# Connecticut PYs 2020-2023 - Vocational Rehabilitation Program (Blind)

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## Program-Specific Requirements for Vocational Rehabilitation (Blind)

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

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

### a. Input of State Rehabilitation Council

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

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

**BESB VR Response: The State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) for the Vocational Rehabilitation Program (BESB VR) at the Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind (BESB) 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 Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (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 BESB VR service recipients for fiscal year (FY) 2019. The purpose of the survey was to evaluate the levels of satisfaction with the services that clients received from BESB VR. The complete survey report is posted in the BESB VR section of the agency website (**<https://portal.ct.gov/aginganddisability>**).**

**From the results of the Consumer Satisfaction Survey, CPPSR found that 93% of respondents would recommend BESB VR services to a friend. On a ten-point rating scale, in comparison to the prior year’s survey findings, satisfaction levels increased in the extent to which clients felt that BESB services met their needs (8.12, up 0.82), overall satisfaction with services (8.22, up 0.67), the extent to which clients felt services met their IPE’s employment goal (8.27, up 0.64), and the extent to which BESB services met clients’ expectations (8.08, up 0.58).**

**In FY 2019, increases in counselor satisfaction ratings occurred in their ability to help clients identify career goals (8.78, up 1.92), counselor professionalism (9.19, up 1.32), counselors’ recognition of clients’ special employment needs (8.65, up 1.12), counselors’ ability to help clients develop an IPE (8.46, up 1.05), counselors’ understanding of clients’ vocational rehabilitation rights (7.88, up 0.91), and counselor knowledge (8.33, up 0.64).**

**In comparison to the FY 2018 results, three services showed an increase in mean satisfaction ratings in FY 2019. Skills Training Services had the largest increase in client satisfaction (9.25, up 1.5), followed by Reader Services (10.0, up 1.29), and Higher Education Training (8.0, up 0.57).**

**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 2018 Consumer Satisfaction Survey, the SRC recommended that the survey be done much sooner after an individual has completed services, rather than conducting the survey only once per year. It was felt that conducting the survey more often would increase the rate of participation and also afford clients the opportunity to offer responses for services that were more recently completed. This approach was also seen as a way to enable BESB VR to respond to any concerns as they were emerging throughout the year rather than waiting until the completion of the entire fiscal year to learn of trends in satisfaction levels. Effective with the FY 2020 survey, this new methodology will be utilized.**

**The SRC also recommended that the survey instrument should be updated to align the questions more closely with the priorities identified in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act and to explore if the survey could be administered using newer survey technologies rather than relying on a telephone survey approach, with a goal of increasing the level of participation in the survey. A workgroup of the SRC was formed in FY 2019 to review the survey instrument with a plan for recommending potential changes in the questions and formatting of the survey for the full SRC’s consideration during FY 2020.**

**The SRC further concluded that some of the responses provided by the FY 2018 survey participants suggested a lack of clarity with the Vocational Rehabilitation policies. It was recommended that the Client Services Handbook be updated to address this. This recommendation was implemented in FY 2019 and the updated handbook is available on the agency website in the BESB VR section. It is also provided to every client at the time of eligibility determination.**

**The SRC also recommended that strategies be utilized for ensuring adequate caseload coverage when vacancies occur, such as seeking approval for a retiree to cover a caseload temporarily and seeking existing staff who are available to work additional hours to help maintain caseload coverage until vacant positions are filled. BESB VR agreed with these recommendations as well and would plan to seek such approvals when BESB VR Counselor vacancies occur in the future.**

**SRC Recommendation 3: Include a Vocational Rehabilitation Client Success Story at each meeting of the Council.**

**BESB VR Response: BESB VR agreed with this recommendation. During FY 2019, the SRC continued its initiative for BESB VR whereby a standing agenda item for SRC meetings consisted of a “VR Success Story”, in the form of a presentation by a BESB VR client who has achieved an employment outcome. The 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 reduced level of funding received through the federal reallotment process in FY 2017 and FY 2018 in comparison to prior years, the SRC formed a joint workgroup with designated members of the Advisory Board for Persons who are Blind or Visually Impaired. The workgroup was charged with making recommendations to the full membership of the SRC on strategies that could be utilized in an effort to stay out of an order of selection. What became evident to the workgroup members through their deliberations was that program costs were outpacing the availability of funding. While carry forward federal funds helped to sustain the Vocational Rehabilitation Program, with the substantial decline in federal reallotment funds in FY 2017 and FY 2018, the workgroup members concluded that difficult decisions would be required of the SRC if the goal for BESB VR was to continue to serve all eligible individuals into future years.**

**The SRC reviewed the proposals of the Order of Selection Workgroup, which included recommendations to modify policies in several purchased service categories that incur some of the higher program costs. Among these categories was post-secondary education. The SRC deliberated on using the State of Connecticut Community College System rate as the baseline for determining the level of funding for circumstances where course credits earned through the community college system could be applied towards the degree requirements. The SRC also recommended that formalized standards for reviewing and approving client requests to receive funding for graduate school be articulated in policy.**

**The policies for residential personal adjustment training programs were also reviewed. It was noted that these programs extend over several months and that costs for some programs can reach $8,000 per month. While the SRC recognized the importance and value of these services, it was also acknowledged that continuation of policies that allow for an open-ended, long-term provision of these types of services could not be sustained in future years for BESB VR to serve all eligible individuals. The SRC recommended several revisions to these policies, including the setting of a standard time frame for funding residential programs and clearly defining conditions whereby the timeframe can be extended based on individual client circumstances.**

**The SRC also recognized that as new adaptive technologies become available, there is a trend toward selling monthly service plans to support the interactive features of these devices. While such options often come with lower costs for the purchase of the device, it requires a long-term investment of funds to maintain the interactive features of the device (such as online or cellular connectivity).  Additionally, the expansion of accessible apps for mainstream devices such as Smartphones has created scenarios where BESB VR is being asked to maintain the monthly cellular service plans for clients who wish to acquire Smartphones. The SRC recommended that policies clearly articulate that ongoing service plan costs are not the responsibility of BESB VR.**

**These proposed policy updates were put forth for public comment and were subsequently approved by the SRC and the Advisory Board, and were implemented in FY 2019.**

**SRC Recommendation 6: 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 the Rehabilitation Services Administration and the United States Department of Labor.**

**BESB VR Response: The following comments were received during the public comment period. Responses from BESB VR follow each public comment. The SRC has deliberated on the public comments received and the proposed updates to the BESB VR section of the Unified State Plan. The SRC has unanimously approved this final draft for submission to the Rehabilitation Services Administration and the United States Department of Labor.**

**Comment: One commenter recommended that BESB VR contain the level of funding reserved for administrative overhead costs and reserve sufficient funding for client services versus staff salaries. The commenter also recommended that there should be a limit established for the number of clients per VR Counselor caseload.**

**BESB VR Response: Salaries and fringe benefits are not variables that BESB VR can alter. Collective bargaining agreements and state administered fringe benefits are the determining factors for these costs, and a formula approved by the U.S. Department of Education determines the amount of indirect costs to the federal VR grant. BESB VR has already reduced staffing levels through attrition and staff transfers to contain administrative costs as much as practical, and now has only 18 federally funded staff, compared to 24 federally funded staff when the prior state plan was completed in FY 2016. It would be difficult to maintain adequate service levels with additional reductions in this category, particularly if there is an expectation to maintain manageable caseload levels. While BESB VR recognizes the need for balanced and manageable caseloads, imposing fixed levels on case load sizes could result in some clients being placed on a waiting list until the caseloads fell below that level. Establishing a waiting list would only be permissible if BESB VR were in an order of selection. It should be noted that the average caseload size has decreased from 102 in FY 2016 to the current level of 84.**

**Comment: One commenter commended the quality of rehabilitation technology training received from BESB VR. The commenter further stated that more funding should be directed to serving clients, citing the cost of the large print calendar production as one area where savings could be achieved to put towards other VR services.**

**BESB VR Response: BESB VR appreciates the positive feedback regarding the quality of rehabilitation technology training that was provided. BESB VR has sufficient funding to serve all eligible individuals. Budgetary projections contained within this document are not proposed caps on expenditures, but rather estimates of how much funding will be necessary for purchased services in future years based upon analysis of prior year trends. BESB VR funds are not utilized for the design and production of the large print calendars. However, the cost in both actual dollars and staff time necessary to prepare the calendar for production has been a consideration that may result in a different approach toward the provision of large print calendars in the future.**

**Comment: One commenter stated that the BESB VR policy requirement for clients to obtain an additional level of approval to participate in more than 3 months of attendance at residential adjustment to blindness training programs creates an administrative burden on BESB VR staff, as well as the clients and the staff at the residential programs. The commenter further stated that these residential programs typically provide for a much longer time period to deliver the full scope of their curricula, varying in both cost and duration from program to program. The commenter recommended that other variables, such as total cost for the full program be considered instead of imposing a 3-month duration on initial approval to attend the residential program.**

**BESB VR Response: The State Rehabilitation Council and the Advisory Board for Persons who are Blind or Visually Impaired each deliberated on the proposed policy revisions, and a duly noticed public comment period was provided prior to their mutual approval of the policy change. It would be at the discretion of the State Rehabilitation Council and the Advisory Board for Persons who are Blind or Visually Impaired to decide if new deliberations on the provisions of this policy are desired.**

**Comment: One commenter stated that efforts should be undertaken to encourage transition-aged students to be more proactive early in the transition process to increase independence and critical thinking. Examples such as having the students provide evaluations of their participation at job fairs, expanding mentoring opportunities, offering peer-to-peer support networking, and leadership development activities were recommended. The use of technology would be instrumental for many of these activities, in part to overcome barriers imposed by limited transportation options. Development of BESB sponsored activities was emphasized. Additionally, the commenter recommended that personnel, such as para-professionals or job coaches, should receive training in the most meaningful and effective communication approaches with BESB clients.**

**BESB VR Response: BESB VR proposes to amend draft Goal B, Objective 2 to encompass these recommendations for transition-aged students. With revisions, the Objective would become:**

**“Pre-ETS clients and their parents or guardians are provided timely notice through the Educational Projects Coordinator or their assigned VR Counselor of BESB-sponsored, as well as BESB endorsed external opportunities that promote the development of self-determination and self-advocacy skills.”**

