

VR Portion of WIOA State Plan for Services for the Blind, Vocational Rehabilitation Program FY-2018

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Program-Specific Requirements for Vocational Rehabilitation (Blind)

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

*** Sec. 102(b)(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;**

BESB VR Update: Input of the State Rehabilitation Council: The State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) for the Vocational Rehabilitation Program at the Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind (BESB VR) continues to be a valuable and active contributing partner to the BESB VR Program and the organization as a whole. Over the course of the past fiscal year, the SRC members have participated in many activities on behalf of BESB VR, as well as continuing their existing responsibilities as identified in the WIOA. The following information summarizes the recommendations and initiatives of the SRC and incorporates BESB VR's response to each item.

SRC Recommendation 1:

Have the Consumer Satisfaction Survey conducted by an entity experienced in performing consumer-based surveys and statistically analyzing outcome data.

BESB VR Response: BESB VR agreed with this recommendation. The SRC commissioned the Center for Public Policy and Social Research (CPPSR) at Central Connecticut State University (CCSU) to conduct a consumer satisfaction survey of VR service recipients for fiscal year 2017. The purpose of the survey was to evaluate the services that clients received from BESB VR. Results of the survey

found that 96 percent of the 49 survey respondents would recommend BESB VR Services to a friend, representing the second-highest rating for this category in the history of the survey. Reported satisfaction with BESB VR services increased in all of the areas surveyed in 2017 in comparison to 2016. The most significant improvement was seen in the extent to which clients felt that their expectations were met (8.54, up 0.97 in rating), an all-time high. Overall satisfaction with BESB VR services also increased substantially over the past year, setting a new record high (8.78, up 0.43 in mean rating). This replaces the previous record of 8.6 set in 2010. The completed report was posted on the BESB VR section of the DORS website (<http://www.ct.gov/besb>).

SRC Recommendation 2:

Based on the results of the Consumer Satisfaction Survey, implement strategies for improving on the delivery of services for clients of the Program.

BESB VR Response: BESB VR agreed with this recommendation. Based upon the results of the FY 2016 Consumer Satisfaction Survey, the SRC utilized these results to carry forward priorities for FY2017. Two major focus areas were transportation options and developing a clearer approach toward assisting clients in the development of business plans.

It was recognized that satisfaction levels associated with transportation services are reliant upon clients having transportation options. Two relatively new options are Lyft and Uber. The members of the SRC requested more information on these services. Toward that end, the Vice-Chair of the SRC coordinated for Uber representatives to present at the March, 2017 meeting. The representatives discussed approaches that could be used to increase access to their services. The SRC learned about services available through Lyft at their December, 2017 meeting.

The SRC also recognized the difficulty that creating a business plan has been for clients and the resulting dissatisfaction with the process. The SRC membership recommended that BESB VR develop a guide for clients to follow, along with a business plan template. An initial draft was presented to the SRC members at the September, 2017 meeting for review and comment and it was approved for use at the SRC's December, 2017 meeting. It is now posted on the DORS website in the BESB VR section for clients to utilize.

SRC Recommendation 3:

Include a Vocational Rehabilitation Client Success Story into each meeting of the Council.

BESB VR Response: BESB VR agreed with this recommendation. During FY 2017, the SRC continued its initiative for BESB VR whereby a standing agenda item for SRC meetings consists of a “VR Success Story”, in the form of a presentation by a BESB VR client who has achieved an employment outcome. Typically explaining the type of work they are involved in and how BESB VR supports helped them with that work, BESB VR and SRC members continue to respond positively to this initiative, as it provides the SRC with an opportunity to hear value-added and diverse perspectives on BESB VR’s ability to support clients and employers in the workplace.

SRC Recommendation 4:

Support initiatives that develop leadership qualities in transition-age youth who are blind.

BESB VR Response: BESB VR supported this important recommendation. The SRC continued its support and sponsorship of the Youth Leadership Forum (YLF), an annual week-long leadership training program for transition-age youth with disabilities to learn team-building, self-advocacy and task management skills. The SRC is an ongoing co-sponsor of this program and considers its co-sponsorship to be very important and worthwhile.

SRC Recommendation 5:

Identify strategies to address the fiscal constraints of BESB VR.

BESB VR Response: BESB VR agreed with this recommendation. Recognizing the fiscal challenges experienced in the state, as well as the relatively small amount of funds received through reallocation in FY 2017, the SRC formed a workgroup, to join with designated members from the DORS-BESB Advisory Board in order to begin discussions on the process that would be required for the implementation of an Order of Selection, if it were to become necessary. The workgroup was further charged with making recommendations to the membership of the SRC and the Advisory Board on strategies that could be utilized in an effort to stay out of an Order of Selection. The work of this group generated recommendations for modifications in policy in areas where costs of purchased services have been increasing to levels that cannot be sustained within available funding. These proposed policy revisions will be presented to the full membership of the SRC and the Advisory Board for discussion, refinement and a subsequent opportunity for public comment during 2018.

SRC Recommendation 6:

Update BESB VR policies to align with changes in state and federal regulations.

BESB VR Response: BESB VR agreed with this recommendation. The SRC, in collaboration with the Advisory Board dedicated significant time during the year in finalizing the policies that govern the administration of BESB's VR and Children's Services Programs. For the BESB VR policies, the primary focus was to update the language to reflect the changes that occurred at the federal level through the passage of WIOA and its accompanying regulations. Several new policies were required, included Pre-Employment Transition Services and Customized Employment. The BESB Children's Services policies required updating to reflect recent changes in state statutes as well as updating of policies related to services for Transition-age youth. Both policy manuals underwent a public comment period with public hearings. The SRC held a special meeting to review and deliberate on the public comments received and to finalize the policies that became effective on July 1, 2017 for both Programs. The finalized policies may be viewed at <http://www.ct.gov/besb>.

SRC Recommendation 7:

Participate in the development of the BESB VR section of the Unified State Plan, reviewing public comments and

approving the final draft for submission to Rehabilitation Services Administration and the United States Department of Labor.

BESB VR Response: One individual attended the public hearing held on February 15, 2018 and one individual submitted written comment. The comments received recommended that BESB VR strengthen its participation in the development of training opportunities offered by BESB's Children's Services Program and to expand these training opportunities to include school district teachers, paraprofessionals, community rehabilitation providers, parents and caregivers. The commenter further recommended that BESB VR continue to focus on engaging younger children in career exploration, peer-to-peer mentoring and self-resourcefulness training. These public comments have been reviewed by the SRC and the Advisory Board. Their respective memberships concur with these recommendations. BESB VR agrees with these recommendations as well and commits to strengthening the collaboration with BESB's Children's Services Program in the planning and delivery of training opportunities offered to young clients and the individuals who interact in their lives. The SRC has further deliberated on the contents of BESB VR section of the Unified State Plan and voted approval for it to be submitted.

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

BESB VR Response: BESB VR agreed with all of the recommendations made by the SRC as detailed in the above section.

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

BESB VR Response: BESB VR did not reject any of the SRC's recommendations.

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;

The Bureau provides the full range of services across the entire state and does not utilize a Waiver of Statewideness.

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

Not applicable.

3. All State plan requirements will apply

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

Not applicable.

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;

The Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind (BESB) is the designated state Vocational Rehabilitation unit for individuals who are blind within the Department of Rehabilitation Services (DORS), which is the designated

state agency. The Commissioner on behalf of, and for the benefit of, the Bureau executes cooperative agreements at the designated state agency level.

The Bureau is in a cooperative agreement with the Social Security Administration (SSA) that makes it possible to seek and receive reimbursement for certain costs associated with clients of the Vocational Rehabilitation Program that have achieved earnings at or above substantial gainful levels and have therefore transitioned off of Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) or Supplemental Security Income (SSI). The process to seek reimbursement requires a combination of cooperative agreements at the state level. Client benefit status verification is obtained through an agreement with the Department of Social Services (DSS). A cooperative agreement with the Connecticut Department of Labor (DOL) makes it possible to review wage records of individuals who are participating in BESB's Vocational Rehabilitation Program to determine if their earnings are above substantial gainful activity (SGA) levels and would therefore qualify the Bureau to request cost reimbursement from SSA. Cost reimbursement would be for the cost of BESB purchased services as well as fees for administrative and tracking costs associated with a client's case. In federal fiscal year 2014 BESB received \$122,689 from SSA under this program.

The Bureau also is in a cooperative agreement with the Native American Vocational Rehabilitation Program in Connecticut. This agreement has been developed to help with both program's efforts to coordinate and provide services to individuals who are mutually served by the

programs or who could benefit from these services if they were to apply and meet eligibility criteria. To maximize collaboration, a representative of the Native American Vocational Rehabilitation Program serves as an appointed member of the BESB State Rehabilitation Council, and a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor from BESB represents the Bureau on the Native American Vocational Rehabilitation Council.

The Bureau also has a cooperative agreement with the other Vocational Rehabilitation State Units within the New England Region that allows for the provision of services, such as mobility training for clients of the Vocational Rehabilitation Program who are attending training programs in those states.

For individuals who are deaf and blind, BESB works closely with the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS) for the coordination of services. Through a cooperative agreement, individuals who are deaf and blind can receive coordinated services from both public vocational rehabilitation programs. Through case conferencing, a determination is made as to which program will assume lead case management responsibilities, with the other program providing support services as needed. For clients who are receiving case management services through BRS, BESB offers vocational consultations, orientation and mobility services, and rehabilitation teaching assistance.

For clients who are blind and have developmental disabilities, the Bureau coordinates services with the State Department of Developmental Services (DDS) to bring about

successful job placements with long—term supports. Each Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor works closely with DDS to establish a strong working relationship and a close collaboration of services with the DDS case manager.

BESB’s Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors also coordinate services with the State Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS) for individuals who are blind and have a mental health diagnosis and/or addiction.

The Bureau also is in a cooperative agreement with the state Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) that implements a state law requiring the department to report on a quarterly basis to DMV the names of individuals age 16 and older who have been declared legally blind in each preceding fiscal quarter. The DMV uses this information to notify such individuals that their driver’s license is no longer valid.

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

Through the Assistive Technology Act, BESB works closely with the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services to provide outreach and referrals of clients who are deaf and blind so that clients who meet the eligibility requirements of the Deafblind Technology Grant can apply for and received specialized adaptive equipment to increase their access to communication.

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

Being a part of the Statewide Workforce Development System, the Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind has access to the full range of programs carried out through the Department of Agriculture.

4. Noneducational agencies serving out-of-school youth; and

The Bureau has entered into service agreements with Almada Lodge Times Farm Camp for the provision of transition programs for in—school and out—of— school youth. Programs include mentoring, leadership development, independent living skills trainings, and work experiences as camp counselors.

5. State use contracting programs.

At the Department level, the agency participates with the Office of the State Comptroller for a Purchase Card program that permits for expedited purchasing of goods and services

needed by clients to participate in the rehabilitation progress. The Department also has established a fee for service contract model with community rehabilitation providers across the state that enables BESB to purchase services at consistent pricing levels, making budget forecasting a more consistent and reliable process.

d. Coordination with Education Officials

Describe:

1. DSU's plans

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.

The Vocational Rehabilitation Program at the Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind is actively involved in a variety of transition school—to—work initiatives, with extensive collaboration and coordination at the administrative and service delivery levels of the organization.

At the direct service level, Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors participate in Planning and Placement Team

(PPT) meetings of clients who are in middle school or high school and assist in the development of Individualized Education Programs (IEP's) for students. The services that are detailed in the IEP of each student are factored into the development of each client's Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE), which must be developed within ninety (90) days of the determination of eligibility for vocational rehabilitation services, or by the time the client exits high school, whichever comes sooner. Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor involvement begins as early as age 14, with referrals to the Program initiated by the Education Consultants of the Bureau's Children's Services Program and Teachers of the Visually Impaired that work directly for school districts. The client is assigned to one of the two Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors that are exclusively dedicated to serving pre—employment transition services eligible clients. Assignments are based on geographic location of the client.

Within the higher education area, the agency has successfully negotiated with the State University System to establish a cooperative agreement that addresses the services available in the university setting for students with disabilities. This cooperative agreement includes the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services and describes the responsibilities of the universities as well as the responsibilities of public vocational rehabilitation to ensure that students with disabilities achieve equal access to classroom instruction, internships, and school—sponsored activities.

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;

Vocational Rehabilitation Program staff continue to participate and present information at in—service training programs organized by the Bureau for public school teachers and guidance counselors on issues affecting students who are blind or visually impaired. The Children’s Services Program of the Bureau further provides a comprehensive training series every year for school district staff to learn about low vision aids and adaptive technology, braille instruction, expanded core curriculum activities and resources that are available to facilitate the education and transition of students served by BESB.

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

In addition to serving on the statewide transition taskforce, the Vocational Rehabilitation Program's Educational Projects Coordinator is also an active member of the Board of Directors of the Youth Leadership Project that oversees the Youth Leadership Forum. The forum is a yearly event that teaches students with disabilities leadership and self—advocacy skills.

BESB continues to conduct career exposure camps for high school students who are visually impaired or legally blind. These programs include opportunities to interact with former recipients of vocational rehabilitation services who are successfully employed in a variety of careers. Some of these programs are held on college campuses, where the students gain a firsthand perspective of residential campus life in addition to gaining insight into a variety of careers that former clients are now engaged in.

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

Through a cooperative agreement with the State Department of Education, the roles and responsibilities of the Vocational Rehabilitation Program and the public educational system are clearly defined. This includes financial responsibilities as well as coordination of services and staff training. To facilitate this coordination, the Transition School to Work

Coordinator from BESB serves on an interagency transition task force and there is an appointed representative from the State Department of Education serving on the State Rehabilitation Council to BESB.

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

Since BESB maintains a registry of all students who are legally blind or visually impaired within Connecticut, the process for identifying and referring clients from Children's Services to the Vocational Rehabilitation Program is streamlined and efficient. The electronic case management system for the Bureau has a built in tracking system for identifying clients by age range to further facilitate the referral of clients who desire to participate in vocational rehabilitation services. The Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors work with the students, educators, parents or legal guardians and the Program's Education Projects Coordinator to identify careers of interest, develop career exploration opportunities, work and job shadowing experiences, mentoring activities and leadership development programs.

Through these comprehensive activities, BESB has and will continue to take an active approach to transition school—to—work activities to prepare students for the world of work.

e. Cooperative Agreements with Private Nonprofit Organizations (Formerly known as Attachment 4.8(b)(3)).

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

The Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind (BESB) uses a wide range of contractual agreements with accompanying fee schedules that have been established by the Department of Rehabilitation Services (DORS), the designated state agency for BESB as well as the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS). This provides for a statewide comprehensive set of program options and services to choose from. More than 50 non—profit community based rehabilitation programs are available through these contractual agreements for clients to select from. The services that are offered through the community rehabilitation programs in the state include job development, job coaching, and work assessments, among a variety of other training and evaluative services to enable clients to prepare for and enter into employment.

Additional fee agreements have been established with private non—profit service providers in other states where it is identified that these programs offer specific vocational and independent living services for persons who are blind. These agreements include non—profit rehabilitation providers in Louisiana, Colorado, Maryland, Arkansas, Pennsylvania, and

Massachusetts, which provide work training programs as well as adjustment to blindness training.

In a contractual agreement with the National Federation of the Blind, the NFB Newslite is available for clients to access news, career information and current events. This collaboration includes the National Federation for the Blind of Connecticut, which provides funding to cover a portion of the cost for this service.

When new community rehabilitation providers become known to the Bureau, staff outreach to the provider to learn of the services that are available, and often to follow up with onsite meetings to assess the relevance of the provider's services to the clients served by BESB. Where the new provider has program offerings that could be beneficial, Bureau staff notify the centralized contracting unit for DORS about the program so that contractual arrangements can be further explored. Upon contractual approval, the Bureau is provided with the agreed-upon fee schedule and Bureau staff are notified of the availability of the new program and the available services. BESB staff members arrange to conduct training of staff at the provider's facility on blindness related topics such as orientation and mobility and the use of adaptive technology to ensure that programs and services are safe and accessible.

f. Arrangements and Cooperative Agreements for the Provision of Supported Employment Services (Formerly known as Attachment 4.8(b)(4)).

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.

The Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind (BESB) has been actively involved in cooperative working relationships with other public and private agencies for many years with regard to supported employment and extended services. The Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors identify individuals who have a significant disability along with legal blindness who can potentially benefit from long—term supports through supported employment. This process begins as early as middle school and high school for transition—age youth through the Counselor's involvement in the Planning and Placement Team meetings and discussions, but it can also often occur during the adult years of clients in situations where supported employment services may be appropriate and beneficial.

The Bureau utilizes contractual agreements and fee schedules established by the Designated State Agency, the Department of Rehabilitation Services in working with community providers to purchase supported employment services prior to the transition to the provider of extended services. Typically, job coaching is the most frequently purchased service, but work assessments to establish the

level of support that may be needed on the job after placement occurs are also utilized.

