under the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and Administration of Community Living, NMTAP fulfills the requirements of the AT act of 1998 and as amended in 2022.

Services are delivered through the main location in the greater Albuquerque area with two satellite offices located in the northeast and southwest areas of the state. NMTAP has contracts with two educational entities, the Northeastern Regional Educational Cooperative—providing services out of New Mexico Highlands University in Las Vegas—and Western New Mexico University in Silver City. All services NMTAP provides are available statewide. The satellite offices allow for quick access to AT devices and services in collaboration with the main office. The satellite offices have an increased focus on students in secondary schools who are transitioning from school to work.

Out of the six services mandated by the AT Act, the four core services required are Device Demonstrations, Device Loans, Financial Loans, and Reutilized Equipment. Additional mandated services are for Training and Technical Assistance. All these services are intertwined with the NMDVR commitment to ensure New Mexicans achieve their employment goals and thrive in the community. The

standard is to include a hands-on experience of the AT devices. The pandemic allowed for timely access of virtual services while providing knowledge effectively and efficiently across the state.

Two core services, Device Demonstrations and Device Loans, are focused on providing access to AT. Device Demonstration provides an opportunity specifically for individuals with a disability, and their advocates, to compare a variety of AT devices to meet a specific goal/objective. This allows individuals to decide which device best serves their needs. Device demonstrations often result in the second component, a loan of an AT device for a trial period. NMDVR participants and others may borrow the AT device for 42 days. This allows individuals and their VR Counselor to assess if the AT will aid employment or education leading to an employment outcome.

The other two core services are focused on the acquisition of AT. The Financial Loan component of NMTAP provides guaranteed loans to individuals with disabilities statewide when there are no other financing options or to offset NMDVR funds. The San Juan Center for Independence contracts with NMTAP to provide financial loans for AT, called Access Loans. Access Loans are often used for accessible transportation or modification for entering or exiting one's home, allowing access to education and employment, especially in rural areas. The final core component, Reutilization, provides used durable medical equipment and refurbished computers to people with disabilities. NMTAP contracts with two Adelante Development Center programs for this service: DiverseIT and Back In Use. NMDVR participants can receive a refurbished computer at no cost to be used for their education or employment through the DiverseIT program, while Back In Use offers used medical equipment.

The other mandated services NMTAP provides are Training and Technical Assistance. Training is to increase knowledge, skills, and competencies regarding AT devices or services. Technical Assistance is a collaborative process that allows for entities or agencies to create or increase their accessibility when providing their services internally and/or externally. NMTAP provides training for professionals working with individuals with disabilities through a two-day annual Assistive Technology Conference (ATC) and several smaller one-day workshops throughout the state, called Hands-On Workshops of AT (HOW-AT). NMDVR traditionally sends VR staff to these events. NMTAP also presents at the annual NMDVR Rehab Academy to train VR staff on the basic principles of AT.

NMDVR and NMTAP collaborate to support individuals with disabilities succeeding in the workforce. The two entities are currently working on a written agreement that will define the roles and responsibilities of each in providing knowledge of, access to, and acquisition of AT to New Mexicans with disabilities. The hope is that the partnership around AT services will be more robust, including an increased alliance with VR staff, access to the latest and state-of-the-art equipment available, as well as increasing services to both urban and rural areas of the state. NMTAP staff are the experts in AT and VR staff are the experts in VR services. Thus a stronger agreement will fulfill the requirement of Title IV of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014.

(2) Programs carried out by the Under Secretary for Rural Development of the Department of Agriculture;

NMDVR currently does not have an active partnership regarding programs carried out by the Undersecretary for Rural Development of the Department of Agriculture but will seek to develop such partnerships in future years. NMDVR works closely with the New Mexico Technology Assistance Program (NMTAP) under the Governors Commission on Disability who offers the New Mexico AgrAbility Program. As referenced above the agencies are working on development and implementation of an Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA) to support efforts to increase assistive technology knowledge.

(3) Non-educational agencies serving out-of-school youth;

Best Buddies is an international 501(c)(3) non-profit organization dedicated to establishing a

global volunteer movement to create opportunities for one-to-one friendships, integrated, employment, and leadership development for people with intellectual or developmental disabilities. Best Buddies is an approved supported employment provider with vocational rehabilitation agencies in 17 states, and an approved Medicaid Waiver provider in 12 states and the District of Columbia. Best Buddies is currently accredited by the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF) in California, Illinois, Indiana, New Mexico, and Virginia. Additionally, Best Buddies is an Employment Network through the Social Security Administration and can serve individuals who have a Ticket to Work. Best Buddies is a long-term service provider in Project SEARCH New Mexico programs. Best Buddies supports students with disabilities and youth through the Pre-Employment Transition contract and direct case services through established VR cases.