**The new Strategy would become:**

**“BESB VR Counselors and the Educational Projects Coordinator working with the Pre-ETS clients shall develop initiatives, and also distribute information on existing initiatives, that focus on peer-to-peer support networking, mentoring matches to individuals with blindness who are employed in a wide-range of careers, job shadowing experiences, paid employment, internships, college preparatory programs, technology training programs, life skills programs (including work life balance) and related career development programs.”**

**The new Measure would become:**

**“Documentation of the services being provided to clients in each of the specific categories identified in the Strategy section.”**

**In reference to the recommendation to provide training to personnel, such as para-professionals or job coaches in the most meaningful and effective communication approaches with BESB clients, BESB VR has provided and shall continue to offer these types of training opportunities, with particular emphasis on the training and retraining of staff employed by the community rehabilitation programs that deliver contracted vocational services to clients served by BESB VR.**

**Comment: One commenter recommended, that in terms of career planning, to ensure that people who are blind, especially youth, gain real work experiences. This is also important for individuals who must change careers due to vision loss as they may have been limited to just one type of job before losing vision. The commenter also stressed the importance of providing training in the use of mainstream technology, as many of these individuals may not be familiar with how to use basic technology devices that would be necessary to compete in the labor market. The commenter also stressed the importance of providing resources that would enable these individuals to keep current with advances in technology.**

**BESB VR Response: The opportunity to participate in real work experiences through summer youth work opportunities offered through the American Job Centers as well as through community rehabilitation providers is an integral component of Pre-ETS services. Additionally, for clients served by BESB VR, there are opportunities for paid internships, on-the-job training arrangements and work assessments at employer locations included in the vocational rehabilitation process. VR Counselors assist clients in registering for services offered through the American Job Centers to access employment and training opportunities. The American Job Centers also offer classes in the use of some mainstream technologies that clients can participate in. However, much of the training in mainstream technology has required an individualized approach, as the skills and adaptive technology needs of each client vary. It has proven to be challenging to find approaches that successfully provide for technology training in group settings that can benefit large numbers of clients. The State Rehabilitation Council is exploring how other states are addressing this critical need area and there are plans to assess whether models in use in other states can be replicated for clients served in BESB VR.**

#### 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;

**BESB VR Response: BESB VR 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

**BESB VR Response: Not applicable.**

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

**BESB VR Response: 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;

**BESB VR Response: BESB is the designated state Vocational Rehabilitation unit for individuals who are blind within the Department of Aging and Disability Services, 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 2019 BESB received $154,884 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 programs’ 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 has served as an appointed member of the BESB State 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.**

**The Bureau is also in a cooperative agreement with the Department of Social Services (DSS) to ensure that recipients of Medicaid are aware of the services that are available through BESB VR, including the provision of information and referral services.**

**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 BESB VR Counselor works closely with DDS to establish a strong working relationship and a close collaboration of services with the DDS case manager.**

**BESB VR 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, acquired brain injury, 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;

**BESB VR Response: 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 receive specialized adaptive equipment to increase their access to communication. Since the inception of this program in 2012, a total of 94 individuals have received services, with the provision of 322 adaptive communication devices distributed. In addition, a low-interest loan program is available to assist clients who desire to acquire adaptive equipment that is not vocationally related, or who may need a short-term loan to cover the cost of repairs to personally owned devices.**

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

**BESB VR Response: Being a part of the Statewide Workforce Development System, the BESB VR has access to the full range of programs carried out through the Department of Agriculture.**

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

**BESB VR Response: 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.

**BESB VR Response: 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 process. The Department also has established a fee for service contract model with community rehabilitation providers across the state that enables BESB VR to purchase services at consistent pricing levels, making budget forecasting a more consistent and reliable process. The agency also utilizes state use contracts made available through the Department of Administrative Services for services that have been competitively procured for statewide agency use. Examples include interpreting services for individuals who are deaf and deafblind, and braille transcription services to convert books into braille formats.**

### d. Coordination with Education Officials

Describe:

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

**BESB VR Response: BESB VR 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. The Department of Aging and Disability Services (the designated state agency for BESB VR and the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services VR Program) has a formal interagency agreement (Memorandum of Understanding - MOU) with the State Department of Education (SDE) that details the roles and responsibilities of Connecticut’s VR programs and SDE in the transition process. This formal interagency agreement was enacted on November 17, 2017.**

**At the direct service level, BESB VR 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. BESB VR Counselor involvement may begin as early as age 14, with referrals to the VR Program to initiate the application for VR services process. These referrals are most frequently initiated by the Education Consultants of the Bureau’s Children’s Services Program and Teachers of Students with Visual Impairments that work directly for school districts. Pre-Employment transition services may be initiated at the age of 16. Pre-Employment transition services clients are assigned to one of the two BESB VR Counselors that are exclusively dedicated to serving these clients who are potentially eligible or who have been found eligible for services. Assignments are based on geographic location of the client. The BESB VR Counselors provide and coordinate the full range of pre-employment transition services to enable the students on their caseloads to gain exposure to careers through real work experiences, discussions with mentors who are blind, job shadowing, informational interviews and internships. Exploring post-secondary programs that can lead to credentialing in careers of interest are also coordinated by the Counselors.**

**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;

**BESB VR Response: As identified in the formal interagency agreement, BESB VR 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. BESB VR staff makes information available on transition initiatives, such as mentoring opportunities, independent living training programs, and work experiences that may be of interest to students who are blind or visually impaired. The Children’s Services Program of the Bureau 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. In FY 2019, over 200 school district staff participated in the Fall Inservice Training Series sponsored by the agency.**

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

**BESB VR Response: The Vocational Rehabilitation Program’s Educational Projects Coordinator serves on the Statewide Transition Task Force, most recently joining the Steering Committee for this group. The Statewide Transition Task Force supports the Connecticut State Department of Education in its efforts to inform and guide students with disabilities, families, school districts, and community organizations to facilitate the progression from school to post-school activities, including postsecondary education, vocational education, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, independent living, and community participation. The Steering Committee maintains the Mission Statement & Guiding Principles of the task force, develops committee activities and projects, creates and facilitates workgroups, and recommends outside experts to assist with the designated activities and projects.**

**The Education Projects Coordinator also participates in the Connecticut Secondary Transition Symposium which brings students and their families together with educators and other professionals to improve secondary transition programming and services for students with disabilities. The 5th annual symposium, with the theme of "Every Voice Matters", continued to build the capacity of educators and other professionals, in partnership with middle and high school students with disabilities and their families, to help ensure successful post-school outcomes. Participants learned about a variety of programs and resources to support students who are transitioning to adult life. The symposium included sessions specifically for students making college and career choices.**

**The Connecticut Transition Community of Practice is another collaborative effort that the BESB VR Education Projects Coordinator participates in. The group brings multiple stakeholders together to collaborate and share ongoing secondary transition information, resources, activities and events in a centralized location that is accessible to all students, families, and statewide transition teams. The resources assist students, families and others in making informed decisions to achieve personal success including education, meaningful employment, self-sufficiency, and community access and involvement.**

**Per the Memorandum of Understanding with the State Department of Education (SDE), staff from SDE assist staff from BESB VR to connect with the individual Local Education Agencies (LEAs) to assure that Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) developed by LEAs for youth with disabilities aged 16 or over include plans for the provision of educationally related transition services as defined in 34 C.F.R. 361.22(b)(4) and 34 C.F.R. 300.43. The educationally related transition services include activities identified by the LEAs that are based on the child's needs, consideration of the child's preferences, and are designed to facilitate movement from school to post-secondary activities, including employment. Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors from BESB VR are actively involved participants in the Planning and Placement Team meetings to assist with the formulation of transition goals and activities. To the maximum extent possible, the BESB VR Counselors also incorporate these transition goals into the IPE of the client to align these transition activities between the LEA and BESB VR.**

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

**BESB VR Response: Through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the State Department of Education (SDE), 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 Education Projects 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.**

**As detailed in the MOU, at no cost to BESB VR, SDE provides general supervision of the implementation of the IDEA's requirements for special education and related services to ensure a free appropriate public education for children and youth with disabilities. SDE coordinates with BESB VR in disseminating information to LEAs regarding effective, results-based practices for preparing students with disabilities for post-secondary education, vocational training, competitive employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation. SDE further collaborates with BESB to disseminate information about and train school personnel on how to coordinate services for students with disabilities as they transition to life after high school, including those students interested in supported employment. For each student with a disability with an IEP or Section 504 Plan that the LEAs have reason to believe may pursue subminimum wage employment following their exit from the school system, SDE assures that the LEAs document the provision of transition services in accordance with the documentation requirements of 34 C.F.R. 397.30(b)(1), including, at a minimum, the child's name, a description of the service or activity completed, the dated signature of the responsible educational official documenting the completion of the required service or activity, and the dated signature of the responsible educational official who transmits the documentation of the provision of transition service.  SDE further ensures that none of the LEAs enter into contracts with an entity for the purpose of operating a program under which a youth with a disability is engaged in work compensated at a subminimum wage.**

**Per the MOU, BESB VR collaborates with the SDE in coordinating, providing, and documenting the provision of pre-employment transition services to students with disabilities. BESB VR provides vocational rehabilitation services to students and youth who meet the eligibility criteria. BESB VR staff assist the LEAs in providing transition planning for students with disabilities that facilitates the development and implementation of their IEPs and also work with the LEAS to develop an Individual Plan for Employment (IPE) for each student eligible for BESB VR services before the student exits high school. BESB staff also provides consultation and technical assistance to assist the LEAs in planning for the transition of eligible students. For students with disabilities who seek subminimum wage from employers who hold special wage certificates under the Fair Labor Standards Act, 29 U.S.C. 214 (c), BESB VR offers pre-employment transition services, and an offer to apply for vocational rehabilitation services. If the individual was found eligible for vocational rehabilitation services and had an IPE, but was unable to achieve the employment outcome specified in the IPE, BESB VR can provide documentation of this outcome after obtaining a signed release of information.**

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

**BESB VR Response: 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 the BESB Children’s Services Program to the BESB VR Program 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. This system is unique in that it allows for BESB VR to be aware of and track every child in Connecticut who is legally blind or visually impaired and who is participating in public education.**

**The BESB VR Counselors work with the students, educators, parents or 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 the MOU with SDE, staff from that agency assist BESB with the distribution of information for LEAs to provide to students who may benefit from BESB VR services. SDE staff also provides information about the availability of BESB VR services to the LEAs to share with school personnel.  SDE further assists the LEAs in providing outreach and identification of students with disabilities who are in need of transition services and pre-employment transition services that can be offered by BESB VR.**