This Bureau continues to have an active working arrangement with the State of Connecticut, Department of Developmental Services (DDS). This cooperative agreement assists in the coordination and identification of training providers that have specific expertise when a client with a developmental disability and legal blindness could benefit from supported employment services. This working relationship also involves the utilization of the Department of Developmental Services as a long—term third party provider of funding.

In addition to the collaborative relationship with DDS, BESB has developed a working relationship with the State of Connecticut, Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS). Through this arrangement, individuals who have a mental health diagnosis, acquired brain injury, or an addiction diagnosis along with legal blindness can access supported employment opportunities, with DMHAS providing the third party funding.

Beyond the collaborative arrangements for third party funding with other state agencies, the Vocational Rehabilitation Program continues to identify and work with a growing number of private Community Rehabilitation Providers throughout the state. Working relationships have been established with providers such as Goodwill Industries of Hartford/Springfield, Mindscape Industries, the Kennedy Center, Marrakech, and C.W. Resources to provide extended

services to ensure the long—term stability of job placements within supported employment settings.

Staff from the Bureau participates in meetings and training seminars organized by the Association of People Supporting Employment First (APSE). This organization links community providers, employers, state agency representatives and other resources together to exchange information on job placement strategies, funding sources and employer job leads. Bureau staff have presented at meetings of this organization on blindness related topics such as adaptive technology so that other providers in attendance would be aware of the options that exist for bringing about a successful job placement when accepting a referral from BESB for a client who is seeking a job placement with supported employment services.

g. Coordination with Employers (Formerly known as Attachment 4.8(b)(5)).

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**

The primary goal of coordinated activities with employers is to bring about long—term partnerships that foster a mutually beneficial relationship for both the employer and the clients served by the Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind. All staff with job placement responsibilities underwent training in job development, case management strategies and relationship development strategies through the consulting firm of Employment Management Professionals. Initially launched as a collaborative effort with the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind, the Bureau underwent further training in June, 2014 with this company. Additionally, the vocational rehabilitation counseling staff received training in motivational interview techniques to strengthen client engagement in the rehabilitation and job search process.

Under the statewide coordinated efforts of the Vocational Rehabilitation Counseling Coordinator, the vocational rehabilitation counseling staff utilizes the techniques learned in these training programs to connect employers with job seeking clients. However, a key component of the Employment Management Professionals strategy is to work with employers to develop longer standing relationships that are built on a genuine interest in the work of each employer, their needs and their priorities. This could mean that an actual job opening for a particular client may not come along for some time, but the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor is nonetheless a resource the employer can turn to for information, referrals to other service providers, and also to learn about job site accommodations and provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

Bureau staff strives to act as an employer's placement agency, where the employer will contact the Counselor before placing job advertisements for open recruitment. If there are no clients with the skill set to meet the particular job requirements, Bureau staff can connect the employer with other agencies or share this information at Job Developer Leadership Network (JDLN) meetings.

BESB also coordinates placement services through the National Employment Team (NET). This is a business approach of all 80 publically funded vocational rehabilitation programs working together to nationally coordinate placement services to employers that have a major presence in multiple states. The NET is a valuable resource to develop relationships with the national companies, where access to Human Resources staff at the state level is less readily available. The NET coordinator puts the businesses local human resources representative in contact with Vocational Rehabilitation agency's point of contact. In turn, the local Vocational Rehabilitation agency point of contact and the human resources staff of the company can meet to discuss specific services or recruitment needs at the local branch level. The needed services can vary from providing job candidates for local job openings, or providing in—service training to front line supervisors on disability topics, to offering job retention assistance for workers with disabilities who have requested work site accommodations.

Within the NET, there is an employer database, referred to as the Talent Acquisition Portal (TAP), where only job seekers who are receiving services from a public Vocational

Rehabilitation agency can access the portal. Employers can search for qualified candidates through this portal as well. This helps the employer recruit pre—screened qualified candidates who have a disability.

Within the provisions of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, the Bureau has been involved in new initiatives with the other partner programs to engage employers in the process of identifying how the system can best respond to their hiring, training and retention needs. A Business Engagement Partnership Forum was held in May for the purpose of hearing from employers, and to begin to develop a strategy to address their business needs. Working groups were formed to continue this effort with the ongoing involvement of staff across the partner programs.

The Bureau is looking forward to a strong and collaborative approach with the other workforce partners who engage in employer outreach, with a focus on offering employers a seamless and coordinated team approach to job order placing and matching candidates from the partner programs to the needs of the employers.

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

With the development of employer relationships, even when employers may not be immediately hiring, they can offer

other valuable services such as informational interviews, job shadowing opportunities and work assessment site hosting. Company tours can further be arranged for clients of the Bureau to learn about a wide variety of careers. This is particularly important to the transition—age youth clients served by the Bureau, who may otherwise have very limited exposure to actual job sites during their junior high and high school years. Employer sites where current or former clients of the Bureau are employed have proven to be particularly beneficial in these situations. The opportunity for mentoring these young clients helps them to learn directly from another individual who is legally blind about careers in many of the occupations that provide solid earnings and long—term stability.

One such example is evident in an initiative launched by the Chair of the Bureau’s State Rehabilitation Council. As an employee of a leading employer in the aerospace industry, she successfully coordinated a mentoring event for transition—age students to spend a day at the company, touring the facility, shadowing employees and gaining inspiration by learning how the Council Chair successfully navigated and problem—solved questions regarding work site accommodations, transportation and career development.

h. Interagency Cooperation

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

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

The Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind (BESB) has been actively involved in cooperative working relationships with other public agencies for many years with regard to supported employment services, benefits counseling and access to public health care information for clients served by the Bureau.

Benefits Counselors from the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services are available to assist clients of this Bureau with understanding how employment earnings and public assistance benefits interact so that clients can make informed decisions regarding employment. The Benefits Counselors also explore with clients the many options that are available within the state and federal government programs including how to apply for Medicaid and Medicare, as well as health insurance under the Affordable Care Act.

One additional provision that Connecticut participates in is Money Follows the Person, a Medicaid demonstration grant that assists with the transition from institutionalized living to community living for individuals who are receiving Title XIX.

A staff person from BESB has been designated to work with this program that is housed in the Department of Social Services.

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

This Bureau has an active working arrangement with the State of Connecticut, Department of Developmental Services (DDS). This cooperative agreement assists in the coordination and identification of training providers that have specific expertise when a client with a developmental disability and legal blindness could benefit from supported employment services. This working relationship also involves the utilization of the Department of Developmental Services as a long—term third party provider of funding.

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

In addition to the collaborative relationship with DDS, BESB has developed a working relationship with the State of Connecticut, Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS). Through this arrangement, individuals who have a mental health diagnosis, acquired brain injury, or an addiction diagnosis along with legal blindness can access

supported employment opportunities, with DMHAS providing the third party funding.

i. Comprehensive System of Personnel Development; Data System on Personnel and Personnel Development (Formerly known as Attachment 4.10)).

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. Data 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;

BESB VR Update: The current composition of BESB VR includes one State Director, one Vocational Rehabilitation Supervisor, one Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Coordinator, one Quality Control Reviewer, one Education Project Coordinator, seven full-time Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors, two Vocational Rehabilitation Assistant Counselors, three Rehabilitation Teachers (two of these staff members are Rehabilitation Technologists), one Administrative Assistant, and one Secretary.

With this staffing level, the staff to client ratio breaks down as follows: Administrative Assistant 1/835; Education Projects Coordinator 1/835; State Director 1/835; Secretary 1/835; Quality Control Reviewer 1/835; Rehabilitation Teachers 1/278; VR Counselor/Assistant Counselor 1/92; VR Counselor Coordinator 1/835; and VR Supervisor 1/835.

In terms of years of service, the breakdown for staff is as follows: 1 - 4 years of service 3/19 or 16%; 5 - 9 years of service 2/19 or 10%; 10 - 14 years of service 5/19 or 26%; 15 - 19 years of service 3/19 or 16%; 20 - 29 years of service 3/19 or 16%, over 30 years of service 3/19 or 16%.

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

BESB VR Update: The service delivery to the clients is divided into five regions throughout the state. At least one Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor is assigned to each of the five regions. The state is divided in half (East and West) for rehabilitation technology services, with one technologist covering each region. The Rehabilitation Technologists each conduct assessments for clients who are in need of adaptive technology to participate in VR services. There is also one Rehabilitation Teacher who serves the entire state, providing independent living skills training and adaptive technology training with screen readers.

There is one Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Coordinator that covers the entire state and works with the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors on case management strategies. This position also provides coordination of job development activities and employer engagement across the state.

The service delivery model also includes one Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor who works primarily with college students. This Counselor has established close working relationships with the offices of Disability Services at public and private institutions of Higher Education that clients from BESB VR are attending. Through this approach, consistent coordination of support services can be achieved. The assignment of a specific Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor to the college students also ensures consistency and timeliness with the financial aid application process.

The Education Project Coordinator serves as the Program's Transition School-to-Work coordinator, overseeing the

statewide provision of Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) in collaboration with two Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors whose primary responsibility is to serve a caseload that is comprised of students with disabilities. The Education Project Coordinator also is responsible for the development and implementation of programs that provide students with opportunities to work through summer employment and internships, as well as providing career exposure experiences through job shadowing, employer tours, and mentor activities.

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.

BESB VR Update: Over the next 5 years, the Bureau anticipates there will be vacancies due to retirement in the category of Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor. The demographic of this need is illustrated by the following description, listing the job title, current number of positions within that job title, the current number of vacancies in the job category and the projected need over the next five years.

Job Title--Total positions--Current vacancies--Projected vacancies over next 5 years:

Administrative Assistant: 1 -- 0 -- 0

Education Projects Coordinator: 1 -- 0 -- 0

State Director: 1 -- 0 -- 0

Secretary: 1 -- 0 -- 0

Quality Control Reviewer: 1 -- 0 -- 0

Rehabilitation Teachers: 3 -- 0 -- 0

VR Counselor/Assistant Counselor: 9 --1-- 2

VR Counselor Coordinator: 1 -- 0 -- 0

VR Supervisor: 1 --0 -- 0

It is projected that within the next five years, there will be two Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors retiring. Due to funding constraints however, the Program is anticipating filling only one of these two projected vacancies. Based on the present Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor- to- client ratio of 1 Counselor to 92 clients, and factoring in the plan for the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Coordinator to assume much of the college student caseload, thus offsetting the reduction of one Counselor position, it is projected that staffing levels will be sufficient to serve the current client population and the anticipated number of new referrals over the next five years. This conclusion is based on a trend analysis of the past 8 years that found an average of 174 new referrals per year and an average of 158 program participants exiting per year.

With the relatively high starting salary for Master's level Rehabilitation Counselors compared to the private

rehabilitation sector within the state, it is anticipated that recruitment efforts would again result in a sufficient applicant pool of qualified individuals when a Counselor vacancy occurs. BESB VR recruits for individuals who meet the highest standard in the state (CRC eligibility) first. The competitive salary offered by the State of Connecticut for this job classification has resulted in the ability to hire individuals who possess this level of credentialing in most situations. If there are no qualified candidates from those recruitments, then recruitment will be made for a Vocational Rehabilitation Assistant Counselor level.

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;

**BESB VR Update: Central Connecticut State University,
Masters in Rehabilitation Counseling**

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

BESB VR Update: BESB VR monitors the number of students enrolled in the Masters of Rehabilitation Counseling program at Central Connecticut State University in New Britain, Connecticut. This program has 88 students enrolled with 16 expected to graduate this year. The number of Masters of Rehabilitation Counseling degree candidates is sufficient to address the projected recruitment needs over the next fiscal year.

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.

BESB VR Update: Central Connecticut State University graduated 9 students with Master's Degrees in Rehabilitation Counseling in 2017.

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.

BESB VR Update: BESB VR remains in contact with the institution of higher education in this state that offers a Master's Degree program in Rehabilitation Counseling to ensure that an adequate flow of graduates is anticipated for projected vacancies. When positions are available, recruitment efforts are conducted through job announcements that are placed on the Department of Administrative Services web site, news publications of minority-based organizations, and colleges in the area. BESB VR also distributes the job vacancy announcements to organizations of and for individuals who are blind within the state, as well as advertising nationally through Rehab Net, which is a list-serve that connects all 79 state public vocational rehabilitation agencies across the country and the island territories. The list-serve for the National Council of State Agencies for the Blind (NCSAB) is also utilized to distribute job announcements to ensure the widest possible distribution.

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) and 34 CFR 361.18(c) 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

BESB VR Update: All staff members working as Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors and the Vocational Rehabilitation Supervisor at the Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind meet the Comprehensive System of Personnel Development requirements. These staff members meet these requirements by having a Master's Degree in Rehabilitation Counseling or a closely related field, as specified by the criteria for certification as a rehabilitation counselor by the Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification (CRCC). In addition, the State Director for BESB VR also meets the CRCC standard and holds the credential of Certified Rehabilitation Counselor.

There are two staff members that do not meet the Comprehensive System of Personnel Development requirements of a Master's Degree in Rehabilitation or a

closely related field. As specified in BESB VR policy, the Vocational Rehabilitation Supervisor, who meets this standard, approves all eligibility decisions, Individualized Plans for Employment, and case closures for these two staff who are both in the job title of Vocational Rehabilitation Assistant Counselor.

There is no requirement in the job specification of the Vocational Rehabilitation Assistant Counselor series to advance into the Counselor level. Staff hired into the job title of Vocational Rehabilitation Assistant Counselor may seek continuing education to meet the qualifications of the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor level, within available funding.

Working with the Department of Labor, the One-Stop Centers and their regional partners, BESB VR staff participated in training seminars on the needs of employers within the state. This has included training in the use of occupational outlook data. Staff has also received training in the use of Career Index Plus through collaboration with the Job Driven Technical Assistance Center.

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.

BESB VR Update: With the passage of WIOA, new opportunities for collaborative training with other partners of

the workforce system have emerged within the state. BESB VR has worked in partnership with the State Department of Labor for training in occupational outlook and labor market projections. Additionally, BESB VR is now working closely with the One-Stop partners, participating in regional team meetings with the business consultants from the partner agencies to identify employment opportunities for clients.

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. System of staff development

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

BESB VR Update: BESB VR makes available a full range of training programs offered through public and private entities such as the Technical Assistance Centers, Rehabilitation Services Administration, the Council for State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR) and the National Council of State Agencies for the Blind (NCSAB). Program staff members are encouraged to identify training areas of particular interest for their individualized professional development in addition to BESB VR identifying programmatic training categories for staff to participate in to remain current in the field of rehabilitation.

Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors work directly with their supervisor to identify areas for professional growth and development each year. Each employee of BESB VR receives at least one written evaluation per year, which is consistent with collective bargaining agreements. The Supervisor of BESB VR meets with staff members regularly to assist with any areas of their job performance that could benefit from further development and to provide feedback on best practices that have proven to be effective in service delivery. Technical assistance on policies and procedures is also provided during individualized meetings and during staff meetings. If an employee is found to need additional assistance and training in order to meet the job requirements, then a plan for improvement is developed. This may include the use of weekly reviews, additional written performance evaluations, and increasing the opportunity for the employee to participate in formalized training programs to increase skills and competencies.

Assistive Technology continues to be among the highest training priorities for staff in BESB VR, particularly since adaptive equipment is so often a component of success on the job for clients served by BESB VR. One of the Rehabilitation Technologists attended and presented at a national conference on technology at California State University at Northridge (CSUN) in 2017. Additionally, staff have attended trainings in the use of the Braille Note Touch, Zoomtext, Microsoft Office with JAWS, Google Docs and Windows 10 with JAWS, along with online training on using JAWS for Windows with Career Index Plus.

Additional areas of staff training in the past year have included a required seminar on the new ethics standards issued by the Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification that all BESB VR staff participated in, a Supported Employment resources conference attended by the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors, the Supervisor and Director, Business Engagement training sessions attended by the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors, Apprenticeship opportunities, and Life Care Planning attended by individual staff.

B. Acquisition and dissemination of significant knowledge

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

BESB VR Update: Information on best practices in other state vocational rehabilitation programs as well as evidenced based research and practices is disseminated to staff of BESB VR to help them remain current with trends and strategies. All of the BESB VR counseling staff as well as their Supervisor and the Director participated in a technical assistance project with the Job Driven Technical Assistance Center, with a primary focus of utilizing labor market information to a greater extent in the career exploration process with clients. This technical assistance was very productive and has resulted in the rollout of Career Index Plus as a tool for both Counselors and clients to utilize. One of the Rehabilitation Teachers has been assigned to train clients in the use of the tool.

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.

BESB VR Update: There are two Vocational Rehabilitation Assistant Counselors who are bicultural, one of whom is fluent in Spanish, and who serves Spanish-speaking clients throughout the State. Part of their duties includes outreach to community-based organizations to distribute information

about services offered through BESB VR. BESB VR also provides information to clients in large-print, Braille, electronic, and audio formats to ensure that materials are accessible. BESB VR staff can also utilize contracted translation services to communicate with clients in other languages. Interpreter services for individuals who are deaf are available on a fee for service basis, including tactile interpreters for clients who are deaf and blind and whose preferred mode of communication is through sign language.