Mandy's Farm, a nonprofit organization based in the South Valley of Albuquerque, provides residential, community-based, and employment services to over 200 individuals and families living in Bernalillo County. Mandy's Farm assists individuals with developmental disabilities to achieve their goals for living, learning, and working in the community. Mandy's Farm has been a disability provider through a contract with the state of New Mexico's DDS since 2012, as well as an NMDVR vendor since 2013. Mandy's Farm has successfully implemented the VAMOS Program since the summer of 2018.

The VAMOS Program provides transition-age students with disabilities and their families with the support and assistance they need to feel confident in completing their high school studies, pursuing post-secondary education, and/or obtaining employment in the community at minimum wage or higher.

The Social Security Administration (SSA) serves out-of-school youth and refers individuals aged 22 to 26 to NMDVR benefits advisement. Services include assisting SSA beneficiaries in reporting income, applying for work incentives, and developing self-advocacy plans.

(4) State use contracting programs;

New Mexico has a state use program and NMDVR adheres to the state use act, which requires that purchases are submitted to the state use vendor, Horizons of New Mexico, for first right of refusal. Horizons of New Mexico works on behalf of the New Mexico Council for Purchasing from Persons with Disabilities to manage the contracts for its members outside of the normal bid process, as long as services are quoted at fair market price. Horizons of New Mexico maintains an itemized list of approved services available through members services.

(5) State agency responsible for administering the State Medicaid plan under title XIX of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 1396 et seq.);

NMDVR staff attends the Medicaid Advisory Committee, working with policies and procedures to clarify issues. Staff members educate Supplemental Security Income (SSI) recipients who are VR program participants by teaching self-advocacy when working with Medicaid. New Mexico continues to be a 1634 state, which means automatic coverage of Medicaid under title XIX.

Each participant receiving Social Security benefits is referred to an NMDVR Benefits Advisor to work with throughout their participation. The participant reviews the Ticket to Work video at the time of orientation and if eligible, they are referred to a Benefits Advisor for an individual appointment for the purpose of:

- Initiating a benefits review.
- Q/A regarding Ticket to Work.
- Discussion regarding how employment or training impacts benefits.
- Discussing method regarding reporting earnings once employed.
- Providing training regarding strategies to avoid overpayments.

NMDVR contracts with the Center for Development and Disability (CDD). CDD, through its Partners for Employment (PFE) program, disseminates resource information and tools on benefits advisement statewide. PFE has staff who have obtained Social Security Administration (SSA) benefits advisement certification via an SSA-approved certification program. The PFE Benefits Advisor provides a minimum of five Employment Incentive training courses statewide annually. To provide statewide access to this information, PFE hosts an online on-demand webinar regarding Social Security benefits. The online on-demand webinar includes the option for participants to obtain a certificate of completion upon passing a skills test. PFE develops at least three fact sheets annually, which are reviewed quarterly and maintained via the PFE website.

(6) State agency responsible for providing services for individuals with developmental disabilities;

a. NMDVR and DDS have executed an MOU to accomplish joint implementation for supported employment under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, 29 USC 730; 8.314.5 NMAC, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 and Revised ADA Regulations. The MOU addresses the mechanisms used to address the referral, exchange of information, and confidentiality of personal information used to determine the eligibility of individuals served in common. It will facilitate the coordinated planning of programs between NMDVR and DDS regarding individuals whom both these agencies jointly serve.

b. Through a contract with CDD, the following trainings are provided:

