

## VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION

The Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Services Portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan <sup>1</sup> must include the following descriptions and estimates, as required by section 101(a) of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended by 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;
  - (2) the Designated State unit's response to the Council's input and recommendations; and
  - (3) the designated State unit's explanations for rejecting any of the Council's input or recommendations.

### Agency response (a):

To be entered after January 27, 2016 end of public comment period.

- (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;
  - (2) the designated State unit will approve each proposed service before it is put into effect; and
  - (3) requirements of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan will apply to the services approved under the waiver.

### Agency response (b):

The Washington State Department of Services for the Blind does not request a waiver of statewide services, as we do provide vocational rehabilitation services statewide.

- (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;

---

<sup>1</sup> Sec. 102(b)(2)(D)(iii) of WIOA

- (2) State programs carried out under section 4 of the Assistive Technology Act of 1998;
- (3) Programs carried out by the Under Secretary for Rural Development of the Department of Agriculture;
- (4) Noneducational agencies serving out-of-school youth; and
- (5) State use contracting programs.

#### **Agency response (c):**

The Washington State Department of Services for the Blind (DSB) believes that collaboration with stakeholders is essential to assisting people with disabilities to successfully become employed. Such an ongoing effort maximizes resources and addresses the quality of life issues that can enhance the ability of a person with a disability to obtain and maintain employment. We have active collaboration with the following organizations and agencies (and formal memorandums of understanding (MOUs) where noted).

The DSB engages in activities with the Washington State School for the Blind (WSSB), school districts, teachers of the visually impaired, and families of students with a visual disability. If the student has a co-occurring disability, we advise co-enrollment with our partner agency the DSHS Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR). DSB, DVR and the Office of Superintendent of Instruction (OSPI) have a memorandum of understanding of how all parties support transition youth services.

The DSB engages with the Center for Change in Transition Services (CCTS). The CCTS is a Washington State Needs Project funded annually by federal resources from the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI). The goal of CCTS is to improve post-school outcomes for students with disabilities in the state. CCTS has provided transition services training, resources and technical support to DSB staff in support of the agency's transition youth services.

The DSB engages with the Blind Youth Consortium, a quarterly meeting of partner agencies (DSB; Washington State School for the Blind; Washington Sensory Disability Services; Lighthouse for the Blind; Washington Talking Book and Braille Library; OSPI Educational School Districts; the Department of Early Learning; the Department of Health; Seattle Children's Hospital; University of Washington) to collaborate and share resources on blind youth issues within Washington State. The group worked to refine coordination of Birth – 3 vision services statewide, and have collaborated in the need to identify and provide services for individuals with either ocular and/or cortical visual impairment at the earliest point.

The DSB engages actively with Public Institutions of Higher Education. DSB and DVR have entered into a formal agreement with the Public Institutions of Higher Education in Washington. This agreement facilitates collaboration for our participants with disabilities who are attending Higher Education schools in Washington State. One of the primary

components in the agreement concerns cost sharing for certain high cost accommodations.

The DSB engages with the Washington Assistive Technology Act Program (WATAP) to broaden access and services to adaptive technology for the agency participants. The DSB and WATAP have an interagency agreement to facilitate equipment loans, technology assessment services and trainings. The DSB informs agency participants of funding mechanisms for adaptive technology through the Washington Access Technology Fund, and works with the Deaf Blind Equipment Program to coordinate technology assessment and training.

The DSB engages in activities with tribal vocational rehabilitation programs, meeting quarterly in each region of the state with the eight partner tribal programs and the DVR, and all partners meet annually to refine the memorandum of understanding on how we will partner on service delivery.

The DSB engages with the Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment program through the Veteran's Administration (VA), and the agency has entered into a memorandum of understanding among the DVR and the VA on how all will partner to provide services among potentially shared customer base.

The DSB engages with the Washington Sensory Disability Services (WSDS). DSB staff partner with the WSDS in providing referrals and services to children who are deaf or hard of hearing, blind or visually impaired, or deaf-blind, and provides training and other supports to families and service providers. The WSDS is a strong partner within the Blind Youth Consortium.

The DSB engages with the Office of the Deaf & Hard of Hearing (ODHH). ODHH is a state agency that provides resources for our Deaf Blind participants, including telecommunication-related services, reasonable accommodations to access DSHS services and human services via regional service centers of the deaf and hard of hearing. ODHH manages the funds for the Deaf Blind Service Center, which provides information, referral and Support Service Providers for environmental interpretation.

The DSB engages with the Helen Keller National Center (HKNC). The Helen Keller National Center is a resource for DSB on Deaf-Blind resources and can provide contracted services to DSB participants as well as trainings for DSB staff for working effectively with DSB Deaf Blind participants.

(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.

- (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;
  - (B) transition planning by personnel of the designated State agency and educational agency that facilitates the development and implementation of their individualized education programs;
  - (C) roles and responsibilities, including financial responsibilities, of each agency, including provisions for determining State lead agencies and qualified personnel responsible for transition services;
  - (D) procedures for outreach to and identification of students with disabilities who need transition services.

#### **Agency response (d):**

DSB collaborates with a number of partners to coordinate statewide needs assessment and strategic planning activities for youth with visual impairment in Washington State.

The DSB Executive Director serves as a member of the Washington State Special Education Advisory Council which assists the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction to set policy, and oversee performance regarding implementation of IDEA for students with disabilities throughout the state. The DSB Director brings to the Council a special emphasis on pre-employment services for school-age youth, as a part of professional training and IEP implementation.

There is active information sharing and strategic coordinated planning among the Washington State School for the Blind (WSSB), the Washington Sensory Disability Services (WSDS), local educational districts and partner education, service and health care organizations in a formalized Blindness Youth Consortium, which meets throughout the year. Partners plan joint outreach efforts, coordinate referral of potential VR eligible youth, and implement process improvements for assessment & training services statewide in the areas of daily living skills, orientation and mobility, communication skills, access to technology, vocational aptitudes, interpersonal and social skills, and academic preparation for transition-age youth. A focus for this group has been to highlight and integrate early identification and services around cortical visual impairment as well as optical visual impairment.

### **Coordination with Early Intervention Services**

#### **Ages Birth – 3**

The Department of Services for the Blind (DSB) is signatory to a Memorandum of Understanding in coordination of early intervention services along with the following agencies:

- Department of Early Learning
- Department of Social and Health Services
- Department of Health
- Health Care Authority
- Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction.

DSB is represented on a governor-appointed board to oversee early intervention and learning services.

DSB helps coordinate and provide services for families with children ages 0-3 who have visual impairments through non-VR dollars. The children are referred through outreach efforts among community partners such as local children's hospitals and eye care physicians. DSB staff provide families with advocacy, referral & information, and training services. DSB partners with service providers to provide training and family support workshops, group trainings and other family-focused events.

### **Coordination with K-12**

The DSB Executive Director is an acting member on the state's Special Education Board.

### **Ages 3 – 8**

DSB's Youth Services specialists provide on-going supports through non-VR dollars for children with visual impairment and their families through age 8, as needed. They provide children and their families with advocacy, referral & information, and training services, and assist in IEP and 504 planning.

### **Ages 9-13**

Washington State interpretation of the Individuals with Disability Education Act (IDEA) allows for transition services as young as necessary, and DSB recognizes that providing pre-employment transition services as early as possible for blind youth is critical for success in their later transition to the adult world of work. DSB Youth Services specialists facilitate and manage pre-employment transition group service workshops for youth ages 9 – 13. The workshops provide an opportunity to introduce the skills to join in family labor, to gain exposure to the world of work, and to learn adapted methods for interacting within the community at large. These workshops are available statewide for customers. The agency plans to expand the scope and location of these workshops to better meet local pre-employment transition needs. The agency collaborates closely with local teachers of the visually impaired and the statewide educational service districts to identify and serve youth in these pre-employment transition group services. DSB Youth Services specialists also coordinate with statewide consumer, family and

school organizations to facilitate youth adaptive skill and self-advocacy activities as services to groups.

### **Ages 14 – 24**

DSB's Vocational Rehabilitation policy, WAC 67-25-399 – Vocational Rehabilitation Services - Transition Services for Students, allows individual application for vocational rehabilitation services at age 14, and requires the development of an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) for all students within 90 days of eligibility, which matches the timeline for adult services.

DSB is signatory to an August 2014 interagency agreement among the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) and the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR). The memorandum of understanding clarifies responsibility and coordination of roles in providing services and programs for those students who are both eligible for special education services under IDEA, and who are also eligible for vocational rehabilitation services. The current agreement remains in effect until August 31, 2017, but may require amendments after federal regulations are finalized.

The agreement outlines each agency's overall role and responsibilities relating to the provision of transition services to high school students with disabilities. This agreement provides for the development and approval of an individualized plan for employment (IPE) before each student determined eligible for vocational rehabilitation services leaves the school setting.

Under this agreement, DSB routinely consults with and provides technical assistance to high schools and educational agencies in planning for the transition of students with disabilities from school to post-school vocational rehabilitation activities.

DSB's agreement with OSPI also states that we will coordinate services with students' Individualized Education Plans (IEP). The Interagency Agreement lays the groundwork for each agency's roles and responsibilities.

DSB's primary services while a student is in high school are outreach, assessment, information & referral, counseling & guidance, and pre-employment transition services in order to prepare for successful transition into post-secondary higher education and career activities.

DSB authorizes and pays for any services needed to establish a transition student's eligibility for DSB services, and funds services outside the scope of the school district's FAPE (free appropriate public education) responsibility. The DSB collaborates with educational staff and families to ensure blind youth have early and deep exposure to pre-employment transition services such as career exploration, job shadowing and paid

work experience, and extra-curricular opportunities to more fully develop self-advocacy and independence skills.

The DSB/DVR/OSPI agreement lists several procedures that are to be used to increase the number of students identified as needing transition services as well as ensuring that the services are provided as soon as possible. Some specific procedures include:

- An OSPI representative is a member of the State's Rehabilitation Council.
- Developing a system to exchange and disseminate data and information.
- Working with county/community councils to provide training and technical assistance relating to transition services.
- Providing outreach to increase education about Vocational Rehabilitation services to underserved populations and students with disabilities.
- OSPI lists DSB transition contact information on the OSPI website.
- DSB youth and transition specialists conduct outreach and ongoing consultation statewide to teachers of the visually impaired, students, families and others in the education community.

At age 14, blind, deaf blind, and visually impaired students become eligible to apply for individualized vocational rehabilitation services. Case management activities are coordinated among the Youth Services specialists and agency VR Counselors to provide pre-employment transition services and to facilitate the move into adult VR services. DSB also coordinates closely with local school districts, district Teachers of the Visually Impaired (TVIs), and the Washington State School for the Blind (WSSB) to identify blind and visually impaired children who are eligible for VR services.

DSB is able to develop early relationships with blind children and parents, providing a vocational context within IEP and 504 Planning & Implementation Team discussions and ensuring an important link to identifying the individualized skills needed to be addressed in order for the youth to be prepared for adult life after graduation.

DSB Youth Services specialists organize a sequential set of youth programs to aid in preparation for post-high school life. Blind and low vision individuals who have early exposure to adaptive skills training, vocational exploration and active socialization have a head start to becoming functional, employed and fully integrated adults. The Department of Services for the Blind knows not all learning can be accomplished in the classroom, and offers the following progression of workshops to complement the learning that is available through the public education system. These pre-employment transition programs serve to give each participant a safe environment to discover their vocational aptitude, to develop confidence in adaptive skills and encourage self-advocacy and independence. The pre-employment transition programs are a key to the



agency's success in quality of employment outcomes for students with visual disabilities.