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.

BESB VR Update: Collaboration through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) occurs on a continual basis through joint training programs and initiatives. Staff members from BESB VR participate in transition work groups including the Transition Taskforce that is facilitated by staff from the State Department of Education. There is also a Community of Practice group that focuses on best practices and emerging trends in transition services to youth with disabilities. This multi-agency initiative includes representatives from BESB VR as well as the State

Department of Education, the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, the Department of Developmental Services and the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS).

j. Statewide Assessment (Formerly known as Attachment 4.11(a)).

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;

BESB VR Update: The SRC to BESB VR commissioned the Center for Public Policy and Social Research (CPPSR) at Central Connecticut State University to conduct a comprehensive statewide needs assessment in fiscal year 2017 to assist the SRC and BESB VR with establishing goals and priorities. The full report as issued by CPPSR appears immediately below. The Council will be utilizing the findings and recommendations within this document to assist with the development of goals, objectives, strategies and measures in the coming year.

CPPSR Report in its Entirety:

I. Assessment Overview

In accord with the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind (BESB) is required to conduct a needs assessment of individuals with disabilities living within the state. This needs assessment complies with the evaluative objectives outlined in the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA) Guide dated November 30, 2009. As noted in the Guide, this analysis is valid for three years. In conducting this analysis, Central Connecticut State University's (CCSU) Center for Public Policy and Social Research (CPPSR) gathered information from consumers, the State Rehabilitation Counsel (SRC), the Internet, and Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) staff.

II. Methodology

In conducting the assessment, the Center for Public Policy and Social Research examined and/or conducted:

- An analysis of population statistics for Connecticut that describe disability and minority status;**
- A description of VR participation rates of minority individuals in comparison to individuals in the overall population in Connecticut and to national VR statistics;**
- An analysis of VR services to individuals with the most significant disabilities,**

- **An analysis of Bureau improvements since the previous VR assessment;**
- **The results of an in-person focus group held with the State Rehabilitation Council (conducted June 2017);**
- **The results of the consumer satisfaction survey for individuals served during Fiscal Year (FY) 2017;**
- **Comparative longitudinal data analysis based off of the consumer satisfaction survey from FY 2014-2017;**
- **The results of in-depth interviews with select BESB VR counselors and VR support staff members (conducted December 2017)**

III. Clientele Summary

A. Overview

BESB's registry has shown a steady increase over recent fiscal years. Data for FY 2013 showed a registry of 11,034, an increase of 2.7% from FY 2012. The registry in FY 2014 comprised of 11,367 individuals with visual impairment, an increase of 2.9% from the prior year. In FY 2015, 11,854 individuals were listed in the registry, the highest number observed for this assessment. Fiscal Year 2015 represented a 4.3% client increase from the prior year. No reliable state blind population statistics are available at this time. Therefore, it is difficult to ascertain whether this recent registry increase indicates growth within the visually

impaired community or success on BESB's behalf at identifying more of its potential clientele.

B. Minorities

According to the U.S. Census Bureau's 2015 estimate data, predictions based on 2010 Census findings, Connecticut's minority population is slightly less representative than that of the national population. Approximately two-fifths of all Americans (38.4%) self-identified their ethnicity in a minority group. Of those individuals who associated with one ethnicity, 17.6% were Hispanic or Latino, 13.3% were African American, 5.6% were Asian, 1.2% were Native American, and 0.2% were Pacific Islander. Deviating slightly from national statistics, approximately one-third (31.8%) of Connecticut residents identified themselves as a minority. In order of frequency, ethnic groups within Connecticut are accounted for as follows: 15.4% Hispanic/Latino, 11.6% African American, 4.6% Asian, 0.5% Native American, and 0.1% Hawaiian/Pacific Islander.

Comparing BESB, state, and national statistics, we find that the Bureau's Vocational Rehabilitation program appears to be successful at engaging Connecticut's visually impaired minority community. Overall, Bureau clientele enrolled in the VR program who self-identify their ethnicity reasonably reflect both the state and national minority population at approximately 33.5%. Sub-groups are similarly represented. For FY 2013, BESB reported the following program enrollment: 17.1% African American, 13.1% Hispanic/Latino, 2.3% Asian, and less than 1% Native American/Pacific

Islander. Currently, there is no reliable data that measures the incidence of blindness in minority communities within Connecticut. For this reason, the needs assessment approximates information based on general minority population statistics.

Since the last VR assessment was issued, BESB has continued to take numerous steps to improve its outreach to the minority community. BESB employs three VR counselors that are bicultural, two of whom are fluent in Spanish. The Bureau also employs two African American counselors, one of whom serves a caseload in traditionally underserved communities. BESB pays for interpreters on an "as needed" basis, continuing outreach to specific minority groups through local meetings and events. Such outreach efforts include attending the Hispanic Alliance of Greater Stamford (HAGS) committee meetings and attending career fairs that cater to Spanish speakers. As another example of a successful outreach effort, a VR counselor was interviewed on the program "Analeh," a Spanish-speaking program that aired on cable access channel 18 and was subsequently posted on YouTube. The interview focused on services available through BESB and various conditions associated with visual impairment. CPPSR concludes that BESB has made successful efforts in reaching out to underserved populations.

C. Youth

Reporting practices vary, so it is difficult to compare BESB's success at reaching minority and child populations with other states. For example, many agency/bureau websites do not divulge statistics for race, ethnicity, or age. Despite the lack of comparative data, it is possible to assess how BESB is doing within its own state. CPPSR concludes that BESB is actively engaging blind youth in the State of Connecticut. In FY 2014, the BESB client registry was 11,367, with children accounting for 1,092 of these individuals. In FY 2015, 1,088 of the 11,854 individuals registered were children, representing a drop of less than half of one percent (.36%). Once in the registry, BESB has an extremely efficient process for identifying clients from Children's Services and referring them to the VR program.

IV. Vocational Rehabilitation Program Challenges

Three key environmental challenges impacting BESB's VR program have emerged since the last needs assessment. This section outlines these three challenges: (1) the implementation of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), (2) agency consolidation within Connecticut, and (3) the deteriorating economic climate. The purpose of identifying these challenges is to more fully contextualize the climate in which BESB is currently operating. With this understanding serving as a foundation, more realistic suggestions can be made concerning ways to improve the VR program.

A. The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)

The following is an overview of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, as described by the United States Department of Labor:

President Barack Obama signed the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) into law on July 22, 2014. WIOA is designed to help job seekers access employment, education, training, and support services to succeed in the labor market and to match employers with the skilled workers they need to compete in the global economy. Congress passed the Act by a wide bipartisan majority; it is the first legislative reform in 15 years of the public workforce system.[1]

The highlights of WIOA, as identified by the United States Department of Labor, include:

- 1. Requiring states to strategically align workforce development programs.**
- 2. Promoting accountability and transparency.**
- 3. Fostering regional collaboration.**
- 4. Improving the American Job Center System.**
- 5. Improving services to employers and promoting work-based training.**
- 6. Providing access to high quality training.**
- 7. Enhancing workforce services for the unemployed and other job seekers.**

8. Enhancing the Job Corps Program

9. Streamlining and strengthening the strategic roles of workforce development boards.

Notable to BESB, WIOA:

Improves Services to Individuals with Disabilities: WIOA increases individuals with disabilities' access to high quality workforce services and prepares them for competitive integrated employment.

- AJCs will provide physical and programmatic accessibility to employment and training services for individuals with disabilities.**
- Youth with disabilities will receive extensive pre-employment transition services so they can successfully obtain competitive integrated employment.**
- State vocational rehabilitation agencies will set aside at least 15 percent of their funding to provide transition services to youth with disabilities.**
- A committee will advise the Secretary of Labor on strategies to increase competitive integrated employment for individuals with disabilities.**
- VR state grant programs will engage employers to improve participant employment outcomes.**

Ramifications: Critical to BESB is the fact that the Bureau is being asked to provide pre-employment transition services without additional funding, drawing upon critical funds from the overall budget to meet this requirement. BESB has had to reallocate valuable resources to meet this requirement,

including dedicating two VR counselors who previously served adults to the pre-employment transition population. A further impediment to BESB is limitations on what is currently classified as “pre-employment” expenditures. Key budgetary areas, such as transportation and higher education expenditures such as tuition and fees, are not included in the 15% of funds that must be spent on pre-employment transition.

B. Agency Consolidation

In 2011, the Connecticut Legislature passed a law that consolidated BESB into a newly created state agency along with other agencies and programs that serve individuals with disabilities.

Ramifications: By being a part of a larger structure, BESB no longer has its own unique budget, as well as the autonomy that comes with being a separate state entity. With that said, the merger did bring about valuable cost efficiencies. Centralized human resources, contracting, and business services (such as asset management) are key examples. Beyond cost savings, this also creates a positive experience for those interacting with DORS. For example, where contracts may have been different across state agencies prior to the merger, vendors now experience consistency in such documents.

C. The Deteriorating Economic Climate

The declining economic climate, on both the federal and state levels, poses the most significant challenge to BESB. This is because the demands on BESB services remain high, yet the Bureau's financial resources are significantly reduced. BESB relies heavily on federal reallocation dollars, money that has dwindled since the last assessment. In Fiscal Year 2016, \$2.5 million was requested in reallocation, while \$982,485 was received. In Fiscal Year 2017, \$2.5 million was requested, while \$238,433 was received. In his 2016 Reallocation Results Notice sent to VR State Directors, RSA Fiscal Unit Chief David Steele writes:

“Thirty-three (33) VR agencies requested a total of \$166,780,457 in additional VR funds through reallocation. This leaves a shortage in additional funds available for reallocation of \$31,170,276, when comparing the total amount of additional funds requested to the total amount of funds available for reallocation under the VR program. This is the first time since FFY 2008 that more VR funds were requested than relinquished by States” (e-mail dated August 30, 2016).

The final sentence aptly contextualizes the fiscal challenge posed to VR programs around the country. The demand for financial assistance now outpaces supply, forcing bureaus like BESB to make extremely difficult cuts to services.

On a more local level, Connecticut's economic climate is also in decline. In a memo dated November 20, 2017, the

Connecticut Office of Policy and Management provided an update on the state's General Fund for Fiscal Year 2018. The memo revealed a projected deficit of \$202.8 million, which represents "slightly more than one percent of net General Fund appropriations." In accord with CGS 4-85, the state is now mandated to pursue a deficit mitigation plan. The memo details sources of the state's financial decline:

These changes result in General Fund revenues being revised downward by \$227.0 million compared to the recently adopted budget for FY 2018. The largest decline was in federal grants, down \$142.1 million due largely to final reconciliation of federal funds received to those earned for medical services during the second half of FY 2017 as well as a \$48.6 million technical update to reflect the revenue impact of net (rather than gross) appropriations for Medicaid rate increases in SB 1503. The Income Tax has been revised downward by \$89.4 million, but \$55.3 million of that change is due simply to a reallocation of some of the tax changes in Public Act 17-2, June Spec. Sess., to the Refunds of Taxes line item. Therefore, the actual reduction in the Income Tax forecast was \$34.1 million. The Sales Tax has been revised downward \$69.6 million as its growth has remained below target. The largest positive change is in the Inheritance and Estate Tax, up \$30.0 million. All other changes net to a negative \$11.2 million.

Ramifications: The significant decline in reallocation dollars poses a difficult challenge to BESB - how to do more with less, all while continuing to offer the quality services that the Bureau is accustomed to delivering. BESB has taken a very

proactive approach to keep out of an order of selection, such as identifying strategies to reduce purchase service and administrative costs. The State Rehab Council has worked closely with the Bureau to help keep BESB out of an order of selection thus far, an effort that is commended by CPPSR.

V. Vocational Rehabilitation Program Client Satisfaction Measurements

In Fiscal Year 2017, the BESB Vocational Rehabilitation Division had 114 clients who achieved employment outcomes, an uptick of 23 individuals from FY 2016. VR program satisfaction amongst these clients, as measured by Central Connecticut State University via a quantitative survey, remains high. Started in 2003, this survey provides valuable longitudinal data on client satisfaction regarding both VR services and counselors. The most recent survey was conducted in the summer of 2017, with CCSU's Center for Public Policy and Social Research completing telephone interviews with 49 VR clients who achieved employment outcomes that fiscal year.

BESB continues to receive high marks for their Vocational Rehabilitation services and counselors. Similar to 2016, almost all of the clients surveyed (96%, down 2 percentage points) reported that they would recommend BESB VR services to a friend. This figure ties the second-highest rating for this question in the history of the survey, bettered only by the all-time high (98%) set last fiscal year. Reported satisfaction regarding overall experiences with BESB

services, as rated on a scale from 1 to 10-point scale, remains strong.

Reported satisfaction with BESB services increased in all of the areas surveyed in 2017. The most significant improvement was seen in the extent to which clients felt that their expectations were met (8.54, up 0.97 in rating), an all-time high. Overall satisfaction with BESB services also increased substantially over the past year, setting a new record high (8.78, up 0.43 in mean rating). This replaces the previous record of 8.6 set in 2010.

Ratings of counselors rebounded from the dips in satisfaction observed last year, with average ratings improving in all but one area. The remaining area remained unchanged from last year. In 2016, two dimensions of counselors improved, while the remaining seven dimensions declined in mean ratings. Two dimensions of counselors that saw particularly large increases in 2017 were identifying career goals (setting an all-time high of 8.96, up 1.51 in mean rating) and understanding the process for complaint resolution (7.92, up 1.21 in mean rating). Counselors' ability to provide information in a format that clients can use remained unchanged from last year (8.51 in mean rating).

Since survey reporting began in 2003, Low Vision and Rehabilitation and Adaptive Equipment have been the most widely-used BESB services, with each respectively averaging over a three-in-four utilization rate. For the second year in a row, Low Vision takes the top spot as the most highly utilized service (84%, no percentage point change), maintaining its third-best utilization percentage in the history of this survey.

On the other end of the usage spectrum, use of Reader Services was cut in half from last year (10%, down 10 percentage points). This represents the second-lowest utilization rate in the history of the survey, second only to the all-time low set in 2012 (8%) by 2 percentage points. Overall, of the eight services offered to VR clients, four of them experienced an increase in use, three reported declines in utilization rates, and one remained at the same level of use this fiscal year.

Of those services that saw an uptick in use, Transportation experienced the largest increase. One-quarter of all VR clients (25%, up 9 percentage points) reported using this service, notching the second-highest utilization rate in the history of the survey. Personal Care Attendant Services also enjoyed an uptick in use (8%, up 6 percentage points), matching the third-highest utilization rate. Small Business Services climbed (14%, up 3 percentage points), also matching its third-highest utilization rate. Finally, Skills Training Services experienced a modest increase (45%, up 1 percentage point), recording the third-highest utilization rate in the history of the survey.

The remaining three services all experienced a decline in use this year, with Higher Education Training being the most notable. This service plummeted to its lowest utilization rate in the history of the survey (4%, down 23 percentage points). Prior to this fiscal year, the lowest recorded use was 11%, a percentage found in both the 2004 and 2012 surveys. Also notable was the drop in the percentage of clients utilizing Rehabilitation Equipment Services (71%, down 12 percentage

points). While rates still remain high, with Rehabilitation Equipment representing the second most widely-used service, the 2017 survey recorded the lowest rate since 2009 (67%).

Section IV of this document details three environmental challenges facing BESB - all of which were in play when this survey was conducted. When placed in context with the new demands of WIOA, agency consolidation, and the deteriorating economic climate (and rapidly diminishing reallocation dollars), findings from this survey become even more remarkable. It is CPPSR's conclusion that BESB is extremely-forward thinking, anticipating and addressing future complexities with careful consideration before they become urgent. It is this type of consistently-applied operational paradigm that contributes to high client satisfaction rates in a difficult economic climate.

VI. Focus Group Summary

As part of the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment, the Center for Public Policy and Social Research conducted a focus group with members of the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC). This focus group was conducted within the context of an SRC business meeting held in June of 2017. The purpose of this focus group was to understand how SRC members felt about BESB services, needs that should be addressed in the near future, and how BESB could increase outreach efforts to the unserved and underserved. Given that

BESB's Director was present at the meeting, Council members seeking greater confidentiality were encouraged to call the Principal Investigator at a later point in time. It is worth noting that these qualitative findings cannot be generalized beyond those individuals attending the June business meeting. Still, these findings provide valuable insight into how a group of select Bureau affiliates view BESB's operations.

Similar to the 2014 needs assessment, access to technology emerged as a focal point of the focus group. Questions were raised by numerous SRC members regarding the extent to which BESB is addressing VR clients' technological needs, particularly as they relate to training. With continually-advancing technology, it is a perpetual challenge to keep clients on the cutting-edge. Fortunately, with the advancement of technology comes more sophisticated accessibility features. The SRC was pleased with the extent to which accessibility features are now built right into the products themselves. To the fullest extent possible, BESB should make sure that clients have access to upgraded units with these built-in specs, such as special readers.