- Customized Employment Trainings to job developers and job coaches and their agencies, NMDVR staff, high school personnel, and families. This training enables the attendees to obtain CESP or ACRE certifications.
- Annual trainings are offered, including retention and follow-along services, via a contract with Washington Initiative Supported Employment (WISE). CDD staff work to co-present and apply the training to New Mexico's specific needs. The topics are varied and include training on topics like customized employment, job development, job coaching skills, and community mapping.
- The Reaching New Heights Conference is facilitated by CDD annually. The conference brings together professionals, including school-to-work transition staff, community inclusion providers and vendors, leadership staff, and State of New Mexico partners. Conference sessions are led by local and national experts and include many sessions and tracks that focus on topics such as the transition from school to work, integrated employment services, community inclusion, and leadership development. This training also provides participants an opportunity to earn continuing education credits.
- CDD provides opportunities for 10 NMDVR staff to attend the national Association of People Supporting Employment First (APSE) Conference or other similar national conferences.
- CDD facilitates statewide quarterly peer networking meetings known as the Supported Employment Local Leaders (SELL) groups. These networking meetings include advocacy groups, family organizations, businesses, civic groups, key state and local agency partners, and providers to build increased community employment options.

(7) State agency responsible for providing mental health services;

The Medicaid program in New Mexico does not allow for Supported Employment services for individuals with mental health diagnoses. NMDVR is a voting member of the Behavioral Health Collaborative, a cabinet-level group representing 15 state agencies and the Governor's office. The

Collaborative is undertaking a transformational process regarding improving behavioral health services to adults, children, youth, and families by focusing on recovery and resiliency.

NMDVR also has a Governor-appointed position on the New Mexico Behavioral Health Planning Council (NMBHPC). The appointee is actively working with the NMBHPC to address this population's employment and long-term support options.

NMDVR is also in preliminary discussions with the Behavioral Health Services Division (BHSD) of the Human Services Department, the Mental Health Resources (MHR) agency, and the five counties served by MHR regarding the likelihood of developing a pilot Individual Placement and Support (IPS) in the Eastern part of New Mexico. The pilot would assess the success of employment and approximate needs from Medicaid for Supported Employment services for this population. NMDVR has been in communication with the IPS Employment Center for support and direction.

NMDVR is developing an MOA with BHSD to provide participants with the support needed to enable them to participate in NMDVR's program more successfully, ultimately increasing the likelihood that the participant will attain economic self-sufficiency.

(8) Other Federal, State, and local agencies and programs outside the workforce development system;
and

The NMDVR has a MOU with The New Mexico Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (CDHH). This agreement addresses services to individuals who are served by NMDVR and have a communication disorder. This agreement transfers funds from CDHH to NMDVR to support and enhance rehabilitation services for individuals who are deaf, Deaf Blind or hard of hearing. NMDVR works to expand services and access through: on-the-job training programs for persons with these disabilities with the state's Independent Living Centers to acquire the skills to work as contracted independent living skills specialists; address technology needs, employment outcomes and post-secondary and vocational training; working collaboratively with state agency job fair organizers to maximize communication accessibility for this population; and for CDHH to assist with locating potential VR Counselors who are fluent in ASL and the cultural and communication needs of this population.

Developmental Disability Supports Divisions – Department of Health DDS

The NMDVR has had a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Developmental Disabilities Supports Division (DDS) since 2018. The purpose of the MOU is the joint implementation and coordination for supported employment services. The MOU is method for the 2 agencies to address the process, exchange of information and confidentiality of personal information. Cases are addressed at the region level to resolve issues and to solve both individual and systemic issues. NM became an Employment First state in 2016 to establish procedures for supporting working age youth and adults to have access to competitive integrated employment.

Navajo Nations OSERS; Jemez Vocational Rehabilitation Program, Laguna Acoma Vocational Rehabilitation program- NMDVR continues to work with tribal entities to maintain the memorandum of understanding (MOU). The scope of this MOU is to ensure the relationship between the two entities establishes processes to ensure shared resources and shared collaboration of serving individuals with disabilities who also receive services from the tribal VR program. The MOU's define shared costs, personnel training, services to Students with Disabilities in the provision pre-employment transition services, eligibility procedures and development of Individualized Plans for Employments to ensure supportive services are not duplicated.

In addition, there are several special projects throughout tribal land to support work-based learning experiences for students with disabilities (Project Hope and Project Search)

(9) Other private nonprofit organizations.

NMDVR ensures the appropriate use of community rehabilitation programs to the maximum extent feasible. The agency purchases a broad range of services for clients through local community rehabilitation programs.

