# 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.

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. Over the course of this plan, 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.

Recommendations from Initial Plan

BESB VR agreed with and responded to each of the recommendations in the initial plan, which included the following:

* Recommendation 1: Have the Consumer Satisfaction Survey conducted by an entity experienced in performing consumer-based surveys and statistically analyzing outcome data.
* 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.
* Recommendation 3: Include a Vocational Rehabilitation Client Success Story at each meeting of the Council.
* Recommendation 4: Support initiatives that develop leadership qualities in transition-age youth who are blind.
* Recommendation 5: Identify strategies to address the fiscal constraints of BESB VR.
* 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.

For the modification period, the SRC offered the following recommendations:

[insert 2022 modification recommendations here]

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

#### [insert responses to the SRC’s 2022 recommendations here]

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

#### [insert responses to the SRC’s 2022 recommendations here]

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

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

Not applicable.

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

Not applicable.

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

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

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

BESB’s Vocational Rehabilitation program is the designated state unit for individuals who are blind within the Department of Aging and Disability Services, which is the designated state agency. The Commissioner executes cooperative agreements at the designated state agency level on behalf of the Bureau.

Social Security Administration: The Bureau has an active 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.

Native American Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Program: The Bureau also has an active cooperative agreement with the Native American VR Program in Connecticut. This agreement has been developed to help with both programs 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 VR Program has served as an appointed member of the BESB State Rehabilitation Council.

New England VR Programs: The Bureau 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 VR Program who are attending training programs in those states.

Connecticut VR-General Program: For individuals who are deaf and blind, BESB works closely with the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS), Connecticut’s VR-General Program, 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.

State Medicaid Agency: The Bureau has 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.

Department of Developmental Services (DDS): For clients who are blind and have developmental disabilities, the Bureau coordinates services with 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.

Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS): BESB VR Counselors coordinate services with DMHAS for individuals who are blind and have a mental health diagnosis, acquired brain injury, and/or addiction.

Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV): The Bureau has a cooperative agreement with the state 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 Through the Assistive Technology Act

#### BESB works closely with the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services, the lead agency for the Connecticut Assistive Technology Act program, 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. 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;

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

The Bureau has entered into service agreements with the LEAP Program in Vermont 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. During the 2020 COVID pandemic LEAP offered programs virtually on TEAMS in the summer and fall, enabling many students in our Pre-Employment Transition Services program to participate at a minimal cost.

#### 5. State use contracting programs.

At the Department level, the agency participates with the Office of the State Comptroller for a Purchase Card program that permits expedited purchasing of goods and services needed by clients to participate in the rehabilitation process. The Department has also 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 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, in the role of designated state agency, has a formal interagency agreement 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 (IEPs) 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 . These referrals are most frequently initiated by Teachers for Students with Visual Impairments, some of whom work for the Bureau and some of whom 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 this population of eligible or potentially eligible students. 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. Exploration of post-secondary programs that can lead to credentialing in careers of interest is also coordinated by the Counselors.

Within higher education, the Department 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 responsibilities of both of the Department’s Vocational Rehabilitation programs and the responsibilities of the universities 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;

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 2021, the events were held virtually, with six separate Google Classrooms and 186 participants joining the virtual In-service.

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

The BESB VR 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 annual symposium builds 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 includes sessions specifically for students making college and career choices. The two Pre-ETS Counselors presented at this event to a group of parents about BESB VR services, the eligibility process and the five core Pre-ETS transition services

The BESB VR Education Projects Coordinator also participates in the Connecticut Transition Community of Practice. This 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.

The agreement with the State Department of Education (SDE) allows staff from SDE to assist staff from BESB VR to connect with the individual Local Education Agencies (LEAs). The intent is 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 student's needs, consideration of the student's preferences, and are designed to facilitate movement from school to post-secondary activities, including employment. Counselors from BESB VR are active 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.

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

Through the 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 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.

The MOU further addresses collaboration between BESB VR and 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 a student is found eligible for vocational rehabilitation services and has an IPE, but is 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.