### **Pre-Employment Transition Group Services Workshops**

Eligible Ages: 9 – 13

In day-camp format, pre-employment training and activities are offered for age-appropriate independent skills development, integration into family labor, and career exposure. Workshops can include hands-on exposure to activities such as household chores, making food, preparing shopping lists and going shopping, where participants learn that they are capable of joining family responsibilities like their sighted peers and siblings, and parents learn that they need to provide equal opportunities to their blind child to allow him/her appropriate developmental experiences. Exposure to career options and the idea of work and workplace can happen in this age bracket through collaboration with business partners such as Jack Straw Studios, where students learn to use audio recording and engineering equipment to interview elder blind mentors, create and record songs and stories around issues of disability, and gain exposure to workplace culture and expectations. DSB will track the spending for these pre-employment group activities, but will not track individual personal information of the attendees who are not agency participants and are not yet made eligible with an active individualized vocational rehabilitation plan.

### **Youth Employment Solutions 1 (YES1)**

Eligible Ages: 14 to 15

The two-week program offers pre-employment career exploration activities that include career interest and aptitude assessments, worksite visitations, guest speakers, mock applications, interviews, resume development, recreational & daily living experiences, and job shadowing.

### **Youth Employment Solutions 2 (YES2)**

Eligible Ages: 16 to High-School Graduation

The six-week program offers paid employment experience based on student interests, experience and ability. The residential living component of the program provides students the opportunity to refine their daily living skills often for their first time away from home and parental supports: students plan, purchase and prepare their meals; manage money and time-management needs; and maintain a tidy household. Traveling daily to work hones independent travel skills and navigation by public transportation. Community speakers and student-planned activities encourage deeper integration into the greater community and tools for self-advocacy.



## Bridge

Eligible Ages: College-bound Youth, Junior and Senior years

The five-week summer program is held on campus at Eastern Washington University (EWU). It prepares students for college in a real way: they attend a five-credit university course, get oriented to the Disability Student Services, learn to advocate for accommodation needs, get experience living independently away from home, and practice their travel and self-management skills. Participants get a hands-on exposure to the adult pace and performance expectations within the college setting.

## Additional Pre-employment Transition Activities

Visual impairment is a low-incidence disability among youth; only 5.5% of all individuals identified with visual difficulty in Washington State are among the American Community Survey age group most aligned with students, ages 5 – 18. Alternatively, 93% of the blind and low vision population are adults ages 19 and older.

While the DSB has had a long history of providing strong vocational counseling & guidance and progressive core pre-employment transition services and activities for students with a visual disability, the costs for these activities as they exist won't come close to meeting the required 15% set aside of the federal grant. Our goal is to both expand upon the existing pre-employment workshops and work experience programs by increasing capacity for the existing summer programs, and also by developing new opportunities for pre-employment workshops, peer mentorship, and career and work experiences year-round, in local communities throughout the state. Our challenges will include identifying appropriate service providers and educational partners that will be able to serve locally a small, low-incidence population with the specialized needs they require. We will seek to identify and implement appropriate curricula and activities that meet the required five pre-employment transition services. We will be in discussion with educational staff and families to explore the benefits of a five-year high school plan in order to allow time for successful completion of rigorous academic requirements, practice of essential adaptive skills, and beneficial work experiences within the school academic fourth and fifth years. The agency will spend a portion of its required set-aside Pre-Employment Transition Service dollars on activities described as nine optional activities in order to build capacity.

DSB has a formal agreement with the Washington State School for the Blind (WSSB) WSSB to clarify referral procedures, expectations and costs for the fifth-year life and vocational skills "Learning Independence for Today & Tomorrow" (LIFTT) residential program held on the WSSB campus. The LIFTT program provides fifth-year 504-plan students a learning environment for daily intensive adaptive skills of Blindness in an age-appropriate setting. Participants in the LIFTT program are able to enroll in Clark

College courses if they are college-bound, and/or are able to participate in work experience sites within the community while learning the intensive skills of Blindness.

DSB and WSSB are in negotiations to co-fund a WSSB staff position that will manage the identification and on-going supports for work experience sites for students at the school throughout the school year.

DSB coordinates with the WSSB in developing the school's annual Career Fair, and helps support attendance at the school's various pre-vocational events.

DSB currently maintains an office on the campus of the Washington State School for the Blind which fosters frequent collaboration in support of pre-vocational services for students who are blind, low vision or deaf blind. This arrangement also provides easy access for school personnel who are collaborating with the VR staff in the planning and provision of career exploration and work experience opportunities for these students. A DSB staff member is also on the WSSB's Board of Trustees.

DSB actively supports blind youth interested in leadership and self-advocacy to attend the Youth Leadership Forum (YLF) and DSB has an active role in organizing the YLF summer program as agency representatives on the Governor's Committee on Disability and Employment.

DSB has collaborated with community partners such as the American Foundation for the Blind (AFB) and the Lighthouse, Inc. to provide pre-employment transition services, and will continue to explore and develop partnerships that expand blind student exposure to meaningful pre-vocational experiences. Through active partnering, DSB connects with local school districts and employers to provide community-based work experiences; develop career fairs, transition workshops and special intensive adaptive skills-training workshops around the state.

DSB has had active membership in the statewide Deaf Blind Advisory Committee, facilitated by the Washington Sensory Disability Services (WSDS) and joined by partners such as the Washington School for the Blind, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, Division of Developmental Disabilities, Office of Deaf and Hard of Hearing, and parents of deaf blind kids.

- (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.

**Agency response (e):**

**Lilac for the Blind, Sight Connections, Vision for Independence Center (VIC), & Edith Bishel** - DSB works closely with these private, non-profit blind and low vision agencies. These agencies often refer clients to DSB, provide meeting space for DSB staff and participants, and offer support programs to agency participants.

**Lighthouse for the Blind, Inc. (LHB)** – DSB partners with this private, for-profit blind and low vision organization for referral of participants, collaboration in shared community issues of blindness, and coordination of services. They are a strong partner within the Blind Youth Consortium.

**Lions Low Vision Clinics** - DSB works with Lions Low Vision Clinics around the state. DSB staff has been presenters at several Lions Low Vision Fairs and sit on some Lions Boards. The Lions organizations refer potentially eligible individuals to our agency and provide services to participants.

**National Federation of the Blind of Washington (NFBW) & Washington Council of the Blind (WCB)** – The agency collaborates and shares information with Blindness consumer groups in Washington State to promote opportunities for our participants, collaborate in shared issues of blindness, and to solicit input for consumer priorities and expectations in service provision. The agency actively encourages and supports agency participants who are new to blindness and staff in attending state consumer conventions in order to broaden exposure to issues of blindness and consumer perspective.

**Goodwill Industries of Tacoma** - DSB has formed a long-term partnership with Goodwill in Tacoma. Goodwill provides a training center and CRP services.

**Washington State Business Leadership Network (WSBLN), the National Employment Team (NET), and Puget Sound Diversity Employment Network (PSDEN)** – DSB has an active relationship and partnership in the activities of the WSBLN, the NET and the PSDEN, providing our specialized expertise as a resource to businesses locally, and connecting agency participant talent to businesses that understand the importance of inclusion of people with disabilities into their workforce.

**Yakima Special Needs Coalition** - This group is a gathering of many community programs working on issues of transportation for individuals with disabilities. The lead agency for the coalition is People for People, a primary regional transportation provider for individuals that cannot access the public transit.

**Washington Talking Book & Braille Library (WTBBL) and Ogden Resource Center (ORC)** – The WTBBL and ORC are community partners in providing alternative access to print materials. They are both strong partners within the Blind Youth Consortium.

- (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.

**Agency response (f):**

Washington DSB provides Supported Employment services to individuals with disabilities co-occurring with visual impairment that make long-term supports necessary for the individual's success in maintaining integrated and competitive employment, including developmental disabilities, traumatic brain injury (TBI) and disabilities due to mental health.

DSB and Washington State have long believed that all individuals are capable of integrated and competitive work with the right supports in place, and the state has over the years reduced options for sub-minimum wage employment. The new regulations requiring the agency to provide pre-employment transition services for youth with disability before certification for sub-minimum wage work is expected to have little impact on the agency, as this is the direction the state has been moving towards for years. A major employer of blind and deaf blind individuals in the state, the Lighthouse for the Blind, Inc., may not meet the RSA eventual definition for integrated workplace, but has met the definition for competitive work among all job classes, with zero sub-minimum wage jobs offered there.

A challenge for supported employment is that the comparable benefit resources available in Washington State to provide extended long-term support services are limited. DSB, the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, and the Development Disabilities Administration (DDA, an umbrella agency of the Department of Social and Health Services) collaborate on cases that have co-occurring disabling conditions that make long-term supports necessary. The DDA prioritizes the provision of long-term support services for qualified individuals who become employed through VR services. Local area DDA staff and regional administrators are made aware of the availability of the Department of Services for the Blind's VR services through active collaboration of agency staff.

Diligent efforts by DSB staff have facilitated long-term services through state benefits, natural supports, employers and self-pay. DSB continues to promote the use of Ticket to Work as a potential income source for developmental disability (DD), mental health (MH), and traumatic brain injury (TBI) service providers to provide long-term support services to our customers after exit from the VR program. The DSB continues to work

with employers and other natural supports to identify funding for long-term support services.

DSB works closely with the Region X Technical Assistance Continuing Education in Rehabilitation (TACE) - which has continued as a regional technical assistance support organization through the University of Washington with new funding sources after the 2014 WIOA re-authorization of the Rehab Act. The TACE sponsors and promotes Supported Employment training activities throughout the state and region. Participation and attendance to these events by DSB staff offers opportunities for VR personnel to network with other entities who are actively involved in Supported Employment placement efforts.

DSB staff also network with a variety of resource and service providers through their attendance at various statewide Supported Employment conferences that are sponsored by local organizations. These events draw registrants from public and private agencies to promote and provide services to people with the most significant disabilities.

DSB will negotiate formal agreements with the Department of Social and Health Services divisions of Developmental Disabilities Administration, Division of Behavioral Health and Recovery, and Washington State's Health Care Authority in order to formalize collaboration, coordination of services, and mutual understanding of scope and role of each agency in promoting success for individuals who require long-term employment supports.

### **Community Rehabilitation Providers (CRPs)**

DSB employs a milestone service-based fee structure with private, for- and not-for-profit vocational rehabilitation service providers for general and supported employment services. The most commonly purchased CRP services include: vocational evaluation, trial work experience, job placement, intensive training, job retention, and transitional employment.

Community Rehabilitation Program providers are qualified through an in-house vendor qualification process, which qualifies individual CRP staff rather than the organization as a whole. All vendor staff must pass a federal background check.

DSB has also established a qualification process for vendors who provide pre-employment services such as Rehabilitation Teaching, Orientation & Mobility and Assistive Technology training. Prior to permitting direct-unsupervised access with agency participants, including supported employment participants, all vendors/providers of services are required to complete and pass background checks through an FBI fingerprinting process. In requiring both the technical qualification process and the criminal background check of providers, DSB has taken the necessary steps to ensure

that when agency participants choose to utilize community providers, they are afforded the utmost safety and the highest quality services that are available

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

**Agency response (g):**

DSB will work in coordination with a broad base of employer connections to continue to build working and collaborative relationships, initiatives and coordinated WIOA partner strategies.

DSB has strong connections to business diversity and inclusion initiatives and will continue to leverage these initiatives to include DSB agency participants and job seekers with disabilities. DSB will utilize these connections to expand strategies to include pre-employment transition services, for students and youth with disabilities.

DSB will continue to be a strong and active partner with WIOA Business Engagement strategies and initiatives to leverage our expertise and knowledge to support inclusion of job seekers and transition youth, with disabilities, in full participation with all WIOA programs and services.

DSB is positioned to provide direct and high value services to 503 Federal Contractors with utilization goals of 7% of their workforce, employees with disabilities. The 503 contractors represent 25% of the national workforce and are mandated to use the One-Stop system for job postings.