These services consist of but are not limited to: 1. Medical, neuropsychological, and vocational services; 2. Testing, fitting, or training in the use of prosthetic and orthotic devices; 3. Recreational therapy; 4. Physical and occupational therapy; 5. Speech, language, and hearing therapy inclusive of purchase of hearing aids; 6. Psychiatric, psychological, and social services, including behavior management services; 7. Assessment for determining eligibility and vocational rehabilitation needs; 8. Rehabilitation technology; 9. Assistive technology; 10. Job development, placement, and retention services; 11. Orientation and mobility services for individuals who are blind; 12. Extended employment; 13. Psychosocial rehabilitation services; 14. Supported employment services and extended services; 15. Services to family members when necessary to the vocational rehabilitation of the individual; 16. Personal assistance services; 17. Services similar to the services described above.

Most services purchased from community rehabilitation programs are on an individualized basis addressing the specific barriers to employment because of an individual's disabling condition. Where applicable, community programs must be accredited by the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF). The agency requires services be purchased in conformance with state laws which regulate professional practices (ex.: psychologists, occupational therapists, speech therapists, etc.). When appropriate to the individualized needs of a participant of vocational rehabilitation services, community rehabilitation programs are utilized toward an employment outcome. Contractual agreements are frequently utilized with community rehabilitation programs.

A cooperative agreement with a private nonprofit service provider may also be established via a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) or Memorandum of Agreement (MOA).

An MOU may be utilized with community rehabilitation providers as appropriate and does not require an exchange of agency funds but is a legal document describing a bilateral agreement between parties. This document expresses a convergence of will between the parties, indicating an intended common line of action, rather than a legal commitment.

An MOA may be utilized as a written document between parties to cooperatively work together on an agreed-upon project or to meet an agreed-upon objective. The purpose of an MOA is to have a written understanding of the agreement between parties. The MOA can also be a legal document that is binding and holds the parties responsible to their commitment, or it may be a partnership agreement that is not legally binding.

Almost all agreements the agency has with private nonprofit organizations are contracts. NMDVR is currently coordinating with Youth Development, Inc. (YDI) to develop an MOU specific to serving New Mexico youth with disabilities, however this MOU is not yet in place.

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION CERTIFICATIONS AND ASSURANCES

CERTIFICATIONS

States must provide written and signed certifications that:	
1.	The (enter the name of designated State agency or designated State unit, as appropriate,) is authorized to submit the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan under title I of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Rehabilitation Act), as amended by title IV of WIOA, ¹ and its State Plan supplement under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act;
2.	In the event the designated State agency is not primarily concerned with vocational and other rehabilitation of individuals with disabilities, the designated State agency must include a designated State unit for the VR program (Section 101(a)(2)(B)(ii) of the Rehabilitation Act). As a condition for the receipt of Federal funds under title I of the Rehabilitation Act for the provision of VR services, the (enter the name of designated State agency or the designated State unit when the designated State agency has a designated State unit) ² agrees to operate and is responsible for the administration of the State VR Services Program in accordance with the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan ³ , the Rehabilitation Act, 34 CFR 361.13(b) and (c), and all applicable regulations ⁴ , policies, and procedures established by the Secretary of Education. Funds made available to States under section 111(a) of the Rehabilitation Act are used solely for the provision of VR services and the administration of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan;
3.	As a condition for the receipt of Federal funds under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act for supported employment services, the designated State agency or the designated State unit when the designated State agency has a designated State unit, agrees to operate and is responsible for the administration of the State Supported Employment Services Program in accordance with the supplement to the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan ⁵ , the Rehabilitation Act, and all applicable regulations ⁶ , policies, and procedures established by the Secretary of Education. Funds made available under title VI are used solely for the provision of supported employment services and the administration of the supplement to the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan;
4.	The designated State unit, or if not applicable, the designated State agency has the authority under State law to perform the functions of the State regarding the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement, and is responsible for the administration of the VR program in accordance with 34 CFR 361.13(b) and (c);

¹ Public Law 113-128.

² All references in this plan to "designated State agency" or to "the State agency" relate to the agency identified in this paragraph.

³ No funds under title I of the Rehabilitation Act may be awarded without an approved VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan in accordance with section 101(a) of the Rehabilitation Act.

⁴ Applicable regulations, in part, include the Education Department General Administrative Regulations (EDGAR) in 34 CFR parts 76, 77, 79, 81, and 82; 2 CFR part 200 as adopted by 2 CFR part 3474; and the State VR Services program regulations at 34 CFR part 361.

⁵ No funds under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act may be awarded without an approved supported employment supplement to the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan in accordance with section 606(a) of the Rehabilitation Act.

