

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

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

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

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

## a. Input of State Rehabilitation Council

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

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

### **INTERNAL CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT**

- VRBS needs to review current rules and make revisions that reflect WIOA values of:
  - Preparing youth with disabilities for meaningful careers,
  - Competitive/integrated employment for all persons with disabilities, and
  - Services to employers
- VRBS needs to engage staff in WIOA changes to enhance outreach to business partners.
- VRBS should enhance the staff's ability to assist all consumers in achieving competitive/integrated employment.
- VRBS needs to continue to handle the financial situation in order to proactively recruit qualified staff, to make corrective actions from RSA monitoring, and to continue to move off the Order of Selection.

### **PROVIDE 21<sup>st</sup> CENTURY QUALITY SERVICE**

- VRBS should coordinate with service providers, such as benefits planners, to make sure consumers can financially benefit from employment.

- VRBS, along with WIOA partners, should continue and improve outreach efforts to businesses.
- VRBS must continue to collect data and refine the approach to Pre-Employment Transition Services, Competitive/Integrated Employment and Employer Services mandated under the WIOA.

#### **NETWORK WITH OTHER AGENCIES & EMPLOYERS**

- With Order of Selection in place, VRBS should work to build strong relationships with other community partners to facilitate access to a broader array of services for Montanans with disabilities.
- VRBS should continue to partner with middle school, high school, and post-secondary levels of education.
- VRBS should continue its multiple contracts with high schools around the state to build on Pre-Employment Transition Services.

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

**SRC Recommendation:** VRBS needs to review current rules and make revisions that reflect WIOA values of: Preparing youth with disabilities for meaningful careers; Competitive Integrated employment for all persons with disabilities; and Services to employers

**VRBS Response:** VRBS has gained considerable expertise since the implementation of WIOA and developed service delivery strategies, in partnership with federal partners and technical assistance centers, to address WIOA mandates regarding the areas mentioned. VRBS is continually reviewing strategies and evolving procedures to improve and strengthen services to youth and businesses as well as increase competitive integrated employment outcomes. Additionally, VRBS continues to work on making administrative rule changes in this regard. The Council will be kept informed as the rule changes proceed.

**SRC Recommendation:** VRBS needs to engage staff in WIOA changes to enhance outreach to business partners.

**VRBS Response:** VRBS has a designated staff person, the business services specialist, who leads a business services team comprised of VRBS staff members across the state. These business services team members make direct contact with businesses in their respective areas of the state; attend and participate in local Chamber of Commerce functions, Society of Human Resource Managers, Job Service Employer Councils (JSEC), Economic Development meetings, and other area specific groups; and provide Windmills trainings to businesses and workforce partners to build awareness of disability-related attitudinal barriers among a myriad of other region specific activities. Business services team members are encouraged to share relevant information obtained through their activities with all VRBS staff members. VRBS will continue to work on developing, improving, and expanding these efforts and keep the Council informed of significant developments.

**SRC Recommendation:** VRBS should enhance the staff's ability to assist all consumers in achieving competitive/integrated employment.

**VRBS Response:** WIOA tasks VRBS with promoting and protecting competitive integrated work for people with disabilities. Procedure outlining the background, specific requirements for, and correct implementation of competitive integrated employment has been written and disseminated to all VRBS staff. It is implied that any consumer completing the application process for VRBS services is

interested in a competitive integrated employment outcome and when staff work on career planning and job placement with those consumers, the updated competitive integrated employment procedure is utilized. VRBS has provided detailed guidance to staff that a variety of past placements did not meet the definition of competitive integrated employment and thus those past placements are no longer accepted as successful program exits. Additionally, VRBS regularly provides career counselling and information and referral services to individuals in segregated settings across the state to provide informed choice related to competitive integrated employment.

**SRC Recommendation:** VRBS needs to continue to handle the financial situation in order to proactively recruit qualified staff, to make corrective actions from RSA monitoring, and to continue to move off the Order of Selection.

**VRBS Response:** VRBS takes the budget, staffing, and Order of Selection (OOS) very seriously. The VRBS Central Office is fully staffed for the first time in three years and hiring in areas identified as having the highest need across the state continues to be ongoing.

VRBS has not yet been provided with the final findings from the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) monitoring, but has taken a proactive approach to improving areas where corrective actions are expected. VRBS is committed to utilizing the outcomes of the recent RSA monitoring to evolve and refine its policies, procedures, operations, and service delivery and will keep the Council abreast of the final RSA feedback as well as steps taken to meet RSA's recommendations.

Since entering into Order of Selection, VRBS has implemented various strategies to resolve issues with overspending and come out of Order of Selection. Some strategies include improved monitoring of counselor purchases, establishment of written internal controls to prevent and identify incorrect spending, and utilization of budget carryforward practices to continue providing quality and comprehensive services to those currently participating in the VRBS program as well as those newly entering into services.

The Council will continue to be updated on the budget, staff vacancies, and movement on the OOS waiting list as progress is being made.

**SRC Recommendation:** VRBS should coordinate with service providers, such as benefits planners, to make sure consumers can financially benefit from employment.

**VRBS Response:** WIOA's emphasis on competitive integrated employment is a large factor in increasing consumers benefiting financially from employment. Specifically, minimum wage is no longer considered to be an appropriate wage for any consumer that is working, but rather a consumer working in a competitive integrated position is expected to be making a wage comparable to others in similar positions. Regarding benefits counseling, VRBS staff have been instructed to refer consumers to qualified benefits counselors in their respective areas across the state as well as to encourage consumers who receive Social Security benefits to actively participate in benefits counseling. Recently, 4 VRBS staff at various locations across the state have begun training to become certified benefits planners in order to provide in-house benefits with the intention of increasing and improving access to benefits planning services for consumers. VRBS will continue to provide updates regarding in-house benefits counseling to the Council.

**SRC Recommendation:** VRBS, along with WIOA partners, should continue and improve outreach efforts to businesses.

**VRBS Response:** Again, VRBS has established an active business services team comprised of VRBS staff across the state that regularly engage with businesses, participate in workforce-focused community meetings, and provide Windmills trainings. Additionally, a standalone VRBS business services website has been created as well as printed business services materials in effort to improve access to information for the dual customer. The business services specialist, business services team members, and VRBS leadership in collaboration with workforce partners continue to gain expertise in the area of providing services to businesses as well as evolve service delivery methods to best meet the needs of the businesses in Montana. VRBS will keep the Council informed of the activities being conducted regarding business services.

**SRC Recommendation:** VRBS must continue to collect data and refine the approach to Pre-Employment Transition Services, Competitive/Integrated Employment and Employer Services mandated under the WIOA.

**VRBS Response:** Again, VRBS has gained considerable expertise since the implementation of WIOA in the areas of Pre-Employment Transitions Services (Pre-ETS), competitive integrated employment and business services. VRBS has continued and will continue to evolve service delivery strategies regarding the areas mentioned, in partnership with federal partners and technical assistance centers, to address WIOA mandates. For example, VRBS recently established its own bureau for Pre-ETS. A bureau chief has been hired who is currently in the process of hiring the first 3 staff of Pre-ETS Specialists, Pre-ETS focused vocational rehabilitation counselors, who will coordinate with schools and other interested parties to ensure that students with disabilities receive Pre-ETS to prepare them for life after high school.

**SRC Recommendation:** With Order of Selection in place, VRBS should work to build strong relationships with other community partners to facilitate access to a broader array of services for Montanans with disabilities.

**VRBS Response:** Consumers determined to be in a closed category during order of selection are given a list of alternative resources for services specific to the region they live in.

Also, WIOA mandates partnership with many other agencies involved with the workforce service system. The relationships built through this stronger partnership are expected to provide new opportunities for consumers in closed categories during order of selection.

In addition, VRBS has been working with other agencies to understand that many consumers are on a waiting list for VR services and agencies need to understand this and do the best they can to help consumers until their VR services can become active.

**SRC Recommendation:** VRBS should continue to partner with middle school, high school, and post-secondary levels of education.

**VRBS Response:** VRBS has completed multiple contracts with high schools around the state to establish Pre-employment Transition services. VRBS emphatically believes that the partnership with high schools is significant and necessary in assisting young people with disabilities to prepare for their careers.

VRBS also partners with other levels of education. VRBS has worked with several of the colleges and universities in the state to develop programs that assist youth with disabilities in a variety of ways. VRBS will keep the Council informed of the activities being conducted with all levels of education.

**SRC Recommendation:** VRBS should continue its multiple contracts with high schools around the state to build on Pre-Employment Transition Services.

**VRBS Response:** Since the implementation of WIOA, VRBS has been contracting with high schools across the state to provide Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) to all students with disabilities within the high schools and continues to do so. Schools in contracts are encouraged to annually renew contracts and to continually improve and enhance their contracted services. Schools not in contracts are annually re-invited to participate and re-informed of the benefits of contracting with VRBS. Additionally, Pre-ETS Specialists will meet with high school staff and other interested parties to develop Pre-ETS contracts, initiate joint training, share best practices and facilitate communication between the parties.

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

None of the Council's input was rejected. Each explanation was included immediately following the SRC comment. See previous section.

## b. Request for Waiver of Statewideness

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

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

No waiver requested.

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

No waiver requested.

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

No waiver requested.

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

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

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

### **Section 121 Vocational Rehabilitation Projects**

VRBS presently has cooperative agreements with all of the six Section 121 projects (Flathead Reservation, Fort Belknap Reservation, Fort Peck Reservation, Rocky Boy's Reservation, Northern Cheyenne Reservation and the Blackfeet Reservation) located in Montana. The purpose of these agreements is to establish procedures to assure continued coordination between the 121 projects and VRBS. These agreements are implemented for the sole purpose of enhancing, to the greatest extent possible, the delivery of rehabilitation services to persons with disabilities living in the state of Montana and residing on or near the six reservations that currently have a tribal vocational rehabilitation project.

### **Mental Health**

This cooperative agreement has provisions that include:

1. To make available the required supported employment/follow-along services from community rehabilitation programs (CRPs) that are certified mental health providers. Follow-along services may be provided through community based psychiatric rehabilitation and support, and through case management services.
2. To serve persons identified as eligible for mental health service under Medicaid or the Mental Health Service Plan.
3. To strengthen supported employment services to Montana citizens eligible for vocational rehabilitation's supported employment services and for community mental health services funded by the Addictive and Mental Disorders Division.
4. To provide cross-training and technical assistance between our agencies.
5. To establish and evaluate annual goals for our interagency work towards coordinated vocational and support services.

### **Montana Small Business Development Centers (SBDCs)**

The purpose of this agreement is to establish guidelines and procedures to be used by the Montana Small Business Development Centers (SBDC) and VRBS in coordinating the services of both programs on behalf of individuals with disabilities who desire to pursue the goal of self-employment. This agreement outlines each party's role and responsibilities, referral procedures, information exchange methods, forms used, and implementation, evaluation, amendments and termination procedures.

### **The Randolph-Sheppard/Business Enterprise Program (BEP)**

The BEP program continues with three vendors. The program is at a point where it can consider starting one or two part-time routes if an interest is expressed by BLVS consumers to become a vendor.

### **Public Transportation Programs**

VRBS has MOUs with the public transportation programs in Great Falls and Billings, which are two of the larger cities in the state. The MOUs commit to procedures to assist VRBS's consumers to obtain documentation necessary to obtain transportation services at reduced fares.

### **Social Security Administration**

VRBS works with the Social Security Administration to collaborate on employment incentives and supports and maximize Social Security Administration/Vocational Rehabilitation (SSA/VR) reimbursement activity through the Ticket to Work Program.

### **Cooperation in Training Activities:**

VRBS routinely collaborates with other organizations to provide training opportunities for VRBS' staff. The following is a list of collaborating organizations:

- University of Montana - Rural Institute on Disabilities
- Montana State University - Billings - Montana Center for Inclusive Education
- Centers for Independent Living
- Client Assistance Program
- Disability Determination Services
- Rocky Mountain Rehab



- Montana Association for Rehabilitation

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

### **State Program under section 4 of the Assistive Technology Act of 1998 (MonTECH)**

Disability Employment and Transitions Division (DETD) has a contract with MonTECH to provide the required services of the Assistive Technology Act of 1998. Also, the two programs cooperate through:

1. Having a VRBS representative on the MonTECH advisory board,
2. Having a MonTECH representative on the VRBS Assistive Technology Team.
3. Training VRBS counselors in available assistive technology and how to access consumer evaluations related to assistive technology.

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

### **Department of Agriculture**

There is no Department of Agriculture project related to disabilities serving Montana at this time.

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

We do not currently have agreements with agencies serving out-of-school youth.

## 5. State use contracting programs.

### **State Use Contracting Programs Montana**

State agencies may purchase supplies and services from sheltered workshops or work activity centers. Such purchases are exempt from competitive bidding laws and rules. The Montana Department of Administration maintains a list of certified sheltered workshops or work activity centers located in the state. The list includes the supplies and services provided by each sheltered workshop or work activity center. (Administrative Rules of Montana 2.5.607).

VRBS does not currently make purchases related to this agreement.

## d. Coordination with Education Officials

Describe:

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

## for the timely development and approval of individualized plans for employment for the students

**Local School Districts:** VRBS has initiated multiple contracts with local school districts to provide pre-employment transition services (Pre-ETS) to high school students with disabilities aged 14-21. School districts develop work plans on how they will provide the five required components of Pre-ETS and are reimbursed quarterly based on the number of Pre-Employment Transition Services provided to students with disabilities who requested them. The school districts are required to provide VRBS with the documentation of services provided to students participating in Pre-ETS.

The most recent agreement with the Office of Public Instruction is from May 29, 2019.