DSB will continue to offer value-added services to the business community, including:

- Workplace disability and competency's training
- Technology assessments and web presence reviews
- Job site assessments for accommodations
- Customer service training for business interaction with individuals with disabilities
- Pipeline and succession strategies

DSB will engage in a multi-prong approach and will include the following strategies:

- Leverage the VR National Employment Team structure to connect job seekers and transition youth with business



- Work in strong partnership with One Stop business services teams throughout the state to ensure DSB expertise and individuals with disabilities are included in WIOA and One Stop business engagement efforts
- DSB will facilitate a coordinated effort to engage Business Leadership Network (BLN) businesses with our collaborative efforts on behalf of the WIOA system, job seekers and transition youth to support mutual success and benefits
- DSB will develop appropriate internal business engagement strategies that will assist the agency in scaling to the statewide and local business engagement efforts
- DSB will leverage existing and underutilized employer connections from our current and past employment outcome data and develop an intentional engagement strategy for establishing stronger relationships and working toward continued employment support as well as engaging in transition youth initiatives
- DSB will work with business to establish rich experiences for career exploration and work experiences and develop collaborative working relationships with Washington State School for the Blind (WSSB) and other community partners to engage youth throughout the state
- DSB will consider working with our WIOA partners to establish an advisory group primarily consisting of business to develop transition youth career exploration and youth employment programs to be implemented in collaboration with DSB and our community partners

(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;
- (2) the State agency responsible for providing services for individuals with developmental disabilities; and
- (3) the State agency responsible for providing mental health services.

**Agency response (h):**

DSB has active collaboration with the Developmental Disabilities Administration and Division of Behavioral Health, but as DSB is not part of the Department of Social and Health Services family of agencies, we do not yet have a formalized agreement with either agency. We will work towards that goal as part of this state plan.

DSB has been in conversation with the state's Health Care Authority around possible inclusion of non-VR blindness services funding, particularly for providing improved access to early intervention services for blind infants ages birth to three. We do not



have a formalized agreement yet with the Health Care Authority, and we will attempt to develop a formal agreement as part of this state plan. This level of agreement will attempt to include provisions for long-term employment supports not covered through the Developmental Disability Administration, and provide provisions for funding of vocational-related services for Medicaid-eligible individuals in case the agency is unable to serve them during an Order of Selection scenario.

### **State Medicaid Plan**

DSB will negotiate an agreement with the Washington State's Health Care Authority in order to formalize collaboration, coordination of services, and mutual understanding of scope and role of Medicaid in promoting success for individuals who require long-term employment supports and provide options for vocational services under an Order of Selection scenario.

### **Division of Developmental Disabilities**

DSB will negotiate an agreement with the Department of Social and Health Services division of the Developmental Disabilities Administration in order to formalize prioritization for securing long-term supports for employed and DDA-eligible individuals, and for detailing means for collaboration, coordination of services, and mutual understanding of scope and role of each agency in promoting success for individuals who require long-term employment supports.

### **Mental Health Services**

DSB will negotiate an agreement with the Department of Social and Health Services Division of Behavioral Health and Recovery in order to formalize collaboration, coordination of services, and mutual understanding of scope and role of each agency in promoting success for individuals who require long-term employment supports.

- (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) Data System on Personnel and Personnel Development
    - (A) Qualified Personnel Needs. Describe the development and maintenance of a system for collecting and analyzing on an annual basis data on qualified personnel needs with respect to:
      - (i) the number of personnel who are employed by the State agency in the provision of VR services in relation to the

- number of individuals served, broken down by personnel category;
  - (ii) the number of personnel currently needed by the State agency to provide VR services, broken down by personnel category; and
  - (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.
- (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;
  - (ii) the number of students enrolled at each of those institutions, broken down by type of program; and
  - (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.
- (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.
- (3) *Personnel Standards.* Describe the State agency's policies and procedures for the establishment and maintenance of personnel standards consistent with section 101(a)(7)(B) and 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
  - (B) the establishment and maintenance of education and experience requirements, to ensure that the personnel have a 21st century understanding of the evolving labor force and the needs of individuals with disabilities.

- (4) *Staff Development*. Describe the State agency's policies, procedures, and activities to ensure that, consistent with section 101(a)(7)(C) of the Rehabilitation Act, all personnel employed by the designated State unit receive appropriate and adequate training in terms of:
- (A) a system of staff development for professionals and paraprofessionals within the designated State unit, particularly with respect to assessment, vocational counseling, job placement, and rehabilitation technology, including training implemented in coordination with entities carrying out State programs under section 4 of the Assistive Technology Act of 1998; and
  - (B) procedures for the acquisition and dissemination of significant knowledge from research and other sources to designated State unit professionals and paraprofessionals.
- (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.
- (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.

#### Agency response (i):

### Qualified Personnel Needs & Personnel Development

#### Overview of Personnel Structure

The Department of Services for the Blind has a vision for teaming which values and encourages a workplace culture of teamwork, respect, accountability, innovation, and nurturing, and encourages demonstration of these qualities among all levels of the organization.

The systematic agency support of multi-disciplinary teams was designed to increase collaboration, ownership and accountability among all staff, resulting in customer-centered, higher quality service provision, and greater independence and quality employment outcomes for DSB customers.

The Employment and Blindness Services Program is organizationally divided into three Regional Teams statewide — North, South and East. There is also a residential training center component of the agency's VR program, called the Orientation and Training Center.

The three Regional Area Managers each supervise 15, 18 and 11 direct-service staff respectively. The training center Program Manager supervises nine direct service staff.

In addition to monitoring and supporting the daily activities of staff, the three Regional Area Managers and OTC Program Manager take a proactive role to provide consistent, timely coaching, mentoring, and training. Regional Area Managers also conduct monthly case reviews which help to assure compliance and adherence to agency procedures, timelines and high quality customer service standards.

Within each regional team, there are cross-functional team roles:

- Rehab Technicians
- Orientation & Mobility and Low Vision Specialists
- Adaptive Skills of Blindness Rehab Teachers
- Adaptive Technology Specialists/Technician
- Youth Services Specialists
- Independent Living Part B (ages 14 – 55 non-vocational) Specialists
- Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors

Benefits of Multi-disciplinary Teaming for Customers and Staff -

- Participant needs are better met and are better prepared to enter the contemporary workforce as a result of the collaboration of the multi-disciplinary work teams
- Participants benefit from more timely responses to service needs. In the event of staff vacancies, services are not interrupted
- Participants with co-occurring disabilities and complex, specialized needs have access to broader array of staff expertise
- Participants are supported by an array of staff in the decision-making process, and are able to more actively participate in developing the direction of their vocational rehabilitation
- DSB team members gain valuable feedback from team interactions
- DSB team members share accountability for success of participant
- Multi-disciplinary teams increase equity of service delivery across the state through resource sharing.
- People working in silos duplicate limited labor & resources and complicate processes for agency participants. By working together, we refine our communications and maximize our skills, abilities, and available resources, providing the participant a more seamless, higher quality experience. This multi-

disciplinary team structure also maximizes existing staff skills and opportunities for professional growth and creativity.

- The counselor is not a lone ranger scrambling for appropriate resources for a customer's needs, but works in concert with a skilled and specialized team to collaborate and address participant needs thoroughly and swiftly
- In-house adaptive skills and technology assessments conducted directly after eligibility provide the participant with a rich set of information in which to make choices and move forward vocationally and in life.
- The agency places high emphasis on technology - the internal Assistive Technology staff address technology needs early and in concert with the team; the high-quality jobs our customers achieve can be seen as a result of the agency's emphasis on technology.

### **FFY2015 Personnel data**

Washington State Department of Services for the Blind (DSB) actively employs sixty-five (65) RSA-defined direct service personnel to serve approximately 1,400 Vocational Rehabilitation and 200 Independent Living Part B participants per year:

- Fifteen (15) Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors
- Eleven (11) Rehabilitation Technicians
- Nine (9) Adaptive Technology Specialist/Technicians
- Eleven (11) Low Vision/Orientation & Mobility Specialists
- Seven (7) Rehabilitation Teachers
- Three (3) Youth Services Specialists
- One (1) Employment Program & Partnership Development Specialist
- Three (3) Regional Area Managers
- One (1) Orientation and Training Center Program Manager
- One (1) Procurement and Supply Specialist
- One (1) Vendor and Program Contracts Manager
- One (1) VR Programs Manager
- One (1) Deputy Director who acts as Chief of Field Services

The DSB also actively employs sixteen (17) RSA-defined non-direct service staff:

- One (1) Executive Director
- One (1) Assistant Director for Operations
- Five (6) Fiscal staff: One (1) Chief Financial Officer, one (1) Business Manager, and three (3) Fiscal Analysts, and one (1) Data Management Analyst

- Four (4) Information and Technology staff: One (1) IT Manager and three (3) IT Specialists
- One (1) Human Resources Technician
- One (1) Communications Specialist
- Three (3) Business Enterprise Program staff: one (1) BEP Manager and two (2) BEP Specialists
- The agency also hires readers/drivers as accommodation for Blind staff, with sixteen (16) part-time, on-call staff currently available to provide reader/driver services as needed
- Services to the state's Older Blind program continue to be managed through a contract with the University of Washington and provided by community vendors statewide

In the past year, the agency has recruited to fill a total of seven (7) direct service staff vacancies, and four (4) non-direct service vacancies. Six of the 11 vacancies were due to retirements.

- Four (4) Rehabilitation Teacher / Orientation & Mobility Specialist positions
- One (1) Rehabilitation Technician position
- One (1) Orientation and Training Center Program Manager
- One (1) Youth Services Specialist
- One (1) Business Enterprise Program Manager
- Two (2) Fiscal & Management Analysts
- One (1) IT Specialist

Many positions in the last year were filled before they were vacated, as retirement planning has allowed recruitment efforts to be completed before the retiring staff leaves the agency. This concurrent staffing assisted in the training and development of several new staff, including program managers. The only positions that were vacant for an extended period have been the four Rehabilitation Teacher/ Orientation and Mobility Specialist positions. We continue to have one lingering vacancy; Orientation & Mobility Specialists are a scarce resource in this state, with competition among school districts and the Veteran's Administration and no training programs located in the state.

Internal training & development is actively considered through the performance evaluation process among Regional Area Managers and staff to fill hard-to-recruit positions where feasible, and is supported by management. The DSB actively supports supervision of vocational rehabilitation counseling students in internship opportunities if the individual him/herself has a visual impairment, in order to promote more skilled pool of peer counselors.

In the past year, the Executive Team management made significant organizational adjustments: shrinking the Executive Management by one position; adding capacity to

the Fiscal team; adding responsibilities and re-allocations to the Regional Area Managers and OTC Program Manager; adding a promotional track for Rehabilitation Teachers / Orientation & Mobility Specialists; and adding a leadership development track in each of the regional teams and the Orientation and Training Center. Through this re-organization, the agency wanted to especially address retention and workload issues for Orientation & Mobility Specialists, and create a system for leadership development and succession planning within the work teams.

A new FTE for Youth Specialist has been allocated from a retired Rehabilitation Teacher position to better meet the deeper Youth Services mandate through WIOA.

### **Estimated Vacancy Rates**

Given the average 5-year employee turnover rate of 20% multiplied by the 65 total number of the Vocational Rehabilitation staff, it is likely that 13 vacancies could be anticipated over the next 5 years.

The number of VR personnel expected to retire in the next five years is nine (9), and may include Vocational Rehabilitation Counseling and Rehabilitation Teaching staff, and a Regional Area Manager.

### **Staff Development & Plan for recruitment**

Western Washington University (WWU) is the only graduate program in the state of Washington that directly prepares vocational rehabilitation professionals.

Western Washington University currently enrolls 37 students in the Masters of Rehabilitation Counseling program. Nineteen of the 37 students identify as having a disability.

Of the total 19 first year students enrolled, seven are currently employed in a field related to Rehabilitation Counseling, three of whom are employed by the Washington General agency.

In FFY 2015, Western Washington University's Rehabilitation Counseling program graduated 12 students. Nine of last year's graduates are employed, and three are in active job search.

One of those WWU Masters in Vocational Rehabilitation program graduates will conduct a VR Counseling internship supervised by DSB staff. DSB as an agency is making deliberate efforts to develop future counseling talent with visual impairment as part of agency succession planning; we currently have two VR Counselors on staff who are blind or has a visual impairment, and one of the two is likely to retire in the next five years.