⁶ Applicable regulations, in part, include the citations in footnote 4, as well as Supported Employment program regulations at 34 CFR part 363.

States must provide written and signed certifications that:	
5.	The State legally may carry out each provision of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement.
6.	All provisions of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement are consistent with State law.
7.	The (enter title of State officer below) has the authority under State law to receive, hold, and disburse Federal funds made available under the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement;
8.	The (enter title of State officer below) has the authority to submit the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and the supplement for Supported Employment services;
9.	The agency that submits the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement has adopted or otherwise formally approved the plan and its supplement.

ASSURANCES

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

The State Plan must provide assurances that:	
1.	Public Comment on Policies and Procedures: The designated State agency assures it will comply with all statutory and regulatory requirements for public participation in the VR Services Portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan, as required by section 101(a)(16)(A) of the Rehabilitation Act.
2.	Submission of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and Its Supplement: The designated State unit assures it will comply with all requirements pertaining to the submission and revisions of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement for the State Supported Employment Services program, as required by sections 101(a)(1), (22), (23), and 606(a) of the Rehabilitation Act; section 102 of WIOA in the case of the submission of a Unified State plan; section 103 of WIOA in the case of a submission of a Combined State Plan; 34 C.F.R. 76.140.
3.	Administration of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan: The designated State agency or designated State unit, as appropriate, assures it will comply with the requirements related to: (a) the establishment of the designated State agency and designated State unit, as required by section 101(a)(2) of the Rehabilitation Act.

The State Plan must provide assurances that:	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (b) either a State independent commission or State Rehabilitation Council, as required by section 101(a)(21) of the Rehabilitation Act. (c) consultations regarding the administration of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan, in accordance with section 101(a)(16)(B) of the Rehabilitation Act. (d) the financial participation by the State, or if the State so elects, by the State and local agencies, to provide the amount of the non-Federal share of the cost of carrying out the VR program in accordance with section 101(a)(3). (e) as applicable, the local administration of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan, in accordance with section 101(a)(2)(A) of the Rehabilitation Act. (f) as applicable, the shared funding and administration of joint programs, in accordance with section 101(a)(2)(A)(ii) of the Rehabilitation Act. (g) statewideness and waivers of statewideness requirements, as set forth in section 101(a)(4) of the Rehabilitation Act. (h) the requirements for cooperation, collaboration, and coordination, as required by sections 101(a)(11) and (24)(B); and 606(b) of the Rehabilitation Act. (i) all required methods of administration, as required by section 101(a)(6) of the Rehabilitation Act. (j) the requirements for the comprehensive system of personnel development, as set forth in section 101(a)(7) of the Rehabilitation Act. (k) the compilation and submission to the Commissioner of statewide assessments, estimates, State goals and priorities, strategies, and progress reports, as appropriate, and as required by sections 101(a)(15), 105(c)(2), and 606(b)(8) of the Rehabilitation Act. (l) the reservation and use of a portion of the funds allotted to the State under section 110 of the Rehabilitation Act for the development and implementation of innovative approaches to expand and improve the provision of VR services to individuals with disabilities, particularly individuals with the most significant disabilities as set forth in section 101(a)(18)(A). (m) the submission of reports as required by section 101(a)(10) of the Rehabilitation Act.
4.	<p>Administration of the Provision of VR Services: The designated State agency, or designated State unit, as appropriate, assures that it will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) comply with all requirements regarding information and referral services in accordance with sections 101(a)(5)(E) and (20) of the Rehabilitation Act. (b) impose no duration of residence requirement as part of determining an individual's eligibility for VR services or that excludes from services under the plan any individual