On the issue of training, BESB currently employs two rehabilitation technologists and one trainer. A concern is that there is still a wide range of clients coming into the VR program with no computer experience. This underscores both the importance of - and challenges associated with - providing such training. The point was raised that, with limited trainers, BESB should identify new and creative ways to deliver training, such as via Skype. It was concluded that

BESB has already considered this, implementing Tandem, remote, and Skype-based training. Perhaps most critically, embracing new training mediums allows for BESB staff to be more efficient in their outreach efforts, as travel time around the state is significantly reduced. SRC members commended BESB for evolving its training programs.

A final point that emerged from the SRC focus group was regarding programming for individuals with multiple disabilities, such as having both visual and mobile impairment. The group concluded that BESB collaborates with other disability-centered agencies; additionally, the VR program does allow for modifications to be made on a case-by-case basis. Collaborative IPEs with VR plans represent a new area of engagement for BESB. These collaborative efforts are commendable and, to the fullest extent possible, should be expanded. Investigating new sources of collaboration would be a worthwhile endeavor.

VII. Targeted Actions Suggested by CPPSR

Informed by both the quantitative and qualitative data collected for this needs assessment, CPPSR makes the following recommendations:

- 1. Increased promotion of client self-resourcefulness to leverage staff time and improve service**

VR clients should be encouraged to be their own best resource, an opportunity to save BESB both time and money. Strong evidence exists that this encouragement is underway; however, more can be done in this regard. Career Index Plus is a job search platform that is accessible to the visually-impaired. BESB sent a letter to VR clients encouraging them to search for jobs on this platform, with the Bureau providing technical training on how to use the Index. We suggest designing a positive incentive program to further encourage clients to be their own best advocate. In a positive incentive program, clients can earn a reward by reaching certain milestones and/or completing pre-determined tasks. Another option, albeit less desirable, is to create a negative reinforcement program where clients relinquish or delay something of value if they do not reach certain milestones or complete pre-determined tasks. To maintain a positive relationship with clients, the former suggestion is strongly preferred by CPPSR.

2. Re-examine volunteer and college intern opportunities to leverage staff time

The 2014 needs assessment found “great merit” in what, at the time, was a newly-minted college mentorship program. This program has struggled in its effectiveness for a number of reasons, including the extensive training that is required to complete most tasks and the “time to productivity” being too long for short-term workers. CPPSR encourages BESB to revisit the utility of volunteers and college interns. Have all

possible angles for these workers to contribute been exhausted? We suggest a brainstorming session where VR employees think outside of the box, reflecting upon tasks that could possibly be done with minimal training. For example, given the growing importance of things like Career Index Plus, business engagement activities, and WIOA compliance, might there be new opportunities for interns or volunteers to assist in these areas? BESB is encouraged to consider if college interns or volunteers can be used in new ways, which in turn could help paid VR staff to become more efficient.

3. Clearly vocalize Bureau initiatives to employees to spread knowledge and boost morale

While conducting in-depth interviews with VR staff, CPPSR observed inconsistency regarding knowledge of the Bureau's key initiatives. These initiatives should be shared widely across all facets of the VR program. As an example, not all employees were aware of the critical inroads that BESB has made with the American Job Centers (AJC). It should be widely communicated that the Bureau has had great success in furthering its relationship with the AJC, including having BESB representatives periodically stationed at these centers and educating AJC employees on topics related to visual impairment. CPPSR suggests designing an internal "success story," similar to those that currently focus on VR clients. This internal "success story" can focus on new community partnerships that were developed or

significantly expanded upon, boosting morale in the Bureau and helping to disseminate knowledge among VR staff.

4. Increase the use of recorded materials to leverage staff time and improve service

Availability of pre-recorded Internet-based materials (i.e. ScreenCasts) covering high-demand topics, such as how to use Career Index Plus, can potentially help cut down on the number of training sessions that need to be conducted. Recordings could be revisited by clients on an as-needed basis. CPPSR is sensitive to the fact that many clients have individual questions regarding the use of these programs; however, pre-recorded files can help address commonly-asked questions and/or introduce clients to a program for the first time.

5. Increase recruitment of client and community constituencies as Bureau advocates

Building on the reserves of goodwill, the Bureau should strategically enlist advocates and systematically build an inventory of positive profiles and stories for use in explaining the nature and impact of Bureau activities. The VR “Success Story” is one great example of such an inventory item. BESB should consider working with both clients and community partners to help shed light on what the Bureau

does. CPPSR suggests the use of personal narrative, which can be quite compelling in underscoring the importance of BESB. Increasing the community awareness of what BESB does may help in a multitude of ways, including capturing the attention of employers, new collaborative partners, and more. To that end, sharing positive profiles via social media may be valuable in increasing community awareness of BESB.

6. Undertake a systematic review of undeveloped synergies with other state/community entities, both within and outside of DORS

The Bureau has already achieved significant cost savings through collaborations with other entities; however, there are likely to be additional opportunities for such efficiencies, especially if a broader range of constituencies are included. Speaking with directors of relevant graduate programs is one example. BESB may discover that graduate programs are hungry for collaborative opportunities, as many of these programs require cornerstone projects or service hours as a graduation requirement.

7. Strengthen the institutional memory of the Bureau by designing an employee-authored manual

BESB has an impressive number of long-serving employees. The knowledge and experience of these employees should be systematically captured. CPPSR suggests developing a manual where current employees can detail items such as insider tips on job effectiveness, things they wish they knew on their first day, valuable assets that took a while to discover, and other related items. BESB has a strong culture of collaboration between employees, but if not systematically captured, some valuable institutional memory may inadvertently be lost over time.”

End of CPPSR Comprehensive Needs Assessment Report

B. who are minorities;

BESB VR Update: Individuals from underserved populations are tracked in BESB VR to ensure that they are engaged in services and fully understand the scope of available services that can be provided. Before any individual from a traditionally underserved population is inactivated from BESB VR with an unsuccessful outcome, a supervisory review process is required. The Vocational Rehabilitation Supervisor confirms that the individual was provided with information in his or her preferred language and accessible format. Additionally, the Supervisor reviews the case record of services to confirm documentation is present, substantiating that the individual was afforded the opportunity to make informed decisions in regards to participation in BESB VR.

BESB VR employs two Counselors that are bicultural, one of whom is fluent in Spanish. BESB VR also employs two Counselors who are African-American. These four staff are available to provide outreach to community based organizations that can offer linkages to traditionally underserved communities. Examples of outreach activities include attending meetings of the Hispanic Alliance of Greater Stamford and career fairs for individuals who are Spanish speaking. Another example of a successful outreach effort was through a local cable access television network for individuals who are fluent in Spanish that was subsequently posted on YouTube. The interview focused on services available through BESB VR. Sign language interpreter services to communicate effectively with individuals who utilize sign language, including tactile signing can be purchased to effectively communicate about services that are available to individuals who are deaf and blind. Due to the statutory reporting requirement for eye doctors in Connecticut to refer to DORS all individuals under their care whom are declared to be legally blind, BESB VR has a strong outreach connection through this mandatory reporting requirement. Individuals from a wide range of ethnic and minority backgrounds learn of services available through BESB as a result of these eye doctor referrals. Residential care facilities also serve as a common referral source for individuals with legal blindness who come under their care. These referral sources help to facilitate a broad scope of individuals from many diverse backgrounds that are referred for BESB services.

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

BESB VR Update: Approximately one-third of Connecticut residents identify themselves as have a minority background. This is further reflected statistically as 15.4% Hispanic/Latino, 11.6% African American, 4.6% Asian, 0.5% Native American, and 0.1% Hawaiian/Pacific Islander. Clients presently participating in BESB VR favorably reflect the state's demographic, with 24% of clients self-identifying as African American, 18% as Hispanic/Latino, 3% as Asian, and 1% as Native American/Pacific Islander.

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

BESB VR Update: BESB VR has been actively involved in referring clients to other programs and services available through the statewide workforce development system. The level of commitment to facilitate client engagement in other components of the system is evident in the data that reflects 94 clients who have engaged in Adult Employment and Training Programs, 38 clients engaged in Adult Education programs, 7 clients engaged in Dislocated Worker Programs, 5 clients engaged in Job Corps, 35 clients enrolled in Wagner-Peyser and 23 clients enrolled in the Youth initiatives. BESB VR finds great value in these partnerships, particularly given the lean fiscal situation. Maximizing the

resources and services available through other components of the statewide workforce development system is crucial for maximizing the limited funding available in BESB VR.

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

BESB VR Update: In addition to a Transition Coordinator, BESB VR has dedicated two Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors to work exclusively with Pre-Employment Transition-Age students. There are currently 94 clients who are recipients of Pre-Employment Transition Services. The Counselors participate in planning and placement team meetings to address the full range of services that are available. Real work experiences are coordinated in both after-school and summer jobs. Career exploration and job shadowing opportunities are further provided to many of these students as well. With the existence of a Children's Services Program at BESB, VR staff has a strong linkage for identifying referrals of new clients who are potentially eligible for Pre-Employment Transition Services. Education Consultants from the Children's Services Program often coordinate with the Vocational Rehabilitation Transition Coordinator to develop expanded core curriculum activities that feature mentoring, career exposure and independent living skills training for clients served in that program as well

as clients that are mutually served by both programs simultaneously.

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

BESB VR Update: BESB VR has identified two areas for improvement (1) providing training to staff of community rehabilitation programs on blindness related technology; and (2) adaptations for accessing training and employment. No additional needs to establish, develop or improve upon these programs have been identified.

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 .

BESB VR Update: In recognition of the extensive need for transition-age youth to acquire knowledge of careers in demand, and to learn of the successes of adults who are legally blind, BESB VR organizes and conducts career exposure programs, mentoring programs, college days and

skills acquisition events, seeking out role models who are legally blind and employed or enrolled in higher education to participate in these events and programs. The BESB VR Transition Coordinator and the Pre-Employment Transition Counselors work directly with school district staff to incorporate these activities into the Individualized Education Program (IEP) or service plan of the students to emphasize the inclusion of these career development strategies as a critical component of the overall education process. BESB VR also utilizes job shadowing to expose transition-age youth to actual employment situations. Real work experiences for students with disabilities are crucial for the development of positive worker traits as well as developing self-confidence and money management skills. In the past fiscal year, 45 students participated in paid work experiences. Through a collaboration with United Technologies facilitated by the Chair of the SRC, 9 students participating in National Mentoring Day, gaining insight and exposure to careers in the aerospace industry.

k. Annual Estimates

Describe:

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

BESB VR Update: In Fiscal Year (FY) 2017, there were 914 eligible individuals in BESB VR. For the first six months of FY 2018, there were 52 new applicants for services, 682 individuals with implemented Individualized Plans for Employment (IPE), plus 13 eligible individuals awaiting IPE development or implementation. An additional 71 individuals are presently in referral status, plus 65 potentially eligible students with disabilities. It is anticipated that by the conclusion of FY 2018, the number of eligible individuals will be approximately 825. For FY 2019, it is projected that the number of eligible individuals will be 865, an increase of approximately 5 percent in comparison to the FY 2018 projection.

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

A. The VR Program;

BESB VR Update: At the onset of FY 2017 there were 748 eligible individuals receiving services through an implemented IPE. An additional 150 new IPEs were implemented during FY 2017, bringing the total to 898 eligible individuals who had implemented IPEs in FY 2017. At the onset of FY 2018 there were 657 eligible individuals with implemented IPEs. For the first half of FY 2018, 59 new IPEs were implemented. It is anticipated that the number of new

IPEs implemented in the second half of FY 2018 will increase at a greater pace than the first six months, due in part to the addition of two new VR Counselors. The projected number of new IPEs for FY 2018 is therefore approximately 135. Added to the 657 eligible individuals with implemented IPEs at the onset of FY 2018, this would represent approximately 792 eligible individuals receiving services under an IPE in FY 2018. In FY 2019, it is projected that the number of eligible individuals receiving services under an IPE will increase to approximately 815.

B. The Supported Employment Program; and

BESB VR Update: In FY 2017, 3 new individuals were found eligible for supported employment services, bringing the total number of eligible individuals to 31 for that fiscal year. Of that total, 13 individuals were youth with disabilities. In FY 2017 there were 7 individuals who exited BESB VR, 2 of whom achieved employment outcomes. For the first half of FY 2018, 3 new individuals were found eligible for supported employment services. One of these individuals is a youth with a disability. During the first half of FY 2018, 4 individuals exited BESB VR, 1 of whom achieved an employment outcome. At the mid-year point in FY 2018 there were 23 individuals eligible for supported employment services, 10 of whom were youth with disabilities. It is projected that 2 more individuals will become eligible for supported employment services in FY 2018, bringing the total to 25 eligible

individuals. It is further anticipated that 2 more individuals will exit BESB VR in FY 2018, resulting in 23 eligible individuals at the onset of FY 2019. In FY 2019, it is projected that 5 new individuals will be found eligible for supported employment services, 3 of whom are likely to be in the category of youth with a disability. This would bring the total number of eligible individuals in FY 2019 to 28.

C. each priority category, if under an order of selection;

BESB VR Update: Not applicable.

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

BESB VR Update: Not applicable.

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.

BESB VR Update: In FY 2017, BESB VR expended approximately \$1.98 million on purchased services for 775 individuals. Additionally, \$115,000 was expended for the improvement and maintenance of Business Enterprise locations. Total Program costs, including all purchased services, staffing, and administrative operations were approximately \$5.67 million for the year. For FY 2018, budget projections indicate that approximately \$5.19 million will be expended on combined Program costs, including an estimated \$1.97 million to provide purchased services to approximately 700 individuals, and \$3.22 million in administrative and operational costs. This estimate includes inflationary adjustments, inclusion of indirect cost charges of 10.9 percent to BESB VR, as well as projected costs to serve Transition-age students receiving Pre-Employment Transition Services. For FY 2019, budget projections indicate that approximately \$4.84 million will be expended on combined Program costs, including an estimated \$1.9 million to provide purchased services to approximately 735 individuals, and \$2.94 million in administrative and operational costs. This estimate includes inflationary adjustments, inclusion of indirect cost charges of 14.93 percent to BESB VR, as well as projected costs to serve Transition-age students receiving Pre-Employment Transition Services.

With the availability of \$3.07 million in Title I carry over funds from FY 2017 in addition to the federal Title I allotment of \$3.15 million (representing 15 percent of the total Title I allotment received by Connecticut) and state matching funds of approximately \$775,000, BESB VR does not anticipate the

need to enter into an Order of Selection in FY 2018 or FY 2019.

I. State Goals and Priorities

The designated State unit must:

1. Identify if the goals and priorities were jointly developed

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.

The following goals, objectives, strategies and measures of performance were developed in collaboration with the State Rehabilitation Council. These goals reflect the vision of Governor Dannel P. Malloy and the accompanying priorities and strategies of the statewide workforce system and the regional partners to contribute towards the achievement of the Governor's vision. Additionally, this document details the strategies that will be utilized by the Vocational Rehabilitation Program to contribute towards the achievement of these shared goals through the provision of services to individuals with significant visual impairments and to employers across the state.

Governor Dannel P. Malloy's Vision: Connecticut will create and sustain the global economy's best-educated, most-skilled, most-productive workforce.

Overarching Goals:

Promote Business Growth: Connecticut businesses in key sectors (economic drivers) must have the skilled, talented employees needed to compete effectively, prosper and create jobs for CT workers.

Strengthen Current Workforce: Workers must have the skills and credentials needed to prosper and advance in careers that support their families.

Develop Future Talent: Connecticut youth must be prepared and ready for career and post-secondary success as productive contributors to a competitive state economy.

System Transformation: Connecticut's multi-faceted workforce system must align and integrate goals, strategies, policies, investments, services, infrastructure and accountability.

Objective 1. Analyze economic conditions, including existing and emerging in-demand industry sectors and occupations.

Strategy: Identify employment needs of employers - knowledge, skills, abilities in key industries and occupations.

Measure: Documentation of coordination with CTDOL, Office of Research to obtain data and information.

Strategy: Analysis of current workforce unemployment data, labor market trends, workforce's educational and skill levels (including individuals with barriers/disabilities).

Measure: Documentation of coordination with CTDOL, Office of Research to obtain data and information.

Strategy: Analysis (strengths, weaknesses, capacity) of CT's workforce development activities (including education and training), to address identified education/skill needs and employment needs of employers.

Measure: Coordination with CTDOL, Office of Research to obtain data and information.

Objective 2. Implement strategies for workforce partners to prepare educated/skilled workforce.

Strategy: Establish performance accountability measures and align strategies across the workforce programs to support economic growth and self-sufficiency, and how Connecticut will assess workforce system effectiveness.

Measure: Performance measures established with each partner program's anticipated contribution to the measures noted.

Objective 3. Operationalize the Service Delivery System

Strategy: Review statewide policies, programs, and recommended actions to support comprehensive streamlined workforce system.

Measure: Vocational Rehabilitation provides policies to workforce partners for review.