### e. Cooperative Agreements with Private Nonprofit Organizations

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

**BESB VR Response: BESB uses a wide range of contractual agreements with accompanying fee schedules that have been established through a competitive bidding process by the Department of Aging and Disability Services, the designated state agency for the Blind and General VR programs. This provides a statewide comprehensive set of program options and services to choose from. Thirteen nonprofit 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 trial work experiences, work readiness training, community placement opportunities and job coaching, among other related services.**

**BESB staff members conduct training seminars for staff of the community rehabilitation providers 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.**

**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, Maine, Arkansas, Maryland, Minnesota, and Massachusetts.**

**Through a fee agreement with the National Federation of the Blind, the NFB Newsline is available for clients to access news, career information, and current events. This collaboration includes the National Federation of the Blind of Connecticut, which provides funding to cover a portion of the overall cost.**

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

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

**BESB VR Response: 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 BESB VR 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 Aging and Disability Services, to work with community providers to purchase supported employment services prior to the transition to the provider of extended services.**

**BESB 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, BESB VR continues to work with the community rehabilitation providers throughout the state that are contracted by the designated state agency for the provision of these services.**

**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. BESB VR 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 VR for a client who is seeking a job placement with supported employment services.**

### g. Coordination with Employers

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

#### 1. VR Services; and

**BESB VR Response: 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 BESB VR, while at the same time avoiding a duplication of efforts. BESB VR is very aware of and sensitive to the time constraints of employers and seeks to work in collaboration with other partners in the Workforce Development System that also perform employer outreach to reduce the potential for overlap in job development efforts.**

**The Vocational Rehabilitation Counseling Coordinator serves as the BESB VR team lead for outreach to employers and the gathering of job lead information. This includes establishing relationships with employers that results in being added to their job announcement distribution lists in order to then share this information with the BESB VR Counselors. The BESB VR Counseling Coordinator also serves as the point of contact with the National Employment Team (NET), administered through the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR). The NET utilizes a business approach to facilitate outreach to larger employers that have a presence across multiple states. The NET is a valuable resource to develop relationships with these national companies, where access to Human Resources staff at the state level is less readily available. The NET coordinator puts the business’s local human resources representative in contact with the 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.**

**BESB VR Counselors are members of the Business Service Teams within each of the five workforce regions, sharing job leads and learning of the employer outreach efforts of other members of these regional teams. Employer outreach activities performed by the BESB VR Counselors are tracked for reporting purposes.**

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

**BESB VR Response: 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 BESB VR to learn about a wide variety of careers. This is particularly important for transition-age youth clients served by BESB VR, who may otherwise have very limited exposure to actual job sites during their 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 a former Chair of the Bureau’s State Rehabilitation Council. As an employee of a leading employer in the aerospace industry, she successfully coordinated the startup of an annual mentoring event for transition-age students to spend a day at the company, touring the facility, shadowing employees and gaining inspiration by learning how she 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;

**BESB VR Response: Through a cooperative agreement with the Department of Social Services (DSS), recipients of Medicaid who have disabilities are made aware of the BESB VR program and BESB VR Counselors provide information and referral assistance for clients who express an interest in seeking services from DSS such as Medicaid benefits, and the Home and Community Based Services waivers.**

**Benefits Counselors from the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services are also available to assist clients of BESB VR 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.**

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

**BESB VR Response: 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. Efforts at coordinating customized employment services are also underway, with joint development of vendor qualifications for the delivery of the components of customized employment being finalized and readied for full implementation.**

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

**BESB VR Response: 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

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

#### 1. System on Personnel and Personnel Development

##### A. Qualified Personnel Needs

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

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

**BESB VR Response: The current composition of BESB VR includes one State Director, one Vocational Rehabilitation Supervisor, one Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Coordinator, one Quality Control Reviewer, one Educational Projects 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 1/760; Education Projects Coordinator 1/760; State Director 1/760; Secretary 1/760; Quality Control Reviewer 1/760; Rehabilitation Teachers 1/253; VR Counselor/Assistant Counselor 1/84; VR Counselor Coordinator 1/760; and VR Supervisor 1/760.**

**In terms of years of service, the breakdown for staff is as follows: 1 - 4 years of service 4/19 or 21%; 5 - 9 years of service 1/19 or 5%; 10 - 14 years of service 4/19 or 21%; 15 - 19 years of service 4/19 or 21%; 20 - 29 years of service 4/19 or 21%, over 30 years of service 2/19 or 11%.**

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

**BESB VR Response: 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 needing 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 Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Coordinator also serves a caseload of clients who are enrolled in college. He works closely 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 Educational Projects 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 Educational Projects 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.**

**BESB VR also has one State Director, one Vocational Rehabilitation Supervisor, one Quality Control Reviewer and two clerical staff to support the administrative functions of the program.**

**The staffing composition of BESB VR aligns with the current needs for the delivery of services.**

###### 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 Response: Over the next 5 years, the Bureau anticipates there will be vacancies due to retirements in the categories of State Director, Administrative Assistant, Education Projects Coordinator, Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor and Rehabilitation Teacher. 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 -- 1**

**Education Projects Coordinator: 1 -- 0 -- 1**

**State Director: 1 -- 0 -- 1**

**Secretary: 1 -- 0 -- 0**

**Quality Control Reviewer: 1 -- 0 -- 0**

**Rehabilitation Teachers: 3 -- 0 -- 2**

**VR Counselor/Assistant Counselor: 9 --0-- 2**

**VR Counselor Coordinator: 1 -- 0 -- 0**

**VR Supervisor: 1 --0 -- 0**

**The present Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor-to-client ratio is 1 Counselor to 84 clients (or 1 to 76 when factoring in the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Coordinator’s coverage of the college student caseload). These staffing levels are 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 10 years that found an average of 164 new referrals per year and an average of 155 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 if a VR Counselor vacancy were to occur. 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 at the 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 Response: 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 Response: 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 94 students enrolled with 21 expected to graduate in 2020. The number of Masters of Rehabilitation Counseling degree candidates is enough 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 Response: Central Connecticut State University graduated 19 students with master’s degrees in Rehabilitation Counseling in 2019.**

#### 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 Response: 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. 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 of the 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. Given the relatively competitive starting salaries for Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors in comparison to the private sector for similar positions, the BESB VR Program is not experiencing a retention issue beyond what is expected through retirements and career advancement decisions. When job openings do occur, the applicant pool is significant and allows for a wide range of potential candidates to be interviewed.**

#### 3. Personnel Standards

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

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

**BESB VR Response: All staff members working as Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors and the Vocational Rehabilitation Supervisor at BESB VR 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 participate in training seminars on the needs of employers within the state. This includes training in the use of occupational outlook data as well as training in high demand jobs and the evolving workforce demographic. Staff has also received training in the use of Career Index Plus through a collaboration with the Job Driven VR 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 Response: BESB VR has continued to collaborate with the State Department of Labor to develop training for BESB VR staff in occupational outlook data and labor market projections, which is provided annually. An orientation to the apprenticeship program was also provided to the BESB VR staff. BESB VR staff work closely with the American Job Center partners, participating in regional team meetings with the business consultants from the partner agencies to identify employment opportunities for clients and to be kept current on emerging sector-based training opportunities within their regions of the state.**

#### 4. Staff Development

Describe the State agency's policies, procedures, and activities to ensure that, consistent with section101(a)(7)(C) of the Rehabilitation Act, all personnel employed by the designated State unit receive appropriate and adequate training in terms of:

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

**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. Training opportunities have included an Introduction to Accessible Educational Materials, How to Make Documents Accessible, How to Locate Captioned Videos and Caption Your Own, Ten Tips for Creating Accessible Web Content, Navigating the New Office Ribbon, Legal Requirements for Website Accessibility, Tips and Tricks with One Note, Using Google Docs and Google Chrome, Excel Tasks with JAWS in Excel, Using Fusion with Windows 10, and Navigating the Web with JAWS 2019.**

**Additional areas of staff training in the past year have included a seminar on the ethics standards issued by the Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification that all BESB VR staff participated in, an Employment First resources conference attended by the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors, the Supervisor and Director, a National Association of Workforce Development conference that featured one of the BESB VR Counselors as a panelist, two conferences on the National Employment Team (NET), the National Council of State Agencies for the Blind fall and spring conferences, the fall and spring conferences of the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation, and a Business Engagement Conference on emerging careers, economic outlook projections, and accommodations in the workplace.**

##### B. 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 from the technical assistance centers is made available to staff and has been utilized to assist with interpreting requirements regarding Pre-Employment Transition Services, as well as for the sharing of information on successful practices. Information gleamed from staff attendance at local, regional and national conferences is also shared with coworkers, providing links to web-based literature and research that is made available during the conference presentations. Through regional meetings of the State Directors of Vocational Rehabilitation, research on quality assurance strategies is also made available. The State Director and VR Supervisor have further been engaged in reviewing the available models for delivering customized employment in order to assist the program in finalizing a collaborative approach with other interested state agencies for the provision of this service.**

#### 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. 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 Task Force 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

#### 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 Response: 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 2017 to assist the SRC and BESB VR with establishing goals and priorities. The full report as issued by CPPSR in December, 2017 appeared in its entirety in the last update to the BESB VR portion of the Unified State Plan. Among the variables reviewed, CPPSR conducted an analysis of BESB VR services to individuals with the most significant disabilities.**

**CPPSR noted that BESB's blind registry had shown a steady increase over recent fiscal years. Data for the most recent year included in the statewide needs assessment found that the registry had grown by 4.3% from the prior year, going from 11,367 individuals in FY 14 to 11,854 individuals in FY 15. Since legal blindness meets the BESB VR definition of a significant disability, the results from this analysis projected a proportionate increase in the number of individuals with most significant disabilities. CPPSR further noted the deteriorating economic climate and the challenges these economic factors presented for securing competitive, integrated employment for individuals who experience multiple, significant barriers to employment. BESB VR has recognized the accompanying necessity to factor this information into projections for an increased need to offer supported employment services as an option for individuals who need long-term supports to achieve and maintain competitive and integrated employment.**

**The Council further utilized the findings and recommendations within this report to assist with the development of goals, objectives, strategies, and measures for the state plan. Among its findings, CPPSR noted the following:**