The State Plan must provide assurances that:	
	<p>who is present in the State in accordance with section 101(a)(12) of the Rehabilitation Act.</p> <p>(c) provide the full range of services listed in section 103(a) of the Rehabilitation Act, as appropriate, to all eligible individuals with disabilities in the State who apply for services or, if implementing an order of selection, in accordance with criteria established by the State for the order of selection as set out in section 101(a)(5) of the Rehabilitation Act.</p> <p>(d) determine whether comparable services and benefits are available to the individual in accordance with section 101(a)(8) of the Rehabilitation Act.</p> <p>(e) comply with the requirements for the development of an individualized plan for employment in accordance with section 102(b) of the Rehabilitation Act.</p> <p>(f) comply with requirements regarding the provisions of informed choice for all applicants and eligible individuals in accordance with section 102(d) of the Rehabilitation Act.</p> <p>(g) provide vocational rehabilitation services to American Indians who are individuals with disabilities residing in the State, in accordance with section 101(a)(13) of the Rehabilitation Act.</p> <p>(h) comply with the requirements for the conduct of semiannual or annual reviews, as appropriate, for individuals employed either in an extended employment setting in a community rehabilitation program or any other employment under section 14(c) of the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, as required by sections 101(a)(14) and 511 of the Rehabilitation Act.</p> <p>(i) meet the requirements in sections 101(a)(17) and 103(b)(2) of the Rehabilitation Act if the State elects to construct, under special circumstances, facilities for community rehabilitation programs.</p> <p>(j) with respect to students with disabilities, the State:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) has developed and will implement, <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (A) strategies to address the needs identified in the assessments; and (B) strategies to achieve the goals and priorities identified by the State, to improve and expand vocational rehabilitation services for students with disabilities on a statewide basis; and (ii) has developed and will implement strategies to provide pre-employment transition services (sections 101(a)(15), 101(a)(25), and 113). (iii) shall reserve not less than 15 percent of the allocated funds for the provision of pre-employment transition services; such funds shall not be used to pay for the administrative costs of providing pre-employment transition services.
5.	<p>Program Administration for the Supported Employment Title VI Supplement to the State plan:</p> <p>(a) The designated State unit assures that it will include in the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan all information required by section 606 of the Rehabilitation Act.</p>

The State Plan must provide assurances that:	
	(b) The designated State agency assures that it will submit reports in such form and in accordance with such procedures as the Commissioner may require and collects the information required by section 101(a)(10) of the Rehabilitation Act separately for individuals receiving supported employment services under title I and individuals receiving supported employment services under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act.
6.	<p>Financial Administration of the Supported Employment Program (Title VI):</p> <p>(a) The designated State agency assures that it will expend no more than 2.5 percent of the State's allotment under title VI for administrative costs of carrying out this program; and, the designated State agency or agencies will provide, directly or indirectly through public or private entities, non-Federal contributions in an amount that is not less than 10 percent of the costs of carrying out supported employment services provided to youth with the most significant disabilities with the funds reserved for such purpose under section 603(d) of the Rehabilitation Act, in accordance with section 606(b)(7)(H) and (I) of the Rehabilitation Act.</p> <p>(b) The designated State agency assures that it will use funds made available under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act only to provide supported employment services to individuals with the most significant disabilities, including extended services to youth with the most significant disabilities, who are eligible to receive such services; and, that such funds are used only to supplement and not supplant the funds provided under Title I of the Rehabilitation Act, when providing supported employment services specified in the individualized plan for employment, in accordance with section 606(b)(7)(A) and (D), of the Rehabilitation Act.</p>
7.	<p>Provision of Supported Employment Services:</p> <p>(a) The designated State agency assures that it will provide supported employment services as defined in section 7(39) of the Rehabilitation Act.</p> <p>(b) The designated State agency assures that</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">the comprehensive assessment of individuals with significant disabilities conducted under section 102(b)(1) of the Rehabilitation Act and funded under title I of the Rehabilitation Act includes consideration of supported employment as an appropriate employment outcome, in accordance with the requirements of section 606(b)(7)(B) of the Rehabilitation Act an individualized plan for employment that meets the requirements of section 102(b) of the Rehabilitation Act , which is developed and updated with title I funds, in accordance with sections 102(b)(3)(F) and 606(b)(7)(C) and (E) of the Rehabilitation Act.</p>

Indicator	PY2022 Negotiated Level	PY 2022 Actual Level	PY 2023 Negotiated Level	PY 2023 In process	PY 2024 Expected Level	PY2024 Negotiated Level	PY 2025 Expected Level	PY 2025 Negotiated Level
Employment (2 nd Quarter After Exit)	40%	41.3%	42%		43%		44%	
Employment (4 th Quarter After Exit)	35%	40.8%	38%		42%		43%	
Median Earnings (2 nd Quarter After Exit)	\$4,500	\$5,033	\$4,600		\$4900		\$5000	
Credential Attainment Rate	26%	37.6%	28%		38%		42%	
Measurable Skills Gains	32.5%	52.9%	35%		54%		55%	
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable

VR Program Performance Indicators