Strategy: Develop/continuously improve workforce system: identify coordination/alignment barriers (avoid duplication); develop career pathways strategies; develop outreach/access strategies for individuals and employers; develop/expand industry/sector partnership strategies; identify regions/designate local areas; develop One-Stop system continuous improvement strategy; develop staff training strategies.

Measure: Vocational Rehabilitation staff participate in regional and statewide workforce meetings that focus on implementation of coordinated One-Stop service delivery system.

Strategy: Develop and update comprehensive State performance accountability measures.

Measure: Vocational Rehabilitation provides data on performance in identified accountability categories.

Strategy: Identify/disseminate info on best practices for: effective operation of One-Stop centers; development of

effective local boards; effective training programs responsive to real-time labor market analysis.

Measure: Vocational Rehabilitation provides to the state and regional workforce system evidence based practice on successful job placement and retention strategies for individuals with significant disabilities.

Strategy: Develop and review statewide policies to coordinate services through One-Stop system: criteria and procedures for WIBs to assess effectiveness and continuous improvement; guidance to allocate One-Stop center infrastructure funds; policies on roles/contributions of One-Stop partners.

Measure: Documentation of Vocational Rehabilitation staff participation in the review and development of coordination of services to people with significant disabilities with One-Stop center staff and partners.

Strategy: Develop strategies for technological improvements to One-Stop system to: enhance digital literacy skills; accelerate acquisition of skills and credentials; strengthen staff professional development; ensure accessibility of technology.

Measure: Documentation of Vocational Rehabilitation adaptive technology consultations and recommendations for equipment to make the One-Stop centers accessible to individuals with significant disabilities.

Strategy: Develop strategies to align technology and data systems across One-Stop partner programs.

Measure: Documentation of Vocational Rehabilitation staff participation in statewide meeting regarding the development of a common-front end data collection system.

Strategy: Develop allocation formulas to distribute funds to local areas for adult and youth programs.

Measure: Documentation of Vocational Rehabilitation staff participation in cost allocation formula reviews that follow prescribed federal requirements.

Strategy: Prepare annual performance reports.

Measure: Vocational Rehabilitation report on performance measures distributed.

Strategy: Develop statewide workforce and labor market information system.

Measure: Vocational Rehabilitation staff provide data on job placements for clients served by the program.

Strategy: Develop other policies to promote statewide objectives and enhance system performance.

Measure: Documentation of BESB participation in the development of state policies and objectives.

Strategy: Alignment of funded activities.

Measure: Vocational Rehabilitation clients gain access to core services offered by the One-Stop centers with information provided in accessible formats by the centers.

Strategy: Alignment with activities not covered by Plan, to assure coordination, avoid duplication.

Measure: Independent Living services are offered and provided to eligible individuals with disabilities who are being served by the One-Stop centers.

Strategy: Coordination of activities, comprehensive services, including support services.

Measure: Vocational Rehabilitation staff members participate in regional and statewide planning and implementation meetings to coordinate the provision of vocational rehabilitation services to eligible clients served by the One-Stop delivery system.

Strategy: Engagement with community colleges, career/technical schools, to leverage resources.

Measure: Vocational Rehabilitation staff become participating members in regional teams that develop certificate and training programs at community colleges and career/technical schools to ensure curriculum accessibility for individuals with significant disabilities.

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

In addition to the participation of the Vocational Rehabilitation Program in contributing to the aforementioned, comprehensive statewide goals for the Workforce system, the following, goals, objectives, strategies and measures specific to the Vocational

Rehabilitation Program have been developed with the full participation and guidance of the State Rehabilitation Council. These goals, objectives and accompanying strategies reflect on the priority to provide comprehensive, timely and quality services to clients of the Vocational Rehabilitation Program, including those clients who are receiving supported employment services. Based on a review of the findings and recommendations in the Statewide Assessment and the Consumer Satisfaction Survey, as well as a review of the most recent Section 107 report and the performance achieved on established program measures in existence at the time of this plan's development, these priorities have taken into account this information to shape the efforts of the Council in establishing focus areas for the coming year.

Goal A: Increase employment opportunities for eligible individuals of the Vocational Rehabilitation Program.

Objective: BESB will collaborate with BRS and at least one major employer with a statewide presence to implement a Disability Resource Team to assist the employer with job recruitment and retention services.

Strategy: BESB Job Developer will coordinate with BRS Job Development Team to identify and work with employer(s) to implement a Resource Team.

Measure: Team is developed and implements resource meetings with employer(s).

Objective: BESB Counselors join job development teams implemented through the regional workforce boards to gain access to employers within the regions who are seeking job candidates.

Strategy: Counselors contact the Job Developers of the regional One Stop Center to become part of their employer outreach teams.

Measure: Each counselor serves as part of a regional job development team.

Objective: Vocational Rehabilitation clients obtain proficiency to utilize web-based job search websites.

Strategy: Rehabilitation teachers and/or fee for service vendors teach no less than ten job seeking clients how to navigate and utilize at least one job search website on the internet.

Measure: Documentation of utilization by each client.

Objective: Each BESB Counselor with job development responsibilities shall engage clients on their caseloads in job fair attendance.

Strategy: Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors will share information on job fairs within their regions with job seeking clients on their individual caseloads and facilitate the attendance of clients at job fairs.

Measure: Documentation of no less than 5 clients per Counselor caseload attending a job fair.

Goal B: Provide coordinated services to students with disabilities to prepare for careers and post-secondary education after exit from high school.

Objective: The Vocational Rehabilitation Program shall designate two full-time Counselors to exclusively serve clients that are in the Pre-Employment Transition Services (PETS) category.

Strategy: Junior high and high school clients will be assigned to one of the counselor caseloads to receive specific, qualifying PETS services with dedicated PETS funding.

Measure: Documentation of caseload assignments.

Objective: PETS eligible students and their parents/guardians shall receive a resource guide that explains all of the BESB services that can be provided to prepare for careers and post-secondary education.

Strategy: The Vocational Rehabilitation Program shall develop a transition resource guide to post on the Bureau's webpage of the DORS website and to distribute to PETS eligible clients and their parents/guardians in their preferred format.

Measure: Case record documentation that the resource guide has been mailed or delivered to each PETS eligible client and their parents/guardians.

Objective: PETS eligible clients are provided timely notice of opportunities from the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors and/or the Transition Coordinator to participate in work exposure programs, paid employment, internships, college preparatory programs, technology training programs, life skills programs and related career development camps, seminars and initiatives, both in state and out of state.

Strategy: Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors and the Transition Coordinator working with the PETS clients provide timely information on available services and programs so that clients and their guardians can make informed decisions on attendance at programs, activities and related transition experiences of interest.

Measure: Case record documentation of the services being authorized.

Objective: The Vocational Rehabilitation Program develops and implements outreach and public education programs for potentially PETS eligible clients and their parents/guardians.

Strategy: Vocational Rehabilitation Transition Coordinator designs and delivers outreach and public education programs to populations where PETS eligible clients are likely to be found, such as, but not limited to school districts.

Measure: Documentation of the programs being provided.

Objective: The Vocational Rehabilitation Program and the State Rehabilitation Council co-sponsor leadership development activities and camps for groups of PETS eligible clients. **Strategy:** The State Rehabilitation Council and the Vocational Rehabilitation Program provide co-sponsorship funding for the Youth Leadership Forum, and similar programs if available.

Measure: Documentation of the funds committed.

Goal C: Utilize Innovation and Expansion authority to engage in continuous improvement initiatives, to increase access to services and activities that can benefit groups of individuals with visual impairment or legal blindness, to increase access to career information, adaptive technology, self-advocacy, and public awareness of the employment potential of individuals served by BESB.

Objective: The Vocational Rehabilitation Program shall provide funding for electronic access to career and news information.

Strategy: Funding provided to have NFB Newsline available to Vocational Rehabilitation clients.

Measure: Documentation of purchase order for NFB Newsline.

Objective: Provide access to the latest adaptive technology devices for clients to try out for assessment purposes.

Strategy: Purchase new adaptive technology devices for the BESB Technology Lab and the Technology Lab at the Southeastern Connecticut Community Center of the Blind.

Measure: Documentation of purchase order for technology devices.

Objective: The State Rehabilitation Council utilizes an entity experienced in administering consumer satisfaction surveys to conduct the fiscal year 2016 Consumer Satisfaction Survey and the results are used to develop continuous improvement initiatives.

Strategy: The State Rehabilitation Council selects a vendor, reviews the results of the survey, and works with Program staff to implement strategies that address the results and trends identified in the survey.

Measure: Documentation of purchase of survey, Consumer Satisfaction Report received and reviewed with Program staff.

Objective: State Rehabilitation Council representatives participate in state, regional and national conferences and programs that provide opportunities to increase public awareness of the employment capabilities of BESB clients, increase the Council members knowledge and understanding of the public Vocational Rehabilitation Program, and create opportunities for learning best practices that can develop into new goals and strategies for the BESB Vocational Rehabilitation Program to explore and implement, if applicable.

Strategy: State Rehabilitation Council Chair is provided with information about upcoming conferences, seminars and activities from the Bureau Director and designates a Council member or members to participate and share information with the full membership.

Measure: State Rehabilitation Council members attend CSAVR, NCSAB and other national, regional or statewide conferences or seminars that address the components stated in the objective.

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

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

The comprehensive needs assessment and the consumer satisfaction survey results were utilized in considering and developing these goals.

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

The bureau has factored in our role in achieving statewide WIOA performance measures in establishing the goals for the VR program.

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.

The State Rehabilitation Council has reviewed the comprehensive needs assessment, the consumer satisfaction survey results and trends in outcomes and services provided in addressing the goals that were developed.

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.

BESB VR Update: BESB VR is not operating under an order of selection and provides services to all eligible individuals.

B. The justification for the order.

BESB VR Update: Not applicable.

C. The service and outcome goals.

BESB VR Update: Not applicable.

D. The time within which these goals may be achieved for individuals in each priority category within the order.

BESB VR Update: Not applicable.

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

BESB VR Update: Not applicable.

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.

BESB VR Update: Not applicable.

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.

It is the primary goal and priority of the Vocational Rehabilitation Program to consider supported employment as an option in all circumstances where the provision of these services will increase the likelihood of placement success for people with significant, multiple barriers to employment.

The Vocational Rehabilitation Program for individuals who are blind received \$45,000 in Title VI, Part B funds for fiscal year 2014. In Fiscal Year (FY) 2014, there were 3 clients who achieved employment outcomes in supported employment

settings. The funding source for long-term support for 2 of these situations was the Department of Developmental Services, with the client's family being the provider of long-term support in the third situation since the client works at a family-run business. Community rehabilitation providers were utilized for onsite training in all three situations.

Fourteen (14) new clients were found eligible for supported employment services during the fiscal year, bringing the total number of clients that have been found eligible for supported employment services to 30. Of the 30 clients that were eligible for supported employment services during the fiscal year, 3 clients achieved employment outcomes, 1 individual was in plan status, 1 individual was placed in employment status, 1 individual was moved to services interrupted status due to medical issues and 24 individuals were in a service status. Of this total number of eligible individuals, Title VI, Part B funds have been utilized for 8 individuals during the fiscal year.

Community rehabilitation providers continue to be utilized most frequently as the providers of extended services for the employment programs coordinated. In the current and upcoming year, this approach will continue to be utilized. This is based on the history of job placement outcomes from preceding fiscal years that has continually demonstrated the proven ability of community rehabilitation providers to employ job coaches and vocational instructors necessary for the provision of long-term employment supports, combined with their willingness to periodically assume the cost of providing extended services when other public funding options are not available. This arrangement is especially

important, given the limited availability of third party funding from other public agency providers.

In addition to the option of utilizing community rehabilitation providers for the provision of extended services, the successful utilization of natural supports through a client's family and the use of a volunteer organization in placement situations in prior years have shown promise as a practice to replicate to expand options for the provision of support services. It is a high priority goal to identify all possible providers of long-term funding to cover the cost of providing the supports over an extended period of time. In addition to seeking out community rehabilitation providers who can financially assume the role of becoming the provider of extended services, the Vocational Rehabilitation Program will continue to explore the option of utilizing volunteer groups, employers, and families where feasible to offer natural supports as an option. The Program will also continue to contract with community rehabilitation providers who can access public and private funds in order to secure supported employment placements.

The Vocational Rehabilitation Program will continue to distribute funds to providers and employers who can offer the long-term assurances that supports will be in place to enable people with the most significant disabilities to participate in integrated employment with competitive wages and benefits. Vocational Rehabilitation Program staff will continue to participate in Planning and Placement Team meetings early in the transition process to identify the need for supported employment services, and to identify

providers, both private and public, that may offer services while a student is preparing to transition from public or private education into employment. Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors will also utilize supplemental evaluations through community rehabilitation providers to identify the need for supported employment services prior to the development of Individualized Plans for Employment in situations where it is uncertain if long-term supports will be necessary to ensure a successful placement outcome.

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

In order to facilitate the identification of supported employment options for transitioning high school students, the two Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors assigned to work with this specific client population participate in Planning and Placement Team meetings (PPTs) and work in cooperation with the Children's Services Program at BESB. The number of students who are legally blind or visually impaired who are age fourteen and older continue to be tracked by the Vocational Rehabilitation Program to ensure that services are offered and made available. There are

approximately 140 students of transition age who are presently being served in the Vocational Rehabilitation Program. With the implementation of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), there are new provisions pertaining to serving youth with disabilities, and in particular, for youth with significant disabilities who require supported employment services, the Vocational Rehabilitation Program can fund the cost of extended services for up to 4 years in situations where no other funding options are available. Provisions within WIOA require that 50 percent of Title VI B funds are reserved to exclusively serve youth with significant disabilities to assist with meeting this priority.

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.

The Bureau works collaboratively with the Department of Developmental Services, the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, employers and community providers to identify and secure alternative sources of long-term funding and support, where available.

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.

BESB VR Update: The following strategies support the goals and objectives that have been identified with the participation of the SRC, and reflect the commitment of BESB VR to increase employment opportunities for people who are legally blind or visually impaired through the provision of Vocational Rehabilitation and Supported Employment Services.

Methods To Be Used to Expand and Improve Services:

Utilizing the results and recommendations from the previous Comprehensive Needs Assessment, as well as the Section 107 Review conducted by Rehabilitation Services Administration, BESB VR identified areas that needed further expansion and revision to better serve clients. Shortening the timeframe for the development of the Individualized Plan for Employment was recommended in the Section 107 Review. This recommendation was implemented in BESB VR

policy subsequent to a public hearing process and prior to the passage of the WIOA. The Act prescribes a time frame of 90 days for plan development to occur. BESB VR is utilizing this requirement to ensure the timely movement of case services subsequent to determinations of eligibility.

To augment the capacity of maintaining adequate levels of contact with clients, BESB VR implemented the recommendation of the Center for Public Policy and Social Research to contact graduate level programs that offer Master's Degrees in Rehabilitation Counseling and closely related fields to seek internship and practicum students who can assist the Program in contacting clients, following up on service requests and maintaining higher levels of contact than what is possible with the existing staffing levels. This approach was initially successful, with students from Springfield College and Central Connecticut State University coming to BESB VR for their graduate field work in Vocational Rehabilitation. However, as staffing within BESB VR has contracted in response to budgetary constraints, the time required to oversee internships has diminished considerably. The level of training required to familiarize interns with the requirements of BESB VR policy and procedures in order for the interns to perform even the most basic of activities proved to be beyond the time capacity of the staff. While BESB VR acknowledges the importance and value of providing internship opportunities, these options will be implemented in the future only when staffing resources are available to provide adequate training and supervision.

BESB VR further addressed case management activities through the reestablishment of the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Coordinator position, which had been vacant for several years. A major focus of this position was to assist the Counselors with case management strategies. Utilizing the newly developed case management computerized dashboard, the Coordinator, Supervisor and the Counselors are able to track the timely movement of client services and timeframes for case status changes. The dashboard is capable of analyzing trends by caseload to further assist in identifying where additional activity is required. Over time however, it has been found that utilizing the Counselor Coordinator for case management reviews has created an overlap of duties with the Supervisor's position. Diminishing staff resources in BESB VR has necessitated a reexamination of the best use of this role. With the impending retirement of two counseling staff, BESB VR intends to shift some of the Coordinator's responsibilities to align with the priorities of BESB VR, with a primary focus on statewide employer engagement strategies, and a secondary role of managing a reduced caseload of clients while they are attending institutions of higher education in order to maintain a single point of contact with Disability Coordinators at these facilities.

The results of the Comprehensive Needs Assessment also found that while BESB's section of the DORS website contained a considerable amount of important and useful information, it was organized in a way that made it difficult to search for information by topic. An extensive review of the website was subsequently conducted and substantial

revisions were implemented. BESB's section of the DORS website is now organized by type of service, with subcategories under each major service heading. Policy manuals are grouped by program type as well so visitors to the website can locate and search the applicable policies more conveniently than in the past. BESB is also participating in the statewide initiative to develop a new format for state agency website presentation that will result in greater ease for visitors to the DORS website to search by topics of interest, rather than having to perform individual program specific searches. This new layout will enable a visitor to more efficiently find all DORS-wide resources and services that may be applicable to their situation.