### **Information related to the process and responsibilities of LEAs (OPI) and the VR agency to document completion of activities required under Section 511 for those students pursuing subminimum wage employment:**

- OPI will require LEAs who work with students with disabilities seeking subminimum wage employment to send documentation of transition services/Pre-ETS provided to VRBS within 30 days of service delivery.
- For students with disabilities seeking subminimum wage employment, OPI will require the LEA to provide documentation to VRBS of transition and Pre-ETS services they provided. Documentation will be provided to VRBS within 30 days of service delivery.
- For students with disabilities seeking subminimum wage employment, OPI will require the LEA to provide documentation to VRBS of the student's refusal to participate in transition services.
- VRBS will inform OPI staff, teachers, students, legal guardians and parents of the mandates found in the Rehabilitation Act, which require the student with a disability exiting the LEA to be referred to VRBS prior to entering subminimum wage employment.
- For a student with disabilities seeking subminimum wage employment, VRBS will provide the individual with documentation of the required activities within the timelines specified under 34 CFR 397.
- For students with disabilities seeking subminimum wage employment who refuse to participate in transition services, VRBS will provide documentation to the student of their refusal to participate within the timelines specified under 34 CFR 397.

### **Additionally, the section on coordination and documentation of subminimum wage employment that is included in the MOU between VRBS and OPI states the following:**

Under section 511 of Rehabilitation Act of 1973, no entity, including businesses which hold a special wage certificate as described in Section 14(c) of the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1958, may compensate any individual with disabilities who is 24 years of age or younger at subminimum wage, unless they have met specific requirements including participation in Transition or Pre-ETS, application for VRBS and receipt of career counseling, information and referral services. The purpose of Section 511 is to ensure that individuals with disabilities have access to information and services that will enable them to achieve competitive integrated employment.

### **Responsibilities of OPI and LEAS under Section 511(d) of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973**

- OPI or LEAs may not enter into a contract or other arrangement with an entity for the purpose of operating a program for an individual age 24 or younger under which work is compensated at subminimum wage
- OPI will provide guidance to LEAs that when a student with a disability is known to be seeking subminimum wage employment, the LEA will share the specific requirements with the student, parents, guardians and teachers as soon as possible. This information should also be shared with participants during IEP meetings for transition planning.
- The student will be referred to VRBS and the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor will be informed by the LEA that the student is known to be seeking subminimum wage.
- Pursuant to 34 CFR §397.30(b)(1), the LEA will provide VRBS with documentation that contains at a minimum, the: (i) Youth's name; (ii) Description of the transition services under IDEA and Pre-ETS completed; (iii) Name of the provider of the required service or activity; (iv) Date required service or activity completed; v) Signature of LEA personnel documenting completion of the required service or activity; (vi) Date of signature and (vii) Signature of LEA personnel transmitting documentation to VRBS; and (viii) Date and method (e.g., hand-delivered, faxed, mailed, e-mailed, etc.) by which document was transmitted to VRBS. The LEA Personnel must provide the documentation to VRBS as soon as possible upon completion of the required actions, but no later than 30 calendar days after completion of the required action or 60 days of additional time is needed due to extenuating circumstances. 34 CFR § 397.30(b)(2)(i). Extenuating circumstances should be interpreted narrowly to include unexpected lengthy absence due to illness or family emergency of LEA personnel necessary to produce the documentation due to illness or family emergency or a natural disaster. 34 CFR §397.30(b)(2)(i)(B). When the LEA personnel transmits the final determination or activity completed to VRBS, as required by 34 CFR §397.20 and 397.30(a), the LEA personnel must provide a cover sheet that itemizes the documentation that has been provided to VRBS regarding that student.
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- The LEA must retain a copy of all documentation provided to VRBS.
- The transmittal of all documentation from the LEA to VRBS will be consistent with the confidentiality requirements of the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) (20 USC 11232g(b) and 34 CFR 99.30 and 99.31) and IDEA (20 USC 1417(c) and 34 CFR 300.622).

**Responsibilities of VRBS under Section 511(d) of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973**

- Pursuant to 34 CFR § 397.20(a) documentation of the activities listed below must be provided by VRBS to the student in an accessible format, as soon as possible after completion of the required action, but no later than 45 calendar days after determination or completion of the required activity or service or within 90 calendar days if additional time is needed due to extenuating circumstances. 34 CFR §397.10(c)(2). Extenuating circumstances should be interpreted narrowly such as unexpected lengthy absence of VRBS personnel necessary for the production of the documentation due to illness, family emergency or natural disaster. 34 CFR § 397.10(c)(2)(B).
  - The individual has received transition services under (IDEA) or Pre-ETS through VRBS or the LEA
  - The individual has applied for VR services and been found ineligible; or applied and was found eligible for VR services and;
    - Had an IPE developed
    - Had been working toward an employment outcome with appropriate supports and services for a reasonable period of time (determined on an individual

basis, but up to 24 months for an individual with a supported employment outcome identified in their IPE) without success; and

- The individual's case is closed; and
  - Has been provided career counseling, and information and referrals to Federal and State programs and other resources in the individual's geographic area that offer employment-related services and supports designed to enable the individual to explore, discover, experience, and attain competitive integrated employment.
- If a youth with a disability or, as applicable, the youth's parent or guardian, refuses, through informed choice, to participate in the activities required by section 511 or the implementing regulations in part 34 CFR part 397, documentation must, at a minimum:
    - Contain the information in 34 CFR § 397.10(a)(2); and
    - The documentation of the youth's refusal must be provided to them in an accessible format within 10 calendar days of their refusal to participate 34 CFR §397.10(c)(2)(i).
  - The youth will be informed that their right of refusal to participate in the required activities outlined in this section will result in their inability to engage in employment at a sub minimum wage.

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

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

The following is from the MOU with the Office of Public Instruction that details the technical assistance responsibilities of each agencies.

#### **Consultation and Technical Assistance**

- VRBS will provide consultation and technical assistance to assist LEAs in planning for the transition of students with disabilities from school to post-school activities including Pre-ETS.
- VRBS Counselors will consult with and provide technical assistance to LEA administrators, school counselors, transition specialists, families, individuals, public and private stakeholders, community agencies, and teachers including those who work in special education, general education, career technical fields, etc.
- VRBS will provide consultation and technical assistance through informational sessions, face to face meetings, phone calls, conference calls, skype meetings, webinars, brochures, rack cards, and shared information on the agency website.
- LEA and VRBS staff will be encouraged to collaborate through their Regional Youth Transition Committees and Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD) Meetings in planning and implementing efforts that are focused on the transition of students with disabilities.

- VRBS counselors will provide consultation and technical assistance during their routine visits to the LEAs, during IEP meetings, at conferences, at training activities, and at other times as requested by OPI or LEAs.
- VRBS will disseminate information about transition services, Pre-ETS, processes for outreach, VR eligibility, scope of VR services, effective practices, training opportunities, funding strategies, assistive technology, and other relevant topics.

In addition VRBS has an MOU with Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education (OCHE).

The purpose of this MOU is to develop and adopt principles which will guide the planning and delivery of support services to individuals with disabilities who are mutual clients of Vocational Rehabilitation and Blind Services (VRBS) and students enrolled in the Montana University System (MUS). This MOU has provisions which include:

- VRBS and the units of the MUS maintain different requirements for determination of eligibility, documentation of disability, and the provision of services or accommodations. This MOU does not require either VRBS or MUS to alter its policies for providing services or supports, and this MOU is not to be used as a basis for determining eligibility for VRBS or MUS services.
- The units of the MUS through the guidance of the OCHE are required to provide services and accommodations to VRBS' clients to the same extent as they are provided to other students with disabilities, in accordance with Montana state law, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (PL 101-336) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (PL 93-112, as amended).
- VRBS is not prohibited in this agreement from contracting with units of the MUS to provide services or support for VRBS' clients beyond those required to assure equal access to equal educational opportunities.
- The MOU will provide both parties with the opportunity to enhance communication and the exchange of information regarding services offered by VRBS and the various campuses of the MUS.
- VRBS and the units of the MUS will work together to enhance cross-referrals of individuals with disabilities, as appropriate to each individual's needs. Personal information about the individual will not be shared without an appropriate release of information.
- The MUS will not require students who have a disability to apply for VRBS before providing services or support. For students who have applied for VRBS, the MUS will not deny or delay the provision of services or support while VRBS is in the process of determining eligibility for services.
- VRBS are provided pursuant to an individualized plan for employment (IPE) which is developed jointly by the rehabilitation counselor and the eligible individual. In those situations where referral has been made to campus disability support services, the appropriate disability services staff may also be involved in helping to develop the IPE.
- The VRBS' rehabilitation counselor and the MUS campus disability support services staff will respect the individual's right and responsibility to fully participate in all decisions regarding his or her vocational future. The IPE shall be developed and implemented in a manner that allows the individual an opportunity to exercise informed choice in selecting an employment outcome, the specific vocational rehabilitation services that are to be provided, the entity that will provide those services, and the methods that will be used to procure the vocational rehabilitation services.

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

The following are sections of the MOU with the Office of Public Instruction related to transition planning.

### **Transition Planning:**

- VRBS and OPI agree to work collaboratively to facilitate and coordinate the smooth transition of students with disabilities from school to post-school activities, including the receipt of Pre-ETS, transition services, and other vocational rehabilitation services.
- Pursuant to 34 CFR 300.321(b)(3), to the extent appropriate, with consent of the parent or adult student, VRBS will be invited to participate in IEP development meetings for shared students with disabilities, depending on availability. VRBS may participate in person or through use of alternative means such as conference calls or other methods. When VRBS is unable to attend the IEP meeting, LEA and VRBS will communicate regarding IEP goals and needed transition services after the IEP meeting.
- VRBS will provide assistance in transition planning for students with disabilities to facilitate development and completion of their IEPs. VRBS can provide information, technical assistance, case consultation and information/referral as needed for eligible or potentially eligible students.
- VRBS will coordinate with non-educational agencies such as juvenile justice, treatment facilities or foster care programs for referrals of co youth with disabilities. These youth will be encouraged to participate in transition services and programs to improve future employment opportunities.
- VRBS will inform LEA teachers of community events such as job fairs, transition fairs, and career days to introduce students with disabilities to possible career goals.
- LEA and VR staff will provide guidance and counseling to students with disabilities regarding post-school options such as employment, post-secondary education, vocational training, and adult education.
- VRBS shall determine the eligibility of all students with disabilities who have applied for VRBS services within 60 days from the date of application.
- VRBS and LEAs will collaborate on the provision of ongoing joint staff training on topics such as development and implementation of IEP's, Pre-ETS, accommodations under Section 504 and limitations on youth entering employment paying sub-minimum wage.
- VRBS and LEAs will work together to facilitate the local level engagement of potential employers to provide job shadows, paid and unpaid work-based learning opportunities, etc. for students with disabilities;
- VRBS, in collaboration with OPI/LEAs, will provide or arrange for the provision of Pre-ETS to all students with disabilities identified as requiring these services. (The coordination and provision of Pre-ETS is outlined in more detail below.)

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

The following are sections of the MOU with the Office of Public Instruction that deal with financial responsibilities of each agencies and related matters.

### **Roles and Responsibilities of Each Agency-**

#### **Joint Responsibilities of OPI and VRBS:**

- OPI and VRBS shall jointly sponsor training for their respective staff members and LEA personnel. Training shall focus on existing and new State or Federal requirements or initiatives that impact the provision of services by both entities concerning education of individuals with disabilities, their transition from school to employment, vocational rehabilitation services, assistive technology, and the substance of this MOU.
- OPI and VRBS shall ensure that timely notice of training is provided to each other and to the LEAs as appropriate.
- OPI and VRBS shall each designate a single point of contact who will serve as the lead person to coordinate joint training programs, communicate with the respective programs and for collaboration of pre-employment transition services and transition activities.
- OPI staff and VRBS will be available to give joint presentations on pre-employment transition services at conferences such as MYTransitions.

#### **Responsibilities of OPI:**

- OPI will facilitate and coordinate the smooth transition of students with disabilities from school to post-school employment-related activities, including working with VRBS to ensure the receipt of appropriate Pre-ETS, transition services, and competitive, integrated employment.
- OPI will host an Annual Joint Stakeholders meeting to network, collaborate, communicate and discuss issues regarding services for students and youth with disabilities.
- OPI will encourage LEAs to participate in local multi-agency Transition Team meetings.
- OPI will request that LEAs identify points of contact to work with the VRBS liaison assigned to each school.
- OPI will disseminate information regarding relevant training and workshops to VRBS including courses available through the Teacher Learning Hub.
- reach out to parents and students to make them aware of coordinated transition services and opportunities. Examples include the Montana Youth Leadership Forum (MYLF) and Movin' On campus programs.
- OPI will encourage LEAs to provide relevant resource materials to stakeholders, parents, families, guardians and students relating to the provision of Pre-ETS and other transition services.
- The OPI Data Accountability Specialist will provide the most recent Special Education State Child Count data upon request. A data driven estimate of the number of students receiving 504 accommodations in the state will also be provided upon request. The OPI Annual Performance Report which includes exit data information for students with disabilities will be shared with VRBS.
- OPI will require LEAs who work with students with disabilities seeking subminimum wage employment to send documentation of transition services/Pre-ETS provided to VRBS within 30 days of service delivery.