1. **Comparing BESB, state, and national statistics, CPPSR found that 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%.**
2. **Youth - BESB has an extremely efficient process for identifying clients from Children’s Services and referring them to the VR program.**
3. **BESB relies heavily on federal reallotment dollars, money that has dwindled since the last assessment. The significant decline in reallotment 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.**
4. **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.**

**As a part of the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment, the Center for Public Policy and Social Research also put forth the following recommendations, each of which are followed by a summary of actions to date:**

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

**BESB VR Update: BESB VR has dedicated a Rehabilitation Teacher to serve as an individual trainer for the Career Index Plus, a web-based product that enables clients to actively engage in career exploration and job search activities. BESB VR staff are extensively using this product, with over 16,000 site visits by staff since the inception of this technical assistance initiative through the Job Driven VR Technical Assistance Center in FY 2017. Using a unique feature of this web-based product, BESB VR Counselors have invited 89 clients to utilize the product and link their career exploration and job seeking activities with their VR Counselor for joint follow along reviews of progress.**

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

**BESB VR Update: This BESB recommendation has been rolled into a broader initiative for the designated state agency’s strategic plan. Job titles across the bureaus that could benefit from having interns or volunteers have been identified and work is underway to standardize a template for memoranda of agreements with colleges, universities, and certificate programs. The Bureau has also utilized the Volunteer Program Coordinator’s assistance in securing volunteers to provide time-limited office support activities.**

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

**BESB VR Update: The State Director conducts three bureau-wide staff meetings per year. Included in each staff meeting are program updates by each of the Program Supervisors so that all staff within the Bureau are aware of the initiatives and priorities in each program. An update on the designated state agency’s strategic plan is also included in each meeting. Certificates of Appreciation are presented to staff at these meetings as well, based upon nominations received by clients and coworkers. Specific to the VR Program, the State Director has articulated to staff the priorities around collaboration and coordination with other partners in the workforce development system and developed a form that VR Counselors update each month to document how their work activities are aligning with these priorities.**

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

**BESB VR Update: The VR Program client handbook has been updated, recorded in English and Spanish and placed on the agency website. It is provided to all clients in their preferred format at the time of eligibility.**

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

**BESB VR Update: The Bureau has active involvement and interaction with the State Rehabilitation Council, Deafblind Advisory Committee, Advisory Board for Persons who are Blind or Visually Impaired, and the Statewide Committee of Blind Vendors. Each of these groups meets quarterly. Their membership includes individuals who are blind as well as representatives from the organizations of and for individuals who are blind. Meeting minutes from each group are widely distributed and posted on the agency website.**

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

**BESB VR Update: As noted in the response to recommendation 5, the Bureau is actively engaged with a wide range of partner organizations that represent a broad perspective on matters related to vocational rehabilitation, continuing education, advocacy, and service delivery options. Through updates that are provided at the quarterly meetings of the State Rehabilitation Council, Deafblind Advisory Committee, Advisory Board for Persons who are Blind or Visually Impaired, and the Statewide Committee of Blind Vendors, there is substantial synergy in place.**

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

**BESB VR Update: Prior to retirement, the VR Counselor assigned to work primarily with college students met with the staff that would be assuming these job duties in order to assist them with developing instructional guides for the various activities and timelines associated with them. In addition, the State Director has initiated the creation of a calendar-style timeline document of monthly activities that includes due dates for federal reports to assist with succession planning.**

##### 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 regarding participation in BESB VR.**

**BESB VR employs two Counselors that are bicultural, one of whom is fluent in Spanish. BESB VR also employs three Counselors who are African-American. These five staff are available to provide outreach to community-based organizations that can offer linkages to traditionally underserved communities. Examples of outreach activities in Program Year 2018 included meetings with representatives at 3 churches in Waterbury that have large congregations from among the African-American community. Information about BESB VR services was distributed at these meetings. BESB VR also participated in the “Dads Matter Too -- Community Provider Day,” hosting a resource table at this all-day community event. Outreach to the Hispanic Coalition has brought about opportunities for work evaluations and internships for BESB VR clients. Outreach to the Bridge to Success Community Partnership has led to the initiation of discussions for the provision of work-based learning opportunities for transition-age youth served by BESB-VR.**

**Working with Latinos who lack English language skills has also been an emphasis of the BESB VR Program.  Outreach efforts have occurred with the Center for Latinos Progress, Adult Education, the Hartford Public Library, and Community Colleges in the Hartford area to coordinate English as a Second Language classes or programs for clients to gain the English language skills necessary to be successful in obtaining employment in a wider range of occupations.  Additionally, engaging clients who have some basic English language with the American Job Centers to enroll them into classes and or training sessions that assist with resume writing or translating Spanish resumes into English has also been occurring. At the American Job Centers, these clients have also participated in mock interviews, and job seeking skills classes have also been utilized. Clients are also informed about and encouraged to use the basic technology available to them via their IOS devices or Android devices, such as Google Translate and other translators to assist them with travel and communication while on the job or in the community.**

**Sign language interpreter services to communicate effectively with individuals who utilize sign language, including tactile signing, can be purchased through contracted vendors to effectively communicate about services that are available to individuals who are deaf and blind.**

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

**BESB VR Update: Approximately 30% of Connecticut residents identify themselves as having a minority background. This is further reflected statistically as 15.36% Hispanic/Latino, 10.47% African American, 4.35% Asian, 0.26% Native American, and 0.03% Hawaiian/Pacific Islander. Clients presently participating in BESB VR favorably reflect the state’s demographic with 26% of clients self-identifying as African American, 20% as Hispanic/Latino, 3% as Asian, less than 1% as Native American, and less than 1% as 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 51 clients who have engaged in Adult Employment and Training Programs, 42 clients engaged in Adult Education Programs, 8 clients engaged in Dislocated Worker Programs, 4 clients engaged in Job Corps, 104 clients enrolled in Wagner-Peyser, and 7 clients enrolled in the Youth Initiatives during Program Year 2018. 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 has been a priority for 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 VR Counselors to work exclusively with Pre-Employment Transition-Age students. There are currently 107 clients who are recipients of Pre-Employment Transition Services. The VR 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 have 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 and Teachers of Students with Visual Impairments from the school districts 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 adaptive technology that is commonly utilized for training and employment; and (2) adaptations that are necessary to enable clients to access training materials. BESB VR sponsored a training with staff of the contracted community rehabilitation programs to address these two topic areas. 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 Program Year 2018, 66 Pre-Employment Transition opportunities were provided, including 26 paid work experiences.**

### k. Annual Estimates

Describe:

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

**BESB VR Update: As of the fourth quarter in Program Year 2019, there are 615 eligible individuals in BESB VR. The Blind Registry for BESB has 9,338 individuals in the state of Connecticut who are legally blind or who have significant vision loss. Connecticut has a state statute that requires eye doctors, physicians, and advanced practice registered nurses to refer to the Department of Aging and Disability Services all individuals whom they have identified to be legally blind.**

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

##### A. The VR Program;

**BESB VR Update: At the onset of FY 2020 there were 620 eligible individuals, 604 of whom had implemented IPEs. The projected number of new IPEs for FY 2020 is approximately 125. Added to the 620 eligible individuals with pending and implemented IPEs at the onset of FY 2020, this would represent approximately 745 eligible individuals that are projected to receive services under an IPE in FY 2020. Projections for FY 2021 closely parallel FY 2020 projections, with approximately 750 individuals anticipated to receive services under an IPE in that fiscal year. In FY 2022, anticipated growth in the program, resulting from continued and focused outreach efforts to eye doctors and community-based organizations, is anticipated to yield an increase in the total number of eligible individuals served, potentially reaching 775 eligible individuals.**

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

**BESB VR Update: In FY 2019, 3 new individuals were found eligible for supported employment services, bringing the total number of eligible individuals to 27 for that fiscal year. Of that total, 9 individuals were youth with disabilities. In FY 2019 there were 4 individuals who exited BESB VR, 2 of whom achieved employment outcomes, leaving 23 individuals who were eligible for supported employment at the onset of FY 2020. It is projected that 3 more individuals will become eligible for supported employment services in FY 2020, bringing the total to 26 eligible individuals. It is further anticipated that 2 more individuals will exit BESB VR in FY 2020, resulting in 24 eligible individuals at the onset of FY 2021. In FY 2021, it is projected that 3 new individuals will be found eligible for supported employment services, 1 of whom is likely to be in the category of youth with a disability. This would bring the total number of eligible individuals in FY 2021 to 27. It is further anticipated that through enhanced collaboration with the school districts, over time there will be a gradual increase in the number of students entering into supported employment placements, resulting in approximately 4 individuals who would exit BESB VR through supported employment by the end of FY 2021. This would result in 23 individuals eligible for supported employment at the onset of FY 2022. If a similar trend continues, then FY 2022 could include an additional 5 individuals who would become eligible for supported employment services during that fiscal year.**

##### 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 2019, there were 722 eligible individuals with IPEs over the course of the fiscal year. BESB VR expended approximately $1.41 million on purchased services for eligible individuals with IPEs during the year, and $3.04 million on administrative and operating costs. Total Program costs including all purchased services, staffing, and administrative operations was approximately $4.45 million for the year. For FY 2020, budget projections indicate that approximately $4.73 million will be expended on combined Program costs, including an estimated $1.52 million to provide purchased services to approximately 745 individuals, and $3.21 million in administrative and operational costs. This estimate includes inflationary adjustments, inclusion of indirect cost charges of 10.3 percent to BESB VR, as well as projected costs to serve transition-age students receiving Pre-Employment Transition Services. For FY 2021, budget projections indicate that approximately $4.94 million will be expended on combined Program costs, including an estimated $1.61 million to provide purchased services to approximately 750 individuals, and $3.33 million in administrative and operational costs. This estimate includes inflationary adjustments, inclusion of indirect cost charges of 10.3 percent to BESB VR, as well as projected costs to serve transition-age students receiving Pre-Employment Transition Services. For FY 2022, budget projections indicate that approximately $5.07 million will be expended on combined Program costs, including an estimated $1.75 million to provide purchased services to approximately 775 individuals, and $3.32 million in administrative and operational costs. This estimate includes inflationary adjustments, inclusion of indirect cost charges of 10.3 percent to BESB VR, as well as projected costs to serve Transition-age students receiving Pre-Employment Transition Services.**