Since BESB maintains a registry of all students who are legally blind or visually impaired within Connecticut, the process for identifying and referring students 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 students 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 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. Eleven 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 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 (PPT) 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 DDS 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.

The VR staff are members of the Association of People Supporting Employment First (APSE) and the VR Supervisor is on the Board representing BESB. Staff participate in regular trainings and seminars offered through 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. Since the COVID-19 pandemic the National APSE conferences and Regional Conferences have gone virtual. This has allowed more staff to participate in the conference. Last year eight staff participated in the National Conference and six participated in the Regional Conference.

### 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

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, with BESB VR receiving and disseminating job announcements. 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. The NET coordinator puts the local human resources representative from a large employer in contact with the Vocational Rehabilitation agency’s point of contact. The local staff meet to discuss specific services or recruitment needs at the local 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.

The State of CT has also established three Job Development Networks of professionals that meet quarterly, in the three regions of the state. VR Counselors are represented within each network.

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

With the development of employer relationships, even when employers may not be immediately hiring, they can offer other valuable services such as informational interviews, job shadowing opportunities, and work assessment site hosting. Company tours can further be arranged for clients of BESB VR to learn about a wide variety of careers. This is particularly important for transition-age youth 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.

 An 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.

BESB’s Transition Coordinator and Transition VR Counselors organized three mentor events during PY 20 and 21. Each event was held virtually with four individuals discussing their experience working as an individual who is blind. Some of the mentors had recently graduated from college and discussed that experience as well. The mentees were transition aged youth or individuals reentering a different career.

The Transition staff also organized two virtual sessions on the college application processs and navigating the disability services offered at the colleges. These sessions targeted our transition aged youth and 10 participants attended. Another session is scheduled for this spring. There was a financial literacy training through the University of Connecticut that the Transition Team organized as a virtual event with 22 transition aged youth participating.

### 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;

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

This Bureau has an active agreement with the State 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 DDS 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 has developed a working relationship with the State 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 services to assist them in achieving a competitive, integrated employment outcome, including 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;

The current composition of BESB VR includes one Interim State Director, one Vocational Rehabilitation Supervisor, one Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Coordinator, one Quality Control Reviewer, one Educational Projects Coordinator, six full-time Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors, two Vocational Rehabilitation Assistant Counselors, three Rehabilitation Teachers specializing in Rehabilitation Technology), 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 (3 Rehabilitation Teachers); VR Counselor/Assistant Counselor 1/95 (8 Councelors) ; 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 4/18 or 22%; 5 – 9 years of service 4/18 or 22%; 10 – 14 years of service 1/18 or 6%; 15 – 19 years of service 2/18 or 11%; 20 – 29 years of service 6/18 or 33%; over 30 years of service 1 or 6%.

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

BESB service delivery 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 for rehabilitation technology services, with one technologist covering each half. 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.

There is one VR Counselor Coordinator that covers the entire state and works with the VR Counselors on case management strategies. This position also provides coordination of job development activities and employer engagement across the state. The VR 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 withone VR Counselor whose primary responsibility is to serve a caseload 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 Interim 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.

The original five-year projections for this plan anticipated retirements in the categories of State Director, Administrative Assistant, Education Projects Coordinator, Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor and Rehabilitation Teacher. Due to changes in Connecticut’s state retirement benefits, the anticipated retirements are expected to occur by summer of 2022, with the State Director retirement already occurring. 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 -- 0

State Director: 1 -- 1 -- 0

Secretary: 1 -- 0 -- 0

Quality Control Reviewer: 1 -- 0 -- 0

Rehabilitation Teachers: 3 -- 0 --1

VR Counselor/Assistant Counselor: 8 --1-- 1

VR Counselor Coordinator: 1 -- 0 -- 0

VR Supervisor: 1 --0 -- 0

With the intent to refill vacancies, 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 VR 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;

###### We analyze the graduate information from the regional Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) – accredited universities to find schools that offer required courses or graduate degrees in rehabilitation counseling. We also check with local CACREP schools for the availability of distance learning opportunities for the required CSPD courses. In the state of Connecticut, there is one CACREP–accredited institution of higher education that is preparing vocational rehabilitation professionals: Central Connecticut State University (CCSU). All rehabilitation counseling graduates from this college will be eligible to sit for the Certified Rehabilitation Counselor (CRC) exam.