All of our current counseling staff meets the agency's CSPD standards as they have all either earned a Master's Degree in Vocational Rehabilitation Counseling or possess a valid Certified Rehabilitation Counselor credential.

DSB plans to continue to hire only qualified Masters in Rehab Counseling or CRC certified VR counselors in these positions, as the agency has adopted this level of education as a minimum requirement. We recognize that the lower standards through WIOA may impact the agency's ability to meet the internal CSPD standards, and will continue to monitor availability and continued quality of candidates with that certification. We are hopeful we can maintain the high caliber of professionalism that the CRC and Masters level training provides our counseling staff. Currently, all 15 VR counselor positions meet that standard and there are no future plans to modify these criteria for the VR counselor positions.

The Department actively coordinates with Washington and regional colleges/universities offering studies towards degrees in vocational rehabilitation for recruitment of talent, including Western Washington University, the University of Idaho, Western Oregon University, San Diego State University, Fresno State University, Arizona State University, and Utah State University. The Department maintains a broad recruitment mailing and website posting list, which we use to advertise vacant vocational rehabilitation positions. Recruitment information is also posted on the agency web site and on several other web sites that support rehabilitation professionals, including LinkedIn. The Washington State Small Agency Human Resources (SAHR) agency is our state-mandated centralized HR resource, and they have provided DSB with supports in recruitment and screening of applications since July 2011.

Institutions: Western Washington University

Students enrolled: 37

Employees sponsored by agency and/or RSA: 3 (RSA)

Graduates sponsored by agency and/or RSA: 9 (RSA)

Graduates from the previous year: 12

### **Recruitment Challenges**

The agency promotes a healthy positive atmosphere, and makes effort to provide staff with clear and consistent communications regarding performance expectations, agency decisions and agency initiatives. We are consistently rated among the highest of state agencies for staff satisfaction.

Recruitment of a diverse staff is important for the agency – we want our staff to be representative of the customer base and communities we serve. We are proud to

acknowledge that over 28% of DSB staff report a documented disability, and many of those are provided with reasonable accommodations. Six of our staff receive assignment pay for ASL, including four VR Counseling staff who are able to directly communicate with deaf blind participants.

The agency's biggest recruitment challenge stems from the fact that Washington State lacks local training programs for both Rehabilitation Teachers/Orientation & Mobility Specialists and ASL Interpreters for Deaf and Deaf Blind individuals.

Without local training avenues, recruitment of Rehab Teaching staff is challenging, and the agency relies primarily on recruitment of out-of-state training program graduates to move into the state. The challenge is the high cost of living, especially in the Puget Sound Region, which frequently dissuades a prospect from accepting a position in Washington State. It is a challenge to be able to establish a new home in the cost-prohibitive Puget Sound region at the salary we are able to offer our Rehab Teaching staff. While the agency was able to secure a promotional opportunity for that job class through the recent re-organization, the increase in pay is still well below national standards and that of our main competition for hire of these positions. The lack of a local Rehab Teaching training facility also results in a lack of qualified teachers of the visually impaired to provide early adaptive skills training through the local school districts, resulting in diminished skill sets for blind K-12 students.

We have options for development of our own Rehab Teacher /Orientation & Mobility staff through an internal staff training & development plan, and have done so in the past. The agency has had a history of promoting professional development efforts especially among our Rehab Technician staff. We have supported Rehab Techs in their educational and professional development to become vocational rehabilitation counselors, AT Specialists, Low Vision Specialists, and Rehabilitation Teacher/O&M Specialists. The agency hasn't had recent success in motivating staff to add a Master's level program of study onto their current workload.

The lack of a local ASL Interpreter Training Program has resulted in a shrinking resource of qualified interpreters for community Deaf Blind events and needs such as the bi-weekly community Deaf Blind classes and Support Service Providers (SSPs) for independent interaction with the community.

### **Staff Training & Development**

The Department's Training Plan for Rehabilitation describes how the agency assesses and prioritizes ongoing training needs through input from the following sources:

1. Staff training needs assessment: A formal comprehensive Performance and Development Plan (PDP) is completed and discussed with each employee on an

annual basis, with an emphasis on individualized staff development needs. Specific development and/or training needs are identified for each employee, by the employee and supervisor, and should be addressed during the following or year to come.

2. External factors: Results of audits, evaluations, state and federal compliance reviews, and agency case reviews identify critical areas that need to be addressed through staff training and provide the basis for our annual VR Program Training Plan.
3. Changes to work: Implementation of new policies or procedures; new work tools implemented, changes the agency effects on the work provide new needs for training.
4. Planned change: Strategic Plan priorities and objectives requiring training as part of implementation.
5. Meeting diversity requirements: Is the agency meeting goals in the Department's Affirmative Action Plan? If not, training may be required.

The Regional Area Management Team plans the agency's annual training agenda and prioritizes the training needs of Department employees.

Comprehensive training plans are developed and implemented for all direct service delivery positions during the first 6 – 12 months of hire. Training is conducted by the Regional Area Manager, a peer mentor/coach, and/or various members of the cross functional teams. A week of intensive adaptive skills training through the Orientation & Training Center helps new staff better understand the participant experience and the context of blindness in the work we do, whether the staff person is working directly with a participant or indirectly in an business administration setting. With the multi-disciplinary teams, job shadowing of each job class is useful for new staff to understand how all the parts fit together. Orientation & Training Center and Business Administration staff are assigned as liaisons to a regional team, and join the quarterly regional team meetings in order to better integrate the work of the agency across programs.

Specific training needs of counseling staff and other VR professionals are primarily being met through the utilization of training resources within the region with occasional support being secured through national workshops and conferences.

As a small Department, the agency does not conduct regular credit earning workshops in rehabilitation. To remedy that, we continue to rely on our coordination with the Region X Technical Assistance Center through the University of Washington to identify educational opportunities as well as develop new resources for earning credit through in-service training and other alternative approaches. The agency's involvement with the Region X Technical Assistance Center through the University of Washington continues

as the region's VR agencies have developed a membership dues system in order to continue to enhance staff and management development through their training services.

DSB will continue to utilize regional training resources including: TACE at the University of Washington, the City University in Spokane, the Center for Change in Transition Services (Seattle University), the Washington State Department of Personnel's Human Resources Development Division, and private organizations and agencies for various rehabilitation related topics.

Department of Services for the Blind has also partnered with Tribal VR agencies of Washington State by attending and participating in events such as the 2013 Consortia of Administrators for Native American Rehabilitation annual conference. Members from the eight confederated tribal VR programs in Washington State, as well as from throughout the country, were in attendance. The conference was nothing less than a learning opportunity for our staff as Tribal members presented information about cultural sensitivity and the cultural differences which are present when serving Native Americans within the VR program. Our on-going partnership with each of these Tribal VR Programs - via staff attendance at quarterly regional meetings and active partnership in shared VR cases - continues to enhance our working relationships with Native American customers who are blind and receiving VR services from our agency.

DSB has a designated staff person to facilitate securing staff CEUs for various internal and/or external trainings.

In FFY15, specific training needs of our counseling staff and other VR professionals were primarily met through the utilization of training resources within the region and working closely with the Technical Assistance Continuing Education (TACE). In support of the professional development of our staff, the last year of the RSA In-service Training Grant was fully utilized to strengthen staff ability to provide quality services to participants with significant disabilities. The ending of the In-Service Training Grant will make staff training less prolific. The agency is aware of the Job Driven VR Technical Assistance and National Transition Technical Assistance grant opportunities, and the agency has made use of the universal technical assistance opportunities through the webinars. We hope in future to apply for more intensive technical assistance in order to help cover staff development needs with the ending of the In-Service Training Grant.

Staff attend out-of-state trainings and conferences, such as the annual California State University at Northridge Adaptive Technology (CSUN) Conference, International American Education & Rehabilitation (AER) Conference, Helen Keller Technology Training, Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR) & National Council of State Agencies for the Blind (NCSAB), and Consortia of Administrators for Native American Rehabilitation Conference (CANAR).

DSB supports Rehabilitation Teacher/Orientation & Mobility staff in securing the required continuing education CEUs to maintain their certification. We have supported staff in developing and securing formalized training in areas of Low Vision assessment, updated Orientation & Mobility concepts, and ethics. The agency Rehab Teachers meet quarterly to provide peer training and share resources.

While currently there are no credential requirements for the agency's Adaptive Technology Specialists, it is an agency responsibility to ensure staff maintain up-to-date training and competence in assessment and training of adaptive tools as technology rapidly changes. The agency has provided annual attendance for AT Specialists to an out-of-state technology conference (usually CSUN), and provide staff time quarterly for vendors to demonstrate new products and staff to provide peer training on devices.

AT staff are committed to reading technology and industry journals and reporting new information on adaptive technology devices to their peers. The team presents formal peer trainings quarterly, and regularly invites AT vendors to demonstrate and loan updated technologies.

### **Personnel to address individual communication needs**

Department policies, procedures and community resources ensure that applicants and recipients of program services who have limited English speaking ability are provided with the appropriate mode of communication to fully benefit from public VR services.

Several of our staff members speak diverse languages such as Spanish, German, French, Japanese, American Sign Language, Tagalog, Bisayan, Cambodian and Korean. Where it makes sense to do so, staff are able to communicate directly with customers and community members in their native or preferred language. We currently provide nine staff with 5% extra assignment pay for language skills: five staff for ASL and four for Spanish. We have one staff who is a certified English as a Second Language instructor, and who develops non-visual ESL lessons to meet the agency participant needs.

Where it does not make sense to rely on staff language skills, or where we do not have access to those skills, agency staff access community resources to communicate with diverse populations. Individuals who are Deaf-Blind or Hard-of-Hearing/Blind may communicate with staff via voice relay service. American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters are utilized when needed for in-person meetings, trainings or events.

The Department continues to employ personnel who are familiar and confident in the use of an array of communication modes to fully benefit the recipients of the program based on the preferred method of communication of the customer.

To address the needs of our customers who have limited English speaking ability and want to speak English more fluently, we have contracted with an English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) provider housed in our Orientation and Training Center. We are able to serve both residential and commuting students in providing literacy coursework accessible to individuals with vision impairment.

### **Coordination of professional development under IDEA**

DSB coordinates with special education programs through the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) and the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR), and through collaborative projects with the Washington State School for the Blind (WSSB).

Agency staff who work with transition-age youth coordinate transition activities and conduct in-service training activities throughout the state to teachers of the visually impaired and other Special Education personnel. In addition to providing in-service training, they work with school district staff and DSB counselors to ensure customers receive services and information necessary to facilitate a smooth transition from school to adult services. Agency staff attend and present at the annual conference of the region's Teachers of the Visually Impaired, families, and educators of rehabilitation (Pacific Northwest Association of Educators of Rehabilitation or PNWAER) in order to alert partners of collaboration opportunities through the agency's transition services.

Based on assessments and training provided by the Department, DSB staff provide recommendations and information to school districts, WSSB, parents and students about vocational rehabilitation services including availability, referral, and eligibility requirements that support a coordinated transition plan from school to post-school services.

Consultation is also provided as early as necessary to special education staff regarding IEP planning and development. DVR, DSB and OSPI staff shares data and reports relevant to program development and planning.

#### **(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;
  - (B) who are minorities;
  - (C) who have been unserved or underserved by the VR program;
  - (D) who have been served through other components of the statewide workforce development system; and

- (E) who are youth with disabilities and students with disabilities, including, as appropriate, their need for pre-employment transition services or other transition services.
- (2) Identify the need to establish, develop, or improve community rehabilitation programs within the State; and
- (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.

#### Agency response (j):

#### Sources of Data

The Department of Services for the Blind (DSB) utilized data derived from comprehensive needs assessment efforts conducted from October 2014 through January 2015, and has built upon that assessment data through meetings, audits, reviews, surveys and public forums with DSB agency participants, employees, partners, service providers, Rehabilitation Council members, the Client Assistance Program (CAP), tribal program representatives, school representatives and other community members.