**With the availability of $3.94 million in Title I carry over funds from FY 2019, in addition to the federal Title I allotment of $3.25 million (representing 15 percent of the total Title I allotment received by Connecticut), and state matching funds of approximately $783,000, BESB VR does not anticipate the need to enter into an Order of Selection in FY 2020, FY 2021 or FY 2022.**

### l. State Goals and Priorities

The designated State unit must:

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

**BESB VR Update: The following goals, objectives, strategies and measures of performance were developed and agreed to by BESB VR and the State Rehabilitation Council.**

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

**BESB VR Update:**

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

**Objective: BESB will engage employers to identify their business needs and to educate them on BESB services and candidate pool.**

**Strategy: BESB VR Counselor Coordinator and VR Counselors will present on the topic of BESB employer support services to trade organizations and employer membership groups.**

**Measure: Documentation of 4 presentations annually.**

**Objective: Develop BESB Client Success stories that can be marketed to employers in multiple formats.**

**Strategy: Collection of 5 success stories developed for print and internet distribution.**

**Measure: Documentation of distribution to employers and postings on the internet.**

**Objective: BESB VR clients utilize Career Index Plus or comparable web-based career exploration tool to actively participate in job seeking activities.**

**Strategy: Rehabilitation teachers and/or fee for service vendors teach no fewer than 10 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.**

**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 fewer than 5 clients per VR Counselor caseload per year 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: BESB VR shall continue to maintain two full-time Counselors to exclusively serve clients that are in the Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) category.**

**Strategy: Pre-Employment Transition 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.**

**Objective: Pre-ETS clients and their parents or guardians are provided timely notice through the Educational Projects Coordinator or their assigned VR Counselor of BESB-sponsored, as well as BESB endorsed external opportunities that promote the development of self-determination and self-advocacy skills.**

**Strategy: BESB VR Counselors and the Educational Projects Coordinator working with the Pre-ETS clients shall develop initiatives, and also distribute information on existing initiatives, that focus on peer-to-peer support networking, mentoring matches to individuals with blindness who are employed in a wide-range of careers, job shadowing experiences, paid employment, internships, college preparatory programs, technology training programs, life skills programs (including work life balance), and related career development programs.**

**Measure: Documentation of the services being provided to clients in each of the specific categories identified in the Strategy section.**

**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.**

**Objective: Partner with organizations that provide financial literacy training to deliver this service to Pre-ETS clients.**

**Strategy: Identify organizations that provide financial literacy training, create accessible training materials, and deliver the training.**

**Measure: Financial literary training is provided to a total of 15 Pre-ETS clients.**

**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 Newsline available to BESB VR 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 purchases for technology devices.**

**Objective: The SRC utilizes an entity experienced in administering consumer satisfaction surveys and needs assessments to conduct the fiscal year 2020 Consumer Satisfaction Survey and Comprehensive Needs Assessment, utilizing the results to develop continuous improvement initiatives.**

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

**Measure: Documentation of purchase of survey and comprehensive needs assessment, Consumer Satisfaction and Comprehensive Needs Assessment reports received and reviewed with Program staff.**

**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.**

**Objective: Provide guidance document to Windows 7 users on available options after Microsoft support for Windows 7 ends.**

**Strategy: Rehabilitation Technologists develop a summary document of the issues and possible solutions to share with clients of the Bureau.**

**Measure: Document is posted on agency website and distributed to organizations of and for individuals who are blind, and mailed to clients upon request.**

**Objective: Create a tutorial series in audio format on the basics of navigation and use of the Windows 10 operating system with adaptive technology.**

**Strategy: Rehabilitation Technologists develop a series of three audio tutorials for distribution.**

**Measure: Tutorials posted on agency website and distributed to organizations of and for individuals who are blind, and mailed upon request to clients.**

#### 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;

**BESB VR Update: The comprehensive needs assessment and the consumer satisfaction survey results were utilized by BESB VR and the State Rehabilitation Council in considering and developing the goals as stated in the preceding subsection.**

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

**BESB VR Update: 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.

**BESB VR Update: The State Rehabilitation Council has reviewed emerging adaptive technology considerations, in addition to the comprehensive needs assessment, the consumer satisfaction survey results, and trends in outcomes and services provided to address 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. Time within which these goals may be achieved for individuals in each priority category within the order; and

**BESB VR Update: Not applicable.**

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

**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: In the event that an Order of Selection were to become necessary, BESB VR has elected to serve eligible individuals, regardless of the established order of selection, who require specific services or equipment to maintain employment.**

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

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

**BESB VR Update: It is the primary goal and priority of BESB VR to consider supported employment as an option in all circumstances where the provision of these services will increase the likelihood of job placement success for people with significant, multiple barriers to employment.**

**In Program Year 2018, 3 new individuals were found eligible for supported employment services, bringing the total number of eligible individuals to 23 for the program year. Of that total, 11 individuals were youth with disabilities. In Program Year 2018 there were 3 individuals who exited BESB VR, 1 of whom achieved an employment outcome, leaving 20 individuals who were eligible for supported employment at the onset of Program Year 2019.**

**The Vocational Rehabilitation Program received $45,000 in Title VI funds allotted for FY 2019, of which $22,500 was apportioned for youth with disabilities. Of that amount, $929 in the federal funds were expended and $2,500 in required state matching funds for youth were also expended during the time period which encompassed Program Year 2018. One client achieved an employment outcome in Program Year 2018 after being found eligible for supported employment services. For this individual, a community rehabilitation provider was utilized for on-the-job supports and the Department of Developmental Services was the provider of long-term supports.**

**The Vocational Rehabilitation Program has found it challenging to utilize the Title VI funding under the allowable uses that were placed upon these funds in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. Under prior regulations, these funds could be utilized to explore vocational opportunities through work assessments, rehabilitation technology assessments, and a host of other support services that were incorporated into each client’s IPE. Under current rules, these funds can only be utilized for support after a job hire, primarily in the form of job coaching and extended services. It is a primary goal of the Vocational Rehabilitation Program to identify strategies that will result in a job hire so that greater utilization of these funds can be achieved. This strategy will necessarily rely upon Title I funds to provide for the work assessments, short-term internships with supports, and for the provision of adaptive technology so the individuals can have the opportunity to demonstrate to potential employers their capabilities.**

**While community rehabilitation providers will continue to be utilized as the providers of extended services when available, greater emphasis on natural supports through the employer will be encouraged as a goal in the future. Where available and feasible, natural supports through a client’s family to expand options for the provision of support services will also be encouraged. With the opportunity to offer extended services funding to youth with disabilities to provide for longer-term supports on the job, the Vocational Rehabilitation Program shall also work closely with the Planning and Placement Teams in the school districts to make them aware of these funding options to support clients placed into supported employment.**

#### 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

**BESB VR Update: 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 teams are informed about the scope of vocational rehabilitation services, including the option for providing up to 4 years of extended services for eligible individuals who meet the requirements. Education Consultants from the Bureau’s Children’s Services Program are also made aware of this provision to assist in facilitating discussions with team members and parents or guardians of these individuals. The Bureau has available funding to support youth with disabilities in extended services and looks forward to entering into such arrangements with school districts, state agencies, private community providers, or directly with employers who can offer natural supports after the period of extended services funding.**

##### 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.

**BESB VR Update: 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: Utilizing the results and recommendations from the Comprehensive Needs Assessment, as well as the Consumer Satisfaction Survey, BESB VR, in collaboration with the SRC, has identified several areas that need further expansion and improvement to better serve clients.**

**From an analysis of the number of new applicants into the Vocational Rehabilitation Program as well as the overall number of new referrals into the Bureau, a longitudinal decline has been noted. Since eye doctors represent the primary source of new referrals into the Bureau, a focused outreach effort was instituted toward the end of FY 2019, continuing into FY 2020. The eye doctor reporting form was updated to add clarity and definitions of both legal blindness and visual impairment. A section was added to allow for the reporting of functional vision for circumstances where consistent results cannot be obtained during eye examinations. This form was posted on the agency website, followed by a mailing of the new form to over 1,100 eye doctors across the state. This outreach effort will be conducted again to ensure that eye doctors are reminded of the statutory reporting requirements and the availability of an improved reporting format. Additionally, each of the VR Counselors will incorporate focused outreach to community-based organizations into their work activities to make these organizations aware of the services that are available through BESB VR.**

**To add greater clarity to the responsibilities of the Vocational Rehabilitation Program and those of the client, the Client Services Handbook was updated and posted on the agency website. This handbook is available in English, Spanish, Braille, large print, and audio versions and it provides an overview of the available services along with descriptions of the processes for requesting these services. A notification was sent to organizations of and for individuals who are blind informing them of this handbook update. The handbook is also provided to clients at the time of eligibility determination.**

**Strategies for ensuring adequate caseload coverage when VR Counselor vacancies occur have also been identified. Options such as seeking approval for a retiree to cover a caseload temporarily and seeking existing staff who are available to work additional hours to help maintain caseload coverage until vacant positions are filled shall be fully considered to reduce interruptions to service delivery in the future.**

**With the recognition that caseload sizes do not make it practical for the VR Counselors to dedicate large amounts of time to assist every individual in job seeking activities, BESB VR has dedicated a Rehabilitation Teacher to serve as the primary point of contact to teach clients how to register for and utilize the Career Index Plus, a web-based product that enables clients to actively engage in career exploration and job search activities. The web-based product includes a vocational interest inventory, economic outlook information, and links to immediate job openings, searchable by location. VR Counselors are actively encouraging their assigned clients to register for this self-directed service and to report their activities back to their VR Counselor. It is anticipated that through this increased focus on the BESB VR Program working in partnership with clients, that increased access to job opportunities will result.**

**Additionally, working in close collaboration with the regional workforce boards, the BESB VR Counselors will continue to participate in business services teams to learn about upcoming job opportunities. Outreach to community colleges to identify certificate program opportunities shall also remain a priority to assist clients with identifying and pursuing careers that are available through these types of initiatives.**

#### 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 BRS to provide outreach and referrals of clients who are deaf and blind so that clients who meet the eligibility requirements of the National Deaf Blind Equipment Distribution Program 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: As part of a new strategy to increase outreach to community-based organizations to make them aware of available services, all of the VR Counselors will have an outreach goal incorporated into their work activities. The individualized relationships the Counselors have established thus far with the community-based organizations have strengthened the outreach activities into the local communities, but this needs to be expanded upon to ensure a wider reach across the entire state. While the demographic data strongly indicates that BESB VR is effectively serving individuals with disabilities who are minorities, the decline in new referrals to BESB VR further suggests that more outreach activity is necessary to ensure that organizations and individuals are made aware of the services that BESB VR can offer.**