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

Currently, there are 94 students enrolled in the CCSU Vocational Rehabilitation Program. This is sufficient to address the projected recruitment needs over the next fiscal year.

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

#### Last year, there were 19 graduates from the CCSU program. This year, the total number of expected graduates is 21. All are eligible to sit for the CRC exam.

#### 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 remains in contact with CCSU, 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 VR 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 VR 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

All staff members working as VR Counselors, the VR Supervisor and the acting BESB VR Director 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).

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 VR 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 VR Assistant Counselor.

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

##### 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.

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.

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 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.

VR 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. In addition, the BESB Rehabilitation Technologists participated in the Microsoft Ability Summit on Technology as well as the Assistive Technology Update: What’s New in 2021.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, many more virtual trainings have become available to staff, increasing the number of opportunities for training and participation in communities of practice. The annual conferences of Council of State Administrators for Vocational Rehabilitation and National Council of State Agencies for the Blind held in the Spring and Fall were held virtually in FY 20 and 21, allowing 10 staff to attend each conference.

The National Employment Team (NET) conference was also held virtually allowing 6 staff members to attend.

 Cultural Diversity and sensitivity continue to be high priority topics for VR staff. A comprehensive four-day training was made available to staff, the VR Supervisor participated in the Knowledge Building Session on Cultural Diversity for members of one of the state’s workforce boards, and members of the VR staff participated in a Community of Practice.

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

Information from the RSA supported 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 from 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.

During the COVID-19 pandemic the VR staff have participated in a number of Communities of Practice (COP) offered through the Technical Assistance Centers and CSAVR. The VR Supervisor participated in a quarterly Veteran’s Professional Network COP comprised of VR professionals throughout the Country. The VR Supervisor, Transition Coordinator and VR Counselor Coordinator participate in the Pre-ETS Blindness COP that meets quarterly and discusses programs offered to Pre-ETS individuals and best practices throughout the country. The three Rehabilitation Technologists participate in an Assistive Technology COP made up of Technology experts throughout the Country. And four VR Staff participated in a Cultural Competency COP..

#### 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.

There are two VR 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.

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), Connecticut’s General VR Program.

### 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’s State Rehabilitation Council commissioned the Center for Public Policy and Social Research (CPPSR) at Central Connecticut State University to conduct a comprehensive statewide needs assessment (CSNA) in 2020 to assist the SRC and BESB VR with establishing goals and priorities. The full report was issued by CPPSR in December, 2020.  This was after the submission of the initial WIOA Plan, and the results are being incorporated into the 2-year plan modification. Among the variables reviewed, CPPSR conducted an analysis of BESB VR services to individuals with the most significant disabilities.

One issue identified in the CSNA was a decrease in the number of individuals on the registry, and a corresponding decrease in the number of new VR clients. BESB has a statutory obligation to maintain a registry of all individuals in Connecticut who are legally blind. After a steady increase from FY 2012 to FY 2015, BESB’s registry has shown some evidence of a decline. In FY 2015, 11,854 individuals were listed in the registry, the highest number observed for this assessment and a client increase of 4.3%. The registry in FY 2019 has 9,338 individuals with significant visual impairment, a 16.2% decrease since FY 2015. And as of the writing of this plan modification, there are 8,642 individuals on the registry. The decrease is likely not a result of a decreasing blind population in Connecticut and may instead be attributed to other factors. One such factor could be the lack of referrals from doctors, a point included in CPPSR recommendations. Another is the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

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:

Comparing BESB, state and national statistics, CPPSR found that the Bureau’s VR program appears to be successful at engaging Connecticut’s visually impaired minority community, enrolling clientele who self-identify their ethnicity that reflects both the state and national minority population at approximately 33.5%. CPPSR concludes that BESB is actively engaging blind youth in the State of Connecticut. Regarding BESB’s financial situation from the previous CPPSR report, in 2019 and 2020, there have been improvements. In both years, BESB received significant supplemental awards through the federal reallotment process. Along with savings due to the pandemic, BESB is in a more financially secure position in an uncertain 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. These recommendations helped to inform BESB’s new goals, which are presented later in the plan.