- For students with disabilities seeking subminimum wage employment, OPI will require the LEA to provide documentation to VRBS of transition and Pre-ETS services they provided. Documentation will be provided to VRBS within 30 days of service delivery.
- For students with disabilities seeking subminimum wage employment, OPI will require the LEA to provide documentation to VRBS of the student's refusal to participate in transition services.
- to provide the required documentation needed by VRBS prior to the provision of Pre-ETS and coordination of services. LEAs will be offered the opportunity to enter into a contract with VRBS to provide Pre-ETS to students with disabilities. LEAs will be provided funding based on the number of students with disabilities who receive Pre-ETS according to the contract fee schedule. LEAs providing Pre-ETS through a VRBS contract will be responsible for securing parent/guardian signatures on student Pre-ETS requests and release forms granting permission for VRBS and LEAs to exchange information.
- OPI will teach LEAs to inform VRBS of students with disabilities who may be in need of transition or pre-employment services through VRBS. OPI will encourage LEAs to inform VRBS as soon as students with disabilities are identified as having a disability regardless of whether the student intends to apply for VRBS services.
- OPI shall encourage LEAs to inform VRBS of students with disabilities who are disconnected or in danger or dropping out.
- OPI shall provide technical assistance to LEAs concerning the provision of FAPE including the responsibility to provide assistive technology to assist with the education of students approaching transition to independent living and employment as appropriate.
- OPI shall assist LEAs with coordination of vocationally related services with VRBS for eligible students. Coordination should commence in the early stages of transition. Vocationally related service coordination and corresponding agency responsibilities should be identified in the IEP and included on the student's IPE when appropriate.
- OPI shall encourage LEAs to inform VRBS of IEP meetings in advance to allow sufficient time for VRBS to participate, subject to parental approval. Development of vocational goals and objectives shall occur in collaboration with the IEP Team.
- OPI will identify needed Pre-ETS and transition services, to include as appropriate, a statement of interagency responsibilities or linkages with other entities (e.g. mental health agencies, Social Security Administration) beginning at age 14.
- LEAs are responsible for providing and paying for any transition service that is considered special education or related services necessary for ensuring a FAPE as required under IDEA. Special Education and related services similar to VR Services may include:
  - Interpreting services;
  - Psychological services;
  - Physical and occupational therapy;
  - Early identification and assessment of disabilities in children;
  - Counseling services, including rehabilitation counseling;
  - Orientation and mobility services;
  - Medical services for diagnostic or evaluation purposes;
  - Work experiences; and
  - Job coaching and support services.



### **Responsibilities of VRBS:**

- VRBS Counselors will participate in the evaluation process of students who have applied for VRBS and subject to parental consent, in the development of IEPs for students with disabilities
- VRBS shall encourage former students who are still eligible for IDEA services to enroll again in school for further study and training to enhance their opportunities for employment. Such former students shall also be eligible for vocational rehabilitation services customarily provided by VRBS to adults over the age of 21.
- VRBS will provide assistive technology services relevant to functions outside those assistive technology services required to access the educational program.
- After the eligible individual exits the LEA, VRBS will continue to provide vocational services, i.e., vocational assessment, career exploration, job shadowing, vocational guidance and counseling, and other required services outlined in the IPE.
- VRBS will accept referral of students with disabilities during the transition planning process for the provision of Pre-ETS. Students are not required to apply for VRBS services to receive Pre-ETS.
- VRBS will provide consultation with LEA district staff on transition planning to prepare a student to move from school to work or post-secondary education in accordance with the student's unique needs as determined through the IEP process and provision of Pre-ETS.
- Although VRBS is currently operating under an Order of Selection, an IPE which is consistent with and which takes into consideration the eligible student's Individualized Education Program (IEP), their strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities, interests, and informed choice will be developed as soon as resources are available.
- Students with disabilities who apply for VRBS, are determined eligible and complete an IPE may receive services such as evaluation, career guidance and counseling, medical or psychological services, training, job development and placement services, rehabilitation technology or other services to help them enter and maintain employment.
- VRBS will provide or arrange for the provision of services required by the IPE goal, when the student has been determined eligible for VR and the services are specific to his/her employment outcome and are not services customarily provided to the student by the LEA under the IDEA.
- VRBS Staff will provide consultation to assist in the identification of eligible and potentially eligible students with disabilities and assessment of their individual needs for Pre-ETS.
- VRBS is responsible for providing information to parents and/or guardians, students and teachers regarding VR eligibility, vocational assessment for employment and postsecondary planning and the CAP.
- VRBS will offer students who wish to apply for VRBS the opportunity to complete and sign a VRBS application form. The student will provide access to available information necessary to determine eligibility and priority for services. Eligibility for VRBS will be determined within 60 days. Students who are only interested in Pre-ETS and do not wish to apply for VRBS services will be given the opportunity to complete and sign the Student Request Form. Verification of disability and student status will be included on the Student Request Form or provided by the student. For students under 18 years of age, the application and Request Form will be signed by a parent or guardian.

- VRBS will obtain written consent for the release of confidential information, pursuant to VRBS policy and procedures, federal and state laws and regulations regarding confidentiality.
- VRBS will share information regarding policies, procedures, guidelines, programs and services for the purpose of improving the access to, and availability of, transition services.
- VRBS will provide brochures and materials about the VR process and services to the LEAs for distribution to students, parents, legal guardians, teachers and others. VRBS staff will also be available to provide information on changes in the law or VRBS policy regarding transition services.
- VRBS will promote employer participation in providing opportunities for work-based learning for students with disabilities.

VRBS is responsible for coordinating the provision of Pre-ETS.

- VRBS will inform OPI staff, teachers, students, legal guardians and parents of the mandates found in the Rehabilitation Act, which require the student with a disability exiting the LEA to be referred to VRBS prior to entering subminimum wage employment.
- For a student with disabilities seeking subminimum wage employment, VRBS will provide the individual with documentation of the required activities within the timelines specified under 34 CFR 397.
- For students with disabilities seeking subminimum wage employment who refuse to participate in transition services, VRBS will provide documentation to the student of their refusal to participate within the timelines specified under 34 CFR 397.
- 
- The VRBS Youth Services Specialist will oversee the implementation of their “Adopt a School” program. Adopt a School builds relationships between local schools and VRBS by establishing regular office hours at larger high schools for Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors. These counselors connect students with disabilities to VRBS and establish collaborations with special education teachers and 504 coordinators, teachers, school administrators and parents, advocacy groups, and others regarding the role of VRBS in transition.
- The VRBS

### **Financial Responsibilities:**

Montana is a local control state in which LEAs are financially responsible for the costs of services they are mandated to provide under the IDEA and Section 504. OPI shall encourage and promote financial agreements between LEAs and VRBS. Such agreements may be made on an individual basis and in consultation with all parties including students, their families, LEA staff, and vocational rehabilitation professionals.

- OPI and VRBS commit to the implementation of complementary programs to assist with the provision of transition and Pre-ETS to students with disabilities in the state, including students with the most significant disabilities, to enable them to achieve an employment outcome in a competitive integrated setting;
- VRBS will provide funding to LEAs for the provision of Pre-ETS to students with disabilities as outlined in individual contracts and according to the contract fee schedule.

- OPI and LEAs are financially responsible for the cost of services they are mandated to provide under IDEA, Part B; including transition services that are considered special education or related services that are necessary for ensuring a FAPE to children with disabilities. Nothing in this MOU will be construed to reduce any obligations under the IDEA.
- VRBS is financially responsible for the cost of services for eligible VR students where the purpose of the services is to support an employment goal.
- Under 34 C.F.R.53, the availability of Comparable Services and Benefits, as defined in 34 C.F.R. §361.5(c)(8), will be determined by VR unless such a determination would interrupt or delay the progress of the individual: toward achieving the employment outcome identified in the IPE; an immediate job placement; or the provision of VR services to individual determined to be at extreme medical risk.

The previously mentioned MOU with the OCHE also deals with financial responsibility.

VRBS' clients who attend a unit of the MUS may need reasonable accommodation, including auxiliary aids or services in order to have equal access to the programs and services offered at that particular institution.

The provision and cost of reasonable accommodations are the responsibility of the particular unit of the MUS. For individuals with disabilities who are mutual clients of VRBS and students at a unit of MUS, and are otherwise qualified for such aids or services, the funding source for auxiliary aids and services will be determined on an individual case-by-case basis.

The MUS unit will provide the appropriate VRBS/ office with an estimate of the number of hours and cost of interpreter services which will be billed to VRBS prior to the start of services.

- The VRBS' office must authorize payment for the interpreter services prior to the start of services.
- VRBS and the MUS unit will require full compliance with the Registry of interpreters for the Deaf (RID) Code of Professional Conduct.

In addition:

Physical disabilities are included in the agreement to split evenly the cost of auxiliary aids and services.

Pre-approval of any cost sharing agreements needs to be obtained prior to the start of the service.

Documentation of services delivered must be provided to VRBS that meets or exceeds state auditing requirements.

Additional guidelines relative to interpreter services for eligible clients/students:

- The MUS unit will be responsible for procuring and paying interpreters. VRBS will reimburse for its share of the cost.
- The MUS unit will provide the appropriate VRBS/ office with an estimate of the number of hours and cost of interpreter services which will be billed to VRBS prior to the start of services.
- The VRBS' office must authorize payment for the interpreter services prior to the start of services.
- VRBS and the MUS unit will require full compliance with the Registry of interpreters for the Deaf (RID) Code of Professional Conduct.

Lastly:

- Physical disabilities are included in the agreement to split evenly the cost of auxiliary aids and services.
- Pre-approval of any cost sharing agreements needs to be obtained prior to the start of the service.
- Documentation of services delivered must be provided to VRBS that meets or exceeds state auditing requirements.

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

The following section of the MOU with the Office of Public Instruction describes procedures of outreach and identification of students with disabilities needing transition services.

### **Outreach Identification:**

- VRBS assigns a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor to each public high school in the state. Counselors shall inform students, families, special and regular education teachers, school administrators, advocacy groups, and others about VRBS.
- Counselors will give presentations and distribute both print and electronic materials that explain transition and pre-employment services along with traditional vocational rehabilitation services. The information provided will include a description of the purpose of VRBS, eligibility requirements, application procedures and scope of services that may be provided to eligible and potentially eligible individuals.
- Students who wish to apply for VRBS services will be offered the opportunity to complete and sign a VRBS application form. The student will provide access to available information necessary to determine eligibility and priority for services. Eligibility for VRBS will be determined within 60 days. Students who are only interested in Pre-ETS and do not wish to apply for VRBS services will complete and sign the Student Request Form. Verification of disability and student status will be included on the Student Request Form or provided by the student. For students under 18 years of age, the application and Request Form will be signed by a parent or guardian.
- OPI shall assist the LEAs with methods and procedures for outreach and identification of students and families who may benefit from VRBS. Assistance with the methods and procedures should include actions needed to engage those who are not aware of VRBS, including how the LEAs identify and work with transition aged students who may be in alternative high schools, residential facilities, or are incarcerated.
- VRBS will reach out to eligible and potentially eligible students with disabilities who are in need of transition services and Pre-ETS as early as possible through outreach activities such as information sharing at IEP's, transition planning meetings, career fairs, orientations, back to school nights, work with parent support groups, and other activities.
- VRBS Counselors will work with LEA staff to identify and reach out to all students with disabilities to include those served in special education, those receiving an accommodation under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and other students and youth with disabilities. Outreach activities will include students with disabilities receiving school psychological, health, nursing or social work services, and students with disabilities enrolled in an educational program and not in special education. VRBS will also reach out to youth with disabilities who have dropped out of an education program or students who are at risk of dropping out of high school.

- VRBS will inform students with disabilities about the availability of and opportunities to exercise informed choice; including the availability of support services for individuals with the most significant disabilities who require assistance in exercising informed choice throughout the vocational rehabilitation process;
- The designated VRBS Counselor will work closely with each LEA to coordinate, identify students and implement Pre-ETS. VRBS will provide the necessary forms and templates for required documentation including Student Request Forms for Pre-ETS.
- VRBS will work with the LEA to ensure collaboration between transition services provided under IDEA and the Pre-ETS provided by VRBS through direct provision of services or through contracts with LEAs and other providers.
- 
- Not all eligible or potentially eligible students with disabilities will require all five required activities, however, all should receive all *needed* services, as determined through informed choice and consultation with each student based on their strengths and needs and consistent with their IEP, when applicable.

## e. Cooperative Agreements with Private Nonprofit Organizations

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

The designated state unit contracts with for-profit and non-profit providers of vocational rehabilitation services. Vocational Rehabilitation and Blind Services (VRBS) operates on a purchase-of-service basis. We have identified and enrolled rehabilitation providers who meet qualification standards established by the designated state unit. VRBS' staff communicates regularly with the providers regarding fee structures, services provided, and consumer satisfaction.

VRBS requires Community Rehabilitation Providers (CRP) to accept a set fee for service, but does not guarantee a minimum level of consumers to be referred. The contract used with CRPs follows the master contract developed by the Department of Public Health and Human Services (DPHHS) legal unit to cover liability and related Issues. Services purchased by VRBS from CRPs are directly approved from the VRBS' counselors utilizing an authorization process. The amount of services purchased depends upon the amount and type of services needed by the consumer. Agencies eligible to receive authorizations must be enrolled vendors and must be current service providers of DPHHS; or have accreditation from the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF) or Rehabilitation Services Accreditation System (RSAS). In a limited number of cases, individuals with appropriate backgrounds are authorized to provide services in remote rural areas where a DPHHS, RSAS or CARF provider is not available.

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

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

**Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities** are important stakeholders in providing supported employment services. Their contributions are described later as they have their own sections below.

**Enrolled CRPs:** VRBS works with a number of community-based organizations across the state. Many are enrolled as extended support service providers to assure quality in service delivery for consumers. VRBS has enrolled programs in mental health services, developmental disabilities, as well as other disability organizations to provide these services at the local level.

## g. Coordination with Employers

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

### 1. VR Services; and

VRBS coordinates with businesses through several avenues, including actions and activities that are designed to enhance efforts to identify competitive integrated employment and career exploration opportunities for Montanans with disabilities. These actions facilitate the provision of VR services and transition services, including pre-employment transition services.

These actions include:

- Making direct contact with businesses to learn about their services, market position, goals and workforce needs.
- Attending and participating in community meetings such as Chamber of Commerce functions, Society of Human Resource Managers, Job Service Employer Councils and Economic Development meetings.
- A standalone VRBS Business Services website for businesses to use to learn about the services we have to offer and printed resource materials describing our services.
- Coordination with Montana Workforce Centers to input and collect data on Business Services using the MWORKS data base. This allows VRBS to collaborate with the Workforce Centers and document ongoing relationships with business and ensure deliverables and services are provided.
- Improved knowledge of Labor Market Information and how to incorporate this information into Business Services practices
- Business Services Team members are Windmills curriculum trainers. This training is used as an employer-employee awareness program specifically addressing attitudinal barriers.