#### 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 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 Connecticut Transition Community of Practice.**

**BESB VR continues to conduct career exposure programs 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 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. BESB VR Counselors are also available to provide vocational counseling and coordinate trial work opportunities for students who are considering sub-minimum wage placement options, to ensure that these individuals are fully aware of the opportunities for success in the competitive labor market, with supports, if applicable.**

#### 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 VR 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 VR Counselors are co-located on a part-time basis at the American 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 American Job Centers and partner services.**

#### 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 in blindness related topics, including how adaptive technology can be utilized to make core services of the American Job Centers and training programs accessible, is offered to the partner programs. The Rehabilitation Technologists review testing and training materials, equipment and structural design at the American Job Centers, offering recommendations on how to make information and training materials accessible to job seekers who are blind. Additionally, BESB VR Counselors provide in-service training to staff of partner programs on effective approaches to utilize when working with and assisting individuals who are blind. BESB VR staff are an active and ongoing resource to partner program staff in this area.**

#### 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 factor to achieving this goal. Being a part of regional business services teams ensures that BESB VR Counselors 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 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 need for greater utilization of supported employment funding to increase employment opportunities for eligible individuals with multiple, significant impediments to employment. With the opportunity to utilize a portion of these funds to support youth with disabilities in extended services, this employment option will be stressed at PPT meetings to expand awareness of this approach to employment.**

**Greater utilization and awareness of adaptive technology has also been identified as a priority to ensure that clients have the tools and training necessary to participate fully in vocational training opportunities and in employment. New goals developed within this plan include tutorials and guides to assist clients with self-directed training to augment the training services offered by BESB VR.**

**A coordinated approach to expand the ability of partner programs and community-based organizations to communicate the availability of BESB VR services is an equally important strategy to achieve the overarching goal of employment for clients.**

##### 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, BESB VR provides access to the National Federation of the Blind’s (NFB) Newsline 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 Newsline 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 programs 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: Ensuring that clients from BESB VR have access to accessible training materials from the onset is essential. Remedial provision of such information places the client at a disadvantage and jeopardizes full participation and inclusion in the training program. With institutions of higher education, BESB VR strives to obtain coursework syllabi in advance of the semester to assist with assessing what textbooks can be obtained in web-based or other accessible formats. Where materials need to be converted into Braille, close collaboration with the university or training program’s Disability Services Coordinator is critical to ensure that accessible materials are ready for the client on the first day of instruction.**

### 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:**

**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: This objective was achieved. Through ongoing collaboration with the Department of Labor’s Office of Research, a significant amount of economic and occupational outlook data is made available to the BESB VR Counselors, all of whom receive monthly updates on labor market information. The VR Counselors have also participated in training conferences that included presentations on the current labor market and an analysis of the trends looking into the future. Labor market information is also readily available for staff and clients to access at** <http://www1.ctdol.state.ct.us/lmi/index.asp>**. Through this website, BESB VR Counselors and clients can review occupations in demand, use a searchable employer database, review education and training programs, re-employment initiatives and the Connecticut Career Resources Network. The information can be narrowed in search criteria to focus on specific regions within the state.**

**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: This objective was achieved. From information provided by the CTDOL, Office of Research, as of September, 2019, the unemployment rate in Connecticut was at 3.6%. Economic projections reflect significant growth in statisticians (up 36.5%), Home Health Aides (up 34%), CNC Machinists (up 33.5%), Research Analysts (up 29.6%), Software Developers (up 29.3%), Mechanical Drafters (up 28.9%), Nurse Practitioners (up 28.6%), and Physician’s Assistants (up 28.4%) by 2026. In total, there are 19 occupations that project increases in growth by more than 20% by 2026.**

**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.**

**BESB VR Update: This objective was achieved. BESB VR staff continue to actively participate 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 self-directed 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 objective is in progress. Performance accountability measures are being established under this new state plan.**

**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 objective was 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. Through collaborative meetings amongst the partners, opportunities to discuss and review how BESB VR policies apply to specific client situations have made it possible for each partner to leverage services available from the other partner programs to make the best use of available funding for the provision of vocational training opportunities. The policies may be viewed on the agency website at** <https://portal.ct.gov/AgingandDisability> **or by selecting this link:** [BESB VR Policy Manual](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/AgingandDisability/documents/BESB/VR-Policy-Manual-January-2019-PDF-version.pdf?la=en)**.**

**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 objective was achieved. This strategy is in full operation with BESB VR Counselors participating in regional business service teams, and designated staff also participating in statewide, interagency team meetings. BESB VR Counselors are co-located on a part-time basis at the primary American Job 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 objective was achieved. BESB VR provides data on employer engagement to CT DOL for inclusion into the statewide reporting on that measurement. In Program Year 2018, BESB VR engaged 112 employers to address their recruitment and employee retention needs.**

**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 objective was achieved. BESB VR has provided technical assistance and recommendations pertaining to accessibility of American Job Centers and training program services. This has included reviewing training materials in use and recommending methods to remediate documents that were not originally created in accessible formats. Through this partnership, job seeking skills class materials are now available in electronic, accessible formats. BESB VR Rehabilitation Technologists have also assisted in the review of computer hardware and software in use at the American Job Centers, providing recommendations for updates and computer settings to optimize accessibility features. BESB VR Counselors regularly meet with staff of the American Job Centers to discuss individual placement strategies, the availability of on-the-job training and internship funding and the wide array of supports that BESB VR can provide to employers to bring about successful job placements.**

**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: This objective was achieved. BESB VR staff were members of the teams that reviewed and completed certification of the American Job Centers, offering 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: This objective was achieved. Recognizing the ongoing nature of this objective as new training and employment opportunities become available, BESB VR staff have continued to offer accessibility consultations, offering low tech and where necessary, extensive adaptive technology solutions. Rehabilitation Technologists are available to support BESB VR Counselors and partner program staff in assessing job opportunities to determine the types of adaptations that would be typically needed, recognizing that an individualized assessment for specific job candidates is necessary to finalize the recommendations that are beneficial for each candidate’s placement success.**

**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 objective was not achieved. There are no imminent plans for a shared data collection system across the partner programs, although discussions of the merits of such a “common-front end” data collection system for the partner agencies has continued. 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 has been a barrier to progress.**

**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 objective was achieved. Cost allocation formulas were finalized and are in use relative to co-location of BESB VR Counselors at the American Job Centers.**

**Strategy: Prepare annual performance reports.**

**Measure: BESB VR report on performance measures distributed.**

**BESB VR Update: This objective was achieved. In Program Year 2018, BESB VR served 766 individuals under an IPE. There were 102 individuals whom achieved an employment outcome. The average hourly earnings for these individuals was $19.95. BESB VR has also provided performance data for inclusion in the Department’s report of activities and measures achieved. This document for the agency provides information on program performance for Federal Fiscal Year 2019, and it may be viewed at:** <http://portal.ct.gov/das/Lists/Publications/Reports/Digest-of-Administrative-Reports>**. Among the notable findings, BESB VR served 804 clients in Federal Fiscal Year 2019. Of these, 782 were served under an individualized employment plan and 86 clients achieved employment. The average hourly wages for these consumers were $23.48. Through the Randolph-Sheppard Program, gross sales from the vending facilities reached $5.1 million. There were 31 vending facility operators, who employed an additional 79 workers. Average annual income for the vending facility operators was $41,410, with five of the locations providing income of more than $80,000.**

**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 objective was achieved. BESB VR data on services and outcomes is available to partner programs for use in aggregate reporting.**

**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 objective was achieved. BESB VR has actively participated in the interagency workgroup that set an objective of designing a reference guide on partner program services to share with employers and community-based organizations in the state. The workgroup further developed and delivered two business services conferences in Program Years 2017 and 2018 that brought partner program staff together to learn about best practices, employer perspectives, emerging occupations, and apprenticeship opportunities.**

**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 objective was achieved. BESB VR clients have actively engaged in services offered by the American Job Centers with 104 clients enrolled in core services.**

**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: This objective was achieved. The Adult Services Program provides independent living training through orientation and mobility instructors and rehabilitation teachers to BESB VR clients whose Individualized Plans for Employment identify the need for these services as a component to achieve an employment outcome. In Program Year 2018, 59 clients received these disability related skills training services from the Adult Services staff.**

**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 objective was achieved. Through part-time co-location at the American Job Centers, BESB VR Counselors had an onsite presence at the centers 135 times during Program Year 2018, meeting with 115 clients at the centers. Additionally, BESB VR Counselors participated in 29 Business Services team meetings during that time period. BESB VR Counselors directly facilitated the registration of 27 clients in partner services during these onsite meetings.**

**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 objective was achieved. BESB VR staff have been actively engaged with representatives from the State College and University System to discuss how course curriculum can be made accessible. The BESB VR Rehabilitation Technologists have assisted with reviewing website design and electronic media for coursework completion, making recommendations on approaches that will increase access and accessibility. BESB VR staff have also participated in meetings and tours of certificate and training programs at the community colleges, such as the dental assistant program at Tunxis Community College, as well as working with private institutions of post-secondary education such as the Connecticut Center for Massage Therapy to increase the accessibility of their curriculums.**

**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 were developed with the full participation and guidance of the SRC.**

**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: This objective was achieved. The VR Counselor Coordinator serves as the point of contact with the BRS Job Development Team and regularly attends their monthly meetings. BRS and BESB continue to collaborate by sharing job leads. BRS and BESB have partnered with a company from Israel, Project Ray, LLC to provide job candidates. Additional collaborations have included meeting with staff from the Lowes Distribution Center to identify jobs that would be accessible for individuals that utilize screen reading adaptations, Advance Auto Distribution Center in Enfield, and Cartus, Inc. in Danbury.**

**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 objective was achieved. In Program Year 2018, BESB VR Counselors participated in 29 business services team meetings across the 5 workforce regions. Through these collaborations, clients have obtained interviews, gained access to an apprenticeship opportunity, and two job hires have resulted.**