1. Improve Bureau outreach and visibility by sharing client success stories online, as well as continuing to promote BESB VR services to eye doctors.
2. Offer new virtual services to encourage clients to utilize VR services.
3. Work with community organizations to improve outreach and client engagement.
4. Further emphasize online career opportunities for VR clients to broaden employment and internship possibilities.
5. Continually refine plans for providing necessary services to vulnerable clients in the event of a pandemic-related lockdown.
6. Make additional efforts to equip and train VR clients with technology to prepare them for virtual work and education.
7. Look into arranging housing placement for VR clients who struggle with finding secure housing.

##### B. Who are minorities;

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 VR 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 who are bicultural, one of whom is fluent in Spanish. BESB VR also employs three Counselors who are African-American, two of the Counselors covering a regional caseload and the third covering a Transition caseload. These five staff are available to provide outreach to community-based organizations that can offer linkages to traditionally underserved communities. 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. One of the Assistant VR Counselors is an active participant in the quarterly Hispanic Council in the Southern part of the state.

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

Based on the new U.S. census information released in 2021, the majority of Connecticut residents are white, though data shows the state is becoming more diverse, with an increase in the number of Hispanic residents of approximately 30% over the last decade.

The state's Hispanic population increased by 144,206 people from 2010 to 2020, while the white population declined by 377,282. The state’s white population dropped from 77.6% in 2010 to 66.4% in 2020, while the Hispanic or Latino population grew from 13.4% to 17.3%. The Black population grew from 10.1% to 10.8% and the Asian population grew from 3.8% to 4.8%. Those figures do not include people of mixed race.

Overall, Bureau clientele enrolled in the VR program who self-identify their ethnicity reasonably reflect both the state and national minority population at approximately 33.5%. Sub-groups are similarly represented. For PY 2021, BESB reported the following VR program enrollment: 25% African American, 18.8% Hispanic/Latino, 3% Asian, and less than 1% Native American/Pacific Islander.

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

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, 47clients engaged in Adult Education Programs,5 clients engaged in Dislocated Worker Programs, 3 clients engaged in Job Corps, and 103 clients enrolled in Wagner-Peyser during Program Year 2020. BESB VR finds great value in these partnerships. 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.

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 119 students who are potential eligible or eligible for f Pre-Employment Transition Services. The VR Counselors participate in Planning and Placement Team (PPT) 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 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 VR 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 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.

Due to the COVID pandemic, two community rehabilitation providers dropped off the contract and are no longer able to provide services. All the providers on contract have suffered financial set backs and loss of staff. They are currently not at full capacity. The provision of services is being looked at with Connecticut’s VR-General program within the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services and regular meetings with the CRP committee occur.

#### 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

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

### 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 2020, there are 606 eligible individuals in BESB VR. The Blind Registry for BESB has 8,642 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.

This represents a continued decrease in the number of individuals on the registry, from a high of 11,854 in FY2015, to 9,338 in FY2019 to the current number of 8,642. There are a combination of factors at play, including a lack of referrals from doctors and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

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

##### A. The VR Program;

At the onset of FY 2021 there were 587 eligible individuals, 586 of whom had implemented IPEs. The projected number of new IPEs for FY 2021 is approximately 125. Added to the 586 eligible individuals with pending and implemented IPEs at the onset of FY 2021, this would represent approximately 745 eligible individuals that are projected to receive services under an IPE in FY 2021. Projections for FY 2022 closely parallel FY2021 projections, with approximately 750 individuals anticipated to receive services under an IPE in that fiscal year. In FY 2023, 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 760 eligible individuals.