The State Rehabilitation Council co-sponsored four public forums in the past year, where a call-in phone line allowed for statewide input from Washington State residents and agency participants. DSB staff met with the State Rehabilitation Council in December 2015 to solicit discussion, engagement and feedback on the content of the combined state plan and the agency's VR supplemental attachments.

A strategic planning process in 2014-2015 provided outside perspective in confirming our high performance as a VR agency, and outlined strategic initiatives for the next five years.

Analysis of customer satisfaction surveys, performance data and RSA statistics show that DSB provides very high quality services and outcomes. The RSA r-911 data provides strong evidence that DSB places emphasis on careers that provide living wages and benefits, within a competitive and integrated context. The agency wants to maintain and build on this excellence in quality of services and outcomes.

Demographic data compiled from the agency and compared to general Washington state demographics through tools such as the American Community Survey highlights underserved communities for agency programs.



State audits conducted in 2014 and 2015 have provided data that the agency is consistently following policy & procedure, and has addressed any identified areas of concern.

Meetings with Community Rehabilitation Providers in 2014 and 2015 have elicited discussion about how to be more successful with serving the agency's participants.

Meetings with community partner agencies around statewide Deaf-Blind issues and needs occurred in 2014 and 2015.

Community partners convened in 2014 and 2015 on ways to streamline and improve services to youth with visual impairments within Washington State

### **Assessment Data Results:**

DSB has been able to provide the full range of VR services to all eligible individuals, including those experiencing the most significant disabilities, as DSB has not required an order of selection to date.

The agency has worked to increase numbers of customer participation in vocational rehabilitation services; numbers served has increased steadily over the past ten years, and the corresponding agency spending on direct client services has increased steadily, while administrative costs have remained flat.

The agency has identified communities that appear to be underserved by our agency based on general population demographics, and analyzed performance data and customer/staff feedback to identify regions where agency resources are thin and can be bolstered.

### **Demographic Profile**

Working age individuals (ages 18 – 64) represent the primary segment of the state's population with visual disabilities (52%) who may qualify for the agency's vocational rehabilitation services. Approximately 41% of those in the state with visual disability are age 64 and older. Youth with a visual disability, age birth to 18, represent approximately 7% of the state population.

A large segment of the agency vocational rehabilitation participants (23%) are beyond age 55, representing a shift in traditional notions of working and retirement age. In FFY2015, in fact, two individuals who were age 84 exited the program with employment outcomes.

The segment eligible for pre-employment transition services (Pre-ETS) represent about 5% of the state's population with visual disability.

The American Community Survey results closely echo earlier ACS and 2010 US Census data. We have made use primarily of ACS 2014 1-year and 2013 5-year compilation data for the statistics below.

There are an estimated total of nearly 7 million Washington State residents, per the 2014 ACS estimates.

Approximately 820,000 residents of all ages, or 12.2% of all individuals who reside in Washington State, identify as having a disability.

Disability is slightly more prevalent for men of traditional working ages 18 - 64 (226,792 or 10.6%) than for women age in the same age group (215,755 or 10.0%). When considering the range 18 – 74 as an expanded notion of working age, the gap continues: men with disability at 291,427, or 12.4%, of males in that age range; women with disability at 277,450, or 11.5%, of females in that age range. The gap of prevalence of disability per gender closes when considering all ages (Men: 407,322 or 12.2%; Women: 411,929 or 12.1%), primarily due to the higher number of women over age 75 with a disability (Men over 75: 77,544 or 51.8%; Women over 75: 111,513 or 52.5%)

Visual disability impacts approximately 66,464 Washington residents of ages 18-64, or 1.6% of that traditional working age demographic.

The prevalence of visual disability associated with race or ethnicity in Washington State among working age residents indicate the highest prevalence of disability in the Native American or Alaskan Native population with approximately 5.0% of that demographic; followed in descending order by Other race identified, 2.5%; Black/African American, 2.4%; Hispanic, 1.7%; White, 1.3%, and Asian, 0.9%.

Washingtonians with a visual disability age 16 – 64 are employed at lower rates than the total population, but at higher rates than the demographic group for all disabilities. The employment rate for all Washington residents age 16 – 64 is 70.0%; for all individuals with a disability in that age group 40.7%; and for all individuals with a visual disability 51.5%.

In order to close the employment gap between those with a visual disability and population as a whole in Washington and to match the 70.0% employment rate, an additional 12,861 blind, low vision or deaf blind individuals would need to become employed. We serve approximately 10% of the potential need in any given year.

### **DSB Participants served**

99.3% of DSB active participant cases during FFY2015 were identified as having either a most significant disability (MSD) or a significant disability (SD). Almost all, 98.25% of

those individuals exiting DSB's VR program with employment, earned greater than or equal to the state minimum wage.

All eligible DSB participants have a visual disability. Many participants also have multiple disabilities. For example, of the 365 cases exited with employment outcomes for the two year period of FFY2014 & 2015, 155 (42.5%) of those participants had additional disability barriers, including 71 individuals with mobility & general physical conditions (19.5%), 29 individuals with cognitive impairment (7.9%), 25 individuals with hearing impairment (6.8%), and 22 individuals with additional mental health barriers (5.5%). Twenty-six of the 365 cases with employment outcomes, or 7.1% of all employment outcomes, were integrated employment outcomes requiring long term supports.

Where other disability expertise is needed, we readily collaborate with partner agencies such as Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, Office of Deaf & Hard of Hearing, and Division of Developmental Disabilities. When an applicant presents no functional visual disability and therefore does not meet eligibility for DSB services, information & referral to Workforce Development Partners is provided as appropriate.

For those participants who exited the program with employment outcomes in FFY2015, the average participant age at closure was 45 years old. The eldest participant with an employment outcome in that time period was age 84 (two individuals: one an Electrical Engineering job retention and the other a Piano Technician job retention) and the youngest age 21 (three individuals). Of all employment outcomes in 2015, 4.7% were transition-age individuals.

For the year 2014, Social Security Administration estimates for Social Security disability recipients in Washington State show that approximately 16.3% of all residents with a disability receive SSI/SSDI benefits. For FFY2015, 20.4% of all participants served through the agency's VR program were recipients of Social Security benefits. Of those individuals who exited with an employment outcome and had listed public assistance as their primary support at application, 75% instead were able to list earnings from their work as primary support at exit. We serve a higher proportion of individuals on SSI/SSDI, and fewer DSB participants require those benefits upon exiting the program.

## **What we know about DSB from the Comprehensive Needs Assessment data:**

### **RSA and performance data:**

- DSB customer base is predominantly made up of individuals who have either significant or most significant disabilities

- Strengths of the agency can be seen in quality of employment outcomes – high percentage competitive and integrated; high average hourly and weekly wages; high number hours worked per week; high number of participants meeting Substantial Gainful Activity; diversity of career outcomes and individualized vocational goals; strong supports for higher education and adaptive technology within the vocational plan.
- Challenges can be seen in quantity of outcomes and numbers served and accessibility of electronic information and data systems at participant job sites.
- DSB VR participant base overall strongly matches population distribution of individuals with vision difficulty among the state’s counties (per 2013 ACS 3 year estimates).
- Statewide, the Asian community continues to be under-represented among our customer base. Targeted areas for outreach for increasing Asian participation in DSB services include these counties: King, Snohomish, Kitsap, Thurston, and Pierce; and the following linguistic communities: Chinese, Filipino, Vietnamese, and Korean.
- The Hispanic/Latino community had also been under-represented two years ago, but outreach and service provision efforts have brought parity of the percentage of the DSB Hispanic participant base and the state’s Hispanic/Latino demographic data. Targeted areas of outreach for increasing Hispanic participation have included the following counties: King, Snohomish, Franklin, Grant, Skagit, Kitsap, Whatcom, and Walla Walla.

### Strategic Plan survey

In a broadly disseminated survey, agency participants, families, and business & community partners provided feedback on the agency’s strengths, quality of outcomes, barriers, risks, opportunities and high value services. The survey also collected inputs about what DSB should stop doing, and what DSB should do differently in order to maximize vocational success and goal achievement by 2020.

The top strengths of DSB were cited as the skilled staff and array of specialized services offered by the agency, the solutions-focus and customer-centric responsiveness, and the leadership and collaboration the agency provides in the community.

When asked what was considered barriers to achieving agency goals of competitive employment, public acceptance of the blind and visually impaired, lack of community & employer outreach, access to data, staffing capacity, and funding concerns were the top responses cited.

Top ranked among opportunities to achieve the agency mission was to provide increased visibility of the agency among businesses, more outreach in the community, and increase resources for technology and youth services.

When asked what DSB should quit doing, responses included relying on outdated communications methods and “remaining quiet” on agency services and achievements.

#### Identified DSB strengths:

**Participants** (former and current): vocational, blindness and youth services; experienced caring staff and executive director; flexible, resourceful, supportive attitudes; respect for partnering

**Business:** excellent, committed, responsive staff; range of services; solutions-focused agency; knowledgeable, resourceful, and good follow through

**Community Partners:** Skilled, open and diverse staff, teaming; flexibility; range of blindness and vocational services; leadership and vision; technology

**Family/Friends of participants:** range of adaptive technology, daily living and advocacy services; knowledgeable staff working to increase access; one-on-one supports and collaborative relationships

#### Identified DSB Barriers:

**Participants:** funding; outreach –agency services not broadly known; loss of experienced staff; adequate staffing capacity; presence of blind role models on staff; staff knowledge of issues of blindness/deaf blindness

**Business:** adequate staff and financial resource to meet need; external factors – public acceptance of blindness, labor market; length of time for services

**Community Partners:** funding; appropriate priorities for services; consistency through state

**Family/Friends of participants:** adequate resources; too heavy workload; too many silos in agency; outdated models

#### Identified DSB risks:

**Participants:** funding; economy; decreased quality or quality assurance of services; merger into umbrella department; not keeping up with technology and techniques; losing consumer organization support

**Business:** funding; economy; technology changes

**Community Partners:** funding; economy; loss of good staff; unnecessary processes; leadership satisfaction with status quo; consolidation into larger agency

**Family/Friends of participants:** funding; need for more organized training for parents; getting information about agency services out to community

#### **Identified DSB opportunities:**

**Participants:** partnerships with other organizations, business; increase number of qualified blind individuals in higher skill jobs; self-employment; family education/support; improved training curriculum

**Business:** increased visibility; new types of jobs; technology and access; reaching a larger population

**Community Partners:** collaboration external partners; technology and access; increase self-employment; increase service to outlying areas

**Family/Friends of participants:** children and youth services, camps; technology training for youth; more access to physical education for blind youth;

#### **Identified DSB high value services:**

**Participants:** technology training and equipment for jobs; independent travel training; agency outreach; increase services to older blind; peer-mentorship; confidence building and problem-solving skills; connecting with employers; youth services

**Business:** education and outreach; job site assessment services and assist with accommodation process; technology training and tools;

**Community Partners:** center training; technology; family program services

**Family/Friends of participants:** advocacy; mobility and technology training; more training opportunities

#### **Agency Participant Satisfaction Survey**

The University of Washington Center on Technology and Disability Studies conducts an anonymous satisfaction survey, on behalf of the SRC for the Blind, for VR customers who were closed in the federal fiscal year. This year, the survey was conducted in November 2015. Surveys were completed online or by phone

Following the completion of the 2014 survey, the SRC for the Blind made clarity revisions to the wording of the questions, then reviewed and approved them during a quarterly meeting. The questions are aligned to the Results Washington initiatives. Questions were designed to address the three categories that the Results Washington initiatives focus on, including Accuracy, Timeliness, and Respectfulness. Two additional categories were reviewed for satisfaction, including Training.

Of the 310 agency participants contacted, 165 (or 53%) responded. Of those responding, 61% participants experienced successful employment outcomes at the time of closure. Questions were rated on a scale of 1 to 6, with 6 as very satisfied. The DSB prefers the highest standard in performance measurements, and does not include ratings of “somewhat satisfied (4)” among the “percent satisfied” compilation: scores of 5 and 6 are considered “percent satisfied”, while scores of 4 (somewhat satisfied) and lower are considered “percent not satisfied”.