**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 objective was achieved. Through VR Counselor referrals, 89 clients have access to Career Index Plus. The Rehabilitation Teacher remains involved as a technical assistance resource and trainer for all of the clients who request assistance in utilizing this web-based job search and career exploration tool.**

**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: This objective was achieved. In total, 58 clients of the BESB VR Program attended at least one job fair, with 13 clients attending more than one job fair. All of the VR Counselors with full-time regional caseload responsibilities for the entire program year had at least 5 clients from their caseload attend job fairs.**

**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 objective was achieved. There are two Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors assigned to serve clients who are students with disabilities, providing Pre-Employment Transition Services. Case assignments are made based on geographical location, with each Counselor covering half of the state.**

**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 agency 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 objective was partially achieved. The resource guide has been completed but was put into use subsequent to the completion of Program Year 2018.**

**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: This objective was achieved. The Transition Coordinator provides information to the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors on programs and initiatives for transition-age youth with a focus on Pre-Employment Transition Services. For Program Year 2018, this resulted in 66 opportunities that included paid work and internship experiences, independent living residential programs, mentoring experiences, youth leadership camp, and college tours.**

**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: This objective was achieved. BESB VR works with 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, the Pre-ETS program for the General VR agency, Community of Practice, the five Regional Education Service Centers, as well as the American Job Centers and the workforce boards. These collaborations yielded events such as the Transition Symposium, the CT Youth Leadership Forum, multiple Regional Transition Expos, an Adaptive Technology Conference, Disability Mentoring Day, and participation at 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 objective was 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 Newsline available to BESB VR clients.**

**Measure: Documentation of purchase order for NFB Newsline.**

**BESB VR Update: This objective was 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. This service was extensively utilized in Program Year 2018 with more than 320,000 minutes of phone utilization and 87,000 downloads to Victor Stream players.**

**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 objective was achieved. Adaptive technology updates have included an adapted keyboard, talking graph calculator, Zoomtext Fusion, Typing Tutor, and an UltraMag portable magnifier, in order to offer a wide array of adaptive devices and software for evaluations and demonstrations at the labs in Windsor and New London.**

**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.**

**BESB VR Update: This objective was achieved. The Center for Public Policy and Social Research (CPPSR) 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 were identified and implemented. CPPSR was also utilized for the Consumer Satisfaction Surveys that were conducted in Program Years 2017, 2018, and 2019.**

**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 objective was achieved. The Chair of the SRC attended the spring, 2018 conferences of CSAVR and NCSAB.**

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

**BESB VR Update: Prior to receipt of the most recent reallotment award in September, 2019, diminishing financial resources significantly impacted BESB VR, requiring a reduction in staffing levels as vacancies occurred, and updating policies to implement cost containment strategies. The SRC has worked in collaboration with BESB VR to implement these strategies to reduce administrative and purchased service costs with a goal of continuing to serve all eligible individuals in future years within available funding. With the addition of $1.4 million through the recent reallotment award, BESB VR is looking toward the future for increased innovation and expansion initiatives that will identify potential candidates for VR services through focused outreach and that will also generate increased opportunities for employment of the clients that are served.**

#### 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: With 23 clients of BESB VR eligible for supported employment services, 8 of whom meet the criteria for the definition of “youth with a disability,” BESB VR is achieving its goal of identifying situations where supported employment services are beneficial. In particular, by participating in Planning and Placement Team meetings, it allows for opportunities to discuss and consider this option for employment at the earliest stages of the transition process. This participation by BESB VR Counselors expands discussions beyond day program placements in some situations to instead focusing on how the model of supported employment can enable students to achieve competitive and integrated employment.**

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

**BESB VR Update: With the narrow allowances for the use of supported employment funds, utilization rates are lower than desired. The requirement that states must expend the matching fund requirement for the placement of a youth with a disability into supported employment in order to carry forward the unobligated portions of both the youth and the adult portions of the grant award have hampered the availability of these funds. BESB VR is working to identify strategies that tap into the Title I funds for trial work opportunities and other services that can best prepare individuals for job placement success.**

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

**BESB VR Update: BESB VR is participating in discussions on the implementation of performance measures with the other partners in the workforce system and these accountability measures will be reported upon once established. BESB VR assisted 102 individuals to achieve employment outcomes in Program Year 2018. The average hourly earnings for these individuals was $19.95 per hour.**

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

**BESB VR Update: During Program Year 2018, 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 was a separate co-sponsor of this leadership development camp on a college campus for transition-age students.**

**Innovation and Expansion funding was utilized to secure the Center for Public Policy and Social Research to conduct and analyze the 2018 consumer satisfaction survey and to report their findings to the SRC for use in developing Program goals and priorities. Funding was also utilized to facilitate the participation of the SRC, through its Chair, to attend national activities at the conferences of the NCSAB and CSAVR.**

**Innovation and Expansion funds were utilized to update two adaptive technology laboratories with the provision of hardware and software to enable clients and groups of eligible individuals to have opportunities to try out devices and to obtain training and adaptive technology evaluations.**

**Thus far in Program Year 2019, Innovation and Expansion Funds have been utilized for the continuation of the NFB Newsline service, for conducting of the consumer satisfaction survey by the Center for Public Policy and Social Research, and also for membership in the National Council of State Agencies for the Blind to ensure timely access by the SRC membership and BESB VR to information on best practices, service trends and matters of relevance and importance to the field of blindness rehabilitation.**

**Looking forward to the remainder of Program Year 2019 and into Program Year 2020, BESB VR will be exploring new adaptive technology products and devices that can be obtained for evaluations and demonstration purposes for clients, as well as for demonstrations to employers and community partners. The NFB Newsline service is also anticipated to continue in Program Year 2020 as well as the conducting of the consumer satisfaction survey to assist BESB VR and the SRC with developing continuous improvement strategies.**

### 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

**BESB VR Update: Supported employment services refer to competitive integrated employment, including customized employment in an integrated work setting in which an individual with a most significant disability that includes visual impairment or legal blindness, including a youth with a most significant disability, is working on a short-term basis toward competitive integrated employment that is individualized and customized. These services are provided in a manner that is consistent with the unique strengths, abilities, interests, and informed choice of the individual. Supported employment services are available for individuals for whom competitive integrated employment has not historically occurred, or for whom competitive integrated employment has been interrupted or intermittent as a result of a significant disability, and who, because of the nature and severity of their disabilities, need intensive supported employment services and extended services after the transition from support provided by the Bureau, in order to perform this work.**

**An individual with a most significant disability, whose supported employment in an integrated setting does not satisfy the criteria of competitive integrated employment, is considered to be working on a short-term basis toward competitive integrated employment so long as the individual can reasonably anticipate achieving competitive integrated employment within six months of achieving a supported employment outcome. In limited circumstances, a period not to exceed 12 months from the achievement of the supported employment outcome is permissible if a longer period is necessary based on the needs of the individual and the individual has demonstrated progress toward competitive earnings based on information contained in the service record. The six-month short-term basis period, and the additional six months that may be available in limited circumstances, begins after an individual has completed up to 24 months of supported employment services (unless a longer period of time is necessary based upon the individual’s needs) and the individual has achieved a supported employment outcome. The job placement of the individual must be stable for a minimum period of 90 days following the transition to extended services. At this point, the individual has achieved a supported employment outcome.**

**Ongoing support services, including customized employment, and other appropriate services needed to support and maintain the client in supported employment are organized and made available, singly or in combination, in such a way as to assist the client to achieve competitive integrated employment, and these services:**

**(A) Are based on a determination of the needs of an eligible individual, as specified in an Individualized Plan for Employment;**

**(B) Are provided by the Bureau for a period of time not to exceed 24 months, unless under special circumstances the eligible individual and the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor jointly agree to extend the time to achieve the employment outcome identified in the Individualized Plan for Employment; and**

**(C) Following transition, 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.**

**Supported employment services are initiated once the individual is hired and has started to work at the actual job site for the employer. Title 6B Supported Employment funds can only be utilized for this specific service or for extended services for youth with disabilities placed into supported employment. All other services as planned for and detailed in the IPE, including job placement services, can only be paid for using basic Vocational Rehabilitation Title I funds, state matching funds, or program income funds. The most frequent type of supported employment service is job coaching, although on-site evaluators and similar services that provide direct support to the individual at the job site may also be considered for funding through the Title 6B funds.**

**An Individualized Plan for Employment for an individual with a most significant disability, for whom an employment outcome in a supported employment setting has been determined to be appropriate, must–**

1. **Specify the supported employment services to be provided by the Bureau;**
2. **Specify the expected extended services needed by the eligible individual, which may include natural supports;**
3. **Identify 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, include a description of the basis for concluding that there is a reasonable expectation that such a source will become available;**
4. **Provide for periodic monitoring to ensure that the individual is making satisfactory progress toward meeting the weekly work requirement established in the Individualized Plan for Employment by the time of transition to extended services;**
5. **Provide for the coordination of services provided under an Individualized Plan for Employment with services provided under other individualized plans established under other Federal or State programs;**
6. **To the extent that job skills training is provided, identify that the training will be provided on site; and**
7. **Include 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 individuals with the most significant disabilities.**

#### 2. The timing of transition to extended services

**Extended services refer to ongoing support services and other appropriate services that are needed to support and maintain an individual with a most significant disability that includes visual impairment or legal blindness, including a youth with a most significant disability, in supported employment. Extended services can be made available singly, or in combination, in such a way as to assist an eligible individual in maintaining supported employment. The services are customized and based on the needs of the eligible individual, as specified in their Individualized Plan for Employment. Extended services may be provided by a State agency, a private nonprofit organization, employer, or any other appropriate resource, after an individual has made the transition from supported employment provided by the Bureau. Transition to extended services occurs once the individual has received up to 24 months of supported employment services or the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor and the individual have determined that an extension of time to provide supported employment services beyond 24 months is necessary to support and maintain the individual in supported employment before the individual transitions to extended services.**

**For a youth with a most significant disability that includes visual impairment or legal blindness, the Bureau may directly provide or fund extended services for a period not to exceed four years or at such time that a youth reaches age 25, whichever occurs first. The Bureau cannot provide extended services to an individual with a most significant disability who is not a youth with a most significant disability.**

### Vocational Rehabilitation (Blind) Certifications

States must provide written and signed certifications that:

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

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

**Department of Aging and Disability Services, Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind, Vocational Rehabilitation Program**

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

##### Enter the name of designated State agency

**Department of Aging and Disability Services**

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

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

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

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

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

##### Enter the name of authorized representative below

**Brian S. Sigman**

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

##### Enter the title of authorized representative below

**Director of Education and Rehabilitation, BESB**

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

#### Footnotes

 [14] Public Law 113-128.
 [15] Unless otherwise stated, "Rehabilitation Act" means the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended by WIOA, signed into law on July 22, 2014.
 [16] All references in this plan to "designated State agency" or to "the State agency" relate to the agency identified in this paragraph.
 [17] No funds under title I of the Rehabilitation Act may be awarded without an approved VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan in accordance with section 101(a) of the Rehabilitation Act.
 [18] Applicable regulations, in part, include the Education Department General Administrative Regulations (EDGAR) in 34 CFR parts 76, 77, 79, 81, and 82; 2 CFR
part 200 as adopted by 2 CFR part 3474; and the State VR Services program regulations.
 [19] No funds under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act may be awarded without an approved supported employment supplement to the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined  State Plan in accordance with section 606(a) of the Rehabilitation Act.
[20] Applicable regulations, in part, include the citations in footnote 6.