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

Agreements with private and non-profit providers related to transition include the following:

**Montana Youth Transition (MYTransition):** VRBS provides funding and collaboration with MYTransitions to provide:

- An annual conference on Montana Transition activities with separate tracks for school personnel, adult service personnel, parents, and youth, along with combined sessions for developing coordination.

**Montana Youth Leadership Forum (MYLF {pronounced my life})** VRBS provides funding and collaboration for the week-long forum for approximately 20 youth with disabilities. The forum focuses

on developing a plan for contributing to the community, self-advocacy, soft skills, adult resource identification and a variety of other skills and abilities related to transition. VRBS also provides funding for follow-up and MYLF Step II for those who participated in the MYLF Forum. MYLF Minis are offered in rural areas to allow students with disabilities to participate in a condensed format.

**Counselor-purchased Pre-ETS services:** VRBS is contracting with several private, for- and non-profit community rehabilitation providers and other groups (e.g., centers for independent living) for services and activities in all five of the core Pre-ETS service categories.

As mentioned before, VRBS also contracts with local school districts on developing and providing pre-employment transition services based on the individualized needs of the local area. The pre-employment transition work plan is developed by the local schools, VRBS personnel and other stakeholders.

VRBS has collaborated with the University of Montana and Montana State University-Billings to develop "Movin' On," a VRBS funded program, where approximately 30 youth with disabilities participate in a week-long activity on college campuses to explore post-secondary education as a transition option. The program exposes students to the campus, college type classes, disability services and other aspects of post-secondary education. The University of Montana will not be providing the service this year but we hope to re-enter into this relationship in the future.

## h. Interagency Cooperation

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

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

#### **Interagency Cooperation**

VRBS will continue to collaborate and work towards a cooperative agreement with the Department of Public Health and Human Services, the state agency responsible for administering the state Medicaid plan under Title XIX of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 1396 et seq.) that outlines the roles and responsibilities of all parties regarding the delivery of VR services and long-term support services for individuals with the most significant disabilities who have been determined to be eligible for home and community-based services under a Medicaid waiver, Medicaid state plan amendment, or other authority related to a state Medicaid program.

Also, VRBS works closely with the Social Security sponsored Work Incentives Planning and Assistance project in Montana to assist consumers to understand the impact of working on their benefits, including Medicaid.

It is anticipated that additional cooperative agreements with the state Medicaid agency and service agencies funded through Medicaid will be developed in the upcoming year to respond to changes made in WIOA legislation.

The description of how VRBS will collaborate with the Developmental Disabilities Program's Medicaid Waiver Program and the Medicaid services through Mental Health are described in a future section.

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

VRBS has had a long and productive relationship with the Developmental Disabilities Program (DDP), including a recently completed new cooperative agreement. The program continues to sign off for

extended long-term support services for many individuals with significant disabilities. As mentioned previously, cross-training and technical assistance between our agencies to make available the required supported employment services continues to be ongoing.

- The short-term services to be provided through CRPs enrolled by VRBS.
- The long-term follow-along services to be provided by DDP through developmental disability providers. DDP services are funded through the state general fund and the Medicaid home and community waiver.

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

VRBS has a negotiated cooperative agreement with the Addictive & Mental Disorders Division. The cooperative agreement provides guidance for: cross-training and technical assistance between our agencies, establishment and evaluation of annual goals for interagency work towards coordinated vocational and support services, and makes available the required supported employment/extended support/follow-along services from enrolled community rehabilitation programs (CRPs) and certified mental health providers.

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

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

### 1. System on Personnel and Personnel Development

#### A. Qualified Personnel Needs

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

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

The Comprehensive System for Personnel Development (CSPD) information is currently maintained by the Quality Control Officer (QCO) of the Vocational Rehabilitation and Blind Services (VRBS) program. The QCO developed and maintains a spreadsheet comprised of all personnel and each member's respective CSPD status: 1) those who hold both a master's degree and CRC, 2) those who are in training assignments working toward their master's degree and CRC, and 3) those who have been newly hired and are preparing to begin graduate studies.

The spreadsheet is updated whenever a new staff member is hired, signs a CSPD agreement, enters graduate school, earns a master's degree, and obtains a credential (e.g., CRC). The information is regularly shared with the program administrator to assist in the staffing decisions.

The following table illustrates the number served per year, the number of personnel per position, and the approximate caseload size of case carrying staff member.



Please note that the number served progressively decreased after VRBS entered Order of Selection (OOS), closing Category III in the fall of 2015, Category II in the summer of 2016, and Category I in the spring of 2017.

**Number Served Per Year:**

FY2018 - 4564

FY2019 - 1964

Number of Personnel Per Category	FY2018	FY2019
Counselors (regular VR and BLVS counselors carrying full caseloads)	21	19
Counselor Supervisors (regular VR and BLVS supervisors carrying partial caseloads)	6	12
Administrative Staff	33	33.5
Orientation & Mobility Specialists	3	3
Vision Rehabilitation Therapists	3	4
<b>Total Staff</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>71.5</b>

Approximate Caseload Size per Position per Year	FY2018	FY2019
Counselors Carrying Full Caseloads	<b>190</b>	<b>80</b>
Counselor Supervisors Carrying Partial Caseloads	<b>95</b>	<b>37</b>

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

In FY2018, VRBS served 4564 Montanans with disabilities, wherein each counselor carrying a full caseload served approximately 190 consumers each, and counselor supervisors carrying a partial caseload served approximately 95 consumers each.

In FY2019, VRBS served 1964 Montanans with disabilities, wherein each counselor carrying a full caseload served approximately 80 consumers and counselor supervisors carrying a partial caseload served approximately 37 consumers.

The population in western Montana continues to grow, while the population in eastern Montana decreases. Yet, Eastern Montana has such large travel distances for counselors to meet with consumers that a reduction of staff in less populated parts of the state is not feasible.

When all the positions are filled, VRBS has had enough staff to provide vocational rehabilitation services throughout the state. However, as the population continues to grow, it is conceivable the need for additional staff will grow, too. Additionally, as mentioned elsewhere in this report, VRBS recently added a new **Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS)** Bureau to better meet the transition needs of youth with disabilities. The new **Pre-ETS** Bureau will be adding designated **Pre-ETS** counselors in its field offices. Future CSPD reports will reflect growth in this area.

Also refer to table below (and in section i. 1. A. iii.) for further information relevant to this section. Specifically, the first column in the table, labeled “Total Positions,” represents VRBS fully staffed and/or the total personnel Needed to provide VR services. Historically, this has been the number of staff necessary to serve clients when VRBS is not in Order of Selection. The 3<sup>rd</sup> column, “Vacancies,” represents the number of vacancies when this report was written.

Personnel by Job Title (Current as of 1/31/2020)	Total Positions/Total Personnel Needed	Filled Positions	Vacancies	Projected Vacancies Over Next 5 Years
	Division Administrator	1	1	0
Bureau Chiefs (Program Support; Field, Pre-ETS)	3	3	0	
Prog Managers (Independent Living; Deaf; Soc Sec; Quality Control; Transportation; Business Services; BLVS Administrator)	7	7	0	2
Central Office Admin Support Staff	1.5	1.5	0	
Counseling Staff (Counselors and Counselor Supervisors for both General Program & BLVS Program)	47	31	16	5
Orientation and Mobility Specialists	4	4	0	
Vision Rehabilitation Therapists	4	3	1	

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

Personnel by Job Title (Current as of 1/31/2020)	Total Positions	Filled Positions	Vacancies	Projected Vacancies Over Next 5 Years
Division Administrator	1	1	0	
Bureau Chiefs (Program Support; Field, Pre-ETS)	3	3	0	
Prog Managers (Independent Living; Deaf; Soc Sec; Quality Control; Transportation; Business Services; BLVS Administrator)	7	7	0	2
Central Office Admin Support Staff	1.5	1.5	0	
Counseling Staff (Counselors and Counselor Supervisors for both General Program & BLVS Program)	47	31	16	5
Orientation and Mobility Specialists	4	4	0	
Vision Rehabilitation Therapists	4	3	1	
Field Administrative Support	23	19	4	5
Tech Sup (Budget Manager; Budget Analyst; Business Analyst; Technology Assistant)	4	4	0	

Personnel by Job Title (Current as of 1/31/2020)	Total Positions	Filled Positions	Vacancies	Projected Vacancies Over Next 5 Years
<b>Totals</b>	<b>94.5</b>	<b>73.5</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>12</b>

## B. Personnel Development

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

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

In the system described above, the Quality Control Officer maintains records regarding the number of employees in CSPD plans, the institutions in which they are completing graduate studies, and the dates upon which they complete earn their respective degrees and credentials.

Montana VRBS requires professional counseling and supervisory staff to have a master's degree in Rehabilitation Counseling. The Certified Rehabilitation Counselor credential is preferred. Toward that end, VRBS has incentivized the credential by providing a pay raise for those who earn their CRC credential.

The agency seeks to hire fully qualified individuals whenever possible. However, due to the rural location and lower wages, it is difficult to recruit fully qualified candidates. Consequently, VRBS often hires excellent candidates who are willing and able to participate in a training assignment, wherein they learn (complete master's degree) while they earn.

Newly hired trainees are provided information (CSPD Agreement and Graduate School Tip Sheet) and support to help them select a graduate school that offers both online education and the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) Scholarship. To mitigate expense of graduate school, VRBS has worked hard to foster positive relationships with schools offering the RSA scholarship. To date, all of our trainees have been accepted to the school of their choice.

Montana State University is the only institution in Montana that offers Rehabilitation Counseling degrees. Unfortunately, MSU does not offer the RSA scholarship. Understandably, trainees are encouraged to seek training at institutions offering the RSA scholarship.

Currently, 100% of VRBS professional counseling and supervisory staff (33) meet the agency's CSPD standard: 22 are Certified Rehabilitation Counselors, and 11 are in CSPD plans. Of the 11 in CSPD plans, 5 are in graduate school, 4 are eligible to sit for the CRC exam, and 2 are preparing to enter graduate school.

The following tables illustrate the data noted above.

Institution	Degree Offered	Number Graduated in FY2018	Number Graduated in FY2019	Number Graduated in FY2020 to date	Number Currently Enrolled

Institution	Degree Offered	Number Graduated in FY2018	Number Graduated in FY2019	Number Graduated in FY2020 to date	Number Currently Enrolled
<b>West Virginia University</b>	Rehabilitation Counseling	1	2		
<b>Utah State University</b>	Rehabilitation Counseling		1		3
<b>University of Kentucky</b>	Rehabilitation Counseling			1	
<b>University of Massachusetts</b>	Rehabilitation Counseling				1
<b>George Washington University</b>	Rehabilitation Counseling				1
<b>Western Michigan University</b>	Orientation & Mobility		1		
<b>Hunter University of New York</b>	Vision Rehabilitation Therapy			1	
<b>Total</b>		<b>1</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>5</b>

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

Information for this section is reported above in the table found in Section i.1.B.i.

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

Information for this section is reported above in the table found in Section i.1.B.i.

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

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

## **Recruitment & Retention**

VRBS has had marked difficulty attracting qualified candidates due to low base wage, especially the trainee base wage. Moreover, VRBS has undergone significant turnover in the recent past, losing several fully qualified staff for better paying positions elsewhere. In 2019, in response to the aforementioned recruitment and retention difficulties, VRBS modified its existing wage progression to increase the base trainee wage from \$16.75 to \$17.50 per hour. Additionally, as of this writing, there are efforts being undertaken to further increase the wage range to a level that is closer to the current market level, and one that is commensurate with other state employees performing similar work.

Montana has no state university training for either Vision Rehabilitation Therapy or Orientation and Mobility. Therefore, attracting highly qualified professionals in these areas will continue to be a challenge for BLVS. Likewise, Blind and Low Vision Services (BLVS) staff continue outreach efforts to attract candidates from across the country to fill Vision Rehabilitation Therapist and Orientation and Mobility Specialists. In other cases, BLVS must hire someone locally on a training assignment and pay for their schooling.

Montana VRBS believes in a personnel body that is representative of its constituents. Likewise, VRBS works with Montana colleges and other entities to recruit individuals from minority backgrounds, including Montana's tribal peoples and persons with significant disabilities. VRBS takes affirmative action to employ and advance in employment, qualified individuals of minority all minority status, including Native Americans and with people with significant disabilities.

## **Preparation**

All new employees undergo VRBS Foundations Training to 1) establish an understanding of the values that underpin the mission of our profession, and 2) teach best practices that promote efficiency and excellence in the service of our consumers.

All employees are encouraged to build leadership skills via service on a variety of task teams wherein challenges are addressed and solutions are developed. Current teams include: Procedure and Policy Team; Internal Controls Team; Quality Controls Team; Youth Services Team; Business Services Team; Life Support Team (Administrative Support); and the Assistive Technology Team.

## **3. Personnel Standards**

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

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

As noted above, VRBS requires a master's degree for its professional staff (i.e., Rehabilitation Counselors, Orientation and Mobility Specialists, and Vision Rehabilitation Therapists) and desires that professional staff obtain relevant credentials (i.e., CRC; CVRT, COM).

As of this writing, 100% of Counseling staff and 87% Blind and Low Vision Staff meet the CSPD standard of Montana VRBS. (One Vision Rehabilitation Therapist position is currently vacant.) See tables below.

Number	22 of 33	11 of 33	33
Percentage	.666%	.333%	<b>100%</b>

	Certified Vision Rehabilitation Therapists	Total Number BLVS Staff who meet the VRBS CSPD Standard
Number	4 of 8	3 of 8
Percentage	50%	.375%

**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.**

Since our last report, VRBS has made significant progress in preparing staff to meet the needs of both individuals with disabilities and employers in a 21<sup>st</sup> century workforce.

Specifically, VRBS has:

- Produced outreach materials to educate employers on the services available to them from VRBS
- Provided Windmills training to employers to increase the disability awareness in the workplace
- Committed to maintained regular employer outreach efforts to carry out the Business Services mandates of WIOA
- Conducted annual outreach to those working in jobs paying subminimum wage to educate them about the option of work in competitive integrated settings
- Developed a comprehensive pre-employment transition service platform from which to serve youth with disabilities in concert with educators and community rehabilitation providers, moving them through high school graduation to post-secondary education and competitive employment.