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

In the 2020 program year (PY), 1 new individual was found eligible for supported employment services, bringing the total number of eligible individuals to 16 for that fiscal year. Of that total, 4 individuals were youth with disabilities. In PY 2020 there were 4 individuals who exited BESB VR, 1 of whom achieved employment outcomes, leaving 12 individuals who were eligible for supported employment at the onset of PY 2021.

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.

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

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.

In FFY 2020, there were 710 eligible individuals with IPEs over the course of the federal fiscal year. BESB VR expended approximately $3.92 million on combined Program costs, including $1.04 million to provide purchased services, and $2.88 million in administrative and operational costs. In FFY 2021, there were 697 eligible individuals with IPEs over the course of the fiscal year. BESB VR expended approximately $3.94 million on combined Program costs, including $1.08 million to provide purchased services, and $2.86 million in administrative and operational costs. For FFY 2022, budget projections indicate that approximately $4.55 million will be expended on combined Program costs, including an estimated $1.42 million to provide purchased services to approximately 675 individuals, and $3.13 million in administrative and operational costs. This estimate includes inflationary adjustments, inclusion of indirect cost charges of 11.95 percent to BESB VR, as well as projected costs to serve transition-age students receiving Pre-Employment Transition Services.

With the availability of $4.1 million in Title I carry over funds from FFY 2021, in addition to the federal Title I allotment of $3.35 million (representing 15 percent of the total Title I allotment received by Connecticut), and state matching funds of approximately $790,000, BESB VR does not anticipate the need to enter into an Order of Selection in FY 2022, FY 2023 or FY 2024.

### 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

The BESB VR goals, objectives, strategies and measures of performance were jointly 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

The VR Staff, State Rehabilitation Council and Advisory Board met to develop new goals based on the results of the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment, the emerging needs from the COVID-19 Pandemic and the current environment.

**Goal A:** Engage employers to increase career opportunities for eligible individuals of BESB VR.

**Objective A1:** BESB staff will reach out to employers and partner agencies to collaborate and educate them on BESB services.

Strategy: BESB VR Counselor Coordinator and VR Counselors will meet with and present to employers, partner agencies, and national organizations educating them on BESB services.

Measure: Documentation of 5 presentations annually.

**Objective A2:** Develop digital BESB marketing materials that can be distributed to employers and partner agencies.

Strategy: Create materials showing success stories and services that BESB offers.

Measure: Documentation of distribution to employers and partner agencies.

**Objective A3:** Train BESB VR clients how to use CT Hires, Career Index Plus, Talent Acquisition Portal (TAP), Indeed and other accessible job exploration platforms.

Strategy: Rehabilitation teachers and VR Counselors will teach no fewer than 10 job seeking clients per year how to navigate and utilize these platforms.

Measure: Documentation of a list of accessible and effective sites and utilization by each client.

**Objective A4:** VR Counselors will engage clients on their caseloads to participate in job fairs, hiring events and training programs with partner agencies.

Strategy: VR Counselors will share this information with individuals on their caseloads and facilitate attendance at these events.

Measure: Documentation of no fewer than 5 clients per VR Counselor caseload per year attending one of these events and a survey of their experience.

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

**Objective B1:** BESB VR will continue to serve clients that are in the Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) category.

Strategy: Students will be assigned to a caseload to receive specific, qualifying Pre-ETS services with dedicated Pre-ETS funding.

Measure: Documentation of Pre-ETS services

**Objective B2**: BESB VR staff will coordinate enrollment and participation for their Pre-ETS eligible students in BESB run events as well as partnership with agencies that promote the development of self-determination, self-advocacy and financial literacy.

Strategy: BESB VR staff working with Pre-ETs eligible students will develop opportunities and distribute information on existing programs. These opportunities will focus on pre-employment activities such as work based learning opportunities, internships, college preparatory programs, life skills programs, and related career development programs.

Measure: Documentation of participation in these events.

**Objective B3:** BESB VR Staff will develop a mentor program for transition aged students

Strategy: BESB transition aged students will be provided opportunities for group mentoring events, job shadowing and peer-to-peer support networking.  Individuals will be matched with a mentor that is blind or visually impaired who is employed within a wide range of careers.