The Comprehensive Needs Assessment also recommended that BESB develop a presence in social media, possibly uploading information on services to YouTube. This recommendation has been explored and has been conservatively implemented. To date, there have been 5 BESB mentor videos uploaded to YouTube for public viewing, but plans for greater expansion in the use of social media have become part of the larger discussion at the agency level. It is anticipated that the agency and BESB will expand further into social media in future years.

Results of the Consumer Satisfaction Survey illustrated how a lack of transportation options impacted on levels of satisfaction in that service category. The members of the SRC requested more information on services offered through Lyft and Uber. Toward that end, the Vice-Chair of the SRC coordinated for Uber representatives to present at the March,

2017 meeting. The representatives discussed approaches that could be used to increase access to their services. The SRC learned about services available through Lyft at their December, 2017 meeting. BESB VR plans to pursue purchasing arrangements with these services in situations where short-term transportation solutions are needed as an interim step while clients and staff seek more long-term solutions that cannot be funded through BESB VR.

BESB VR and the SRC further recognized the difficulty that creating a business plan has been for clients and the resulting dissatisfaction for the process. The SRC recommended that BESB VR develop a guide for clients to follow, along with a business plan template. This has been completed and is now posted on the agency website for clients to utilize. Notification of the availability of this document has been widely distributed to organizations of and for individuals who are blind in Connecticut and the counseling staff have been provided with the guide and template as well to facilitate its use by clients that are seeking a goal of self-employment.

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.

BESB VR Update: BESB VR employs two full time Rehabilitation Teachers in the role of Technologists who are

available to provide individualized assessments on adaptive technology options and solutions so that clients can make informed decisions as to the best option for their particular vocational training and employment situations. The Technologists are able to provide these assessments at the employer site, training facility or home of the client by utilizing a portable array of technology devices that are maintained by BESB VR. The Technologists are further available to offer short-term training in the use of adaptive technology that is needed for participation in vocational training or employment. A third Rehabilitation Teacher is available to provide training to clients in the use of Career Index Plus with adaptive technology so that clients can be more fully engaged in the career exploration and job seeking process.

Additionally, BESB VR maintains a fully equipped adaptive technology laboratory in Windsor that is available for both assessments and training sessions. These training sessions can be done in person or remotely with the use of tandem training through the internet. In collaboration with the Southeastern Connecticut Community Center of the Blind, an additional technology laboratory is located at their facility in New London.

BESB VR further utilizes fee for service vendors for training in the use of adaptive technology devices in circumstances where training is required over multiple sessions that stretch beyond the capacity of the on-staff Rehabilitation Teachers. Through the Assistive Technology Act, BESB works closely with the BRS to provide outreach and referrals of clients who

are deaf and blind so that clients who meet the eligibility requirements of the Deafblind Technology Grant can apply for and receive specialized adaptive equipment to increase their access to communication.

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.

BESB VR Update: BESB VR will continue with the successful approach of utilizing specifically assigned staff to provide outreach to community based organizations that have linkages to individuals from underserved populations. As noted in subsection J (Statewide Assessment) of this section of the Unified State Plan, the percentage of individuals who self-identify a minority background reflects a demographic that is consistent with or greater than the demographic for the overall state. The individualized relationships the Counselors have established with the community based organizations has strengthened the outreach activities into the local communities. Statutory reporting requirements by eye doctors further ensure that individuals under their care who are legally blind will also be referred to BESB for services.

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

BESB VR Update: The two Pre-Employment Transition Counselors participate in Planning and Placement Team (PPT) meetings of students with disabilities and assist in the development of Individualized Education Programs (IEP's) for these students. The services that are detailed in the IEP of each student are factored into the development of each client's Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE), which must be developed within ninety (90) days of the determination of eligibility for vocational rehabilitation services, or by the time the client exits high school, whichever comes sooner. Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor involvement can begin as early as age 14, with Pre-Employment Transition Services commencing at age 16. Referrals to BESB VR are most commonly initiated by the Education Consultants of BESB's Children's Services Program and Teachers of Students with Visual Impairments that work directly for school districts.

Since BESB maintains a registry of all students who are legally blind or visually impaired within Connecticut, the process for identifying and referring clients from Children's Services to BESB VR is streamlined and efficient. The electronic case management system for BESB has a built in

tracking system for identifying clients by age range to further facilitate the referral of clients who desire to participate in vocational rehabilitation services. The Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors work with the students, educators, parents or legal guardians and the Program's Transition Coordinator to identify careers of interest, develop career exploration opportunities, work and job shadowing experiences, mentoring activities and leadership development programs.

In addition to serving on the statewide transition taskforce, BESB VR's Transition Coordinator is also an active member of the Board of Directors of the Youth Leadership Project that oversees the Youth Leadership Forum. The forum is a yearly event that teaches students with disabilities leadership and self-advocacy skills.

BESB VR continues to conduct career exposure camps for high school students who are visually impaired or legally blind. These programs include opportunities to interact with former recipients of vocational rehabilitation services who are successfully employed in a variety of careers. Some of these programs are held on college campuses, where the students gain a firsthand perspective of residential campus life in addition to gaining insight into a variety of careers that former clients are now engaged in.

BESB VR staff members continue to participate in and present information at in-service training programs organized by BESB for public school teachers and guidance counselors on issues affecting students who are blind or visually impaired. The Children's Services Program of BESB

provides a comprehensive training series every year for school district staff to learn about low vision aids, adaptive technology, braille instruction, expanded core curriculum activities and resources that are available to facilitate the education and transition of students served by BESB.

BESB VR has also established a goal of participating in Planning and Placement Team meetings early in the transition process to identify the need for supported employment services, and to identify providers, both private and public, that may offer services while a student is preparing to transition from public or private education into employment.

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

BESB VR Update: Other than providing training to staff of community rehabilitation programs on blindness related technology and adaptations for accessing training and employment, no needs to establish, develop or improve upon these programs have been identified.

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

BESB VR Update: WIOA provided new opportunities for collaboration, coordination and participation of partners, with a shared goal and vision of connecting job seekers with relevant training and employment. Through these partnerships, BESB Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors are now part of regional business services teams, meeting regularly to discuss current employer needs within their regions, and to identify upcoming employment opportunities and skill requirements to be considered as a qualified candidate for these positions. Through the execution of Memorandums of Understanding and accompanying Infrastructure Agreements, the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors have also begun part-time co-location at the America's Job Centers, encouraging clients to register for applicable services available through partner programs. Rehabilitation Technologists offer technical assistance on approaches to increase accessibility of the One-Stop Centers and partner services. While this new system is still in the implementation stages, it is bringing collaboration and coordination to a new level that had not previously existed, with the shared goal of achieving the performance measures for the state.

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

BESB VR Update: BESB VR staff's expertise on blindness related topics, including how adaptive technology can be utilized to make core services of the One-Stop Centers and training programs accessible is offered to the partner programs. The Rehabilitation Technologists have been reviewing testing materials, equipment and structural design at the America's Job Centers, offering recommendations on how to make information and training materials accessible to job seekers who are blind. Further discussion is underway in regards to involving BESB VR in assessments on new curriculum materials in the initial planning stages so that decisions can be made with accessibility variables considered prior to the selection of materials in future training programs and workshops.

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

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

BESB VR Update: Providing clients with the skills and training necessary to qualify for occupations that exist in the economy is essential. With diminishing financial resources, partnering with other components of the workforce system is a key component to achieving this goal. Being a part of regional business services teams ensures that Counselors from BESB VR are at the forefront of discussions with

employers who are seeking to fill job vacancies as well as those employers who are considering expansion in this state. Dedicating staff resources to offer training to clients in the use of Career Index Plus is an important strategy employed by BESB VR to encourage clients to take a more immersive role in the career exploration and job seeking process. Career Index Plus is accessible to individuals that utilize adaptive technology. It contains a vocational interest inventory, economic forecasting by career cluster, and it also includes direct links to job openings by region, state and zip code. For BESB VR to be effective in bringing together qualified job seekers with employers, all of these approaches must be utilized to the greatest extent possible.

BESB VR further recognizes the great potential that customized employment holds for individuals with multiple, significant impediments to employment. BESB VR explored the option of committing time for staff training in this model, but found the time commitment to be beyond the availability of the existing staff. BESB VR is looking forward to utilizing a fee for service model with community rehabilitation providers that can offer this service after staff in their organizations receive the training and credentialing to provide it.

A coordinated approach to expand the ability of partner programs to communicate the availability of their services is an equally important strategy to achieve the overarching goal of employment for clients. Expanding the use of social media to educate the public about services was a recommendation contained in the Comprehensive Needs Assessment and

through a coordinated effort across partner programs, this recommendation is likely to experience a greater level of growth than it may have experienced as a separate and distinct goal for BESB.

B. support innovation and expansion activities; and

BESB VR Update: Offering a robust approach to career information and job openings is a key component of the Innovation and Expansion activities that have been established as priorities for BESB VR. In addition to using Career Index Plus as a tool in this regard, BESB VR provides access to the National Federation of the Blind's (NFB) Newline service to provide a lower-tech option through touch tone telephones for clients who may not have internet access or current skills in the use of computers. NFB Newline also offers a web-based option for clients who have access to the internet.

Programs serving youth, including youth from underserved populations, is another priority that has been identified in the Innovation and Expansion initiatives for BESB VR. VR staff assists in the development of independent living, leadership and career exposure camps and initiatives. The SRC and BESB VR offer co-sponsorship to the Youth Leadership Forum, a proven model for developing leadership skills and community involvement for youth with disabilities.

Expansion of the availability of adaptive technology in training programs, core services and apprenticeship programs is another category where there is considerable activity. BESB VR staff brings their knowledge of blindness related technology accommodations into discussions with the partners so that solutions can be identified and implemented in the planning stages of new initiatives, ensuring equal access to services. BESB VR also provides support for the adaptive technology laboratory located at the Southeastern Connecticut Community Center of the Blind, making it possible for clients of BESB located in that region to receive local training in the use of adaptive technology.

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.

BESB VR Update: Perhaps the most significant barrier within the category of training is the materials utilized across a broad spectrum of vendors and service providers. Materials are often created in formats that do not readily lend toward conversion into accessible text to speech formats for those clients who are not able to access print. This is particularly seen in training materials that are distributed electronically, where PDF files are a common format of the documents being distributed. Being at the front end of discussions with partner programs on how to make training materials

accessible from the onset is in its initial stages, but showing great promise. BESB VR staff have also begun to explore training opportunities offered through the certificate programs at the state community colleges to better educate clients on these options.

The ability of BESB VR to now provide for up to four years of extended services for youth with disabilities has also opened up new options for clients that may require long-term job supports to be successful. Prior to WIOA, if there was no available provider of long-term support, there were limited options for clients that required supported employment services. With the new provisions for extended services, it is now possible to explore job opportunities for youth who require long-term supports, with the knowledge that BESB VR can initiate the job placement supports directly and then pursue other sources for funding in the long-term.

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.

BESB VR Update: The following goals, objectives, strategies and measures of performance were developed in collaboration with the SRC. These goals reflect the vision of Governor Dannel P. Malloy and the accompanying priorities and strategies of the statewide workforce system and the regional partners to contribute towards the achievement of the Governor's vision. Additionally, this update details the strategies that have been utilized by the BESB VR to date to contribute towards the achievement of these shared goals through the provision of services to individuals with significant visual impairments and to employers across the state.

Governor Dannel P. Malloy's Vision: Connecticut will create and sustain the global economy's best-educated, most-skilled, most-productive workforce.

Overarching Goals:

Promote Business Growth: Connecticut businesses in key sectors (economic drivers) must have the skilled, talented employees needed to compete effectively, prosper and create jobs for CT workers.

Strengthen Current Workforce: Workers must have the skills and credentials needed to prosper and advance in careers that support their families.

Develop Future Talent: Connecticut youth must be prepared and ready for career and post-secondary success as productive contributors to a competitive state economy.

System Transformation: Connecticut's multi-faceted workforce system must align and integrate goals, strategies, policies, investments, services, infrastructure and accountability.

Objective 1. Analyze economic conditions, including existing and emerging in-demand industry sectors and occupations.

Strategy: Identify employment needs of employers - knowledge, skills, abilities in key industries and occupations.

Measure: Documentation of coordination with CTDOL, Office of Research to obtain data and information.

BESB VR Update: Through ongoing collaboration with the Department of Labor's Office of Research, a significant amount of economic and occupational outlook data has been identified and is readily available for staff and clients to access at: <https://www1.ctdol.state.ct.us/lmi/index2.asp>.

Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors have joined with partner agencies as members of the business services teams in their regions to learn of specific growth sectors and employment trends for the region.

Strategy: Analysis of current workforce unemployment data, labor market trends, workforce's educational and skill levels (including individuals with barriers/disabilities).

Measure: Documentation of coordination with CTDOL, Office of Research to obtain data and information.

BESB VR Update: As of December, 2017 Manufacturing had a 2.6 percent increase in growth, followed by financial activities with 1.7 percent growth. Professional and Business Services indicated 1.2 percent growth, with Educational and Health Services at 1.1 percent growth. In terms of actual job growth in specific numbers, the Manufacturing sector gained 4,100 jobs, followed by the Educational and Health Services professions that gained 3,600 jobs.

Strategy: Analyze (strengths, weaknesses, capacity) of CT's workforce development activities (including education and training), to address identified education/skill needs and employment needs of employers.

Measure: Coordination with CTDOL, Office of Research to obtain data and information.

BESB VR Update: BESB VR staff are participating in meetings on both a statewide and regional basis to identify strategies to prepare program participants for the employment opportunities that exist and that will be available into the future. One particular strategy in use at BESB VR is the strong focus on engaging clients to utilize Career Index

Plus as a tool for conducting research that is individualized to their unique circumstances and interests.

Objective 2. Implement strategies for workforce partners to prepare educated/skilled workforce.

Strategy: Establish performance accountability measures and align strategies across the workforce programs to support economic growth and self-sufficiency, and how Connecticut will assess workforce system effectiveness.

Measure: Performance measures established with each partner program's anticipated contribution to the measures noted.

BESB VR Update: This strategy is in progress.

Objective 3. Operationalize the Service Delivery System

Strategy: Review statewide policies, programs, and recommended actions to support comprehensive streamlined workforce system.

Measure: BESB VR provides policies to workforce partners for review.

BESB VR Update: This has been achieved. The policies for BESB VR have been updated to reflect changes brought

about by WIOA and the policies have been made available to the partner programs. The policies may be viewed at <http://www.ct.gov/besb> in the “Employment and Vocational Rehabilitation Section.”

Strategy: Develop/continuously improve workforce system: identify coordination/alignment barriers (avoid duplication); develop career pathways strategies; develop outreach/access strategies for individuals and employers; develop/expand industry/sector partnership strategies; identify regions/designate local areas; develop One-Stop system continuous improvement strategy; develop staff training strategies.

Measure: BESB VR staff participates in regional and statewide workforce meetings that focus on implementation of a coordinated One-Stop service delivery system.

BESB VR Update: This strategy is in full operation with BESB VR staff participating in regional business service teams, and designated staff also participating in statewide, interagency coordination team meetings. Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors have begun part-time co-location at the primary One-Stop Centers in their assigned territories, arranging for clients to register for services available through partner programs where applicable.

Strategy: Develop and update comprehensive State performance accountability measures.

Measure: BESB VR provides data on performance in identified accountability categories.

BESB VR Update: This strategy is in progress.

Strategy: Identify/disseminate info on best practices for: effective operation of One-Stop centers; development of effective local boards; effective training programs responsive to real-time labor market analysis.

Measure: BESB VR provides to the state and regional workforce system evidence based practice on successful job placement and retention strategies for individuals with significant disabilities.

BESB VR Update: This strategy is in progress. BESB VR has provided assistance and recommendations pertaining to accessibility of One-Stop Centers and training program services, reviewing materials in use as well as the adaptive devices that are available at these locations, with a goal of enabling clients of BESB VR to more fully participate in the services offered through partner programs.

Strategy: Develop and review statewide policies to coordinate services through One-Stop system: criteria and procedures for Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs) to assess effectiveness and continuous improvement; guidance to allocate One-Stop center infrastructure funds; policies on roles/contributions of One-Stop partners.

Measure: Documentation of BESB VR staff participation in the review and development of coordination of services to

people with significant disabilities with One-Stop center staff and partners.

BESB VR Update: BESB VR staff were assigned to assist in the review and certification of the One- Stop Centers and offered recommendations for accessibility enhancements, where applicable.

Strategy: Develop strategies for technological improvements to One-Stop system to: enhance digital literacy skills; accelerate acquisition of skills and credentials; strengthen staff professional development; ensure accessibility of technology.

Measure: Documentation of BESB VR adaptive technology consultations and recommendations for equipment to make the One-Stop Centers accessible to individuals with significant disabilities.