## 4. Staff Development

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

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

VRBS solicits and/or identifies training needs through a variety of means: Training Needs Surveys; regular case review findings; and emerging topics in rehabilitation. Identified training needs are met via monthly All Staff Webinars, annual All Staff Conferences, and external training events offered by reputable entities included but not limited to: Montana Association for Rehabilitation; Montana Youth Transitions; Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired.

VRBS is mindful of the continuing education needs of its credentialed staff and endeavors to develop and deliver internal training approved for CEUs and/or identify, share, and approve relevant external training activities.

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

**Acquisition:** VRBS has developed solid working relationships with several national technical assistance centers (e.g., WINTAC; Rural Institute on Disability; CSAVR) to keep apprised of emerging knowledge and best practices in their focus areas.

**Dissemination:** VRBS leadership and many members of its staff body receive announcements of publication from several reputable and rich sources of information including but not limited to: WINTAC, RRI, OSERS, ODEP, and CSAVR. Notifications of current publications in relevant vocational rehabilitation topics are emailed to staff regularly. Additionally, these topics are discussed for inclusion in ongoing staff training **and presented in various formats including but not limited to local office staff meetings and monthly All-Staff Training sessions as well as in-person annual All-Staff meetings, webinars, articles, and emails among others.**

## 5. Personnel to Address Individual Communication Needs

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

VRBS requires that rehabilitation counselors who are hired specifically to work with deaf and hard of hearing consumers work to develop fluency in sign language skills. Sign language interpreters for the deaf or hard of hearing are also provided when necessary. Other accommodations, such as documentation in alternative formats, are routinely made by VRBS. The policy of VRBS is to consult with the consumer to determine the most appropriate mode of communication.

Montana has a relay system for telephone communication with consumers who are deaf or hard of hearing and all offices are equipped with communication devices: Ubi-Duos. Three offices (with the highest numbers of deaf/hard of hearing clients) have video phones for enhanced communication. The Montana Telecommunications Access Program is housed in the Disability Employment and



Transitions Division and lends tremendous technical support to the staff of VRBS working with sensory impaired consumers. BLVS has also developed a full time Assistive Technology Specialist position. VRBS purchases interpreter services as needed by consumers.

The issue of consumers whose primary language is not English is a very rare issue in Montana. The issue is most likely to occur with Native American consumers who are the largest minority group in Montana. Even with this group, it is quite rare to have a consumer whose primary language is not English. Montana is fortunate to have six Native American vocational rehabilitation projects (funded through section 121 of the Rehabilitation Act) located in Montana. The local offices have good working relationships with the Native American projects and they are an excellent resource for assisting Native Americans who are not English speakers.

The Billings region has the largest population of Spanish speaking consumers and they have utilized assistance from the local migrant council when working with consumers whose primary language is Spanish.

In other very rare instances when working with consumers who speak other languages as their primary language, counselors have been able to utilize family members of the consumer to interpret. Also, Montana has colleges and universities that offer a variety of foreign languages and, if necessary, it may be possible to utilize instructors or students from these programs to assist with interpreting or identifying community resources to assist with communication.

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

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

The VRBS CSPD coordinates with the requirements of the CSPD under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

Since the advent of VRBS's Transitions program in 2007, VRBS staff have become embedded in schools across the state, creating a more cohesive transition experience for students and their support teams. VRBS continues to coordinate training between VRBS, OPI, and the schools. Together, VRBS staff and school staff work annual events for transition aged youth, including transition fairs, the Montana Youth Transition Conference, and Montana Youth Leadership Camps. Montana VRBS has embraced the WIOA mandate to further improve service to students with disabilities with the establishment of a Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) Bureau and dedicated staff to serve students in our schools.

### j. Statewide Assessment

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

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

Each VR program is required to conduct a statewide assessment every 3 years. The currently completed 3-year Needs Assessment was a statewide assessment, jointly conducted by Vocational Rehabilitation and Blind Services (VRBS) and the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC). This assessment examined the need to establish, develop, or improve community rehabilitation programs,

and the rehabilitation needs of individuals with disabilities, particularly the vocational rehabilitation needs of:

- Individuals with the most significant disabilities including their needs for supported employment services;
- Individuals who are minorities and individuals with disabilities who have not been served or are underserved by VRBS;
- Individuals with disabilities served through other components of the statewide workforce investment system;

Three types of input were analyzed:

- Direct inputs such as the consumer satisfaction survey, VRBS counselor survey, focus forums (small regional groups of consumers), consumer survey related to status 30 contacts, and the public hearings.
- Other indicators such as the Client Assistance Program report of needs, SRC input, demographic trends, involvement with the State Employment Leadership Network (SELN), program evaluation tools (such as the standards and indicators and federal annual report), and our current strategic plan summary.
- Priorities from other programs such as the federal priorities, and legislative priorities.

Method:

Consumer satisfaction surveys are sent to consumers of VRBS each three years of the assessment: approximately 1,750 surveys are sent out each year. The survey response rate is between 20 and 25 percent each year.

Public hearings are held of the three years of the assessment, with each providing general input on improving the VRBS program and input on the draft goals, activities and performance measures of the VRBS' strategic plan. Teleconferencing sites are located in Billings, Bozeman, Butte, Great Falls, Glasgow, Helena, Kalispell, Miles City and Missoula. Tribal sites are being considered for the present round of solicitation of comments. Participation at the statewide public hearings typically ranges between 60 and 100 clients. Written and electronic comments are also accepted.

## B. Who are minorities;

According to 2010 census data 89.4% of Montana's population is white and 6.3% is American Indian or Alaska Native persons. Persons reporting two or more races made up 2.5% of the population. In Montana, for most persons reporting two or more races, at least one of the races would be American Indian. Other minorities make up the remaining 1.8% of the population. Six Section 121 American Indian VR projects are located in Montana, covering six of the seven reservations located in Montana. Although most American Indian on or near the reservation prefer to be served by their Section 121 project, a number are served by VRBS or by both VRBS and the Section 121 project. In FY 2013, VRBS served 1,425 minority consumers (17.6% of the caseload), of which 719 were American Indian, 326 were of two or more races, 81 African Americans, 29 were Asian American, 250 were Hispanic/Latino and 20 were Hawaiian or Pacific Islander. The majority of American Indian Montanans live on reservations. Many more live just outside the reservation. However, Montana does have a number of urban areas that have significant numbers of American Indian residents. This population is served by American Indian service centers (Billings, Butte, Helena, Missoula, and Great Falls). Staff of VRBS maintain contact with the American Indian Services Centers to seek appropriate referrals and to obtain information on the needs of American Indians with disabilities residing away from reservations. Input on issues related to serving American Indians with disabilities was received from Section 121 Directors and public hearings conducted on reservations. Input received included:

- The Crow Nation should be encouraged to apply for a tribal vocational rehabilitation project

- There is a need for independent living services on the reservations
- There is a need for assistance related to the Ticket to Work Program
- Montana VRBS' counselors need to make appropriate follow up when there are referrals from a tribal vocational rehabilitation project
- There is a need for assistance related to assistive technology
- Transportation difficulties limit access to employment on reservations
- It is difficult to develop plans for employment due to lack of resources on the reservation
- There are problems getting good documentation of disability. Indian Health records are available, but often there is a wealth of information that is provided with little of the information relevant to the person's disabling conditions, particularly impediments to employment. Setting up appointments to get adequate documentation is difficult. Psychological testing and other specialty testing often requires going to a site off the reservation
- There is a lack of job opportunities on the reservations and many of the consumers are not interested in leaving the reservation
- There is a lack of sheltered and supported employment opportunities on reservations
- There is also some difficulty serving hearing impaired persons on the reservations, but on the Blackfeet reservation there have been some procedures developed that have been successful
- There needs to be assistance for helping tribal members develop their own businesses
- It is difficult to identify tribal members who have hidden disabilities

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

In recent years, the disability makeup of the VRBS caseload has significantly changed. In 1986, 69% of the consumers had physical disabilities, 19% had mental disabilities, and 12% had sensory disabilities. In 2013, 34% of the consumers had physical disabilities, 54% had mental disabilities, and 12% had sensory disabilities. The number of cases with mental disabilities has significantly increased, especially in areas like severe and persistent mental illness, learning disabilities and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. While the numbers served have grown, the fact that many of the VRBS' staff have had less experience working with this population has led to the SRC considering consumers with mental disabilities an underserved group because VRBS counselors may not be able to provide the same level of quality with this group of consumers. Findings of the comprehensive statewide needs assessment for individuals with mental disabilities including severe and persistent mental illness include:

- The need for more mental health centers to provide job placement and supported employment services
- More information regarding Social Security Work Incentives
- Improved transportation options
- Better communication between VRBS and the Addictive and Mental Disorders Division
- The need for a statewide task force to work on improving long-term follow along services for persons with mental disabilities

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

Currently these efforts have been focused at the local level. VRBS staff are members of the local community management teams (CMTs). As members of these teams, VRBS staff offer consultation and technical assistance on disability issues as needed. Also, most of the enrolled CRPs are active members of the CMTs.

One need that VRBS provides the system is information on Social Security Work Incentives when the workforce development system has consumers receiving Social Security benefits.

Through the planning process for developing the WIOA state plan more strategies in this area will be developed.

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

While assessing the needs of youth and students with disabilities, particularly in the Pre- Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) area has been occurring to some degree. The new priority for this to be an area of assessment is new and comprehensive need assessment methods are still to be developed.

However, the following needs are very apparent with what information has been gathered.

- Montana has a very unique school funding structure compared to other states. In Montana, most students with disabilities graduate at age either 18 or 19. There are very few school districts that serve students to age 21. Therefore, in Montana there is a need for developing a service structure outside the schools for youth with the most significant disabilities ages 19-21. In other states these are being provided in the schools for that age range. Unfortunately, Pre-ETS funding cannot be used for these services in Montana because the students are no longer in school.
- Further development and refinement of the Pre-ETS program is a very high need. Most of the mechanisms for delivering these services were developed rapidly and full implementation and refinement is going to be an ongoing process over the next few years. However, VRBS has developed new strategies to address the challenges of providing services to students with disabilities who are spread out over a large geographic area and continues to refine these strategies presently.
- VRBS is working with OPI to leverage some of that agency's data tools in order to work with all schools in the state in a more comprehensive manner that does not rely upon individual relationships and contacts. This work continues presently.

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

Supported employment services are the primary emphasis of the VRBS and CRP relationship and were the focus of the needs assessment.

Issues identified to improve supported employment services include:

1. Expansion of services to rural and remote areas by the continued certification of private providers who meet VRBS' qualification levels for job assistance and supported employment services

2. Expansion of mental health providers as CRP's to serve those with severe and persistent mental illness
3. Planning for the needs of consumers requiring higher level of long-term supports was identified through participation with the Supported Employment Leadership Network (the employment first network of Montana).

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

As mentioned previously the development and refinement of a comprehensive Pre-ETs delivery system is the greatest need for addressing these issues.

The main focus of the Pre-ETS system is contracts with individual school districts to carry out an individualized Pre-ETS work plan to meet the needs of the local area. Therefore, most Pre-ETS are going to be an integral part of the school's delivery of services provided under the Individuals with Disabilities Act.

It should be noted that the contracts with school districts clearly define the population of Pre-ETS is all students potentially eligible for VRBS services not just those served through the Individuals with Disabilities Act.

## **k. Annual Estimates**

Describe:

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

According to data provided by the 2017 American Fact Finder, the latest data available, there are approximately 70,309 people with disabilities who are between the ages of 18 and 64 years of age residing in Montana.

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

#### **A. The VR Program;**

- In FFY20 VRBS anticipates serving 2,000 participants at a case cost of \$5.8 million using Title I funding, with 230 individuals becoming employed.
- In FFY21 VRBS anticipates serving 2,500 participants at a case cost of \$7.3 million using Title 1 funding, with 280 individuals becoming employed.

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

- Our program also anticipates that a total of 200 consumers will receive Title VI-B Supported Employment services at an overall case cost of around \$300,000 with an estimated 30 consumers employed in FFY20.
- For FFY2021 our program anticipates that a total of 200 consumers will receive Title VI-B Supported Employment services at an overall case cost of around \$300,000 with an estimated 30 consumers employed in FFY21.

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

The following table depicts how, for Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2020, VRBS estimates the number of individuals that will receive services under each Priority Category.

	<b>Title I or VI</b>	<b>Estimated Funds</b>	<b>Estimated Number to be Served in FFY20</b>	<b>Average estimated cost of services per case in FFY20</b>
<b>Priority Category 1</b>	Title I	\$4,680,000	1560	\$3000
<b>Priority Category 2</b>	Title I	\$997,500	380	\$2625
<b>Priority Category 3</b>	Title I	\$128,580	60	\$2143
<b>Totals (Title 1)</b>		\$5,806,080	2000	
<b>Priority Category 1</b>	Title VI	\$300,000	200	\$1500

The following table depicts how, for Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2021, VRBS estimates the number of individuals that will receive services under each Priority Category.

	<b>Title I or VI</b>	<b>Estimated Funds</b>	<b>Estimated Number to be Served in FFY21</b>	<b>Average estimated cost of services per case in FFY21</b>
<b>Priority Category 1</b>	Title I	\$6,330,000	2110	\$3000
<b>Priority Category 2</b>	Title I	\$918,750	350	\$2625
<b>Priority Category 3</b>	Title I	\$85,720	40	\$2143
<b>Totals (Title 1)</b>		\$7,334,470	2500	
<b>Priority Category 1</b>	Title VI	\$300,000	200	\$1500

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

It is estimated that at the end of FFY 2020, 3000 individuals will be eligible for VR services, but will be on the waiting list for services because of order of selection.

It is estimated that at the end of FFY 2021, 2500 individuals will be eligible for VR services, but will be on the waiting list for services because of order of selection.