Measure: A list of mentors available for a match with a transition aged student. Documentation of mentor matches and participation at events.

**Objective B4:** 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 leadership events such as the Youth Leadership Forum, and similar programs if available.

Measure: Documentation of the funds committed.

**Goal C:** Use Innovation and Expansion authority to increase access to career information, adaptive technology, self-advocacy and employer awareness of the employment potential of individuals served by BESB.

**Objective C1:** 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 C2:** 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 of technology devices.

**Objective C3:** The SRC will identify a contractor to conduct the annual consumer satisfaction survey and periodic comprehensive needs assessments and use 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 C4:** 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 a 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 C5:** Identify a Vendor to create outreach materials for distribution of information on BESB.

Strategy: Rehabilitation Technologists identify accessibility issues with marketing documents and solutions to share with clients of the Bureau.

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

**Objective C6:** Create a tutorial series in an accessible format on the use of the adaptive technology.

Strategy: Rehabilitation Technologists develop a series of tutorials, such as but not limited to working in a remote environment, how to use common assistive technology and other technology for distribution.

Measure: Tutorials posted on agency website and distributed to organizations of and for individuals who are blind and distributed 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;

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

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

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

The State Rehabilitation Council has reviewed 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 is not operating under an order of selection and provides services to all eligible individuals.

##### B. The justification for the order

Not applicable.

##### C. The service and outcome goals

Not applicable.

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

Not applicable.

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

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

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

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.

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

In order to facilitate the identification of supported employment options for transitioning high school students, the two VR 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.

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

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 VR 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 VR 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 Rehabilitation Teachers assist with teaching clients how to register for web-based job search platforms such as the Career Index Plus, Monster, and CT Hires through the DOL to name a few. These web-based products include a vocational interest inventory, economic outlook information, and links to immediate job openings and labor market information 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 this will result in increased access to job opportunities.

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 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

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 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 was expanded 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)

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. VR 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 or by 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 students who desire to participate in vocational rehabilitation services. The VR 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

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. BESB’s VR Supervisor is an active participant on the statewide Community Rehabilitation Providers committee made up of Department of Aging and Disability staff as well as staff from the Community Rehabilitation Providers. This committee meets quarterly to improve collaboration and create efficient, effective processes.

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

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 in all five regions, 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 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;

Providing clients with the skills and training necessary to qualify for occupations that exist in the economy is essential. 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 and other job search engines 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 was developed by a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor and 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 Planning and Placement Team (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. Guided by this plan, staff from BESB VR created 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

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.

In response to the changing work environment and increase in remote work options, a BESB Rehabilitation Technologist will create a tutorial series in accessible format on the use of adaptive technology. Examples of tutorials will be working in a remote environment, the use of common assistive technology and other non-adaptive technology. These tutorials will be posted on the website and distributed as needed to clients.

Another identified need is accessible marketing materials that are electronic, a QR code, social media or pamphlets. A vendor will be identified to create outreach materials for distribution of information on BESB

##### 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.

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

Connecticut’s WIOA State Plan presented a set of overarching goals, which include the following:

* 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.

BESB VR was able to contribute to these overarching goals in the following ways:

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

Strategy 1.1: Identify employment needs of employers - knowledge, skills, abilities in key industries and occupations.

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

Strategy 1.2: Analysis of current workforce unemployment data, labor market trends, workforce’s educational and skill levels (including individuals with barriers/disabilities).

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

Strategy 1.3: 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 for the first two years of the plan based on the identified strategies and work is ongoing.

* 1.1 Analyze Economic Conditions. Through 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 online. 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.
* 1.2 Analysis of data, trends, skills. CTDOL, Office of Research data showed a 3.6% unemployment rate in September of 2019 as the initial plan was being developed. Economic projections reflected significant anticipated growth over 20% in 19 occupations by 2026, including statisticians, Home Health Aides, CNC Machinists, Research Analysts, Software Developers, Mechanical Drafters, Nurse Practitioners, and Physician’s Assistants. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic the unemployment rate increased dramatically in 2020 to 8.2 percent in CT. Among the hardest hit industries were Hospitality and Service. As of December2021 the unemployment rate is decreasing and is at 5.8 percent in CT, with more opportunities in the fields that were hardest hit.
* 1.3 Analysis of Workforce Development Activities. 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 strategy engages clients with Career Index Plus and other web-based job search engines as a tool for conducting self-directed research individualized to their unique circumstances and interests.