#### Certification Signature

| Signatory information | Enter Signatory information in this column |
| --- | --- |
| Name of Signatory | Brian S. Sigman |
| Title of Signatory | Director of Education and Rehabilitation, BESB |
| Date Signed | February 27, 2020 |

### Assurances

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

| The State Plan must include | Include |
| --- | --- |
| 1. Public Comment on Policies and Procedures: The designated State agency assures it will comply with all statutory and regulatory requirements for public participation in the VR Services Portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan, as required by section 101(a)(16)(A) of the Rehabilitation Act. |  |
| 2. Submission of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and Its Supplement: The designated State unit assures it will comply with all requirements pertaining to the submission and revisions of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement for the State Supported Employment Services program, as required by sections 101(a)(1), (22), (23), and 606(a) of the Rehabilitation Act; section 102 of WIOA in the case of the submission of a unified plan; section 103 of WIOA in the case of a submission of a Combined State Plan; 34 CFR 76.140. |  |
| 3. The designated State agency or designated State unit, as appropriate, assures it will comply with the requirements related to:Administration of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan: |  |
| 3.a. The establishment of the designated State agency and designated State unit, as required by section 101(a)(2) of the Rehabilitation Act |  |
| 3.b. The establishment of either a State independent commission or State Rehabilitation Council, as required by section 101(a)(21) of the Rehabilitation Act. The designated State agency or designated State unit, as applicable (A or B must be selected): |  |
| 3.b.(A) “is an independent State commission” (Yes/No) | No |
| 3.b.(B) “has established a State Rehabilitation Council” (Yes/No) | Yes |
| 3.c. Consultations regarding the administration of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan, in accordance with section 101(a)(16)(B) of the Rehabilitation Act |  |
| 3.d. The financial participation by the State, or if the State so elects, by the State and local agencies, to provide the amount of the non-Federal share of the cost of carrying out the VR program in accordance with section 101(a)(3) |  |
| 3.e. The local administration of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan, in accordance with section 101(a)(2)(A) of the Rehabilitation Act. Select yes or no, as appropriate, to identify if the designated State agency allows for the local administration of VR funds (Yes/No) | No |
| 3.f. The shared funding and administration of joint programs, in accordance with section 101(a)(2)(A)(ii) of the Rehabilitation Act. Select yes or no, as appropriate, to identify if the designated State agency allows for the shared funding and administration of joint programs (Yes/No) | No |
| 3.g. Statewideness and waivers of statewideness requirements, as set forth in section 101(a)(4) of the Rehabilitation Act. Is the designated State agency requesting or maintaining a waiver of statewideness for one or more services provided under the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan? (Yes/No) See Section 2 of this VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan | No |
| 3.h. The descriptions for cooperation, collaboration, and coordination, as required by sections 101(a)(11) and (24)(B); and 606(b) of the Rehabilitation Act |  |
| 3.i. All required methods of administration, as required by section 101(a)(6) of the Rehabilitation Act |  |
| 3.j. The requirements for the comprehensive system of personnel development, as set forth in section 101(a)(7) of the Rehabilitation Act |  |
| 3.k. The compilation and submission to the Commissioner of statewide assessments, estimates, State goals and priorities, strategies, and progress reports, as appropriate, and as required by sections 101(a)(15), 105(c)(2), and 606(b)(8) of the Rehabilitation Act |  |
| 3.l. The reservation and use of a portion of the funds allotted to the State under section 110 of the Rehabilitation Act for the development and implementation of innovative approaches to expand and improve the provision of VR services to individuals with disabilities, particularly individuals with the most significant disabilities |  |
| 3.m. The submission of reports as required by section 101(a)(10) of the Rehabilitation Act |  |
| 4. Administration of the Provision of VR Services: The designated State agency, or designated State unit, as appropriate, assures that it will: |  |
| 4.a. Comply with all requirements regarding information and referral services in accordance with sections 101(a)(5)(D) and (20) of the Rehabilitation Act |  |
| 4.b. Impose no duration of residence requirement as part of determining an individual's eligibility for VR services or that excludes from services under the plan any individual who is present in the State in accordance with section 101(a)(12) of the Rehabilitation Act |  |
| 4.c. Provide the full range of services listed in section 103(a) of the Rehabilitation Act as appropriate, to all eligible individuals with disabilities in the State who apply for services in accordance with section 101(a)(5) of the Rehabilitation Act? (Yes/No) | Yes |
| 4.d. Determine whether comparable services and benefits are available to the individual in accordance with section 101(a)(8) of the Rehabilitation Act |  |
| 4.e. Comply with requirements regarding the provisions of informed choice for all applicants and eligible individuals in accordance with section 102(d) of the Rehabilitation Act |  |
| 4.f. Comply with requirements regarding the provisions of informed choice for all applicants and eligible individuals in accordance with section 102(d) of the Rehabilitation Act |  |
| 4.g. Provide vocational rehabilitation services to American Indians who are individuals with disabilities residing in the State, in accordance with section 101(a)(13) of the Rehabilitation Act |  |
| 4.h. Comply with the requirements for the conduct of semiannual or annual reviews, as appropriate, for individuals employed either in an extended employment setting in a community rehabilitation program or any other employment under section 14(c) of the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, as required by section 101(a)(14)of the Rehabilitation Act |  |
| 4.i. Meet the requirements in sections 101(a)(17) and 103(b)(2) of the​​​​​​​ Rehabilitation Act if the State elects to construct, under special circumstances, facilities for community rehabilitation programs |  |
| 4.j. With respect to students with disabilities, the State, |  |
| 4.j.i. Has developed and will implement, |  |
| 4.j.i.I. Strategies to address the needs identified in the assessments; and |  |
| 4.j.i.II. Strategies to achieve the goals and priorities identified by the State, to improve and expand vocational rehabilitation services for students with disabilities on a statewide basis; and |  |
| 4.j.ii. Has developed and will implement strategies to provide pre-employment transition services (sections 101(a)(15) and 101(a)(25)) |  |
| 5. Program Administration for the Supported Employment Title VI Supplement: |  |
| 5.a. The designated State unit assures that it will include in the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan all information required by section 606 of the Rehabilitation Act |  |
| 5.b. The designated State agency assures that it will submit reports in such form and in accordance with such procedures as the Commissioner may require and collects the information required by section 101(a)(10) of the Rehabilitation Act separately for individuals receiving supported employment services under title I and individuals receiving supported employment services under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act |  |
| 5.c. The designated state unit will coordinate activities with any other State agency that is functioning as an employment network under the Ticket to Work and Self-Sufficiency program under Section 1148 of the Social Security Act |  |
| 6. Financial Administration of the Supported Employment Program: |  |
| 6.a. The designated State agency assures that it will expend no more than 2.5 percent of the State's allotment under title VI for administrative costs of carrying out this program; and, the designated State agency or agencies will provide, directly or indirectly through public or private entities, non-Federal contributions in an amount that is not less than 10 percent of the costs of carrying out supported employment services provided to youth with the most significant disabilities with the funds reserved for such purpose under section 603(d) of the Rehabilitation Act, in accordance with section 606(b)(7)(G) and (H) of the Rehabilitation Act |  |
| 6.b. The designated State agency assures that it will use funds made available under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act only to provide supported employment services to individuals with the most significant disabilities, including extended services to youth with the most significant disabilities, who are eligible to receive such services; and, that such funds are used only to supplement and not supplant the funds provided under Title I of the Rehabilitation Act, when providing supported employment services specified in the individualized plan for employment, in accordance with section 606(b)(7)(A) and (D), of the Rehabilitation Act |  |
| 7. Provision of Supported Employment Services: | Yes |
| 7.a. The Designated State Agency Assures That it Will Provide Supported Employment Services as Defined in Section 7(39) of the Rehabilitation Act |  |
| 7.b. The designated State agency assures that: |  |
| 7.b.i. The comprehensive assessment of individuals with significant disabilities conducted under section 102(b)(1) of the Rehabilitation Act and funded under title I of the Rehabilitation Act includes consideration of supported employment as an appropriate employment outcome, in accordance with the requirements of section 606(b)(7)(B) of the Rehabilitation Act |  |
| 7.b.ii. An individualized plan for employment that meets the requirements of section 102(b) of the Rehabilitation Act, which is developed and updated with title I funds, in accordance with sections 102(b)(3)(F) and 606(b)(6)(C) and (E) of the Rehabilitation Act |  |

### Vocational Rehabilitation Program (Blind) Performance Indicators

**Performance Goals for the Core Programs**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

| Performance Indicators | PY 2020 Expected Level | PY 2020 Negotiated Level | PY 2021 Expected Level | PY 2021 Negotiated Level |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Employment (Second Quarter After Exit) | Baseline | Baseline | Baseline | Baseline |
| Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit) | Baseline | Baseline | Baseline | Baseline |
| Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)  | Baseline | Baseline | Baseline | Baseline |
| Credential Attainment Rate  | Baseline | Baseline | Baseline | Baseline |
| Measurable Skill Gains  |  29.0 | 37.0 | 32.0 | 42.0 |
| Effectiveness in Serving Employers  | Not Applicable [1](#footnote-1) | Not Applicable [1](#footnote-1) | Not Applicable [1](#footnote-1) | Not Applicable [1](#footnote-1) |

*1*

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