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

This information for FFY 2020 and FFY2021 can be found in the table in Section k. 2. c

## I. State Goals and Priorities

The designated State unit must:

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

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

VRBS and the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) have developed the goals and priorities, which are listed below., VRBS and the SRC review the progress on the goals regularly.

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

Goal: Modernize the VRBS service delivery system to be consistent with WIOA requirements.

Priority 1:VRBS will be a leader in services to youth with disabilities across the state of Montana, primarily through providing a strong base of Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) for Montana students with disabilities.

Priority 2:Increase alignment with WIOA partners, with an emphasis on developing and enhancing services for employers. Note: Beginning with the 2017 2nd Qtr. The priority language changed from

services to employers to services to businesses. The language change reflects how businesses see and refer to themselves.

Priority 3: Build and maintain the capacity necessary to provide persons with disabilities employed in sub-minimum/segregated wage jobs opportunities to choose and achieve competitive, integrated employment. (Section 511 of WIOA). This includes building and maintaining the capacity of the Supported Employment program to provide services to these individuals exiting subminimum/segregated settings.

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

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

VRBS and the SRC meet regularly to look at the results of the statewide needs assessment, and the discussions were used in the state plan.

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

VRBS management staff, SRC, the Statewide Independent Living Council, and the Client Assistance Program representative met to discuss the draft of the strategic plan and make final recommendations.

This review included a review of the standards and indicators and yearly performance related to the standards and indicators.

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

As of February 1, 2020, VRBS has not received its written monitoring report from the RSA on-site monitoring that occurred in 2019. The informal recommendations given to VRBS from the on-site RSA monitoring were presented to the council over the course of meetings preceding the development of the strategic plan and were considered by the council when providing input to the state plan. Not all of the challenges discovered during monitoring have been addressed, and planning is ongoing.

### **m. Order of Selection**

Describe:

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



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

VRBS has established the following three priority categories under order of selection:

**Priority Category One** - Most Significantly Disabled (MSD): Eligible individuals with serious functional limitations in three or more functional capacities, and who will require multiple services over an extended period of time.

**SD Priority Category Two:** Eligible individual(s) with serious functional limitations in one or more functional capacities, and who will require multiple services over an extended period of time.

- **OR** - The individual is a recipient of Social Security Disability Benefits (SSDI) or Supplemental Security Income (SSI) as a result of disability or blindness.

**NSD Priority Category Three:** All other eligible individuals with disabilities.

## B. The justification for the order

Since Montana's Vocational Rehabilitation and Blind Services program (VRBS) does not believe it will be able to serve all eligible individuals with the available resources, it has implemented an order of selection.

VRBS first entered into order of selection in March of 2014 when it closed Category 3 and was able to be out of the order of selection for a period of time before reopening category 3. However, it was necessary to Close Category 3 again in October 2015. Category 2 was closed in July 2016. Category 1 was closed in March of 2017. All categories are currently closed. All of the category closures were made because VRBS believed that it could not serve all eligible individuals with the available financial and/or personal service resources. This belief remains in place as well for Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2020.

The following paragraphs below present our justification by describing the factors that impact our belief that remaining in an order of selection is necessary.

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) requires a 15 percent reserve for pre-employment transition services. As such, VRBS anticipates the required service to students with disabilities who are eligible or potentially eligible for services will necessitate VRBS to focus its efforts to provide services to local school districts. These efforts, both in terms of financial and staff resources, will be above and beyond the services that were historically provided solely through case services in years past.

Specifically, according to the Montana Office of Public Instruction's data, the State of Montana has 413 public school districts which contain 171 high schools. In order to create the necessary infrastructure to provide Pre-Employment Transition Services, which previously has not existed prior to WIOA, members of the VRBS field staff travel to varying high schools or district offices to meet with school personnel, many of whom are located in rural environments. We anticipate that this will result in a higher backlog of traditional case services.

Additionally, the trend of the availability of re-allotment Title I funds nationally may indicate that additional federal funds might not be available in the full amount requested by the state even if the non-federal matching funds are sufficient and available. This assumption is based on the national data provided by RSA when comparing year-over-year the net amount relinquished versus requested in aggregate for all grant recipients through FFY 2020's re-allotment period. This is another indicator to VRBS that remaining in an order of selection status is merited.

We also are anticipating the Maintenance of Effort penalty to be assessed for our FFY2020 award and our FFY2022 award which decreases our ability to serve all eligible individuals.

VRBS anticipates having all categories remaining closed through fiscal year 2020.

## C. The service and outcome goals

The time frames for achieving these goals by priority category are depicted in the table below:

Priority Category	Number of Individuals to be served	Estimated number of individuals who will exit with employment after services	Estimated number of individuals who will exit without employment after services	Time within which goals are to be achieved
1	1530	320	400	Immediately to two years
2	450	130	200	Immediately to two years
3	70	25	30	Immediately to two years

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

This information is provided in the previous section.

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

Those individuals in Priority Category One will have the highest priority and will be served first, followed by individuals in Priority Category Two, and finally by those individuals in Priority Category Three. All individuals within a higher priority category will be served before any individual in the next lowest priority category.

Regardless of which category closure scenario is in effect, eligible individuals will be released from the statewide waiting list first by priority category, most significant to least significant; and then by order of application date, oldest to newest.

Since August 2018 to February 2020, VRBS has invited 373 consumers from the Priority Category One waiting list to develop an Individual Plan for Employment (IPE) the vast majority of which, 223, have occurred since October 1, 2019. A total of 165 new IPEs have been developed and 34 consumers are currently in the IPE development phase.

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

The DSU chose to serve eligible individuals, regardless of any established order of selection, who required specific services or equipment to maintain employment through December 31, 2017.

Effective January 1, 2018 the DSU stopped waiving the established order of selection for individuals who required specific services or equipment to maintain employment.

## n. Goals and Plans for Distribution of title VI Funds

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

The goal of the state's supported employment program is to maintain a system whereby individuals with the most significant disabilities are afforded the opportunity to participate in competitive integrated employment.

Supported employment services are provided on a statewide basis through the Title VI, Part B funds. Individuals eligible for supported employment are those individuals with the most significant disabilities for whom competitive integrated employment has not historically occurred, or for whom competitive integrated employment has been interrupted or intermittent as a result of a significant disability, and who, because of the nature and severity of their disabilities, has had supported employment identified as the appropriate employment service followed by long term supports after the VR case is closed. Fund allocation on a statewide basis ensures an equitable statewide service delivery.

Vocational Rehabilitation and Blind Services (VRBS) will continue to encumber Title VI, Part B funds on a fee-for service basis. When supported employment services exhaust Title VI, Part B funds, then Title I funds will be utilized to provide needed supported employment services. At this time and in recent years, this procedure has made it possible to provide all planned supported employment services for individuals receiving VRBS services. If in the future VRBS determines that there are inadequate funds to provide all needed supported employment services for individuals on the VRBS caseload then supported employment will be funded with Title I dollars.

In addition, VRBS prioritizes the use of supported employment models that maximize integration of persons with the most significant disabilities in real work sites, doing meaningful work. VRBS does not support the use of segregated bench work, sheltered, enclave or segregated crew models. VRBS has been aware of and used customized employment techniques for some time, however with the passage of WIOA, VRBS plans to emphasize these techniques to a greater degree.

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

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

Section 603(d) of the *Rehabilitation Act* requires a State to reserve half (50 percent) of its allotment for the provision of SE services, including extended services, to youth with the most significant disabilities. VRBS has met this requirement in years past and plans to continue to meet this requirement. Once employment is obtained, VRBS funds the employment supports for youth with the most significant disabilities with the funds reserved pursuant to section 603(d) for 90 days minimum. Then the counselors may fund these supports longer (up to 4 years) while the counselor simultaneously is pursuing the availability of other long-term funding for the employment supports. VRBS does not discontinue funding for the youth's extended services until other funding is secured. VRBS maintains an accounting structure to track these expenditures as well as written procedure and internal controls to monitor the period of time in which VRBS is funding these supports under the service category Extended Services so as not to exceed 4 years.

## **B. How the State will leverage other public and private funds to increase resources for extended services and expanded supported employment opportunities for youth with the most significant disabilities.**

VRBS has identified the following sources of funding for long-term on-the-job support services. Each funding source has a different group of providers for the services, but most of the extended services providers are CRPs enrolled with VRBS:

- A. Extended Employment Services – State General Fund
- B. Mental Health cooperative agreement
- C. Developmental Disabilities cooperative agreement
- D. Private pay to CRP (CRP is signoff)
- E. Natural supports
- F. Medicaid waiver program
- G. Utilize employment work expenses as an option for Social Security recipients.

## **o. State's Strategies**

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

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

The comprehensive needs assessment is the primary process for identifying areas related to innovation. Activities supported specifically by innovation and expansion funds include the consumer satisfaction survey and meetings for the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) and the Statewide Independent Living Council.

Other activities related to expanding services are detailed in below in activities to achieve goals and priorities.

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

VRBS works closely with MonTECH (the Montana State operator for the state grant AT program) who has two offices located on the two halves of the state (one in Missoula and one in Billings). MonTECH is also available to demonstrate equipment and assess technology needs through the use of video conferencing. VRBS hopes to assist with expansion of these efforts through expanding the computer communication technology available in VRBS offices. Each VRBS office has been provided with a variety of assistive technology items that are commonly used by persons with disabilities.

MonTECH will be able to assist with the demonstrations of this equipment through the video conferencing systems.

Each BLVS regional office has a rehabilitation teacher who has background in technology related to blind and low vision and each regional office has some demonstration equipment available for consumers to test equipment before purchase. MonTECH provides additional demonstration equipment to the three BLVS offices outside of Missoula or Billings.

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

American Indians represent the significant minority group in Montana (6.5% of the population). Montana has seven reservations and some of the reservations are home to more than one tribe. Each reservation has an autonomous governing body. In addition, the Little Shell Chippewa Tribe was recently granted Federal recognition but has no reservation. VRBS has counselors who serve consumers on each reservation. These counselors coordinate with Section 121 project staff to identify potential referrals and resources. American Indians with disabilities living on reservations face unique challenges.

- First, they are eligible for a combination of tribal, federal, and state programs to meet their vocational and health needs. This requires extensive coordination and cooperation between agencies.
- Secondly, they are faced with significant cultural and economic barriers. Unemployment on these reservations varies from 4.7% to 11.7%, while Montana's statewide unemployment rate is 3.7% (Montana Department of Labor and Industry website). Today there are very few private or self-employment opportunities on reservations; most employment comes through tribal and federal programs.

Six Section 121 vocational rehabilitation projects (Confederated Salish & Kootenai, Blackfeet, Chippewa Cree, Assiniboine Sioux, Fort Belknap, and Chief Dull Knife College) are located in Montana. This gives improved access to vocational rehabilitation services for American Indians with disabilities residing on or near reservations served by the projects. Section 121 projects have a better grasp of the cultural and service delivery barriers that exist on reservations and can help support VRBS counselors as needed.

VRBS' counselors assigned to these six reservations coordinate with each project staff as needed. In addition, the VRBS program manager visits each 121 project annually and provides technical assistance when requested.

In some cases, VRBS has access to specialized programs, or services, which are not always found on reservations. VRBS works to network, coordinate, offer technical assistance, and provide training opportunities for Section 121 project staff to ensure consumers with disabilities have access to the full range of vocational rehabilitation services. Cooperative agreements have been completed with each of the Section 121 projects and are monitored on an annual basis by the program manager.

In order to ensure that VRBS is meeting the needs of American Indians that do not live on or near the reservation, VRBS staff meet with: Missoula Native American Center, Helena Indian Alliance, Great Falls Indian Family Health Center, Butte - North American Indian Alliance, and the Indian Health Board of Billings. VRBS provides program referral information regarding VRBS and the transitions services for youth.

## **Identification of Outreach Procedures Used to Identify and Serve Individuals with Disabilities who have been Unserved or Underserved by VRB**

For several years VRBS has considered Native Americans as the unserved/underserved population of the state. In addition, VRBS conducted an assessment of case work data to determine other potential unserved/underserved populations and will be developing outreach strategies for the groups identified.

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

The primary method of improving and expanding VR services to students with disabilities has been described elsewhere in this document. The main method has been contracting for Pre-ETS services with school districts. There also have been additional contracts with programs like Montana Youth Transitions, Montana Youth Leadership Forum, Moving On, Project Search, Montana Center for Inclusive Education's Virtual college peer mentoring program, and exploring specialized Pre-ETS collaboration with the tribal VR programs located in Montana.

In addition, VRBS counselors have been encouraged to take applications with students with disabilities at a younger age and provide IPE services that are focused on vocational and career exploration rather than a specific vocational goal.

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

VRBS continually assesses the need to establish, develop and improve community rehabilitation programs through town hall meetings, break-out listening session at the Montana Association for Rehabilitation Conference, annual stakeholder meetings with CRPs, and ongoing informal communication. The need areas being addressed at this time include:

Expansion of services to rural and remote areas by the continued certification of private providers who meet VRBS qualification levels for job placement and job coaching services

Expansion of mental health providers as CRP's to serve those with severe and persistent mental illness

In the past years, through the collaboration with multiple agencies, CRPs, and consumers, many initiatives are under consideration that will increase the number of persons with significant intellectual disabilities to be placed in competitive community employment. A significant number of the initiatives under consideration include assisting CRP services to be prepared to serve this population. One initiative that has been started is to develop web-based training for vocational services staff of CRPs that is required by VRBS called Invest. This training was used with success from 2014-2016 but was discontinued by the providers of the training. VRBS is researching and seeking out additional training that could be used to train and update CRPs and their staff.

In addition, VRBS has been actively engaged with Marc Gold and Associates to provide training to our CRPs on Customized Employment. Gateway trainings in Discovery were held in Missoula in the summer of 2017 and in Billings during the fall of 2018 leading to the establishment of 7 Discovery Certified providers across the state of Montana. The DSU plans to provide a Gateway Training on Customized Job Placement in Missoula during the spring of 2020 for all previously Discovery Certified providers in the state.