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

Strategy 2.1: 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.

* 2.1 Performance Accountability and Alignment. BESB will continue work with the larger workforce investment system to set thresholds for the new WIOA performance accountability measures.

**Objective 3.** Operationalize the Service Delivery System

Strategy 3.1: Review statewide policies, programs, and recommended actions to support comprehensive streamlined workforce system.

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

Strategy 3.2: 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.

Strategy 3.3: Develop and update comprehensive State performance accountability measures.

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

Strategy 3.4: 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.

Strategy 3.5: 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.

Strategy 3.6: 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.

Strategy 3.7: 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.

Strategy 3.8: Prepare annual performance reports.

Measure: BESB VR report on performance measures distributed.

Strategy 3.9: Develop statewide workforce and labor market information system.

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

Strategy 3.10: 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.

Strategy 3.11: 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.

Strategy 3.12: Alignment with activities not covered by Plan, to assure coordination, avoid duplication.

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

Strategy 3.13: 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.

Strategy 3.14: 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 for the first two years of the plan based on the identified strategies and work is ongoing. The updates are summarized here.

* 3.1 Statewide policies, programs and actions. The policies for BESB VR have been updated to reflect WIOA changes and the policies have been made available to the partner programs. Collaborative partner meetings provide opportunities to understand program policies and leverage services to meet the needs of Connecticut job seekers.
* 3.2 Continuous improvement of workforce system. BESB VR Counselors participate in regional business service teams, and designated staff participate 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.
* 3.3 State Performance Accountability Measures. BESB VR provides data on employer engagement to CT DOL for inclusion into the statewide reporting on that measurement. In Program Year 2021, BESB VR engaged 417 employers to address their recruitment and employee retention needs.
* 3.4 Statewide Policies. BESB VR has provided technical assistance and recommendations pertaining to accessibility of American Job Centers and training program services, including training material review and recommendations to remediate documents. 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.
* 3.5 Technological Improvements. 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.
* 3.6 Align Technology and Data Systems. BESB VR staff continue to offer accessibility consultations. Rehabilitation Technologists are available to support BESB VR Counselors and partner program staff in assessing job opportunities to determine typical adaptations, recognizing that an individualized assessment for specific job candidates is necessary to finalize the recommendations. Discussions continue on the merits of a “common-front end” data collection system for the partner agencies, but no specific decision has been made due to the uniqueness of each of the partner’s current data collection software and the cost that would be incurred to develop any universal data collection system.
* 3.7 Allocation Formulas. Cost allocation formulas were finalized and are in use relative to co-location of BESB VR Counselors at the American Job Centers.
* 3.8 Performance Reports. In Program Year 2020, BESB VR served 672 individuals under an IPE. There were 56 individuals who achieved an employment outcome, with an average hourly wage of $22.57. Through the Randolph-Sheppard Program, gross sales from the vending facilities were approximately $770,000.00. There were 25 vending facility operators, who employed an additional 20 workers. Average annual income for the vending facility operators was $19,437.00, with one location providing income of more than $60,000.
* 3.9 Statewide Information System. BESB VR data on services and outcomes is available to partner programs for use in aggregate reporting.
* 3.10 Other Policies. BESB VR has actively participated in an interagency workgroup that developed and continues to update a reference guide on partner program services to share with employers and community-based organizations in the state. The workgroup 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.
* 3.11 Alignment of Funded Activities. BESB VR clients have actively engaged in services offered by the American Job Centers with 104 clients enrolled in core services.
* 3.12 Alignment of Other Activities. 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 2020, 48 clients received these disability related skills training services from the Adult Services staff.
* 3.13 Coordination of Activities and Services. Collaboration with the five Regional Workforce Development Boards has been a strong focus in FY 2021. Prior to the pandemic, Counselors were co-located on a part-time basis at the American Job Centers. After the onset of the pandemic, most activities were shifted to a virtual model and continue to be virtual with only 7 in person appointments occurring. Counselors contact clients remotely, with 1128 contacts regarding AJC activities and 177 clients involved in AJC Services. Counselors participated in virtual business services meetings with American Job Center partners on 74 occasions. 91 clients were assisted with registering for services through the American Job Centers, up from 42 for the previous year. Starting in July, Counselors have been back to co-location in 3 of the 5 sites throughout the state.
* 3.14 Engagement with Community Colleges and Technical Schools. 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 reviewed website design and electronic media for coursework completion, making recommendations on access and accessibility. BESB VR staff 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 at the onset of the initial plan. Progress on these goals is presented below.