Table 1. Overall Satisfaction by Region and Office. Data based on, “Overall, how satisfied were you with the services you received from DSB?”

Regions and Offices	Overall Satisfaction
East Region: Spokane	94%
East Region: Yakima	90.5%
North Region: Seattle	83%
South Region: Lacey	87%
South Region: Tacoma	100%
South Region: Vancouver	78%

Table 2. Customer Satisfaction by Category [Elements that have an asterisk indicate that responses to multiple questions were combined to best meet satisfaction element]

Customer Satisfaction Element	Number satisfied	Number not satisfied	2015 Satisfaction Percentage	% change from 2014
Overall* (process and services)	263	67	80%	+7%
Training offered	132	33	80%	+2%
Accuracy of staff* (knowledge; options and clarity of written materials; range of services; and community resources)	698	127	85%	+4%
Timeliness of staff* (internal staff; external providers)	258	72	78%	+6%
Respectfulness of staff	138	27	84%	+5%

The majority in all categories of “percent not satisfied” were those respondents who noted they were “somewhat satisfied (4)”. The agency understands one of its



challenges is to bring a segment of participants from intermittent satisfaction to full and consistent satisfaction.

Survey respondents were given the opportunity to share their thoughts and opinions at the end of the survey. The majority of comments simply expressed their gratitude for the services they received, either from the Department or from specific people and counselors at the DSB.

(k) **Annual Estimates.** Describe:

- (1) The number of individuals in the State who are eligible for services.
- (2) The number of eligible individuals who will receive services under:
  - (A) The VR Program;
  - (B) The Supported Employment Program; and
  - (C) each priority category, if under an order of selection.
- (3) The number of individuals who are eligible for VR services, but are not receiving such services due to an order of selection; and
- (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.

**Agency response (k):**

The American Community Survey (ACS) provides reliable estimated data for the number of individuals in the state who experience visual function limitations.

The ACS five year estimates (2009-2013) show an estimated 131,000 Washington state citizens of all ages who experience a visual difficulty, or almost 2% of the entire population.

The estimated number of individuals of traditional working age in Washington State who experience visual difficulty (ages 18 – 64) is estimated in the five year ACS at around 65,000; the 2010 census data corroborates the ACS estimated data with a count of 62,697 individuals in that age range reporting a visual difficulty.

ACS 5 year 2009-2013 Data Tables show the below information:

Prevalence of individuals with a disability among general population (US: 12.1%; WA: 12.2%)

Employment status ages 18 – 64:

- All residents: 71.7%
- With any disability: 35.7%
- With visual impairment: 40.7%



Unemployed status ages 18 – 64:

- All residents: 5.1%
- With any disability: 8.2%
- With visual impairment: 7.8%

Not in labor force ages 18 – 64:

- All residents: 23.3%
- With any disability: 56%
- With visual impairment: 51.5%

The ACS 5-year survey shows an estimated 8,184 residents ages 5 – 17 experience a visual difficulty; many from this age group would qualify for and benefit from VR pre-employment transition services. One hundred and seventy-six (176) of the 1341 VR customers served in FFY2015 (or 13.4%) were ages 21 and younger.

The ACS 5-year survey shows an estimated 54,000 citizens ages 65 and older experience a visual difficulty; some of this age group might also qualify for VR services, as the traditional working age expands beyond age 65, and retirees look to supplement fixed incomes with part-time work. The oldest VR customers served in the agency in FY2015 were two participants age 85 (one was a part-time electrical engineer; the other a part-time equipment installer). Two hundred and thirty-eight (238) of the 1341 VR customers served in FFY2015 (or 17.7%) were age 55 and over.

The agency is not under order of selection at this time. There is some anticipation that the 15% set-aside might cause a lack of resource to fully meet our adult services, and are monitoring spending and systems in order to be prepared in the case that DSB will need to enact an order of selection and restrict service delivery in the near future. The agency has updated its priority listing for Order of Selection to align with new allowances in WIOA, including serving as priority those new applicants who have a significant disability and require immediate services or equipment in order to keep a current job.

General Grant Title I Estimated Funds: \$ 8,535,000

Estimated Number to be served: 1,350

Average Cost of Services: \$6,322

Supported Employment Title VI Estimated Funds: \$ 58,000

Estimated Number to be served: 35

Average Cost of Services: \$1,657

Totals: \$ 8,593,000

Estimated Number to be served: 1,385

Average Cost of Services: \$6204

- (I) **State Goals and Priorities.** The designated State unit must:
- (1) Identify if the goals and priorities were jointly developed and agreed to by the State VR agency and the State Rehabilitation Council, if the State has a Council, and jointly agreed to any revisions.
  - (2) Identify the goals and priorities in carrying out the VR and Supported Employment programs.
  - (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;
    - (B) the State's performance under the performance accountability measures of section 116 of WIOA; and
    - (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.

**Agency response (I):**

The agency's goals and priorities have been identified and discussed in collaboration with the agency's State Rehabilitation Council. The goals and priorities were developed in two distinct processes: through both interactions among WIOA core partner programs toward implementation of the new partnerships and legislation through WIOA; and also through the agency's extensive Strategic Planning process that took place in 2015.

The first set of goals and priorities for the agency to be accomplished in the next four year scope of this state plan is the successful implementation of systems, processes and relationships that bring the agency and state towards meeting the intent of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act.

The second set of goals and priorities developed through the Strategic planning process echo and align with many elements towards implementation of the WIOA concepts, and concentrate on increasing the agency's effective reach into the community, refining processes that sharpen the agency's expertise, and a deepening of the vocational aspects of this vocational and rehabilitation agency.

**Goal 1:** Successfully implement intent of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act into agency work and processes

Sub-goal 1.1: Continue to emphasize the State's Strategy of High Skills/High Wages focus for agency participants

Sub-goal 1.2: Ensure equal access for blind, low vision and deaf blind individuals to be able to benefit from the array of services available through the state's workforce system

Sub-goal 1.3: Engage with state and local community businesses in ways that best work for business, and better prepare agency participants for success by ensuring they have the skills that meet business needs.

Sub-goal 1.4: Implement creative and meaningful changes to agency processes and services in order to best meet intent of WIOA around services to youth.

**Goal 2:** Increase agency outreach and effectiveness of services to individuals and communities that would benefit from vocational rehabilitation services

Sub-goal 2.1: Increase effectiveness and cultural relevance of agency story

**Goal 3:** Enhance and maintain DSB capacity & expertise in serving blind Washington residents

Sub-goal 3.1: Enhance awareness among all staff of context, issues, and skills of blindness

Sub-goal 3.2: Improve systems for universal accessibility, both internally within the agency and externally among partners

Sub-goal 3.3: Refine and maintain systems for knowledge transfer and leadership development

**Goal 4:** Enhance the vocational aspects of vocational rehabilitation within agency processes

Sub-goal 4.1: Integrate employment into a unified customer experience at all phases of the vocational rehabilitation process

Sub-goal 4.2: Build employer-desired core soft skills (critical thinking, decision making, etc.) throughout skill development process

Sub-goal 4.3: Build and deepen systems for regional business expertise

(m) **Order of Selection.** Describe:

- (1) The order to be followed in selecting eligible individuals to be provided VR services.
- (2) The justification for the order.
- (3) The service and outcome goals.
- (4) The time within which these goals may be achieved for individuals in each priority category within the order.
- (5) How individuals with the most significant disabilities are selected for services before all other individuals with disabilities; and
- (6) 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.

**Agency response (m):**

The purpose of an order of selection for services is to establish an equitable and organized system which, when resources are not sufficient to meet the demand for services, gives priority to those eligible vocational rehabilitation participants who require immediate services to maintain employment or who meet the definition of most significantly disabled.

The Order of Selection prioritization described below requires formal adoption into the agency's Washington Administrative Code at the time of the plan writing.

When the order of selection for services is in effect, eligible individuals will be assigned to one of three priority categories:

(a) First priority: New eligible participants who meet the definition of significantly disabled and have an immediate need for equipment or services to maintain employment;

(b) Second priority: Follow-along services to those individuals who meet the definition of significantly disabled, and are recent post-secondary graduates who were

being served through pre-employment transition service dollars, in order to not interrupt service provision;

(c) Third priority: New eligible participants who meet the definition of most significantly disabled but who do not have an immediate need for equipment or services to maintain employment;

(d) Fourth Priority: New eligible participants who do not meet the definition of most significantly disabled, and don't have an immediate need for equipment or services to maintain current employment.

The director shall decide when to implement an order of selection for services, if necessary, and will determine which priority categories will be open or closed for the development of new individualized plans for employment. In the event sufficient funds or other resources become available to serve all eligible individuals, the order of priority will be revoked by the director.

Eligible individuals can develop and carry out an individualized plan for employment based on:

(a) The priority of the category to which they are assigned;

(b) Whether or not that category is open for development of new plans; and

(c) The order in which they applied for vocational rehabilitation services as indicated by the date of application.

Participants will be placed in the highest priority category for which they are qualified. The date of application will be used whenever it is determined that a waiting list is required for a category.

Participants will be notified in writing of their category status when they are notified of their eligibility, as well as of the conditions pertaining to that category:

(a) Whether the category is open or closed.

(b) Their position on any existing waiting list.

The only services to individuals in a closed order of selection for services category will be information and referral services. These individuals will not receive counseling and guidance, assessment and training, placement, or other vocational rehabilitation services until their category is reopened and they come off the waiting list.

Participants will be notified of the right to appeal the category decision, in accordance with WAC 67-25-570, and of their responsibility to notify the department if their situation changes in a way that may affect their priority category placement.

Individuals who are receiving services under an individualized plan for employment at the time an order of selection for services is implemented will continue to receive services as planned. They are not subject to the order of selection for services and are not a category within that order.

The order of selection for services will not affect the provision of services needed to determine eligibility for vocational rehabilitation services, WAC 67-25-010 through 67-25-030.

Criteria for non-significant disability, significant disability or most significant disability:

(1) An individual with a non-significant disability is an individual who:

- (a) Has no more than one functional limitation related to employment; and
- (b) Requires no more than one substantial type of services.

(2) An individual with a significant disability is an individual who:

- (a) Has at least two functional limitations related to employment; and
- (b) Requires one or more substantial types of services provided over an extended period of time.

(3) An individual with a most significant disability is an individual who:

- (a) Has at least three functional limitations related to employment; and
- (b) Requires two or more substantial types of services provided over an extended period of time.

(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.
- (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
  - (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.

**Agency response (n):**

All of our Vocational Rehabilitation staff are well versed in the provision of supported employment services and understand the issues related to eligibility, vocational assessment, and creating vocational plans that address the need for on-going long-term support services.

DSB has identified and qualified Community Rehabilitation Program (CRP) providers in local areas across the state to provide specialized Supported Employment services (assessment, skill building, job development, job coaching and retention services). Much of the Title VI Part B funding is utilized for performance-based job development & coaching services provided by CRPs to support individuals who require long-term supports in able to work in integrated and competitive settings.

DSB provides training and technical assistance related to issues of blindness to all CRPs who express an interest in working with individuals who have the potential to achieve an employment outcome through Supported Employment.

In FFY2015, fifteen (15) working-aged individuals with co-occurring disabilities of Cognitive Impairments were successfully employed in integrated and competitive jobs with average hourly wages for the group of \$15.43.

For FFY2016

- DSB will serve 35 Supported Employment (SE) customers
- More than ten (10) SE customers will achieve competitive & integrated employment outcomes

DSB will spend over \$59,000 on SE services.

(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.
- (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.