CRPs that are providing Pre-Employment Transition Services have been referred to the Workforce Innovation Technical Assistance Center (WINTAC) site to view the webinar on collaborative partnerships and strategies for CRPs on Pre-ETS. They have also been provided with the CRP Guidebook from WINTAC. The WINTAC website shares information on the current transition environment and how it is creating opportunities for students with disabilities and those that support their success.

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

Many of the strategies developed to meet the goals established by the comprehensive needs assessments are aimed at improving the long range outcomes of persons exiting VR. Those strategies are detailed below in the section on activities to achieve goals and objectives.

Also, VRBS and the SRC will continue to monitor the performance outcomes throughout the year to assure compliance in meeting the required indicators.

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

As a core partner, VR will be aligned with the workforce system through:

- Representation on the state and local boards.
- Collaborative case management and co-enrollment when needed by the services from more than one system partner. Partners will make referrals to initiate co-enrollment if/when the consumer could benefit from the services of another partner program, if the consumer agrees, and/or if the consumer so requests. Referrals will be made on an individual consumer by-consumer basis, and not as a blanket referral throughout the workforce system.
- Co-enrollment occurs when consumers are actively participating in
- Collaboration with other core partners on targeted outreach activities.
- Enhanced consumer referrals among core partners.
- Participation in evaluation and continuous improvement strategies.
- Specific strategies to strengthen communications among core partners.
- Collaboration among core partners for business outreach activities.

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

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

The management staff of VRBS meet regularly with representatives of the SRC to discuss comprehensive needs and priorities for the upcoming year. The group looked at formal input from public hearings, focus forums, VRBS staff, consumer satisfaction survey, Client Assistance Program, SRC, state and national sources (CSAVR, RSA policy changes, legislative activities, umbrella agency activities), and other surveys. Information from this meeting is used to plan for the next three years and for the legislature. VRBS and the SRC have developed the goals, objectives, and strategies.

For the strategic plan, the format of strategies was changed. In past plans, strategies were connected to specific priorities or objectives. In reviewing this plan's strategies, it was determined that several strategies applied to multiple priorities. Therefore, the strategies will not be listed with specific priorities. Rather, the priorities will be listed numerically and then after the strategy, the priorities that are expected to be impacted will be listed.

### VRBS' STRATEGIC PLAN

**Goal: Modernize the VRBS service delivery system to be consistent with WIOA requirements.**

#### **Priority 1:**

**VRBS will be a leader in services to youth with disabilities across the state of Montana, primarily through providing a strong base of pre-employment transition services (Pre-ETS) for Montana students with disabilities.**

Strategies for achieving Priority 1:

1.A. Increase the number of school district Pre-ETS contracts completed annually for the next three years.

1.B. Increase and expand specialized programs, such as Montana Youth Leadership Forum and Movin' On Montana, that offer Pre-ETS services outside of the schools annually over the next three years.

1.C. Increase the amount of time counselors spend on interaction with students with disabilities, expand the types of activities involving counselor/student interactions.

1.D. Expand Pre-ETS contracts with schools on or near reservations and schools serving youth in treatment and detention facilities annually for next three years.

1.E. Develop and expand annually Pre-ETS services for American Indian students not residing on a reservation. These services will focus on transition issues unique to this population.

#### **Priority 2:**

**Increase alignment with WIOA partners, with an emphasis on developing and enhancing services for employers. Note: Beginning with the 2017 2<sup>nd</sup> Qtr. The priority language changed from services to employers to services to businesses. The language change reflects how businesses see and refer to themselves.**

Strategies for achieving Priority 2:

2. A. Increase employers' awareness of the untapped pool of talented workers with disabilities seeking employment throughout Montana.

2. B. Provide consultation, training and resources to WIOA partners and employers to dispel the stereotypes of disability and focus on the strengths, abilities and unique perspectives people with disabilities bring to the workforce.



2. C. Increasing employment of people with disabilities in state government by working with WIOA partners to implement practices of the National Governor's Association Chair initiative; "A Better Bottom Line: Employing People with Disabilities".

2. D. Work with WIOA partners to increase partnerships with businesses to develop or expand work experience, internship, apprenticeship and other job entry programs for Montanans with disabilities. This will include Montana Workforce specific programs such as RevUp and HealthCARE Montana.

2. E. Ensure VRBS consumers who can benefit from services offered by WIOA partners are made aware of the services and can access the services through a consumer-friendly process, such increased use of the Montana Career Information System (MCIS).

VRBS provided guidance to staff on using MCIS as an entry step to the VRBS program for PreETS consumers.

2. F. Increase VRBS counselors' knowledge of labor market trends and "in-demand" jobs to assist VR consumers in career selection and training options that meet the needs of a job-driven economy and increase their employment options.

### **Priority 3**

**Build and maintain the capacity necessary to provide persons with disabilities employed in sub-minimum/segregated wage jobs opportunities to choose and achieve competitive, integrated employment. (Section 511 of WIOA).**

Strategies for achieving Priority 3:

3 A. Train VRBS staff in the procedures necessary to comply with Section 511 of WIOA.

3 B. Provide guidance to 14 (c) sub minimum wage employers on the procedures to comply with Section 511 of WIOA.

3 C. Provide guidance to school personnel on procedures and documentation necessary to comply with Section 511 of WIOA.

3. D. To facilitate informed choice, VRBS will contract with Montana's Centers for Independent Living to provide information and career counseling services about competitive, integrated employment options every six months during the year following the July activation of Section 511 or an individual's first year of sub-minimum wage employment and annually thereafter.

3. E. For individuals working for a 14 (c) employer who choose to pursue competitive, integrated employment, VRBS will build and maintain the capacity to provide comprehensive VR services, including evidence-based services, for this expanded caseload.

3. F. VRBS will develop or revise old agreements with the Developmental Services Division (DSD), Addictive and Mental Health Disorders Division (AMDD), Medicaid, Senior and Long-Term Care Division (SLTC) and the Office of Public Instruction (OPI) to document the alignment with VRBS involving meeting requirements of WIOA.

## **B. Support innovation and expansion activities; and**

Activities supported specifically by innovation and expansion funds include the consumer satisfaction survey and meetings for the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) and the Statewide Independent Living Council.

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

Northeastern Montana is a very expansive, but thinly populated area. With the new emphasis on serving youth in high school the one office (two counselors) that covers the area had 30 high schools to cover, with only 1 high school in the town the office was located and the other 29 high schools involving commutes of up to 303 miles one way. The strategy to solve this was to move a counselor position from another office to the Northeastern Montana office.

All Montana offices have rural areas to cover and attending IEP meetings was difficult throughout the state and now counselors are working with schools to attend the meetings by teleconferencing.

It is very difficult for Montana to add new positions in a state agency. Therefore, with the new requirement for comprehensive Pre-ETS services statewide the strategy of contracting with school districts was developed.

When an enrolled CRP is not available to provide supported employment services in a remote area, VRBS contracts with a local person with appropriate skills such as retired teachers and human service professionals to provide the service in the local area.

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

Describe:

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

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

The following is the complete evaluation report and within the report there are strategies identified that contributed to achievement of various priorities.

**Goal: Modernize the VRBS service delivery system to be consistent with WIOA requirements.**

### **Priority 1:**

**VRBS will be a leader in services to youth with disabilities across the state of Montana, primarily through providing a strong base of pre-employment transition services (Pre-ETS) for Montana students with disabilities.**

Strategies for achieving Priority 1:

1.A. Increase the number of school district Pre-ETS contracts completed annually for the next three years.

**Progress Update:** Due to budget constraints, VRBS stopped entering into contracts with schools in the spring of 2017. The number of schools completing contracts in PY2017 was 89. VRBS was able to resume entering into contracts with schools again in 2018, but the requirements changed significantly. The fee schedule has changed and students are now asked to provide their social security number along with information about specific Pre-ETS they are requesting. The increased requirements and accountability have resulted in fewer schools contracting with VRBS since 2017.

The number of school district contracts in PY2017, PY2018 and PY2019 has remained steady at 35-40 Pre-ETS contracts completed per year.

1.B. Increase and expand specialized programs, such as Montana Youth Leadership Forum and Movin' On Montana, that offer Pre-ETS services outside of the schools annually over the next three years.

**Progress Update:** VRBS has been providing funding for Movin' On Montana college experience programs at both the University of Montana (U of M) and Montana State University-Billings (MSU-B). The U of M will not offer Movin' On in PY2019, but MSU-B will offer an expanded program. The Montana Youth Leadership Forum (MYLF) has expanded to include follow-along services as well as step 2 for youth who completed the original forum and "mini's" for students who want to participate in a condensed version of the original MYLF. MYTransitions continues to offer a Transition Conference that is always very well attended.

1.C. Increase the amount of time counselors spend on interaction with students with disabilities, expand the types of activities involving counselor/student interactions.

**Progress Update:** Counselors have received extensive training on working with students with disabilities. The Workforce Innovation Technical Assistance Center (WINTAC) spent an afternoon with VRBS staff providing training on Pre-ETS modules and resources that can be used with students with disabilities. They also received specific training on work-based learning experiences. The agency now has a Pre-ETS Bureau which will include Pre-ETS Specialists who will devote all of their time to working with students with disabilities.

### **Priority 2:**

**Increase alignment with WIOA partners, with an emphasis on developing and enhancing services for employers. Note: Beginning with the 2017 2<sup>nd</sup> Qtr. The priority language changed from services to employers to services to businesses. The language change reflects how businesses see and refer to themselves.**

Strategies for achieving Priority 2:

2. A. Increase employers' awareness of the untapped pool of talented workers with disabilities seeking employment throughout Montana.

**Progress Update:** In 2019 the VRBS Business Services Team made contact with 158 Montana businesses regarding VRBS services and individuals ready to work.

2. B. Provide consultation, training and resources to WIOA partners and employers to dispel the stereotypes of disability and focus on the strengths, abilities and unique perspectives people with disabilities bring to the workforce.

**Progress Update:** Members of the Business Services Team are trained in the Windmills curriculum, a disability awareness training and interactive experience. The team has provided this training to the State Rehabilitation Council, Job Service Employer Committees, local community rehabilitation programs and the Disability Determination Service.

2. C. Increasing employment of people with disabilities in state government by working with WIOA partners to implement practices of the National Governor's Association Chair initiative; "A Better Bottom Line: Employing People with Disabilities".

**Progress Update:** The Business Team Lead Specialist meets monthly with the Bureau Chief of the Workforce Services Division to discuss employment of persons with disabilities in State government.

2. D. Work with WIOA partners to increase partnerships with businesses to develop or expand work experience, internship, apprenticeship and other job entry programs for Montanans with disabilities. This will include Montana Workforce specific programs such as RevUp and HealthCARE Montana.

**Progress Update:** Business Team members regularly attend local Community Management Team, Job Service Employer Committee, and Chamber of Commerce meetings to network regarding internships and work experiences for persons with disabilities. A Team member in Missoula recently assisted with the completion of a Memorandum of Understanding with a local employer to create a staffing referral process.

2. E. Ensure VRBS consumers who can benefit from services offered by WIOA partners are made aware of the services and can access the services through a consumer-friendly process, such as increased use of the Montana Career Information System (MCIS).

**Progress Update:** With the closure of all Categories for VRBS services, consumers placed on a waiting list are provided with a resource list of local WIOA partners that may offer services to support their career choices.

2. F. Increase VRBS counselors' knowledge of labor market trends and "in-demand" jobs to assist VR consumers in career selection and training options that meet the needs of a job-driven economy and increase their employment options.

**Progress Update:** The VRBS Business Services Team publishes a monthly newsletter that contains labor market information, trends in employment, industry spotlights, articles regarding State and National employment data and links to recruiting sites.

### **Priority 3:**

**Build and maintain the capacity necessary to provide persons with disabilities employed in sub-minimum/segregated wage jobs opportunities to choose and achieve competitive, integrated employment. (Section 511 of WIOA).**

Strategies for achieving Priority 3:

3 A. Train VRBS staff in the procedures necessary to comply with Section 511 of WIOA.

**Progress Update:** A PowerPoint presentation of Career Counseling and Information and Referral (CCIR) was developed and staff were trained on how to present the information.

3 B. Provide guidance to 14 (c) sub minimum wage employers on the procedures to comply with Section 511 of WIOA.

**Progress Update:** Technical assistance was provided to the sub minimum wage employers via letters, verbal guidance, and on-site consultation.

3 C. Provide guidance to school personnel on procedures and documentation necessary to comply with Section 511 of WIOA.

**Progress Update:** Pre-ETS Bureau Chief developed a 511 Procedure Guide for VR staff and school personnel that addressed the appropriate use of sub-minimum wage employment for students exiting high school.

3. D. To facilitate informed choice, VRBS will contract with Montana's Centers for Independent Living to provide information and career counseling services about competitive, integrated employment options every six months during the year following the July activation of Section 511 or an individual's first year of sub-minimum wage employment and annually thereafter.

**Progress Update:** VRBS contracted with Montana's Centers for Independent Living to provide CCIR services. This proved to be effective and the program is considering re-contracting with the Centers for Independent Living again in PY2019.

3. E. For individuals working for a 14 (c) employer who choose to pursue competitive, integrated employment, VRBS will build and maintain the capacity to provide comprehensive VR services, including evidence-based services, for this expanded caseload.

**Progress Update:** VRBS has piloted Discovery and Customized Employment Services in 2017 and 2018 and has developed procedures and fee schedules to improve capacity in the knowledge and skills to serve this expanded population. As well, VRBS has a scheduled Gateway Training on Customized Job Placement to be facilitated by Marc Gold and Associates and provided in spring of 2020.

3. F. VRBS will develop or revise old agreements with the Developmental Services Division (DSD), Addictive and Mental Health Disorders Division (AMDD), Medicaid, Senior and Long-Term Care Division (SLTC) and the Office of Public Instruction (OPI) to document the alignment with VRBS involving meeting requirements of WIOA.