BESB VR Update: Consultations have been provided in regards to accessibility, offering both short-term and low tech solutions as well as recommendations for a future direction that will be a more pro-active approach to assessing training curriculum and materials in the initial stages of development so that accommodations can be identified and in place from the onset.

Strategy: Develop strategies to align technology and data systems across One-Stop partner programs.

Measure: Documentation of BESB VR staff participation in statewide meeting regarding the development of a common-front end data collection system.

BESB VR Update: This strategy is in progress. BESB VR staff have reviewed the CT Hires data collection system and identified strategies that could make certain data fields more accessible for BESB VR staff to use. At this point however, there are no immediate plans to implement a “common-front end” data collection system for the partner agencies to use due to the uniqueness of each of the partner’s current data collection software and the cost that would be incurred across the programs to develop such a universal data collection system.

Strategy: Develop allocation formulas to distribute funds to local areas for adult and youth programs.

Measure: Documentation of BESB VR staff participation in cost allocation formula reviews that follow prescribed federal requirements.

BESB VR Update: This strategy is in development.

Strategy: Prepare annual performance reports.

Measure: BESB VR report on performance measures distributed.

BESB VR Update: BESB VR has provided performance data for inclusion in the Department’s report of activities and

measures achieved. This document for DORS may be viewed at: <http://portal.ct.gov/das/Lists/Publications/Reports/Digest-of-Administrative-Reports>.

Strategy: Develop statewide workforce and labor market information system.

Measure: BESB VR staff provides data on job placements for clients served by the program.

BESB VR Update: This data is available for partner programs to utilize.

Strategy: Develop other policies to promote statewide objectives and enhance system performance.

Measure: Documentation of BESB VR participation in the development of state policies and objectives.

BESB VR Update: This strategy is in progress. BESB VR has assigned staff to participate in interagency workgroups and committees to develop policy recommendations and strategies to coordinate activities across the partner programs and services. These groups feed information and recommendations to the Service Design and Delivery Committee that is chaired by two members of the Statewide Workforce Investment Board.

Strategy: Alignment of funded activities.

Measure: BESB VR clients gain access to core services offered by the One-Stop Centers with information provided in accessible formats by the centers.

BESB VR Update: This activity is underway and has increased with the recent development of part-time co-location of Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors in the One-Stop Centers in each region.

Strategy: Alignment with activities not covered by Plan, to assure coordination, avoid duplication.

Measure: Independent Living services are offered and provided to eligible individuals with disabilities who are being served by the One-Stop centers.

BESB VR Update: The Adult Services Program of BESB provides Orientation and Mobility instruction and Independent Living training to BESB VR clients who's Individualized Plans for Employment identify the need for these services as a component to achieve an employment outcome.

Strategy: Coordination of activities, comprehensive services, including support services.

Measure: BESB VR staff members participate in regional and statewide planning and implementation meetings to coordinate the provision of vocational rehabilitation services to eligible clients served by the One-Stop delivery system.

BESB VR Update: This strategy has been initiated but is still in the early stages. Through part-time co-location at the One-Stop Centers, Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors are learning of individuals with blindness or visual impairment who may have accessed the programs and services offered by other partners without being aware of BESB VR. In these instances, meetings can be offered to these individuals to learn about the services that can be provided and coordinated through BESB VR, and when desired, referrals can be promptly processed to activate the clients in BESB VR.

Strategy: Engagement with community colleges, career/technical schools, to leverage resources.

Measure: BESB VR staff becomes participating members in regional teams that develop certificate and training programs at community colleges and career/technical schools to ensure curriculum accessibility for individuals with significant disabilities.

BESB VR Update: This strategy is underway, with meetings at the statewide level to identify the certificate and training programs that are presently available at the community colleges and to further identify the criteria for entrance into these programs. Accessibility of the programs will also be a component of this review so that BESB VR can begin to refer potential candidates to these programs.

In addition to the participation of BESB VR in contributing to the aforementioned, comprehensive statewide goals for the

Workforce system, the following, goals, objectives, strategies and measures specific to BESB VR have been developed with the full participation and guidance of the SRC. These goals, objectives and accompanying strategies reflect on the priority to provide comprehensive, timely and quality services to clients of BESB VR, including those clients who are receiving supported employment services. Based on a review of the findings and recommendations in the Statewide Assessment and the Consumer Satisfaction Survey, as well as a review of the most recent Section 107 report and the performance achieved on established program measures in existence at the time of this plan's development, these priorities have taken into account this information to shape the efforts of the SRC in establishing focus areas for the coming year.

Goal A: Increase employment opportunities for eligible individuals of BESB VR.

Objective: BESB will collaborate with BRS and at least one major employer with a statewide presence to implement a Disability Resource Team to assist the employer with job recruitment and retention services.

Strategy: BESB Job Developer will coordinate with BRS Job Development Team to identify and work with employer(s) to implement a Resource Team.

Measure: Team is developed and implements resource meetings with employer(s).

BESB VR Update: Over the past year, a team comprised of staff from BESB VR and BRS worked together in the capacity of a Disability Resource Team to assist Unilever, Travelers and Prudential with job recruitment, job retention services, disability awareness training and education to adaptive technology devices. For Unilever, BESB VR and BRS presented at a Unilever DiversAbility event held in December, 2016. Unilever staff were provided an overview about blindness and adaptive technology. Unilever subsequently hired a BESB VR referred individual, accessing VR services to facilitate a successful employment outcome. Another resource team that formed consisted of BESB VR and BRS staff partnering with CSAVR as a part of an 8 state pilot program to partner with Prudential to assist them with their recruitment efforts. Regular meetings have been held with Prudential's Human Resources staff and managers to educate them about the capabilities of individuals with disabilities as well as to discuss their recruitment needs. Candidates have been referred to both their Hartford and Shelton locations. Currently, Prudential Human Resources is reviewing the resumes of several clients.

Objective: BESB VR Counselors join job development teams implemented through the regional workforce boards to gain access to employers within the regions who are seeking job candidates.

Strategy: Counselors contact the Job Developers of the regional One-Stop Center to become part of their employer outreach teams.

Measure: Each counselor serves as part of a regional job development team.

BESB VR Update: This strategy is underway. Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors are active members of the regional business services teams.

Objective: BESB VR clients obtain proficiency to utilize web-based job search websites.

Strategy: Rehabilitation teachers and/or fee for service vendors teach no less than ten job seeking clients per year how to navigate and utilize at least one job search website on the internet.

Measure: Documentation of utilization by each client.

BESB VR Update: This strategy is recently underway. BESB VR worked very closely with the Job Driven Technical Assistance Center to test Career Index Plus for accessibility and the applicability of features and upon finding it to be a useful tool for clients to use, the Director of BESB sent written correspondence to all active VR clients to notify them of this tool and how to access it. The letter also indicated that a Rehabilitation Teacher has been assigned to train clients in its use. Career Index Plus provides a searchable

listing of job openings by region, state and zip code and can be tailored to individual client's job search preferences.

Objective: Each BESB VR Counselor with job development responsibilities shall engage clients on their caseloads in job fair attendance.

Strategy: Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors will share information on job fairs within their regions with job seeking clients on their individual caseloads and facilitate the attendance of clients at job fairs.

Measure: Documentation of no less than five clients per Counselor caseload per year attending a job fair.

BESB VR Update: Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors have been identifying job fairs and informing clients of these opportunities to network with employers. With the exception of one Counselor caseload, where four clients attended job fairs in the past year, for the other Counselor caseloads, this measure was achieved.

Goal B: Provide coordinated services to students with disabilities to prepare for careers and post-secondary education after exit from high school.

Objective: BESB VR shall designate two full-time Counselors to exclusively serve clients that are in the Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) category.

Strategy: Middle school and high school clients will be assigned to one of the counselor caseloads to receive specific, qualifying Pre-ETS services with dedicated Pre-ETS funding.

Measure: Documentation of caseload assignments.

BESB VR Update: This strategy was achieved with two Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors assigned to serve clients who are students with disabilities, providing Pre-Employment Transition Services.

Objective: Pre-ETS eligible students and their parents/guardians shall receive a resource guide that explains all of the BESB VR services that can be provided to prepare for careers and post-secondary education.

Strategy: BESB VR shall develop a transition resource guide to post on the BESB section of the DORS website and to distribute to Pre-ETS eligible clients and their parents/guardians in their preferred format.

Measure: Case record documentation that the resource guide has been mailed or delivered to each Pre-ETS eligible client and their parents/guardians.

BESB VR Update: This strategy is in progress. The resource guide is in development.

Objective: Pre-ETS eligible clients are provided timely notice of opportunities from the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors and/or the Transition Coordinator to participate in work exposure programs, paid employment, internships, college preparatory programs, technology training programs, life skills programs and related career development camps, seminars and initiatives, both in state and out of state.

Strategy: Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors and the Transition Coordinator working with the Pre-ETS clients provide timely information on available services and programs so that clients and their guardians can make informed decisions on attendance at programs, activities and related transition experiences of interest.

Measure: Case record documentation of the services being authorized.

BESB VR Update: The Transition Coordinator provides information to the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors on programs and initiatives such as the Youth Leadership Forum, independent living programs and camps, paid internships and employment opportunities. For the summer of 2017, this resulted in over 40 clients experiencing paid work or internship opportunities. A college exploration day, in addition to a mentoring day at United Technologies also occurred. BESB VR offers experiential learning opportunities for older students, whereby students who have participated in these programs previously can become camp counselors or facilitators of these events for the new participants.

Objective: BESB VR develops and implements outreach and public education programs for potentially Pre-ETS eligible clients and their parents/guardians.

Strategy: BESB VR Transition Coordinator designs and delivers outreach and public education programs to populations where Pre-ETS eligible clients are likely to be found, such as, but not limited to school districts.

Measure: Documentation of the programs being provided.

BESB VR Update: BESB VR works with the several transition-related groups, focusing on outreach and public education for families about Pre-ETS opportunities and initiatives. These groups include the Transition Task Force, DORS Level Up, Community of Practice, CTAHEAD, Transition Alliance, the five Regional Education Service Centers, as well as the One-Stop Centers and the workforce boards. These collaborations yield events such as the Transition Symposium, the CT Youth Leadership Forum, multiple Regional Transition Expos, an Adaptive Technology Conference, Disability Mentoring Day opportunities and Job Fairs. Many of these groups work diligently and collaboratively on updating educational materials for families as well as school district staff, specific to Pre-ETS related activities and opportunities for successful transition from school to work or post-secondary education.

Objective: BESB VR and the SRC co-sponsor leadership development activities and camps for groups of Pre-ETS eligible clients.

Strategy: The SRC and BESB VR provide co-sponsorship funding for the Youth Leadership Forum, and similar programs if available.

Measure: Documentation of the funds committed.

BESB VR Update: This has been achieved. The SRC has continued its ongoing co-sponsorship of the Youth Leadership Forum annually.

Goal C: Utilize Innovation and Expansion authority to engage in continuous improvement initiatives, to increase access to services and activities that can benefit groups of individuals with visual impairment or legal blindness, to increase access to career information, adaptive technology, self-advocacy, and public awareness of the employment potential of individuals served by BESB VR.

Objective: BESB VR shall provide funding for electronic access to career and news information.

Strategy: Funding provided to have NFB Newslines available to BESB VR clients.

Measure: Documentation of purchase order for NFB Newsline.

BESB VR Update: This has been achieved. In partnership with the National Federation of the Blind of Connecticut, BESB VR has sponsored NFB's Newsline so that clients can access this important service.

Objective: Provide access to the latest adaptive technology devices for clients to try out for assessment purposes.

Strategy: Purchase new adaptive technology devices for the BESB Technology Lab and the Technology Lab at the Southeastern Connecticut Community Center of the Blind.

Measure: Documentation of purchase order for technology devices.

BESB VR Update: This strategy is in progress. A recent addition to the Adaptive Technology Lab in Windsor is a new, portable electronic magnification device that adds to the examples that are available for assessment purposes.

Objective: The SRC utilizes an entity experienced in administering consumer satisfaction surveys to conduct the fiscal year 2016 Consumer Satisfaction Survey and the results are used to develop continuous improvement initiatives.

Strategy: The SRC selects a vendor, reviews the results of the survey, and works with Program staff to implement strategies that address the results and trends identified in the survey.

Measure: Documentation of purchase of survey, Consumer Satisfaction Report received and reviewed with Program staff.

SRC Update: This was achieved. The Center for Public Policy and Social Research at Central Connecticut State University was selected to conduct the Consumer Satisfaction Survey and to analyze the data in comparison to prior years. Results of the survey were utilized to identify areas that needed attention (i.e. transportation and business plan development). In conjunction with BESB VR, strategies for improvement in both areas have been identified and implemented.

Objective: SRC representatives participate in state, regional and national conferences and programs that provide opportunities to increase public awareness of the employment capabilities of BESB VR clients, increase the SRC members knowledge and understanding of the public VR Program, and create opportunities for learning best practices that can develop into new goals and strategies for BESB VR to explore and implement, if applicable.

Strategy: The SRC Chair is provided with information about upcoming conferences, seminars and activities from the BESB Director and designates an SRC member or members to participate and share information with the full membership.

Measure: SRC members attend CSAVR, NCSAB and other national, regional or statewide conferences or seminars that address the components stated in the objective.

BESB VR Update: This was achieved. The Chair of the SRC attended and presented at a national Business Leadership Network conference and also attended the spring, 2017 conferences of CSAVR and NCSAB. The Vice-Chair attended a national conference on technology at California State University at Northridge (CSUN) in 2017.

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

BESB VR Update: Diminishing financial resources have impacted significantly on BESB VR. Reductions in the availability of reallocation funds in combination with reductions in state matching funds has required BESB VR to make difficult staffing decisions in order to align budget projections with anticipated funding levels in future years. The SRC has been working in collaboration with BESB VR to identify strategies for reducing administrative and purchased

service costs with a goal of continuing to serve all eligible individuals in future years within available funding.

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.

BESB VR Update: In addition to seeking out community rehabilitation providers who can financially assume the role of becoming the provider of extended services, BESB VR established the goal to encourage employers to offer natural supports where feasible. BESB VR has also sought to utilize community rehabilitation providers who can access public and private funds for individuals with multiple disabilities in order to secure supported employment placements. In Fiscal Year (FY) 2017, there were two clients who achieved employment outcomes with supported employment services. The funding source for long-term support for both of these situations was the Department of Developmental Services. Community rehabilitation providers were utilized for onsite training in both situations.

BESB VR has also established a goal of participating in Planning and Placement Team meetings early in the transition process to identify the need for supported employment services, and to identify providers, both private and public, that may offer services while a student is preparing to transition from public or private education into employment. The value of this approach is evident in the data that indicates 12 of the 31 clients who were eligible for supported employment services in fiscal year 2017 were youth with disabilities.

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

BESB VR Update: The challenging economy continues to impact on the scope and variety of job placement options available to clients, making these employment opportunities particularly difficult to secure. The availability of extended services for youth with disabilities with BESB VR funds has so far not opened up new opportunities for employment. However, it is hoped that as community rehabilitation providers become increasingly aware of this new option for up to four years of extended services through BESB VR funds that greater priority will be given to working with individuals who may require a more time-intensive job development and job carving approach to secure employment. BESB VR has sufficient supported employment funding available for this purpose and has been in

discussions with community rehabilitation providers to make them aware of this.

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

BESB VR Update: WIOA established new measures of performance for the partner programs to collectively work towards achievement. BESB VR is participating in discussions on the implementation of these new performance measures with the other partners at both the state and the regional level. However, as these are new measures of performance, they will be reported on after baseline measures have been established and each partner program's contribution to those measures has been set. BESB VR assisted 91 individuals to achieve employment outcomes in fiscal year 2017. The average hourly earnings for these individuals were \$19.50 per hour.

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

BESB VR Update: During fiscal year 2017, Innovation and Expansion funding was utilized to cover the cost of the NFB Newsline service. Innovation and Expansion funds were also utilized to cover the cost of the SRC's co-sponsorship of the

Youth Leadership Forum. BESB VR also was a separate co-sponsor of this leadership development camp for transition-age students. Co-sponsorship of a youth symposium for transition-age students was also coordinated with some funding from this reserve.

Innovation and Expansion funding was also utilized to secure the Center for Public Policy and Social Research to conduct and analyze the 2017 consumer satisfaction survey and to report their findings to the SRC for use in developing Program goals and priorities. Additionally, Innovation and Expansion funds were utilized to secure the Center for Public Policy and Social Research to initiate the Comprehensive Needs Assessment. Funding was also utilized to facilitate the participation of the SRC, through its Chair and Vice-Chair to attend national activities, at the conferences of the NCSAB, CSAVR and a national conference on technology at CSUN. The Chair of the Council also attended and presented at a national conference of the Business Leadership Network.

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.

The Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind is committed to providing competitive employment opportunities in integrated settings to all clients of the Vocational Rehabilitation Program. The Program utilizes Title VI, Part B Funds, federal Vocational Rehabilitation Program funds and State matching funds to cover the costs of client placement into supported employment, and ensure that participants are provided with the necessary long-term support to succeed in the competitive labor market.