- (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.
- (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).
- (5) If applicable, plans for establishing, developing, or improving community rehabilitation programs within the State.
- (6) Strategies to improve the performance of the State with respect to the performance accountability measures under section 116 of WIOA.
- (7) Strategies for assisting other components of the statewide workforce development system in assisting individuals with disabilities.
- (8) How the agency's strategies will be used to:
  - (A) achieve goals and priorities by the State, consistent with the comprehensive needs assessment;
  - (B) support innovation and expansion activities; and
  - (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.

**Agency response (o):**

The DSB has developed the following strategies for accomplishing the agency goals as identified through interaction with WIOA core partners, the State Rehabilitation Council, staff, agency participants and community stakeholders.

**Goal 1:** Successfully implement intent of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act into agency work and processes

**Sub-goal 1.1:** Continue to emphasize the State's Strategy of High Skills/High Wages focus for agency participants

**Strategy 1.1:** The DSB will leverage its existing success towards contributing to the State's strategy of High skills/High wages, and will create new pathways to greater self-sufficiency for DSB participants through deeper collaboration among core and partner programs.

The DSB will continue to provide the comprehensive, participant-centered, individualized vocational and blindness rehabilitation services that have consistently made the Rehabilitation Services Administration's rating of the agency's outcomes the strongest among all national vocational rehabilitation agencies – blind or general - in quality of employment achieved and wages earned. The DSB will continue to provide

highly professional and informed counseling and guidance services to assist the participant through issues of adjustment to disability, vocational and skill gap-assessment, career matching, and integration into the workplace. The DSB will continue to make use of client-centered tools, such as deep practice of Motivational Interviewing, to assist the participant to identify the pathways of change that fit best for the individual. The DSB will continue to provide the services that assist an individual who has had a change in vision to keep the high paying job they are skilled at, and will continue to assist individuals require supports to expand and challenge their current work circumstances through promotional opportunities. The DSB will continue to develop, refine, and provide relevant job readiness and entrepreneurial exploration workshops for participants to refine their self-marketing skills and explore self-employment as an option. The DSB will continue to provide the highest quality blindness rehabilitation skills assessment and training which are essential to creating an equal footing among non-disabled peers and within the community and workplace. The DSB will continue to provide cutting-edge adaptive skills assessment, tools matching and training that are critical to developing the technical access, efficiencies and competencies that meet business workforce needs. The DSB will continue to provide vocational and academic training, work experience, and paid internship opportunities that bring the participant the technical and professional skills needed by business, broaden the participant perspective on workplace culture and expectations, and help a workplace recognize the talent of the individual blind participant through active demonstration of value to the business. The DSB will continue to partner among DSB staff, the participant, and employer to provide on-site workplace evaluations for accessibility recommendations and tools. The DSB will continue to refine its message and outreach methods to inform potential eligible participants, business and partners of our comprehensive services. The DSB will continue to refine facilitation of services for historically underserved communities such as non-native-English speaking communities, co-occurring disabilities such as mental & behavioral health, and youth.

Under the Combined State Plan, the DSB expects the new relationship among core group and partner programs to genuinely address the development of pathways for access that allow blind, low vision and deaf blind individuals to also engage in the workforce activities that enhance and increase their opportunities towards the State's strategy of High Skills/High Wages. This access to workforce activities is currently aspirational, as our agency blind participants have been largely denied access to the benefits of the greater workforce system since the 1998 WIA implementation. Future success of equal participation in these workforce activities will depend on the WIOA partners' active awareness and belief that individuals who are blind are viable participants within the workforce, and that the DSB is a valuable collaborator among workforce partners. Access and navigation issues must be addressed with highest priority among all partner programs.

The DSB expects blind, low vision and deaf blind participants to become fully engaged in the greater array of workforce services. The DSB expects our counseling staff to be active and equal partners among the regional and local Business Service Teams, where the talents of agency participants can be more effectively matched with business needs through sharing of sector strategy and real time labor market information. The DSB expects staff will enter agency participant information into the shared profile mechanism that is developed among the core and partner programs, schedule appointments to meet with agency participants at One-Stop centers, and connect agency participants to the array of wrap-around services they are eligible for. The DSB expects partner programs to identify shared core-participant job readiness skill needs, and to work with all partners to develop common-need trainings - and share presentation efforts where applicable – to strengthen the skill sets of our agency participants through access to all. The DSB expects that the new partnership will make our staff and agency participants more informed beneficiaries of relevant targeted workforce vocational training and apprenticeship opportunities towards gaining higher skills that match an individual's aptitude despite visual disability, and thereby securing higher wages and greater self-sufficiencies. The DSB expects to explore bridges among the partner Department of Labor Youth programs to fully engage blind youth in integrated and competitive work experience opportunities that fit individual need.

**Sub-goal 1.2:** Ensure equal access for blind, low vision and deaf blind individuals to be able to benefit from the array of services available through the state's workforce system

**Strategy 1.2:** The DSB views the State's strategy for Access and Technology as the highest priority for the success of our agency participants to connect to and benefit from core group and partner program services which prepare and provide a pathway to them meeting the workforce needs of business.

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act makes accessibility a more prominent expectation for workforce partners, and the DSB will gladly champion universal accessibility among the core group and partner programs, in particular for potential beneficiaries of the workforce system array of services and programs who are blind, low vision or deaf blind.

The DSB has helped workforce partners to broaden their understanding of what universal accessibility means beyond basic architectural access, and DSB has assisted the workforce partners in codifying universal access as an element in the One-Stop certification process. The DSB will continue to remind partner programs of the potential costs of not providing accessible electronic and programmatic services, and will continue to provide technical assistance and referral for procurement, testing and

maintenance of electronic data systems and processes that are accessible and usable by adaptive technology users.

The DSB will be active in assisting with the recruitment of local and state advisory boards for access and technology in order to provide useful guidance to state and local workforce systems on developing and refining greater universal accessibility to communities with barriers to employment.

**Sub-goal 1.3:** Engage with state and local community businesses in ways that best work for business, and better prepare agency participants for success by ensuring they have the skills that meet business needs.

**Strategy 1.3:** The DSB will work towards the State's strategy of increased Business Engagement by developing the agency's array of services that businesses may require or desire of us, thereby facilitating the employment of qualified individuals who are blind, low vision or deaf blind. The agency will deepen collaboration with core and partner programs in order to better connect our blind participants' aptitudes to the skills training and business connection pathways that work best for business needs.

A DSB-offered array of services for business includes many components. One component is to increase awareness among business of the agency's range of services, in order to provide an easy pathway for business to retain a talented employee whose work performance may be impacted due to a change in vision. Another aspect is the ability to fulfill business recruitment needs through connecting the business with the talents of job-ready and skilled agency participants, and to offer the ability to create individualized and low-risk opportunities for the business so that a participant might best showcase their ability and potential value to the workplace. The DSB will provide guidance on issues of disability in the workplace, including education around the Americans with Disabilities (ADA) Act; information on how to benefit from federal and local incentives for hiring of individuals with disabilities, and offer supports to the business for successfully meeting required mandates for hiring of individuals with disabilities. The DSB will offer workplace accommodation recommendations and supports, and education and guidance on making the workplace a disability-friendly and inclusive environment. The DSB will connect business to disability-related resources, training and/or education available in the community at large. The DSB will engage business in identifying supply chain needs, and will assist in establishing entrepreneurs and small businesses that might best fulfill that supply chain need.

Due to the small size of the DSB customer base and agency staffing in comparison to other workforce partner programs, the agency and its eligible participants will benefit

from the broader infrastructure that state plan partners develop and nurture towards increased business engagement. The DSB alone cannot fully provide the amount of skilled talent business requires, and the DSB as a separate entity cannot efficiently engage business statewide. The DSB will rely on active inclusion of its staff in the One-Stop Business Services Teams, and depend on the accessibility of workforce programs for agency participants, in order to meet the broader engagement of business in a manner that works best for business – through a seamless single point of contact. DSB counselors develop relationships with local business partners, and will guide those relationships (as applicable) into the greater workforce system in order to best fulfill the business needs.

**Sub-goal 1.4:** Implement creative and meaningful changes to agency processes and services in order to best meet intent of WIOA around services to youth.

**Strategy 1.4:** The DSB will leverage existing success towards contributing to the State’s strategy of Youth Opportunities, and will create new pathways for youth to gain essential experience and pathways towards the world of work.

The DSB will continue to provide its array of workshops, programs and paid work experience to students and youth with visual disability. The DSB will continue to provide short-term summer workshops in Seattle and Spokane that provide pre-employment transition services to students with visual disability, and will expand those group services to more locations around the state and more frequently throughout the year. The DSB will fund the two-week summer program that provides individual eligible students vocational assessments and experience exploring the world of work through informational interviews and job-shadowing. The DSB will continue to organize and manage the summer six-week paid work experience program for eligible students age 16+, and will expand the program and staffing to provide more paid work experience and pre-employment transition service opportunities in a year. The DSB will continue to nurture the relationships with business that support these work opportunities for blind youth. The DSB will continue to organize and manage the summer university transition program to prepare students for the self-advocacy skills needed for the adult world of higher education. The DSB will continue to support fifth year students who require intensive adaptive skills training through the Washington School for the Blind before transitioning into adult pathways of higher education or work. The DSB will continue to build relationship and participate in IEP meetings with school districts, teachers of the visually impaired, students and families throughout the state. The DSB will continue to present at events such as the Pacific Northwest Association of Educators of Rehabilitation (PNWAER) to inform families and educators who work with students who might be eligible for vocational rehabilitation services.

The DSB will explore methods for supporting work experience for students with visual disability more locally across the state and more broadly throughout the year other than summer. The DSB is in discussion with the Washington School for the Blind and other partners to assist in more consistently identifying and enrolling students with 504 plans who are eligible for vocational rehabilitation services. The DSB is working with the Washington State School for the Blind to co-fund a new Business Specialist position housed at the school which will be responsible for securing and supporting work experience for students both at the school and through the agency. The DSB is in discussion with the Washington State School for the Blind on how to best promote work experience for students while simultaneously acknowledging competing pressures and tight timelines of academic requirements. The DSB is exploring with other partners new methods for providing pre-employment transition services to students with visual disability, focusing in particular upon the adaptive and soft skills necessary to succeed in an adult workplace culture.

**Goal 2:** Increase agency outreach and effectiveness of services to individuals and communities that would benefit from vocational rehabilitation services

**Sub-goal 2.1:** Increase effectiveness and cultural relevance of agency story

**Strategy 2.1:** This strategy is to address the agency's need to better address the needs of underserved populations, and to address the community feedback that the agency needs to have a stronger presence within the community.

The agency wants to ensure all levels of internal staff understand and can speak publicly to all aspects of the agency, whether in a quick elevator-type speech or more formally, in order to allow any moment as an opportunity for outreach.

The agency is analyzing its current tools for outreach for how well the message reads to intended audience – does language describe programs in silos and ways that internal staff might understand, or does it speak more to the services we offer that a potential applicant or business person will find relevant to their needs? Are there concepts that are culturally more relevant and that should be highlighted, whether conveying the message in English or a second language? How best to reach a younger generation of potential VR participants, what messages will motivate the fullest participation? Are there methods for outreach that are more effective? What aspects of social media should the agency expand its presence?

**Goal 3:** Enhance and maintain DSB capacity & expertise in serving blind Washington residents

**Sub-goal 3.1:** Enhance awareness among all staff of context, issues, and skills of blindness

**Strategy 3.1:** This strategy is to ensure that all layers of the agency meets the level of skill and expertise that best serves blind, low vision and deaf blind residents of Washington State.

Supporting a participant to effectively navigate through to the adjustment to blindness, self-advocacy and independence necessary to achieve and maintain a vocational goal requires absolute belief and knowledge that a blind individual, with the right tools, training and aptitude, can do whatever work fits for them. All agency staff must understand fully that success in integrated, competitive employment is achievable for each and every participant who becomes eligible for services. That level of knowledge and belief requires experience and awareness of the blindness community, interaction with an array of role models, and confidence in adaptive techniques of blindness for independence. Not all new hires to the agency have a background in blindness services, but all staff - no matter their role – will have the organizational expectation and support for deep, on-going interaction and active listening of arenas & issues important to the blindness community.