**Progress Update:** An analysis of the existing agreements between DSD, AMDD, Medicaid, and SLTC is currently in progress. The DSU's agreement with OPI has been updated and is reflective of current alignment with WIOA and has been RSA approved.

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

**Goal: Modernize the VRBS service delivery system to be consistent with WIOA requirements.**

### **Priority 1:**

**VRBS will be a leader in services to youth with disabilities across the state of Montana, primarily through providing a strong base of pre-employment transition services (Pre-ETS) for Montana students with disabilities.**

Strategies for achieving Priority 1:

1.A. Increase the number of school district Pre-ETS contracts completed annually for the next three years.

**Progress Update:** Due to budget constraints, VRBS stopped entering into contracts with schools in the spring of 2017. The number of schools completing contracts in PY2017 was 89. VRBS was able to resume entering into contracts with schools again in 2018, but the requirements changed significantly. The fee schedule has changed and students are now asked to provide their social security number along with information about specific Pre-ETS they are requesting. The increased requirements and accountability have resulted in fewer schools contracting with VRBS since 2017. The number of school district contracts in PY2017, PY2018 and PY2019 has remained steady at 35-40 Pre-ETS contracts completed per year.

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

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

VRBS continually assesses the need to establish, develop and improve CRPs. Among the need areas being addressed at this time are:

- Expansion of services to rural and remote areas by the continued enrollment of private providers who meet VRBS qualification levels for job placement and job coaching services. New providers are being developed in the northern Montana and in other remote areas of the

state. Increasing the number of counselors serving the north east section of the state has been a strategy that contributed to improvement in this area.

- Expansion of mental health providers as CRP's to serve those with severe and persistent mental illness VRBS continues to work on this issue, but there has been no new providers added in the last year. VRBS is working with an initiative of the Addictive and Mental Disorders Division to improve employment of persons with significant mental health disabilities. Some of the providers that the Addictive and Mental Disorders Division are developing as part of this initiative may become VRBS enrolled CRPs in the future. The project coordinator was a past IL program manager of this initiative was a past IL program manager and her understanding of VR contributed to this initiative working well with VR.
- VRBS in collaboration with the Developmental Disabilities Program developed an on-line training to be required of all providers (Invest). This provides a core set of information and techniques for all providers in the state. The collaboration and communication by being involved in the Supported Employment Leadership Network was a strategy that contributed to success of this activity.

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

The primary factor that impedes success in the priorities mentioned above is the rural nature of Montana. Large areas with small populations make it difficult to develop supported employment resources.

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

The following is PY2018 data for the performance accountability indicators taken from the WIOA Statewide and Local Performance Report for the VR program.

- Program Year 2018 data is:
  - Employment rate 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter after exit: 28.5%
  - Employment rate 4<sup>th</sup> quarter after exit: not available
  - Median Wage 2<sup>nd</sup> qtr. after exit: \$3275
  - Credential Rate not available
  - Measurable Skill Gains 42.9%
  - Effectiveness in Serving Employers: not available

This information is baseline and actual performance levels will be set when further guidance is received.

In the past, each core program has collected data according to its respective needs, leading to gaps in the prior data available to inform the new performance measure targets. When possible, WIA data was used to fill in the gaps. Proposed performance measures were adjusted downwards to reflect the worker shortage in the current labor market. However, existing data does not allow calculation of measurable skill gains and credential attainment rates for each core program. While the programs will adjust to capture new data, preliminary estimates for those measures were made without support from historic data. The rates are baseline best-guess estimates and will likely change as more guidance is received.

Without any precedent for gauging the effectiveness of employer services, Montana will use employment retention for the Effectiveness in Serving Employers measure (retention of employment 4

quarters after program exit). This measure is being used by all the other partners involved with the Combined Plan and allows for comparison across programs. In the upcoming low-unemployment environment we will work with businesses seeking help with their hiring challenges by providing information and resources on sound hiring and retention practices and by educating them on the value of hiring populations previously not considered by Montana's businesses, including individuals with disabilities.

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

- Support the Statewide Independent Living Council and the State Rehabilitation Council, which each meet four times during the year to conduct business. Expenditures included travel, stipends, supplies, meeting room rental, interpreters, and facilitation services.
- To pay some costs related to the consumer satisfaction survey.

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

Include the following:

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

**Quality of Supported Employment** Vocational Rehabilitation and Blind Services (VRBS) enrolls providers who will provide supported employment time services. The enrollment process requires that providers have met a set of standards described in administrative rules. This enrollment process ensures that the providers maintain the necessary education, skills, and degree of professional expertise to provide a level of service commensurate with VRBS work service standard. VRBS values its priority partners who have met the required standards. Supported employment providers enrolled through the developmental disability system or mental health system represent the majority of our providers. The Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF) and Rehabilitation Services Accreditation System (RSAS) are also utilized by providers. Other providers are individuals or organizations who have been enrolled to provide services for a limited number of consumers in a rural area where there are no established providers.

Quality of services is continually monitored by the VR counselors as well as by the Program Manager who conducts reviews of the CRPs supported employment services.

#### **Scope of Services**

The scope of services available may include one or more of the following services depending on the individual's needs:

- Supported Employment Services
- Extended Services

Extended support services are available through a variety of programs following closure of the VR case. These services are described previously in this document.

VRBS has recently updated policy to align with WIOA changes on youth and supported employment/extended services.

**Extent of Supported Employment:**

An individual shall be eligible to receive supported employment services using Title VI Part B funds for those:

1. for whom competitive integrated employment has not historically occurred, or
2. for whom competitive integrated employment has been interrupted or intermittent as a result of a significant disability, and
3. who, because of the nature and severity of their disabilities, has had supported employment identified as the appropriate employment service followed by long term supports after the VR case is closed

**Cooperative Agreements:**

When a goal requiring supported employment is identified in the IPE, a document (cooperative agreement) signed and dated by the extended service provider reflecting the commitment of extended service provisions will be placed in the file prior to closure. A similar commitment is obtained from the fund provider when appropriate.

## 2. The timing of transition to extended services

**Funding Extended Support Services Prior to Closure:**

VRBS provides time-limited services needed to support an individual in employment (with the exception of extended services for youth with the most significant disabilities between the ages of 14-24 for which the time limit is 48 months). VRBS can fund a maximum of 24 months of job coaching and follow-along services unless the Individualized Plan of Employment (IPE) indicates that more than 24 months of services are necessary for the individual to achieve job stability prior to transitioning to extended support services. Prior to the purchase of supported employment services, the need for services, the appropriate extended support services, funding, and the appropriate agency to provide the services are established and identified on the IPE. Supported employment services are available statewide.

## Vocational Rehabilitation (Combined or General) Certifications

States must provide written and signed certifications that:

1. The (enter the name of designated State agency or designated State unit, as appropriate,) is authorized to submit the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan under title I of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Rehabilitation Act), as amended by WIOA[14], and its supplement under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act[15];



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

Disability Employment and Transitions Division

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

Enter the name of designated State agency

Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services

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

administration of the supplement to the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan;

4. The designated State agency and/or the designated State unit has the authority under State law to perform the functions of the State regarding the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement;

5. The State legally may carry out each provision of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement.

6. All provisions of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement are consistent with State law.

7. The (enter the name of authorized representative below) has the authority under State law to receive, hold, and disburse Federal funds made available under the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement;

Enter the name of authorized representative below

Chanda Hermanson

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

Enter the title of authorized representative below

Division Administrator

9. The agency that submits the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement

has adopted or otherwise formally approved the plan and its supplement.

## Footnotes

[14] Public Law 113-128.

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Certification Signature

Signatory information	Enter Signatory information in this column
Name of Signatory	Chanda Hermanson
Title of Signatory	Administrator
Date Signed	03.02.2020

## Assurances

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

The State Plan must include	Include
1. Public Comment on Policies and Procedures: The designated State agency assures it will comply with all statutory and regulatory requirements for public participation in the VR Services Portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan, as required by section 101(a)(16)(A) of the Rehabilitation Act.	
2. Submission of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and Its Supplement: The designated State unit assures it will comply with all requirements pertaining to the submission and revisions of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement for the State Supported Employment Services program, as required	

The State Plan must include	Include
by sections 101(a)(1), (22), (23), and 606(a) of the Rehabilitation Act; section 102 of WIOA in the case of the submission of a unified plan; section 103 of WIOA in the case of a submission of a Combined State Plan; 34 CFR 76.140.	
3. The designated State agency or designated State unit, as appropriate, assures it will comply with the requirements related to: Administration of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan:	
3.a. The establishment of the designated State agency and designated State unit, as required by section 101(a)(2) of the Rehabilitation Act	
3.b. The establishment of either a State independent commission or State Rehabilitation Council, as required by section 101(a)(21) of the Rehabilitation Act. The designated State agency or designated State unit, as applicable (A or B must be selected):	
3.b.(A) "is an independent State commission" (Yes/No)	No
3.b.(B) "has established a State Rehabilitation Council" (Yes/No)	Yes
3.c. Consultations regarding the administration of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan, in accordance with section 101(a)(16)(B) of the Rehabilitation Act	
3.d. The financial participation by the State, or if the State so elects, by the State and local agencies, to provide the amount of the non-Federal share of the cost of carrying out the VR program in accordance with section 101(a)(3)	
3.e. The local administration of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan, in accordance with section 101(a)(2)(A) of the Rehabilitation Act. Select yes or no, as appropriate, to identify if the designated State agency allows for the local administration of VR funds (Yes/No)	No
3.f. The shared funding and administration of joint programs, in accordance with section 101(a)(2)(A)(ii) of the Rehabilitation Act. Select yes or no, as appropriate, to identify if the designated State agency allows for the shared funding and administration of joint programs (Yes/No)	No
3.g. Statewideness and waivers of statewideness requirements, as set forth in section 101(a)(4) of the Rehabilitation Act. Is the designated State agency requesting or maintaining a waiver of statewideness for one or more services provided under the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan? (Yes/No) See Section 2 of this VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan	No
3.h. The descriptions for cooperation, collaboration, and coordination, as required by sections 101(a)(11) and (24)(B); and 606(b) of the Rehabilitation Act	
3.i. All required methods of administration, as required by section 101(a)(6) of the Rehabilitation Act	
3.j. The requirements for the comprehensive system of personnel development, as set forth in section 101(a)(7) of the Rehabilitation Act	
3.k. The compilation and submission to the Commissioner of statewide assessments, estimates, State goals and priorities, strategies, and progress reports, as appropriate, and as required by sections 101(a)(15), 105(c)(2), and 606(b)(8) of the Rehabilitation Act	
3.l. The reservation and use of a portion of the funds allotted to the State under section 110 of the Rehabilitation Act for the development and implementation of innovative approaches to expand and improve the provision of VR services to individuals with disabilities, particularly	

The State Plan must include	Include
individuals with the most significant disabilities	
3.m. The submission of reports as required by section 101(a)(10) of the Rehabilitation Act	
4. Administration of the Provision of VR Services: The designated State agency, or designated State unit, as appropriate, assures that it will:	
4.a. Comply with all requirements regarding information and referral services in accordance with sections 101(a)(5)(D) and (20) of the Rehabilitation Act	
4.b. Impose no duration of residence requirement as part of determining an individual's eligibility for VR services or that excludes from services under the plan any individual who is present in the State in accordance with section 101(a)(12) of the Rehabilitation Act	
4.c. Provide the full range of services listed in section 103(a) of the Rehabilitation Act as appropriate, to all eligible individuals with disabilities in the State who apply for services in accordance with section 101(a)(5) of the Rehabilitation Act? (Yes/No)	No
4.d. Determine whether comparable services and benefits are available to the individual in accordance with section 101(a)(8) of the Rehabilitation Act	
4.e. Comply with requirements regarding the provisions of informed choice for all applicants and eligible individuals in accordance with section 102(d) of the Rehabilitation Act	
4.f. Comply with requirements regarding the provisions of informed choice for all applicants and eligible individuals in accordance with section 102(d) of the Rehabilitation Act	
4.g. Provide vocational rehabilitation services to American Indians who are individuals with disabilities residing in the State, in accordance with section 101(a)(13) of the Rehabilitation Act	
4.h. Comply with the requirements for the conduct of semiannual or annual reviews, as appropriate, for individuals employed either in an extended employment setting in a community rehabilitation program or any other employment under section 14(c) of the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, as required by section 101(a)(14) of the Rehabilitation Act	
4.i. Meet the requirements in sections 101(a)(17) and 103(b)(2) of the Rehabilitation Act if the State elects to construct, under special circumstances, facilities for community rehabilitation programs	
4.j. With respect to students with disabilities, the State,	
4.j.i. Has developed and will implement,	
4.j.i.I. Strategies to address the needs identified in the assessments; and	
4.j.i.II. Strategies to achieve the goals and priorities identified by the State, to improve and expand vocational rehabilitation services for students with disabilities on a statewide basis; and	
4.j.ii. Has developed and will implement strategies to provide pre-employment transition services (sections 101(a)(15) and 101(a)(25))	
5. Program Administration for the Supported Employment Title VI Supplement:	
5.a. The designated State unit assures that it will include in the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan all information required by section 606 of the Rehabilitation Act	

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

## Vocational Rehabilitation Program Performance Indicators

### Performance Goals for the Core Programs

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

For Program Year (PY) 2016-2019 plans, the Departments used the transition authority under section 503(a) of WIOA to designate certain primary indicators of performance as "baseline" indicators to

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

level of performance for the Effectiveness in Serving Employers indicator for PY 2020 and PY 2021. However, core programs are expected to collect data and report on this indicator for PY 2020 and PY 2021 as they did for PYs 2016-2019 plans.

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

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

Performance Indicators	PY 2020 Expected Level	PY 2020 Negotiated Level	PY 2021 Expected Level	PY 2021 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline
Credential Attainment Rate	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline
Measurable Skill Gains	43.0	n/a	44.0	n/a
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not Applicable <sup>1</sup>	Not Applicable <sup>1</sup>	Not Applicable <sup>1</sup>	Not Applicable <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>

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