Supported Employment refers to competitive integrated employment, including customized employment, that is individualized and customized consistent with the strengths, abilities, interests, and informed choice of a client with a most significant disability, and that includes ongoing support services. Supported employment services may be considered for individuals for whom competitive integrated employment has not historically occurred, or for whom competitive integrated employment has been interrupted or intermittent, and where there is a need for extended services after the transition from support provided by the Bureau, in order for the client to perform this work. Supported employment may also be provided in the form of transitional employment services for individuals with the most significant disabilities due to mental illness, in addition to legal blindness or lessened visual acuity.

Supported Employment Services are ongoing support services, including customized employment, and other appropriate services: (A) Organized and made available, singly or in combination, in such a way as to assist an eligible individual to achieve competitive integrated employment; (B) Based on a determination of the needs of an eligible individual, as specified in an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE); and (C) Provided by the Bureau for a period of not more than 24 months, unless under special circumstances the eligible individual and the rehabilitation counselor jointly agree to extend the time to achieve the employment outcome identified in the IPE; and (D) Following transition to extended services, as post-employment services that are unavailable from an extended services provider, and that are necessary to maintain or regain the job placement or advance in employment.

Prior to determining that an applicant is unable to benefit from vocational rehabilitation services, the Vocational Rehabilitation Program must conduct an exploration of the individual's abilities, capabilities, and capacity to perform in competitive integrated work situations. This is accomplished through the use of trial work experiences, which must be provided in competitive employment settings to the maximum extent possible, consistent with the informed choice and rehabilitation needs of the individual. Trial work experiences include supported employment, on-the-job training, and other experiences using realistic integrated work settings. Trial work experiences must be of sufficient variety and over a sufficient period of time for the Bureau to determine that there is sufficient evidence to conclude that

the individual cannot benefit from the provision of vocational rehabilitation services in terms of a competitive integrated employment outcome. The Vocational Rehabilitation Program will provide appropriate supports, including assistive technology devices and services and personal assistance services to accommodate the rehabilitation needs of the individual during the trial work experiences.

For individuals who have been found eligible for services, an IPE shall be developed as soon as possible, but not later than a deadline of 90 days after the date of the determination of eligibility, unless the Bureau and the eligible individual agree to an extension of that deadline to a specific date by which the IPE shall be completed. If the Bureau is operating under an order of selection, this timeframe will apply to each eligible individual to whom the Bureau is able to provide services.

The Bureau will conduct an assessment for determining vocational rehabilitation needs, if appropriate, for each eligible individual or, if the Bureau is operating under an order of selection, for each eligible individual to whom the Bureau is able to provide services. The purpose of the assessment is to determine the employment outcome, and the nature and scope of vocational rehabilitation services, including the need for supported employment services, to be included in the IPE. The IPE will be designed to achieve the specific employment outcome that is selected by the individual consistent with the individual's unique strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities, interests, and informed choice, and results in competitive,

integrated employment. The IPE will be amended, as necessary, by the individual or, as appropriate, the individual's representative, in collaboration with a qualified vocational rehabilitation counselor employed by the Bureau if there are substantive changes in the employment outcome, the vocational rehabilitation services to be provided, or the providers of the vocational rehabilitation services. For a student with a disability, the IPE will consider the student's Individualized Education Program or 504 services.

For a supported employment outcome to be considered, the employment must be within an integrated work setting in the community that is at a location where the employee interacts with other persons who are not individuals with disabilities (not including supervisory personnel or individuals who are providing services to such employee) to the same extent that individuals who are not individuals with disabilities and who are in comparable positions interact with other persons, and that, as appropriate, presents opportunities for advancement that are similar to those for other employees who are not individuals with disabilities and who have similar positions.

The outcome must also be for paid employment where the client will be compensated at a wage that is not less than the rate specified in Section 6(a)(1) of the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 (29 U.S.C. 206(a)(1)) or the rate specified in the applicable State of Connecticut minimum wage law. The wage should not be less than the customary rate paid by the employer for the same or similar work performed by other employees who are not individuals with disabilities, and who are similarly situated in similar occupations by the same

employer and who have similar training, experience, and skills. The client will also have access to the same level of employer-offered benefits that are available to similarly situated employees within the company.

For a client for whom an employment outcome in a supported employment setting has been determined to be appropriate, the IPE or subsequent amendment developed to include supported employment must identify: (A) The supported employment services to be provided by the Vocational Rehabilitation Program; (B) The extended services needed by the eligible individual, which may include natural supports; (C) The source of extended services, or to the extent that the source of the extended services cannot be identified at the time of the development of the IPE, a description of the basis for concluding that there is a reasonable expectation that such a source will become available; (D) Periodic monitoring to ensure that the individual is making satisfactory progress toward meeting the weekly work requirement established in the IPE by the time of transition to extended services; (E) The coordination of services provided under an IPE with services provided under other individualized plans established under other federal or state programs; (F) The extent that job skills training is provided, and identification that the training will be provided at the job site; and (G) Placement in an integrated setting for the maximum number of hours possible based on the unique strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities, interests and informed choice of the individual.

2. The timing of transition to extended services.

Extended Services in supported employment refer to ongoing support services and other appropriate services that are: (A) Organized or made available, singly or in combination, in such a way as to assist an eligible individual in maintaining supported employment; (B) Based on the needs of an eligible individual as specified in an IPE; (C) Provided by a state agency, a private nonprofit organization, employer, or any other appropriate resource, after an individual has made the transition from support provided by the Bureau, and; (D) Provided to youth with the most significant disabilities by the Bureau for a period of time as established by policies adopted by the Bureau, not to exceed 4 years.

Ongoing Support Services in supported employment are identified based on a determination by the Vocational Rehabilitation Program of the individual's needs as specified in an IPE, and are furnished by the Vocational Rehabilitation Program from the time of job placement until transition to extended services, unless post-employment services are provided following transition, and thereafter by one or more extended service providers throughout the individual's term of employment in a particular job placement or multiple placements if those placements are being provided under a program of transitional employment. These services include an assessment of employment stability and provision of

specific services or the coordination of services at or away from the worksite that are needed to maintain stability based on: (A) at a minimum, twice-monthly monitoring at the worksite of each individual in supported employment; or (B) if under special circumstances, especially at the request of the individual, the IPE provides for off-site monitoring, twice monthly meetings with the individual, consisting of:

(1) Any particularized assessment supplementary to the comprehensive assessment of rehabilitation needs; (2) The provision of skilled job trainers who accompany the individual for intensive job skill training at the work site; (3) Job development and training; (4) Social skills training; (5) Regular observation or supervision of the individual; (6) Follow-up services including regular contact with the employers, the individuals, the parents, family members, guardians, advocates or authorized representatives of the individuals, and other suitable professional and informed advisors, in order to reinforce and stabilize the job placement; (7) Facilitation of natural supports at the worksite; (8) Any other service identified in the scope of vocational rehabilitation services in Bureau policy.

Certifications

Name of designated State agency or designated State unit, as appropriate Department of Rehabilitation Services,

Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind, Vocational Rehabilitation Program

Name of designated State agency **Department of Rehabilitation Services**

Full Name of Authorized Representative: **Brian S. Sigman**

Title of Authorized Representative: **Director of Education and Rehabilitation, BESB**

States must provide written and signed certifications that:

1. The designated State agency or designated State unit (as appropriate) listed above 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*, and its supplement under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act. Yes**

2. As a condition for the receipt of Federal funds under title I of the Rehabilitation Act for the provision of VR services, the designated State agency listed above agrees to operate and administer the State VR Services Program in accordance with the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan , the Rehabilitation Act, and all applicable regulations , 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; Yes

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* , the Rehabilitation Act, and all applicable regulations , 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; Yes**

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; Yes

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

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

7. The Authorized Representative listed above 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; Yes

8. The Authorized Representative listed above has the authority to submit the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and the supplement for Supported Employment services; Yes

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. Yes

Footnotes

Certification 1 Footnotes

*** Public Law 113-128.**

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

Certification 2 Footnotes

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

**** No funds under title 1 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.**

***** 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 3485; and the State VR Services Program regulations.**

Certification 3 Footnotes

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

**** Applicable regulations, in part, include the citations in *** under Certification 2 footnotes**

Additional Comments on the Certifications from the State

Certification Regarding Lobbying — Vocational Rehabilitation

Certification for Contracts, Grants, Loans, and Cooperative Agreements The undersigned certifies, to the best of his or her knowledge and belief, that:

(1) No Federal appropriated funds have been paid or will be paid, by or on behalf of the undersigned, to any person for influencing or attempting to influence an officer or employee of an agency, a Member of Congress, an officer or employee of Congress, or an employee of a Member of Congress in connection with the awarding of any Federal contract, the

making of any Federal grant, the making of any Federal loan, the entering into of any cooperative agreement, and the extension, continuation, renewal, amendment, or modification of any Federal contract, grant, loan, or cooperative agreement.

(2) If any funds other than Federal appropriated funds have been paid or will be paid to any person for influencing or attempting to influence an officer or employee of any agency, a Member of Congress, an officer or employee of Congress, or an employee of a Member of Congress in connection with this Federal contract, grant, loan, or cooperative agreement, the undersigned shall complete and submit Standard Form-LLL, "Disclosure of Lobbying Activities," in accordance with its instructions.

(3) The undersigned shall require that the language of this certification be included in the award documents for all subawards at all tiers (including subcontracts, subgrants, and contracts under grants, loans, and cooperative agreements) and that all subrecipients shall certify and disclose accordingly. This certification is a material representation of fact upon which reliance was placed when this transaction was made or entered into. Submission of this certification is a prerequisite for making or entering into this transaction imposed by section 1352, title 31, U.S. Code. Any person who fails to file the required certification shall be subject to a civil penalty of not less than \$10,000 and not more than \$100,000 for each such failure.

Statement for Loan Guarantees and Loan Insurance

The undersigned states, to the best of his or her knowledge and belief, that:

If any funds have been paid or will be paid to any person for influencing or attempting to influence an officer or employee of any agency, a Member of Congress, an officer or employee of Congress, or an employee of a Member of Congress in connection with this commitment providing for the United States to insure or guarantee a loan, the undersigned shall complete and submit Standard Form-LLL, "Disclosure of Lobbying Activities," in accordance with its instructions. Submission of this statement is a prerequisite for making or entering into this transaction imposed by section 1352, title 31, U.S. Code. Any person who fails to file the required statement shall be subject to a civil penalty of not less than \$10,000 and not more than \$100,000 for each such failure.

Applicant's Organization Department of Rehabilitation Services, Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind

Full Name of Authorized Representative: Brian S. Sigman

Title of Authorized Representative: Director of Education and Rehabilitation, Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind

SF LLL Form – Disclosure of Lobbying Activities (only if applicable)

(<http://www2.ed.gov/fund/grant/apply/appforms/appforms.html>). If applicable, please print, sign, and email to MAT_OCTAE@ed.gov

Certification Regarding Lobbying — Supported Employment

Certification for Contracts, Grants, Loans, and Cooperative Agreements The undersigned certifies, to the best of his or her knowledge and belief, that:

(1) No Federal appropriated funds have been paid or will be paid, by or on behalf of the undersigned, to any person for influencing or attempting to influence an officer or employee of an agency, a Member of Congress, an officer or employee of Congress, or an employee of a Member of Congress in connection with the awarding of any Federal contract, the making of any Federal grant, the making of any Federal loan, the entering into of any cooperative agreement, and the extension, continuation, renewal, amendment, or modification of any Federal contract, grant, loan, or cooperative agreement.

(2) If any funds other than Federal appropriated funds have been paid or will be paid to any person for influencing or attempting to influence an officer or employee of any agency, a Member of Congress, an officer or employee of Congress, or an employee of a Member of Congress in connection with this Federal contract, grant, loan, or cooperative agreement, the undersigned shall complete and submit Standard Form-LLL, "Disclosure of Lobbying Activities," in accordance with its instructions.

(3) The undersigned shall require that the language of this certification be included in the award documents for all subawards at all tiers (including subcontracts, subgrants, and contracts under grants, loans, and cooperative agreements) and that all subrecipients shall certify and disclose accordingly. This certification is a material

representation of fact upon which reliance was placed when this transaction was made or entered into. Submission of this certification is a prerequisite for making or entering into this transaction imposed by section 1352, title 31, U.S. Code. Any person who fails to file the required certification shall be subject to a civil penalty of not less than \$10,000 and not more than \$100,000 for each such failure.

Statement for Loan Guarantees and Loan Insurance

The undersigned states, to the best of his or her knowledge and belief, that:

If any funds have been paid or will be paid to any person for influencing or attempting to influence an officer or employee of any agency, a Member of Congress, an officer or employee of Congress, or an employee of a Member of Congress in connection with this commitment providing for the United States to insure or guarantee a loan, the undersigned shall complete and submit Standard Form-LLL, "Disclosure of Lobbying Activities," in accordance with its instructions. Submission of this statement is a prerequisite for making or entering into this transaction imposed by section 1352, title 31, U.S. Code. Any person who fails to file the required statement shall be subject to a civil penalty of not less than \$10,000 and not more than \$100,000 for each such failure.

Applicant's Organization Department of Rehabilitation Services, Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind

Full Name of Authorized Representative: Brian S. Sigman

Title of Authorized Representative: Director of Education and Rehabilitation, Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind

SF LLL Form – Disclosure of Lobbying Activities (only if applicable)

(<http://www2.ed.gov/fund/grant/apply/appforms/appforms.html>).

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:

1. Public Comment on Policies and Procedures:

The designated State agency assures it will comply with all statutory and regulatory requirements for public participation in the VR Services Portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan, as required by section 101(a)(16)(A) of the Rehabilitation Act.

2. Submission of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and Its Supplement:

The designated State unit assures it will comply with all requirements pertaining to the submission and revisions of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement for the State Supported Employment Services program, as required by sections 101(a)(1), (22), (23), and 606(a) of the Rehabilitation Act; section 102 of WIOA in the case of the submission of a unified plan; section 103 of WIOA in the case of a submission of a Combined State Plan; 34 CFR 76.140.

3. Administration of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan:

The designated State agency or designated State unit, as appropriate, assures it will comply with the requirements related to:

a. the establishment of the designated State agency and designated State unit, as required by section 101(a)(2) of the Rehabilitation Act.

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 (B) has established a State Rehabilitation Council

c. consultations regarding the administration of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan, in

accordance with section 101(a)(16)(B) of the Rehabilitation Act.

d. the financial participation by the State, or if the State so elects, by the State and local agencies, to provide the amount of the non-Federal share of the cost of carrying out the VR program in accordance with section 101(a)(3).

e. 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.

The designated State agency allows for the local administration of VR funds No

f. the shared funding and administration of joint programs, in accordance with section 101(a)(2)(A)(ii) of the Rehabilitation Act.

The designated State agency allows for the shared funding and administration of joint programs: No

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? See Section 2 of this VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan. No

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.

- i. all required methods of administration, as required by section 101(a)(6) of the Rehabilitation Act .**
- j. the requirements for the comprehensive system of personnel development, as set forth in section 101(a)(7) of the Rehabilitation Act.**
- k. the compilation and submission to the Commissioner of statewide assessments, estimates, State goals and priorities, strategies, and progress reports, as appropriate, and as required by sections 101(a)(15), 105(c)(2), and 606(b)(8) of the Rehabilitation Act.**
- l. the reservation and use of a portion of the funds allotted to the State under section 110 of the Rehabilitation Act for the development and implementation of innovative approaches to expand and improve the provision of VR services to individuals with disabilities, particularly individuals with the most significant disabilities.**
- 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:

- a. comply with all requirements regarding information and referral services in accordance with sections 101(a)(5)(D) and (20) of the Rehabilitation Act.**
- b. impose no duration of residence requirement as part of determining an individual's eligibility for VR services or that**

excludes from services under the plan any individual who is present in the State in accordance with section 101(a)(12) of the Rehabilitation Act .

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?

Agency will provide the full range of services described above Yes

d. determine whether comparable services and benefits are available to the individual in accordance with section 101(a)(8) of the Rehabilitation Act.

e. comply with the requirements for the development of an individualized plan for employment in accordance with section 102(b) of the Rehabilitation Act.

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.

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.

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.

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

j. with respect to students with disabilities, the State,

i. has developed and will implement,

A. strategies to address the needs identified in the assessments; and

B. strategies to achieve the goals and priorities identified by the State, to improve and expand vocational rehabilitation services for students with disabilities on a statewide basis; and

ii. has developed and will implement strategies to provide pre-employment transition services (sections 101(a)(15) and 101(a)(25)).

5. Program Administration for the Supported Employment Title VI Supplement:

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.

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.

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:

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.

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:

a. The designated State agency assures that it will provide supported employment services as defined in section 7(39) of the Rehabilitation Act.

b. The designated State agency assures that:

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

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.

Additional Comments on the Assurances from the State