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

Objective A1: 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 and ongoing.

* 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. 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, Advanced Auto Distribution Center in Enfield, and Cartus, Inc. in Danbury. In FY 2021 additional collaboration included HRACC (Human Resource Association of Central Connecticut), Amazon, United Heath Group, Bender Consults, Community Renewal Team, and J.Lodge.

Objective A2: 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.

* Counselors participated in virtual business services meetings with American Job Center partners on 74 occasions. 91 clients were assisted with registering for services through the American Job Centers, up from 42 for the previous year.

Objective A3: 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 pder 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.

* In FY 21 the program continued its strong commitment to facilitating active engagement of clients in the career exploration and job seeking process. The BESB VR Program assisted 138 clients to connect with Career Index Plus, a self-directed web-based resource for researching jobs in demand, credentialing requirements and current job openings

Objective A4: 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, 131 clients of the BESB VR Program attended at least one job fair, 124 of those job fairs were held virtually in FY 21 and 7 were in person. 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 B1: 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 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 B2: 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 achieved.

* The resource guide has been completed and is shared with BESB VR clients, as appropriate. In addition, BESB disseminates a yearly compendium of programs offered in the summer.

Objective B3: 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 VR Counselors on programs and initiatives for transition-age youth with a focus on Pre-Employment Transition Services. For Program Year 2021, this resulted in 41 opportunities that included 17 paid work and internship experiences, independent living residential programs, mentoring experiences, youth leadership camp, and college tours.

Objective B4: 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 and ongoing.

* 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, Transition 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. These groups work collaboratively to update educational materials for families and school district staff, specific to Pre-ETS related activities and opportunities for successful transition from school to work or post-secondary education.

Objective B5: 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 C1: 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.

Objective C2: 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 C3: 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. In conjunction with BESB VR, strategies for improvement in both areas were identified and implemented. CPPSR was also utilized for the program’s annual Consumer Satisfaction Surveys.

Objective C4: 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 these conferences, CSAVR and NCSAB, in the spring and fall of 2020 and 2021, both of which were held virtually.

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

When this plan was initially written, 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 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 reallotment dollars, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the program is financially stable. BESB VR is looking toward the future for increased innovation and expansion initiatives that will increase the number of clients served. To do this, BESB will need to identify potential candidates for VR services through focused outreach and generate increased opportunities for employment of the clients that are served. At the same time, BESB VR is facing a major retirement wave and will be looking at rebuilding and stabilizing the workforce.

#### 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

With16 clients of BESB VR eligible for supported employment services, 4 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 to a focus on supported employment enabling students to achieve competitive and integrated employment.

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

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.

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

During Program Year 2020, Innovation and Expansion funding was utilized for a number of activites, including the following:

* To cover the cost of the NFB Newsline service.
* 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.
* To secure the Center for Public Policy and Social Research to conduct and analyze the 2020 Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment and consumer satisfaction survey and to report their findings to the SRC for use in developing Program goals and priorities.
* To facilitate the participation of the SRC, through its Chair, in national activities at the conferences of the NCSAB and CSAVR.
* 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.

###

### 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

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 |  |
| Title of Signatory | Director of Education and Rehabilitation, BESB |
| Date Signed |  |

### 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.*