One of DSB's identified strengths is its specialized skill and expertise. An important aspect of blindness adaptive skills is the use of technology as aids; the pace of change in technology requires special attention and diligence of agency staff in order to provide relevant training and services to participants. The specialized skills of blindness need to be adaptable to an array of participant needs. Broad experience and consistent practice of skill sets without relying on vision are critical elements for practitioners to best assist a participant in finding the methods that are most effective for the individual. The agency supports peer training opportunities among staff to share broadly new methods, ideas and tools and hone expertise.

Awareness and addressing potential co-occurring disabilities are critical to the success of the agency participant in the workplace. Agency staff need to be trained and confident in identifying other obstacles, and be experienced with the community to be able to identify and connect with an appropriate partner and collaborator to address the obstacles.

**Sub-goal 3.2:** Improve systems for universal accessibility, both internally within the agency and externally among partners



**Strategy 3.2:** This strategy addresses the primary issue that keeps agency participants from fully engaging in the workforce partner systems, employment, and the greater community: accessibility of electronic data. It also acknowledges the unique and pivotal role that DSB as an agency can play in enacting change towards a broader understanding and implementation of programmatic and systems accessibility.

Internally, the DSB will be analyzing its own systems for continued accessibility and usability. The DSB will ensure methods of access to agency data for those new to vision loss and who do not yet have the adapted tools to read print or electronic data. The DSB will continue to identify and resolve internal access issues with highest priority, and will develop systems of internal supports to better manage access issues. The DSB will continue to make accessibility a requirement in all agency electronic software and hardware procurements, and to ensure the manufacturer is fully responsible for a fix if access or usability fails at any point in the life of the product.

Externally, the DSB will champion full programmatic and information accessibility for individuals who are blind, low vision and deaf blind among all core WIOA, business and community partners. The DSB will consistently offer information as to the benefits of making access an organizational essential priority, and provide supports to get partner organizations and businesses on the path towards accessibility. The DSB will continue to demand access for its agency participants to the full array of services through the workforce system, and view the most critical change through implementation of WIOA to be the focus and achievement of greater accessibility to WIOA partner programs and services. The DSB will continue to provide referral and tech supports to other state agencies and programs around improving accessibility. Information and supports around issues of access are a prime service the agency offers to businesses.

The DSB will continue to provide excellent skills training to agency participants so they have the skills to troubleshoot access issues as they arise in a workplace, and are able to effectively self-advocate for their needs.

The DSB will partner with other officials, agencies, consumer groups, organizations and individuals wherever possible to promote greater access in the workplace and community for blind, low vision and deaf blind individuals.

**Sub-goal 3.3:** Refine and maintain systems for knowledge transfer and leadership development

**Strategy 3.3:** This strategy addresses the need to systematize processes to ensure the smoothest transition of staff, in order to have the least interruption of services to the agency's participants and community partners.

The agency wants to ensure the smoothest operations possible despite changes in the workforce. The DSB will identify positions that are at highest risk if systems for transfer of knowledge are not in place, and will be more thoroughly documenting required task processes, timelines and expectations for those positions. Development of staff through sharing of knowledge, job shadowing and cross-training will be emphasized for targeted positions. The agency will continue to double-fill positions where a vacancy is planned in order to allow the incumbent to provide the new hire with their specialized training and experience.

The DSB has initiated through reorganization a new team structure that provides greater paths for leadership experience throughout the agency, and the agency will work to build a bigger pool of internal, prepared candidates in which to fill future leadership vacancies. The DSB will continue to support training and development for leadership at all levels.

**Goal 4:** Enhance the vocational aspects of vocational rehabilitation within agency processes

**Sub-goal 4.1:** Integrate employment into a unified customer experience at all phases of the vocational rehabilitation process

**Strategy 4.1:** This strategy addresses the need to better balance both aspects of the agency's mandate in providing vocational rehabilitation services, and to enhance the vocational aspects of the agency's services.

The agency will continue its strong comprehensive and individualized vocational work, and will enhance those efforts by nurturing an agency culture where vocational activity is possible, supported and encouraged at any and every stage of the vocational rehabilitation process. Vocational-related concepts can be integrated into all agency processes, from the moment a potential participant enters the door to the day he/she exits.

The agency recognizes that it has had to duplicate many pre-vocational services that have been provided to the general public by the One-Stop Job Development Centers simply because none of the One-Stop programs or data systems have been accessible for blind, low vision or deaf blind individuals. If access issues are successfully addressed by the WIOA partners, there will be many programs, services and workshops that our agency participant base could make use of more naturally through the One-Stop systems, and get better connected to the array of businesses and job opportunities that are available to the general public. If the agency can successfully shift some current processes to the greater workforce system – contingent on successful accessibility

changes within the One-Stops - the agency can focus on serving great numbers with better services.

The agency staff will be more involved in the Business Service Teams through the One-Stops, and will build the relationships that help get their participants connected to the best opportunity.

**Sub-goal 4.2:** Build employer-desired core soft skills (critical thinking, decision making, etc.) throughout skill development process

**Strategy 4.2:** This strategy is to address the business-identified skill gaps in the workforce, and to better prepare our agency participants in improving their marketability and value for business.

The agency recognizes both that businesses have identified soft skills as the biggest barrier to employment, and that acquiring these skills as an adult likely requires a difficult path of behavioral change. There is impetus for the agency to address these skills as early as possible, as consistently as possible, and as seamlessly as possible in all the interactions with participants. Youth workshops and activities will always have some component of soft skills training included. Counseling and services will emphasize supporting self-determination through informed choice.

Curriculum that emphasizes or folds in soft skills training and feedback will be identified, implemented and refined. An assessment of soft skills will be developed and refined in order to assist in determining “job readiness”.

**Sub-goal 4.3:** Build and deepen systems for regional business expertise

**Strategy 4.3:** This strategy is strongly aligned with strategy 1.3 above, where greater successful collaboration with the One-Stop partners will greatly expand the agency’s regional business expertise.

Due to the small size of the DSB customer base and agency staffing in comparison to other workforce partner programs, the agency and its eligible participants will benefit from the broader infrastructure that state plan partners develop and nurture towards increased business engagement. The DSB alone cannot fully provide the amount of skilled talent business requires, and the DSB as a separate entity cannot efficiently engage business statewide. The DSB will rely on active inclusion of its staff in the One-Stop Business Services Teams, and depend on the accessibility of workforce programs for agency participants, in order to meet the broader engagement of business in a

manner that works best for business – through a seamless single point of contact. DSB counselors develop relationships with local business partners, and will guide those relationships (as applicable) into the greater workforce system in order to best fulfill the business needs.

Internally, the agency will analyze streamlined ways to connect with businesses and prepare staff to meet the needs of business. The agency will refine internal systems for identifying, assessing and training towards job readiness standards that match what businesses require, so that agency participants are best prepared to compete within the job market. The agency will refine systems for informing participants and businesses of potential strong matches for job openings.

(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.
  - (B) Describe the factors that impeded the achievement of the goals and priorities.
- (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.
  - (B) Describe the factors that impeded the achievement of the goals and priorities.
- (3) The VR program's performance on the performance accountability indicators under section 116 of WIOA.
- (4) How the funds reserved for innovation and expansion (I&E) activities were utilized.

**Agency response (p):**

The DSB's successes and challenges in meeting the goals defined in the 2015 State Plan are described below

**Goal 1: Improve and Expand Customer Services**

Statistics demonstrate the agency's success in expanding customer services. In the five years from FFY2010 to FFY2015, the agency has experienced consistent increase in participants served, new applications, eligibilities, and plans, and number and quality of

outcomes. The agency had been able to add four direct service staff in 2012 and 2013 which has assisted the capacity for serving more participants.

Activity	Number in FFY2010	Number in FFY2015	Percent change
Total served	1280	1341	+4.8%
New Applications	389	410	+5.3%
New Eligibilities	344	363	+5.5%
New Plans	257	340	+32%

Timelines have shortened for participants, assisting the participant in more active and relevant services.

Activity	FFY2013	FFY2015	Percent change
Average time to Eligibility	31 days	28 days	-10%
Average time to Plan – all	182 days	118 days	-54%
Average time to plan – students	419 days	105 days	-300%

There has also been a noticeable Increase in number of referrals of the targeted underserved Hispanic/Latino communities. The gap in percent of customers served who identify as Hispanic/Latino compared to general Washington State demographics has been virtually closed. The gap of Asian participants compared to general state demographics continues to be present, however. The agency has focused on alternative outreach efforts to reach these communities, such as a presence on Spanish- and Korean-language radio talk shows and providing outreach to community and culturally-relevant events, with outreach materials printed in Spanish, Chinese, Korean, and Vietnamese.

Underserved community	Percent of general Washington State population	Percent of agency participants FFY2012	Percent of agency participants FFY2015	Change in gap
Hispanic/Latino	11.6%	8.6%	11.2%	Narrowed from 3.0% to 0.4%
Asian	7.5%	5.7%	5.4%	Widened from 1.8% to 2.1%

Overall customer satisfaction with agency’s service provision is 80 percent positive satisfaction for cases that were closed in FFY2015.

**Goal 2: Improve the economic vitality of residents who have visual disabilities through high quality employment outcomes, wages and benefits.**

The DSB has a long history of high skill/high wage outcomes for its agency participants. The agency is proud of the improvement that has occurred over the past five years in increase of number of employment outcomes, increase in hourly wages, increase in number of job retention cases, increase in attendees of agency-sponsored entrepreneurial trainings, and increase in number of participants who exit the program by starting up and maintaining a new small business. The data table below highlights the changes for these elements over the past five years.

Activity	Number in FFY2010	Number in FFY2015	Percent change
2 year exit with employment	279 (FFY2009-10)	357 (FFY2014-15)	+28%
Average hourly wage	\$16.61	\$20.34	+22%
Job Retention cases	58	72	+24%
Number attend entrepreneurial trainings	0	15	+100%
Number exit with new small businesses	4	10	+150%

**Goal 3: Be a resource of quality expertise on issues of vision impairment and employment**

The Agency continues to partner with agencies and organizations in the community around blindness, low vision and deaf-blind issues, and provides staff expertise as resource for state & local projects and workplace trainings around disability and employment.

- (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.
  - (2) The timing of transition to extended services.

**Agency response (q):**

In FFY2015, fifteen (15) working-aged individuals with co-occurring disabilities of Cognitive Impairments were successfully employed in integrated and competitive jobs with average hourly wages for the group of \$15.43.



## VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION CERTIFICATIONS AND ASSURANCES

### CERTIFICATIONS

<b>States must provide written and signed certifications that:</b>	
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, <sup>2</sup> and its supplement under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act <sup>3</sup> ;
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) <sup>4</sup> agrees to operate and administer the State VR Services Program in accordance with the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan <sup>5</sup> , the Rehabilitation Act, and all applicable regulations <sup>6</sup> , 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;
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 <sup>7</sup> , the Rehabilitation Act, and all applicable regulations <sup>8</sup> , 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.

<sup>2</sup> Public Law 113-128.

<sup>3</sup> Unless otherwise stated, "Rehabilitation Act" means the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended by WIOA, signed into law on July 22, 2014.

<sup>4</sup> All references in this plan to "designated State agency" or to "the State agency" relate to the agency identified in this paragraph.

<sup>5</sup> 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.

<sup>6</sup> Applicable regulations, in part, include the Education Department General Administrative Regulations (EDGAR) in 34 CFR parts 76, 77, 79, 81, and 82; 2 CFR part 200 as adopted by 2 CFR part 3485; and the State VR Services Program regulations.

<sup>7</sup> No funds under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act may be awarded without an approved supplement to the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan in accordance with section 606(a) of the Rehabilitation Act.

<sup>8</sup> Applicable regulations, in part, include the citations in footnote 6.

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

**ASSURANCES**

The designated State agency or designated State unit, as appropriate and identified in the State certifications included with this VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement, through signature of the authorized individual, assures the Commissioner 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: