

**VERMONT UNIFIED STATE PLAN
FOR
WORKFORCE INNOVATION AND
OPPORTUNITY ACT 2014**



**SUBMITTED APRIL 1, 2016 BY
VERMONT STATE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD**

Vermont Unified State Plan for WIOA 2014

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OVERVIEW

The State of Vermont is submitting a Unified Plan (State Plan or Plan) to meet the requirements of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), Public Law No. 113–128. The Plan includes the six required WIOA programs — the Youth, Adult and Dislocated Worker Programs under Title I, the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act Program under Title II, the Wagner-Peyser Act Program under Title III, and the Vocational Rehabilitation Program under Title IV.

Vermont Governor Peter Shumlin’s Statewide Strategic Plan outlines the State’s highest priority goal to “create a brighter economic future for Vermonters by raising incomes, growing jobs, improving job training, strengthening our local foods-based agriculture, and improving our quality of life”.

The Governor’s vision for workforce development focuses on creating jobs in key economic sectors, opportunities and incentives for the workforce to grow and prosper in Vermont. Key goals include:

- Coordination of the state’s economic development, workforce development and education systems;
- Increased state funding for post-secondary education, training and loan forgiveness;
- Coordination and expansion of workforce development activities;
- Increased career awareness and exploration in secondary and post-secondary schools;
- Building strong pre-apprenticeships and other work experience activities for students at all levels, strengthening the workforce pipeline for Vermont employers;
- Focusing on key economic sectors identified for real growth in Vermont; and
- Increased support for entrepreneurship and job development.

Single State Local Area

Vermont has and will continue to operate as a Single State Local Area, with the State Workforce Development Board as the federally-recognized workforce board.

Agency	Programs
Department of Labor	Youth, Adult, & Dislocated Worker Programs (WIOA Title I); & Wagner-Peyser Act Program (Wagner-Peyser Act, as amended by WIOA Title III)
Agency of Education	Adult Education and Family Literacy Act Program (WIOA Title II)
Agency of Human Services	Vocational Rehabilitation Program (Title I of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended by WIOA Title IV)

The Unified Plan partners will collaborate to develop policies and guidance with respect to best practices to increase and maximize access to services for individuals, particularly those with barriers to employment. Plan partners will also provide assistance to other partner organizations and their staff in order to help implement protocols and practices to help increase and maximize access to workforce development services for individuals, particularly those with barriers to employment.

Some of the issues identified as action steps to enhance the workforce system include:

- Reduce duplication, identify barriers to collaboration, and increase collaboration of all partners at the one-stops.
- Focus on workforce training beyond entry-level skills and achieving postsecondary awards/credentials.
- Identify barriers to participant referrals or access to appropriate service providers within the one-stop system.
- Identify integration opportunities and data sharing on assessment information among workforce partners.
- Reduce duplication of services among various partners.
- Develop knowledge of all partners regarding roles and responsibilities.

New strategies for addressing workforce system improvements include:

- Integrate one-stop services (remove duplication and increase communication among partners);
- Incorporate middle skills training and learn-and-earn models into system;
- Develop a common intake and referral process for all partners;
- Develop a system for universal assessment and sharing results among agencies;
- Provide professional development to program staff on integration within a one-stop system;
- Co-enroll common customers in appropriate educational programs;
- Develop data-sharing capability among all agencies;
- Develop a data-sharing system that contains a common eligible training provider list;
- Align and utilize funding to serve the client's specific needs.

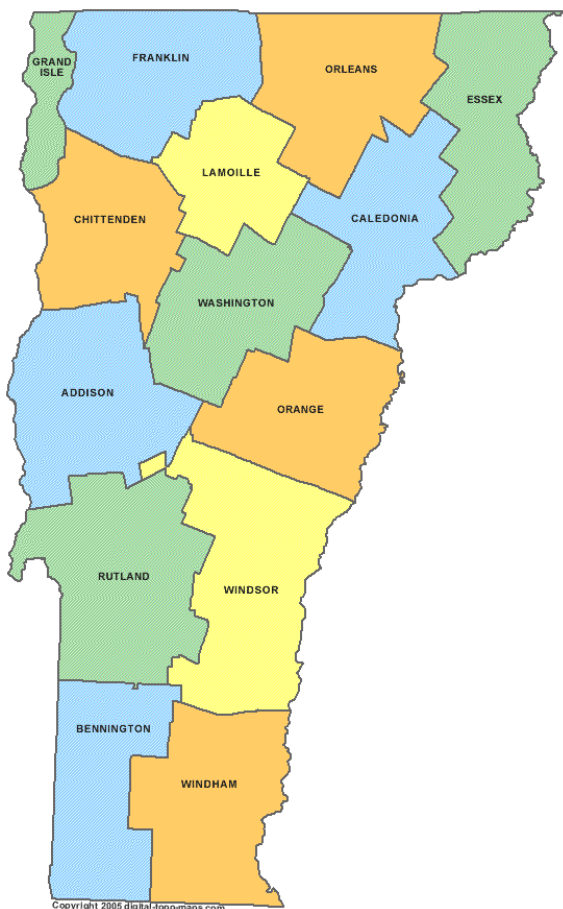
Alignment of the core programs, as well as other resources available to the State, have been infused into the vision and goals and incorporated throughout the Unified State Plan. Key Stakeholders have been identified and invited to be participants in Vermont's planning and implementation process.

STRATEGIC PLANNING ELEMENTS

I. Economic Analysis

Population Overview

Vermont is a rural state located between the large metropolitan areas of Boston, New York and Montreal. With a population of approximately 626,500+ people, Vermont ranks as the 2nd least populous state in the country. According to U.S. Census Bureau data, 25 U.S. cities have a greater population than the state of Vermont.



Additionally, Vermont’s population growth has been shown to be minimal. According to 2010 U.S. Census figures, Vermont had an annual growth rate of less than 0.3% between 2000 and 2010. That rate fell to 0.1% between 2010 and 2013. From 2012 to 2013, seven of Vermont’s 14 counties experienced population declines (Bennington, Essex, Orange, Rutland, Washington, Windham and Windsor), while the northwest counties around Burlington continued to grow (Addison, Chittenden, Franklin and Grand Isle). Based upon birth rates and migration patterns, Vermont does not anticipate seeing further population growth with some projections showing actual population contraction (see Populations Projections).

Chittenden County is home to some of the largest cities and towns in Vermont, including Burlington, the State’s largest city with a population of 42,200+.

Nearly 40 percent of the state population is centered in the northwest counties of Addison, Chittenden, and Franklin. Rutland (Rutland County) and Bennington (Bennington County) are two other cities that have large populations comparable to those in Chittenden County. See Population Projections for a population breakdown by county.

Not only does Vermont have a small population, but the population is one of the oldest in the nation. Between 2010 and 2013, the two age cohorts with the largest percent increase were people 65 years of age and older (+12.5%) and people 55-64 years of age (+5.9%). The aging of Vermont’s population presents both challenges and potential for workforce systems in the state.

At the county level, Chittenden County has the lowest proportion of residents over the age of 55 (25.5%). Franklin is the second lowest (27.5%) while Lamoille is third (28.7%). In all other counties, greater than 30% of the population is over 55 years old. Inversely, Franklin County has the highest concentration of children – both for children under five (6.1%) and school age children aged 5 to 19 (12.9%).

According to Census data, Vermont's population is predominantly white at 95%. The remaining 5% are made up of Hispanics (1.8%), Asians (1.6%), Blacks or African Americans (1.2%), and Native Americans (0.4%).

Table 1: Vermont Population Projections, 2010 - 2030

Population Projections 2010-2030							
County	Census 2010	Low Scenario			High Scenario		
		Projection 2020	Projection 2030	Percent Change* 2010-2030	Projection 2020	Projection 2030	Percent Change* 2010-2030
Vermont	625,741	628,688	620,480	-0.8%	653,575	670,073	7.1%
Addison	36,821	35,820	34,113	-7.4%	37,198	36,730	-0.2%
Bennington	37,125	36,470	35,034	-5.6%	37,695	37,470	0.9%
Caledonia	31,227	32,199	32,534	4.2%	32,336	32,752	4.9%
Chittenden	156,545	161,812	162,967	4.1%	165,690	171,718	9.7%
Essex	6,306	5,974	5,480	-13.1%	5,949	5,489	-13.0%
Franklin	47,746	49,253	50,739	6.3%	51,810	55,647	16.5%
Grand Isle	6,970	6,773	6,405	-8.1%	8,777	10,708	53.6%
Lamoille	24,475	25,281	25,618	4.7%	28,198	31,639	29.3%
Orange	28,936	28,946	28,443	-1.7%	29,813	30,056	3.9%
Orleans	27,231	27,424	27,008	-0.8%	28,598	29,296	7.6%
Rutland	61,642	58,494	54,175	-12.1%	60,791	58,439	-5.2%
Washington	59,534	60,027	59,960	0.7%	61,186	62,372	4.8%
Windham	44,513	44,427	43,609	-2.0%	46,477	47,429	6.6%
Windsor	56,670	55,788	54,395	-4.0%	59,057	60,328	6.5%

Note: *Percent changes are calculated as simple percent changes and are not on an annual basis.
Source of Historical Data: US Census Bureau website, online at www.census.gov.
Source of Projections: the Vermont Agency of Commerce & Community Development, <http://accd.vermont.gov/>.

Economy Basics

Vermont is well-known for the Green Mountains that run the length of the State, from the southern border with Massachusetts to the northern border with Quebec. Vermont's mountains provide many opportunities for leisure and hospitality, yet also present geographic challenges with impacts on the transfer of goods, services and labor.

The Vermont economy depends on a diversified mix of manufacturing, private education, health care, tourism, professional services and public sector employers. However, with over 7,000 farms, agriculture remains an important component of the state's economy and cultural image.

After increasing every year since 1993, gross state product (GSP) – the value of all final goods and services produced in Vermont – fell for three consecutive years between 2007 and 2009 during the national recession. Since this time, the over the year change in GSP has been positive. The most recent data (2013) reflects a 2.7% annual rate of growth. Growth was spread across both Goods Producing industries (2.1% growth) and Service Providing industries (2.8% growth). The only industries that experienced contraction were Durable Goods Manufacturing (-1.0% growth) and Wholesale Trade (-1.3% growth). The private sector grew 2.6%, while the government sector grew 3.0%.

In northwest Vermont, Chittenden County provides nearly one-third of the State's jobs, and serves as the economic engine of Vermont's economy. Burlington and South Burlington make up the core of the State's only Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA). The area employs thousands of workers in retail, construction, manufacturing, education, health care and tourism industries. The MSA extends into parts of Franklin, Grand Isle and Addison counties.

Southern Vermont has worked to maintain a balance between economic development and preservation of the rural working landscape. Easy access from northeastern urban centers has created significant demand for second home development. In addition, ski resorts in the area have expanded to provide self-contained winter recreation facilities and more year round activities, such as promotion of mountain biking, craft fairs and concert venues. The area along the Connecticut River has close economic ties to neighboring New Hampshire communities. The northern part of Windsor County benefits from its proximity to Hanover, New Hampshire, which employs many workers in education, health care and advanced manufacturing.

Bennington County, in the southwestern corner of the State, provides a wide range of recreation and tourist activities. It is a popular area with visitors from adjoining New York State. The county also is home to many manufacturing, retail and health care employers.

While central Vermont is well known because of the capital city, Montpelier, the region also contains a diverse economy with an interesting industrial history. Granite quarries provide stone for monuments and construction all over the world. In addition to its large public sector workforce, the central Vermont area has strong insurance and financial services sectors, and many health care, non-profit, and social service employers.

Lamoille County in north central Vermont has a high concentration of service industry jobs related to recreation and tourism. Recent resort expansion and development has provided construction and retail jobs for the area.

Essex, Orleans and Caledonia counties in northeastern Vermont, known collectively as the Northeast Kingdom, contain some of the last remnants of a rural, underdeveloped New England. The forests provide income for loggers and serve as a resource for furniture and other wood products manufacturing. Residents of the Kingdom report income levels among the lowest in the State and poverty rates among the highest. An on-going expansion project in Newport / Jay Peak, through EB-5 investing, has the potential to transform the economic landscape of the region.

Existing Demand Industry Structure

Table 2 shows the employment numbers for Vermont's current industry structure. Within the private sector, the largest industry sectors are: 1) private education and health services; 2) trade, transportation, and utilities; 3) leisure and hospitality; and 4) manufacturing. However, in addition to those private industry sectors, Vermont has a substantial portion of its current workforce in the public sector, including a large portion of government employees (which includes public education).

As shown, education and health services accounts for 19.4% of covered employment with roughly 59,000 jobs. Many factors drive this industry sector in Vermont, including public policies fostering education and social assistance and Vermont's demographics of an educated and older population. Vermont has built a brand around high-quality post-secondary education, most of which is private. There are 27 colleges and universities in Vermont enrolling more than 45,000 students, of whom less than one-third are Vermonters. While significant growth is not expected, private education provides nearly 10,000 jobs with an average wage of \$42,153.

As for health services, Vermont has access to two large, research-oriented tertiary medical facilities: the University of Vermont Medical Center in Burlington and Dartmouth Hitchcock Medical Center just across the border in New Hampshire. Within the health services sector, nurses and personal care aides are the largest occupations, accounting for 6,540 and 7,050 employment opportunities, respectively.

The second largest private industry sector is the trade, transportation, and utilities supersector with 18.2% of covered employment. Retail trade accounts for two-thirds of this supersector. Nearly half of retail employment is found in two occupations, retail salespersons and cashiers. This sector is experiencing downward pressure due to increase competition from online retail services, some of which are being developed in Vermont.

Due to Vermont's robust leisure and hospitality industry in the State, retail trade still plays an important part for the visitor experience, providing high quality, local products. Leisure and hospitality make up approximately 11.5% of Vermont's covered employment. Because of Vermont's landscape and natural beauty, the State has an active tourist industry for 9 months of the year. Vermont's leisure and hospitality sectors are unique in that they are not closely tied to the business cycle, as many other tourist-dependent states. Vermont's close proximity to major

metropolitan areas, as well as the Canadian border, act as buffers to the economic up and down swings of the U.S. economy. During economic good times Vermont draws visitors from across the country and globe. During economic downturns Vermont tourism caters to nearby urban population centers with regional traffic from neighboring states and Canada. This results in an extremely stable industry across the business cycle providing gainful employment opportunities to Vermonters of all education and experience backgrounds. This industry sector accounts for roughly 35,000 jobs with an average wage of \$20,304.

Manufacturing makes up roughly 10.2% of covered employment with 31,200 jobs. The relative share of employment in this sector is higher in Vermont than the national average of 9%. This sector encompasses both durable goods manufacturing and non-durable goods manufacturing.

Durable manufacturing in Vermont has traditionally included producing products such as semiconductor chips, car parts and military equipment. Within the durable goods manufacturing sector, the most common occupations relate to production line duties. Similar to national trends, durable manufacturing in Vermont has experienced employment contractions. However, this is related to the industries increased use of technology in relation to labor. Although this results in downward pressure in employment, this does not mean durable manufacturing is not an important industry, as shown by rising productivity and output, which are expected to continue. There is a high concentration of very technical and professional services associated with manufacturing in engineering, research and development and programing. As a result, industry wages for manufacturing tend to be higher than wages for other industries with a current annual salary of \$59,226.

Outside of the private sector, federal, state, and local government employs roughly 17.4% of Vermont's covered employment. Vermont's proximity to the Canadian Border, which includes border crossings, provides employment opportunities within the Federal Government. A large portion of State and local government occupations are within educational services and public administration, as shown in Table 5. Educational services represents nearly 40% of State government and 72% of local government occupations. As a state, Vermont is committed to a high quality public education system and its statutory commitment to uniform and equal quality services throughout the State.

Table 2: Total Covered Employment, 2014 (Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages)

VERMONT - Covered Employment by Industry 2014				
Industry Title	Number of Establishments	Average Employment	Share of Employment	Average Wage
Total Covered - all ownerships	24,398	304,554	100.0%	\$43,017
Private ownership	22,897	251,528	82.6%	\$42,158
Goods Producing domain	4,326	49,613	16.3%	\$51,090
Natural Resources and Mining supersector	507	3,636	1.2%	\$34,809
Construction supersector	2,758	14,777	4.9%	\$46,228
Manufacturing supersector	1,061	31,200	10.2%	\$55,290
Durable Goods manufacturing	639	20,367	6.7%	\$59,226
Non-Durable Goods manufacturing	423	10,833	3.6%	\$47,891
Service Providing domain	18,571	201,915	66.3%	\$39,963
Trade, Transportation, and Utilities supersector	5,166	55,577	18.2%	\$36,671
Information supersector	488	4,758	1.6%	\$53,850
Financial Activities supersector	1,663	11,823	3.9%	\$61,575
Professional and Business Services supersector	4,770	26,627	8.7%	\$58,452
Education and Health Services supersector	2,296	59,134	19.4%	\$42,277
Leisure and Hospitality supersector	2,214	35,172	11.5%	\$20,304
Other services, ex. public admin. supersector	1,975	8,823	2.9%	\$31,308
Government total	1,501	53,026	17.4%	\$47,095
Federal Government	439	6,673	2.2%	\$69,254
State government	232	16,503	5.4%	\$52,691
Local government	830	29,850	9.8%	\$39,047

Total covered employment in Vermont stood at 304,554 in 2014. Private ownership accounted for 83% of those jobs, while government accounted for 17%. The service-provider domain accounted for a large majority (80%) of private sector jobs, while local government was the largest public-sector domain accounting for 56% of all government employment.

Table 3: Employment and Wages in Health Care and Social Assistance (OES, May 2014)

Most Common Detailed Occupations - Health Care and Social Assistance								
Code	Occupational Title	Employment	Hourly Wages					
			Mean	10th Percentile	25th Percentile	Median	75th Percentile	90th Percentile
29-1141	Registered Nurses	6,540	\$30.92	\$23.22	\$25.68	\$29.31	\$35.83	\$42.43
31-1014	Nursing Assistants	3,360	\$12.84	\$9.85	\$11.00	\$12.71	\$14.28	\$16.43
39-9021	Personal Care Aides	7,050	\$12.60	\$9.38	\$10.00	\$10.99	\$12.71	\$15.88
31-1011	Home Health Aides	450	\$12.46	\$9.97	\$10.90	\$12.41	\$13.89	\$14.81
29-2061	Licensed Practical and Licensed Vocational Nurses	1,470	\$21.36	\$16.32	\$18.80	\$21.18	\$23.55	\$27.53
31-9092	Medical Assistants	730	\$16.21	\$12.29	\$13.70	\$15.95	\$18.13	\$21.29
43-6013	Medical Secretaries	810	\$18.08	\$13.06	\$15.23	\$17.50	\$20.85	\$23.90
43-4171	Receptionists and Information Clerks	2,310	\$14.06	\$9.97	\$11.74	\$13.69	\$16.26	\$18.53
43-9061	Office Clerks, General	2,000	\$14.64	\$9.40	\$11.59	\$14.31	\$17.31	\$19.90
39-9011	Childcare Workers	1,230	\$11.57	\$9.24	\$9.96	\$11.08	\$12.87	\$14.60

Within the Health Care and Social Assistance sector Personal Care Aides are the most common occupation with 7,050 positions and a median hourly wage of \$10.99. Registered Nurses are the second most common occupation with 6,540 employees and a median wage of \$29.31 per hour. Other occupations with high levels of employment include Nursing Assistants (3,360 positions at a median wage of \$12.71), Licensed Practical Nurses (1,470 positions at a median wage of \$21.18) and Receptionists and Information Clerks (2,310 positions at a median wage of \$13.69).

Table 4: Employment and Wages in Health Care and Social Assistance (OES, May 2014)

Most Common Detailed Occupations - Manufacturing								
Code	Occupational Title	Employment	Hourly Wages					
			Mean	10th Percentile	25th Percentile	Median	75th Percentile	90th Percentile
51-2092	Team Assemblers	1,360	\$14.49	\$10.35	\$11.70	\$13.81	\$16.66	\$18.93
51-1011	First-Line Supervisors of Production Workers	1,680	\$27.92	\$15.88	\$20.39	\$26.84	\$34.18	\$40.82
51-9061	Inspectors, Testers, Sorters, Samplers, & Weighers	950	\$17.50	\$10.09	\$13.20	\$16.60	\$20.22	\$26.20
51-4041	Machinists	710	\$19.56	\$13.33	\$15.87	\$19.27	\$22.80	\$27.18
53-7062	Laborers and Freight, Stock, & Material Movers, Ha	2,270	\$13.80	\$9.57	\$10.78	\$12.94	\$15.85	\$19.20
51-9198	Helpers--Production Workers	640	\$13.53	\$10.04	\$11.56	\$13.42	\$15.60	\$17.62
51-9111	Packaging and Filling Machine Operators and Tend	1,460	\$14.79	\$11.26	\$12.67	\$14.38	\$16.93	\$18.62
51-4121	Welders, Cutters, Solderers, and Brazers	390	\$17.25	\$11.99	\$13.59	\$16.43	\$19.82	\$23.22
41-4012	Sales Reps., Wholesale and Manufacturing	2,180	\$29.75	\$15.90	\$20.16	\$26.45	\$34.27	\$46.05
49-9071	Maintenance and Repair Workers, General	3,000	\$18.02	\$11.54	\$14.18	\$17.36	\$21.43	\$26.06

Within Manufacturing, Maintenance and Repair workers are the most common occupation with 3,000 positions with a median hourly wage of \$17.36. Other common occupations include Laborers (2,270 positions with a median hourly wage of \$12.94) and Sales Representatives (2,180 positions, \$26.45 median wage).

Table 5: Employment in Educational Services (Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages)

ind_title	avg_establ	avg_employ	avg_female	avg_wage
Total Covered - all ownerships	24,398	304,554	151,722	\$43,017
Private ownership	22,897	251,528	122,776	\$42,158
Educational services	415	9,872	5,751	\$42,153
Government total	1,501	53,026	28,946	\$47,095
Federal Government	439	6,673	na	\$69,254
State government	232	16,503	8,954	\$52,691
Educational services	28	6,503	3,756	\$49,997
Public administration	128	6,686	3,366	\$55,143
Local government	830	29,850	19,986	\$39,047
Educational services	273	21,421	16,535	\$39,340
Public administration	422	6,580	2,987	\$36,904

The combined public and private Educational Services Sectors account for 37,796 jobs in Vermont. The private sector includes 9,872 positions including employment at private colleges and primary/secondary schools as well as specialized Educational service. In the public domain, Local Government Educational Services accounts for 21,421 positions. State Educational Services, which includes public higher education, accounts for 6,503 positions.

Emerging demand industry Sectors and Occupations

Vermont’s emerging in–demand sectors and occupations consist of the following industries: 1) manufacturing, with a notable concentration of non-durable goods; 2) health care services; and 3) professional and business services.

First, Vermont has established a nationally-known and respected “brand” around locally produced, quality goods. This translates to a statewide embracing of the made-in-Vermont seal, the Farm to Plate movement, and a thriving Value–Added agriculture market. As a result, Vermont has some of the most widely recognized name brands in non-durable manufacturing. Vermont anticipates tremendous growth in this industry which is expected to continue.

Next, Vermont expects to see a continued growth in demand for healthcare services. This is driven both demographically, from Vermont’s aging population, as well as regionally, from Vermont’s proximity to two large medical facilities. While growth is expected in healthcare services, the rate is not expected to match growth nationally. Currently, Vermont has an existing healthcare infrastructure and has historically been a strong supplier of healthcare services. While pockets of the U.S. economy have been identified as underserved healthcare areas, Vermont is not one.

Finally, one of the most strongly emerging industries is Professional and Business Services. Opportunities within these industries represents some of the most cutting edge of economic and business thinking. This industry captures and embodies an entrepreneurial spirit that has defined this country's economy for 200 years. Business services, often identified by the occupational service provided, such as engineering, computer consultation, economics, marketing and human resources, are the next wave in the march towards specialization. These businesses offer specialized business assistance which can lead to greater efficiency and cost savings for the consumers and businesses.

Between 2012 and 2022 the occupational group with the fastest rates of growth are Personal Care and Service where employment is expected to increase by approximately 22%. This compares with a 16% projected growth rate in the US. Other fast-growing occupational groups include Community and Social Service (15% growth in Vermont); Healthcare Support (15%); Construction and Extraction (15%); Protective Services (12%) and Life, Physical and Social Sciences (12%). More information about Occupational Projections can be found in Attachment 1, *2012-2022 Long Term Occupational Projections*.

Employer's Hiring Needs

Based on the minimum educational attainment level necessary by occupation in Vermont, over 60% of employment in the State requires a high school diploma or less than high school education for entry into the respective occupation. However, due to increased competition, advancements in technology and increased demands by employers, this minimum may not satisfactorily estimate the actual educational levels necessary for Vermonters to be successful in the years to come. For example, based on minimums, over 25% of employment requires a Bachelor's or Professional Degree. These occupations are expected to see a high rate of growth in the next ten years (18.2%). Equally, occupations requiring a high school or less the high school education are expected to grow 18.5%. Although the largest growth in occupations are at the book ends of the education level spectrum, some college level occupations are expected to grow, which will likely require an associate's degree or post-secondary credentialing. To ensure Vermonters have access to employment opportunities that will lead to self-sufficiency, Vermont needs to promote focused education and training opportunities to increase the skill of Vermonters to be able to compete in the modern economy.

In 2014, the Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development issued a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy. The Agency identified, among the workforce and education priorities, the need for a workforce needs assessment. The Vermont Department of Labor, the Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development and the SWDB Chair are working on the extensive on-line and in-person survey of Vermont business to better understand the needs of employers with respect to specific skills that are currently lacking in the Vermont workforce.

II. Workforce Analysis

Unemployment

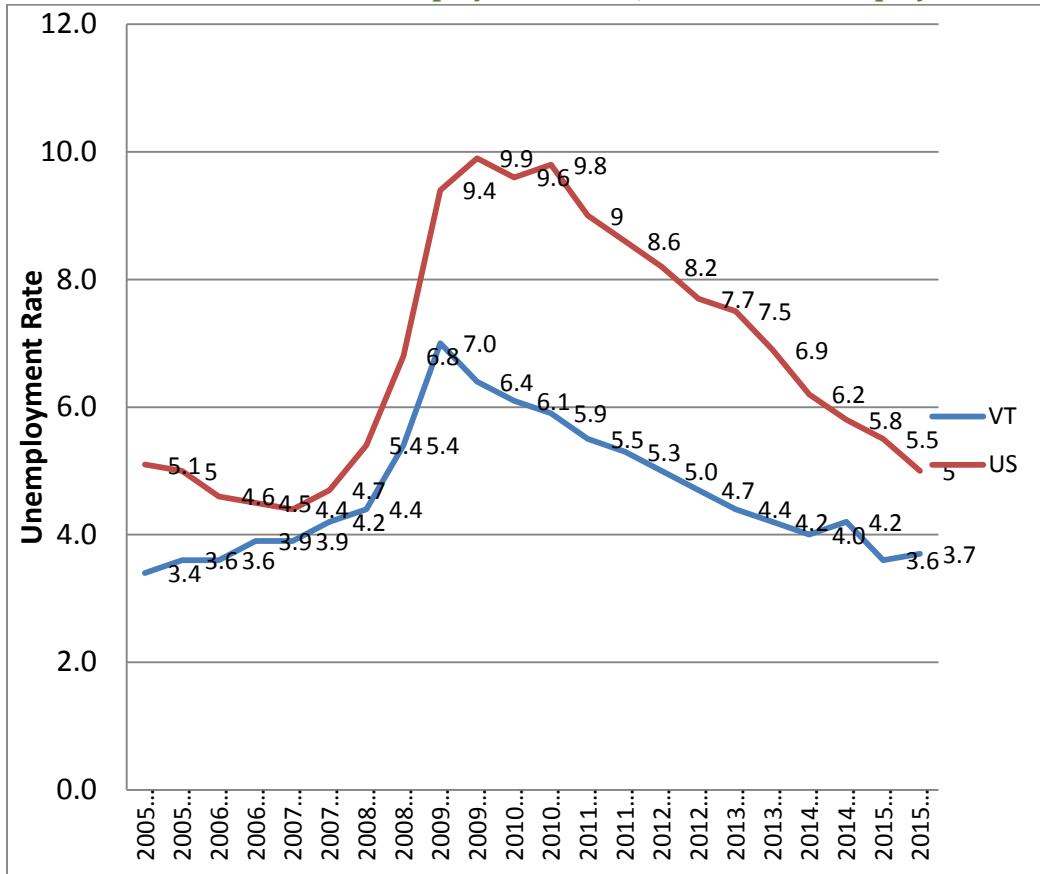
Currently, Vermont has one of the lowest seasonally-adjusted statewide unemployment rates in the country (Note: January 2016 Vermont UI rate was 3.4%). Through the great recession, Vermont was able to maintain a lower than national unemployment rate and has since recovered to pre-recession levels. Chart 1 compares the unemployment rate in Vermont with that of the nation through the period of the recession.

After peaking at 7.0% in May of 2009, Vermont's seasonally adjusted unemployment rate has fallen steadily. It has been below 4% since February of 2015. Across the counties, unemployment in 2014 ranged from a low of 3.1% in Chittenden County to a high of 6.8% in Essex County. Currently, the unemployment rate is 3.4% compared to 4.9% nationally.

Chart 3 shows unemployment rates by gender and age. When looking at unemployment rates by gender, women were hit harder during the recession but have since recovered to pre-recession levels. Male unemployment rates spiked in 2011 but have since fallen to near pre-recession levels. Vermont youth (aged 16-19) continue to have a high unemployment rate above 15%. However, this remains lower than the approximate national average of 20%, during the same time period.

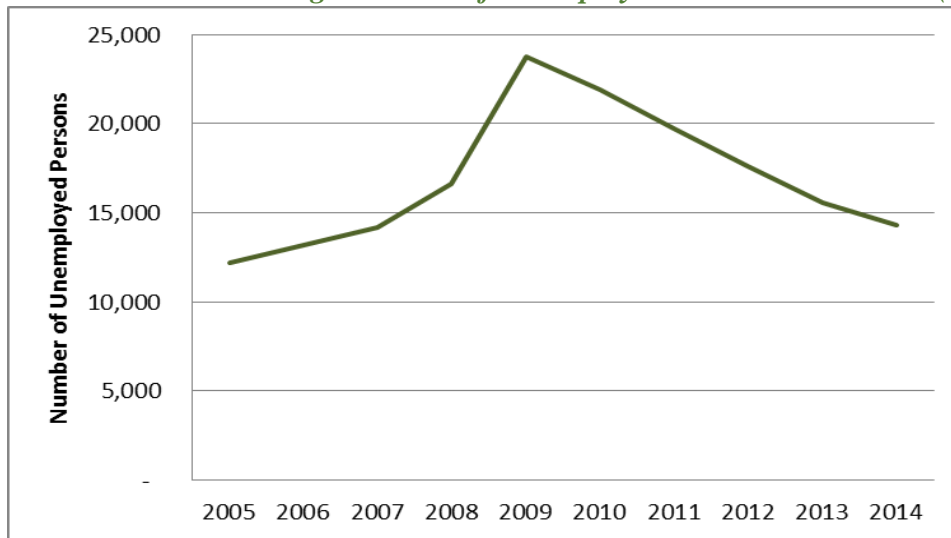
Chart 5 shows unemployment rate by education level. Individuals with less than a high school diploma have a higher percentage of unemployment. However, given Vermont's high education rate, when examining the numbers of unemployed by education level, the largest number of unemployed are high school graduates with no college.

Chart 1: Vermont and US Unemployment Rate (Local Area Unemployment Statistics)



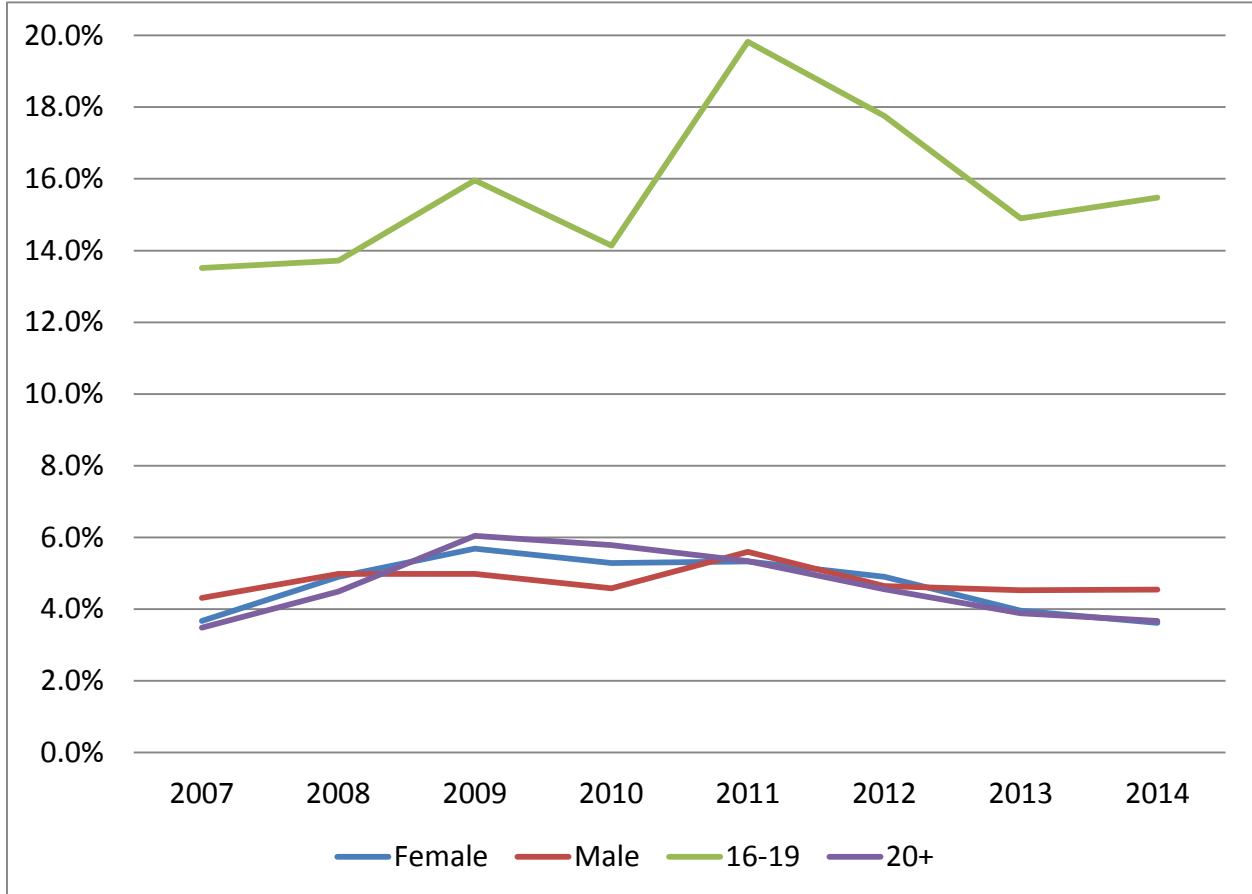
While Vermont’s unemployment rate was significantly elevated during the most recent recession, the rate remained well below the U.S average. Both the Vermont and United States rates have since declined to pre-recession rates. The current (January 2016) seasonally adjusted U.S rate is 4.9% while the Vermont rate is 3.4%.

Chart 2: Annual Average Number of Unemployed Persons in Vermont(LAUS)



The number of unemployed Vermonters increased significantly during the great recession. The number of unemployed persons peaked at 26,200 in May of 2009. The number fell by more than half to 12,250 (December 2015), in line with pre-recession levels.

Chart 3: Unemployment Rate by Gender and Age Cohort (Local Area Unemployment Statistics)



Males and females have similar unemployment rates in Vermont. The female rate increased more at the onset of the recession. It peaked earlier than male unemployment and has since fallen by a larger amount. The differences, however, are quite small.

Similar to national trends, the unemployment rate among young people in Vermont is significantly higher than the rate for adults. The unemployment rate among people age 16-19 peaked at an annual average of 19.8% in 2011, and today stands at 12.7%, while the comparable rate for those 20+ never climbed above 6% and today is at 3.2%. Disaggregated for gender, men aged 16-19 current unemployment is 17.8% and women aged 16-19 current unemployment is 7.4%.

Chart 4: Unemployed by educational attainment (Current Population Survey)

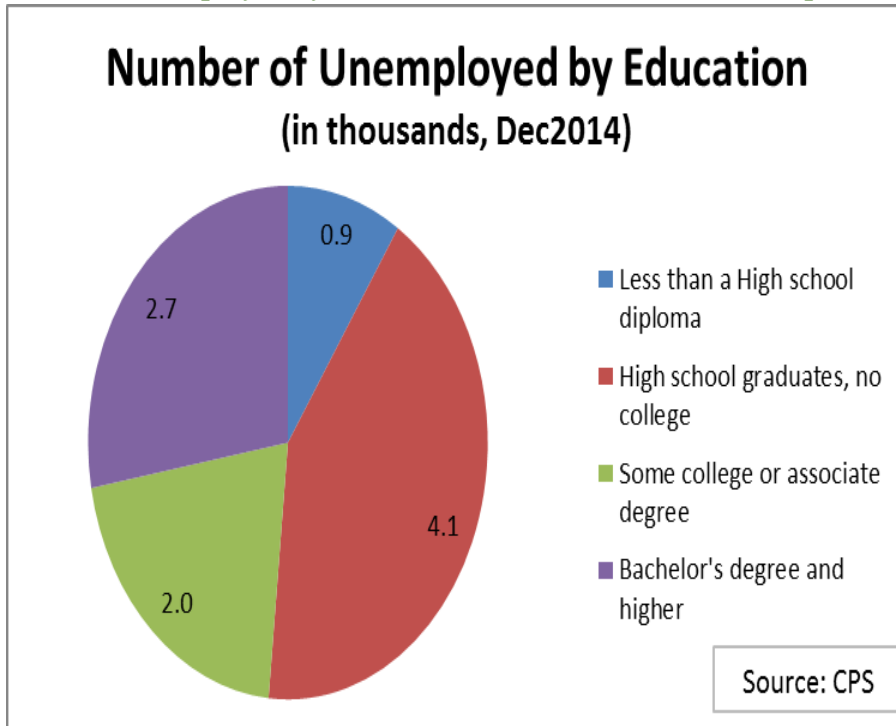
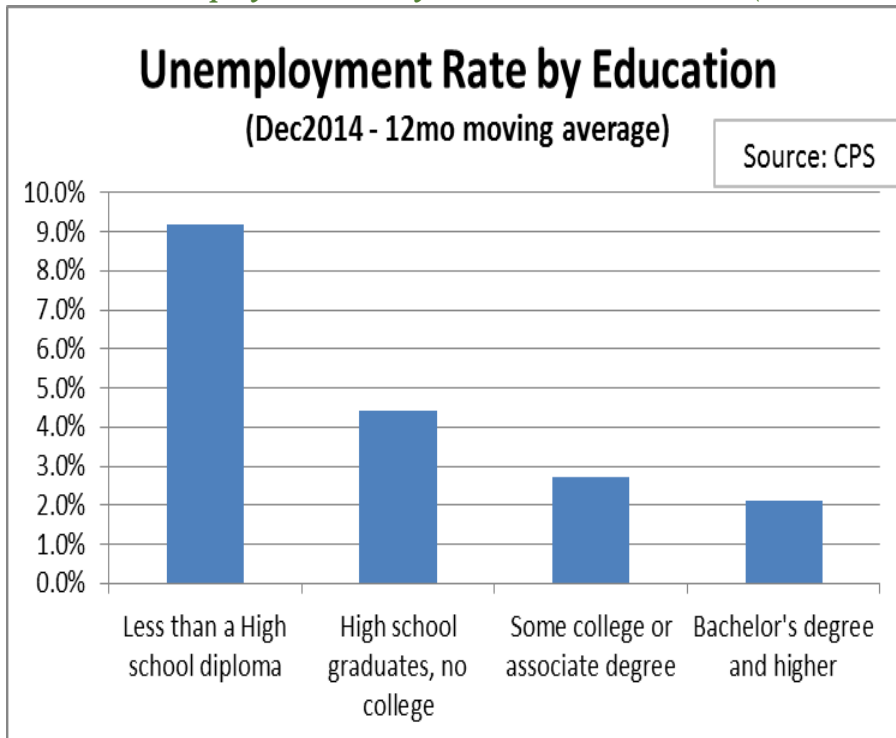


Chart 5: Unemployment rate by educational attainment (Current Population Survey)

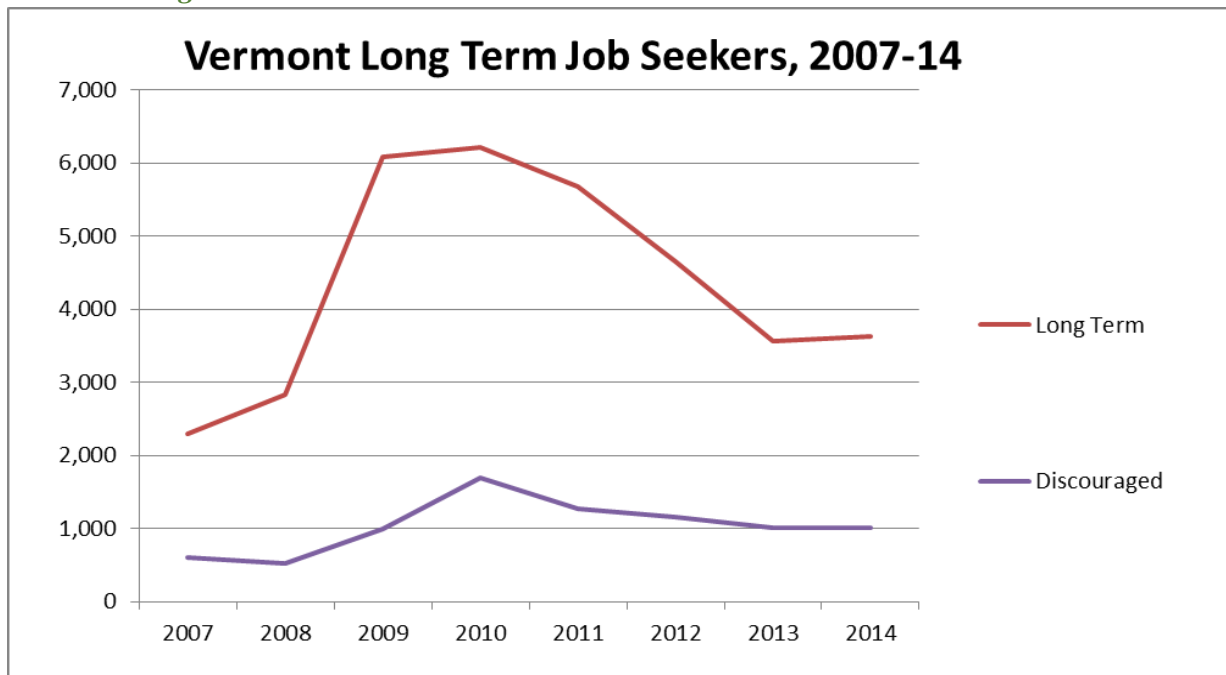


The diverse educational requirements for jobs Vermont’s economy leads to a need for people at every level of education. Individuals with lower levels of education, however, experience lower rates of labor force participation and higher rates of unemployment. A person in the labor force who did not complete high school is more than twice as likely to be unemployed as a person who completes high school but attains no other education. The person who does not complete high school is more than four times more likely to be unemployed than a person with a Bachelor’s degree or higher.

“Underemployment”

As a means of understanding “underemployment,” an analysis of Vermont’s long-term unemployed, discouraged worker, and part time for economic reasons populations has been performed. In the last 7 years Vermont has seen a near return to pre-recession levels of discouraged workers. This has not been the case for long-term unemployed or those employed part time for economic reasons. These two populations remain elevated compared to the business cycle, indicating potential barriers to employment or a mismatch in skills relative to those in demand.

Chart 6: Long Term Job Seekers in Vermont



Labor force Participation Rate

Currently, Vermont has a labor force participation rate of 67.8%, which is above the national average of 59%. Vermont has consistently been above the national average in this category. Similar to the national level, Vermont has not seen a return to pre-recession levels in labor force participation due to a demographic shift as baby boomers start to retire. Compared to 2005, Vermont has seen a 3 percentage point overall drop in its labor force participation rate while the nation has experienced a nearly 4 percentage point drop.

Chart 7: Vermont and U.S. Labor Force Participation Rates.

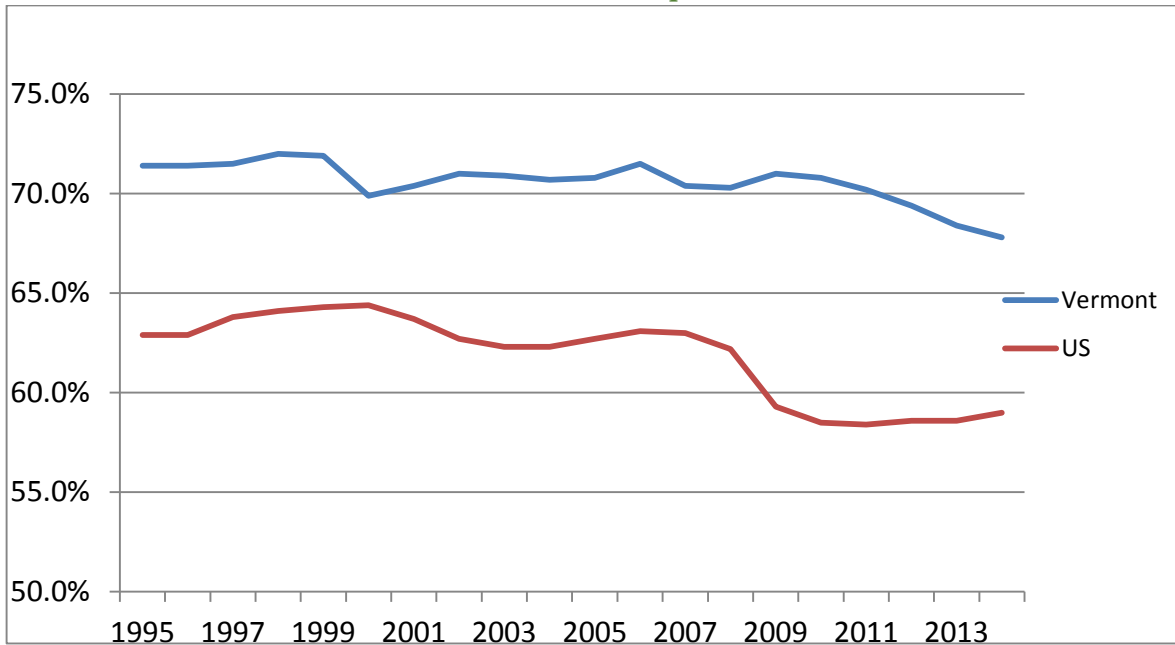
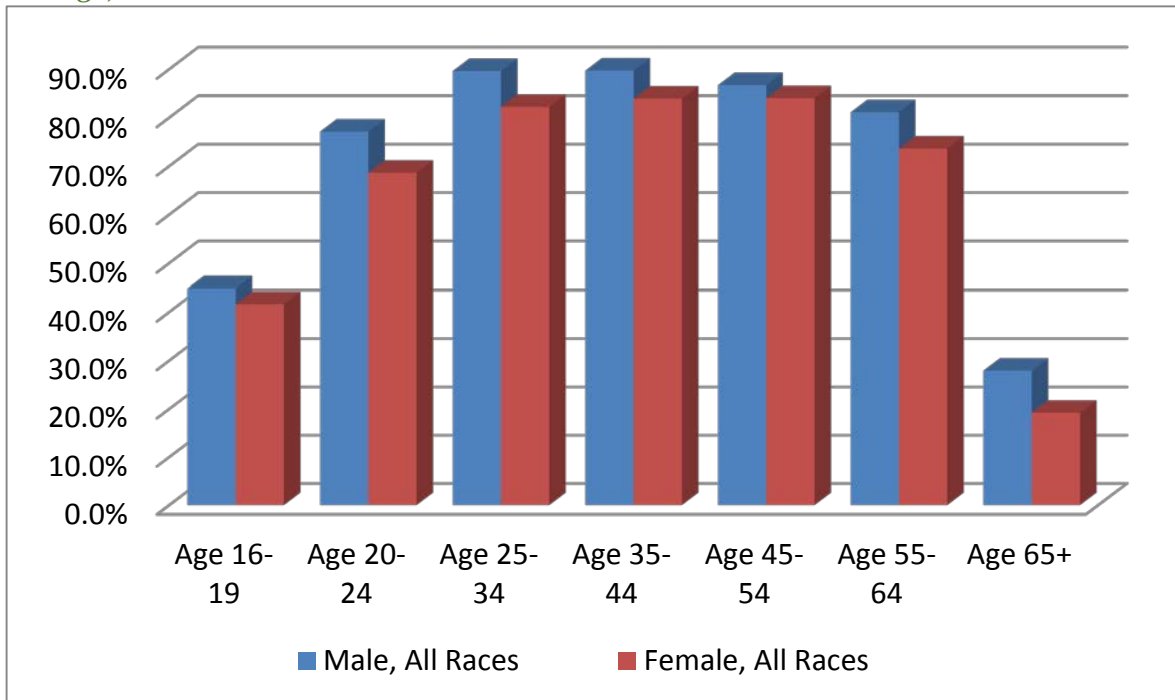


Chart 8: Vermont Labor Force Participation by Age and Gender (2014, 12-month moving average)



While female labor force participation rates have increased significantly over the last several decades, they do not yet equal or surpass the labor force participation rate of men. Although the gap between women and men has narrowed, recent history indicates a leveling off of women’s labor force participation rate, while men’s has seen a recent decrease. Following a national trend, labor force participation rates for young Vermonters (20-24) have seen a declining rate mostly attributed to a rise in post-secondary education.

Labor Market Trends

Between 2010 and 2014, the Vermont economy gained 11,466 jobs (+3.9%). Jobs in Vermont increased by 1.0% in 2014 as the local and national economic expansion continued. This rate of change translates to an additional 2,940 jobs in the State’s economy, resulting in an overall total of 304,554 jobs in 2014. Between 2013–2014, statewide job growth was distributed across both Goods Producing Sectors (0.7%) and Service Providing Sectors (1.1%).

In June 2015, the Vermont Department of Labor issued a “2012–2022 Long Term Occupational Projections” study, which is attached. The decade from 2012–2022 predicts solid growth in jobs for Vermont. The state is projected to have 115,306 openings over the ten-year period in over 500 occupations. Twenty nine percent of the openings are due to growth in employment and seventy one percent are needed to replace workers leaving the occupation.

Chart 10 ranks the major occupational groups by number of annual openings. It shows both openings due to replacements and due to growth. The three groups of occupations with the most employment are Office and Administrative Support; Sales and Related; and Education, Training

and Library Occupations. The first two of these groups have the largest number of annual openings. Education occupations rank eighth. As mentioned above, school populations are dropping in Vermont, causing flat to negative growth in education employment, and long tenure in this category further reduces the number of openings due to replacements. Food Preparation and Serving Related Occupations and Personal Care and Services Occupations have the next largest numbers of annual openings due to high turnover rates and because of rapid growth in the latter group. Healthcare Practitioners and Technical and Construction Occupations have higher than average rates of growth, contributing to their high rank in number of openings.

Education and Skill Levels

Vermont's population has education attainment levels above the national average. According to U.S. Census figures (2009 – 2013) 91.4% of Vermonters 25 and older are high school graduates, compared to 86% nationally. Similarly, Vermont has a higher percentage of residents with a Bachelor's degree or higher at 34.8%, compared to 28.8% nationally. With over 27 colleges and universities, Vermont has the most post-secondary institutions per capita in the country.

According to 2013 Census figures, 24,298 Vermonters over the age of 25 have no high school diploma or equivalent. This includes 13,023 Vermonters with less than a 9th grade education level.

As for primary and secondary schools, Vermont school enrollment has been declining since 1997. This can be correlated to Vermont's population trends and education levels. Both an aging population and high education levels tend to lead to lower birth rates. In school year 2013–2014, Vermont's high schools had a combined enrollment of 24,037 students. This number reflects a drop of 2.0% from the 2012–2013 school year when comparing the same schools. Dropout rates vary widely across school. Overall, the statewide dropout rate for high school students averaged 2.6% for the three year period ending in school year 2013–2014.

In school year 2012–2013, 35% of the tested high school population was able to demonstrate *Proficient* (level 3) or *Proficient with Distinction* (level 4) for math, 74% for reading, 32% for science, and 54% for writing. In math 38% of students statewide tested at *Substantially Below Proficiency* (Level 1). In reading 12% performed at level 1; in science 26%; and in writing 6%.

Apparent Skill Gaps

“Globalization and labor automation are accelerating the shift toward a knowledge-based economy, wherein a company retains its competitive edge by hiring those most willing and able to learn new skills. These ‘great employees’ stay valuable contributors over the course of their career, even as their roles evolve to meet new market demands. Therefore, providing and encouraging lifelong learning opportunities isn't just another benefit that companies can use to attract new talent; investment in human capital development is a critical tool for survival now more than ever.” Dennis Yang/Huffington Post 12/22/15

On a monthly basis, Vermont has approximately 2,000-3,000 job openings. The Vermont employers are reporting the same concerns that are echoed nationally -- a growing skill gap between their needs and the skills of those in the available labor pool. With rapid changes in technology, incumbent workers' knowledge and skills are constantly challenged, and sometimes

lagging behind, which adversely impacts the ability of the business to compete, to thrive or to expand, which hinders additional hiring, or may even result in the exporting of jobs overseas or the importing of foreign skilled labor.

Vermont employers report that they need their workers to have critical thinking and problem solving skills, be able to work as part of a team, communicate, manage multiple tasks, and have technical skills related to the job, as well as basic competency in reading and applied math. In order to secure a trained workforce, employers are teaming up with many entities to for workforce training and education, including state agencies, secondary education (including career and technical education centers), adult technical education programs, higher education, apprenticeship programs, and training providers/organizations. The businesses themselves are investing in internal training programs, and are often encouraging and funding professional development options.

Business owners in Vermont are engaging with the State agencies, educational institutions, and training providers to share their perspective on the competencies and skills they need and will expect from a new hire. Programs of study, and new models of training, are being developed or revamped to meet the in-demands skills for the available jobs.

Populations with Barriers to Employment

According to U.S. Census data, within the past 12 months 7.6% of families in Vermont, and 11.8% of all individuals, had income below the poverty level. 13,709 accessed Supplemental Security Income, 11,311 with cash public assistance income. 82,594 Vermonters have a disability; 1,556 are homeless; 8,580 individuals currently within one of four community-supervised correctional classifications; 9,096 were treated for substance abuse in 2013; 87,525 Vermonters participated in the SNAP program (3SquaresVT); 78,140 older individuals.

Vermont's workforce system must be intentionally and purposefully inclusive, providing for good jobs, livable wages, and economic stability for all Vermonters.

In order to promote economic prosperity and justice, Vermont leaders in government, business, education, workforce training and social programs must commit to ensuring equal and greater opportunity for all Vermonters. To advance the goals an equitable and inclusive workforce and economy, Vermont must commit to and prioritize programs and initiatives that close gender, employment and education gaps, and which build pathways to employment for women, minorities, persons with disabilities, low-income and at-risk youth and adults, mature workers, persons with barriers to employment and those who have been marginalized or under-valued through biases in the system or its administration.

The workforce development system must direct its resources to support programs that align with the business community's hiring needs and the state's occupational projections and priority sectors. It must give Vermonters the skills and training that will enable them to achieve their personal career goals as well as sustain employment during periods of economic downturn.

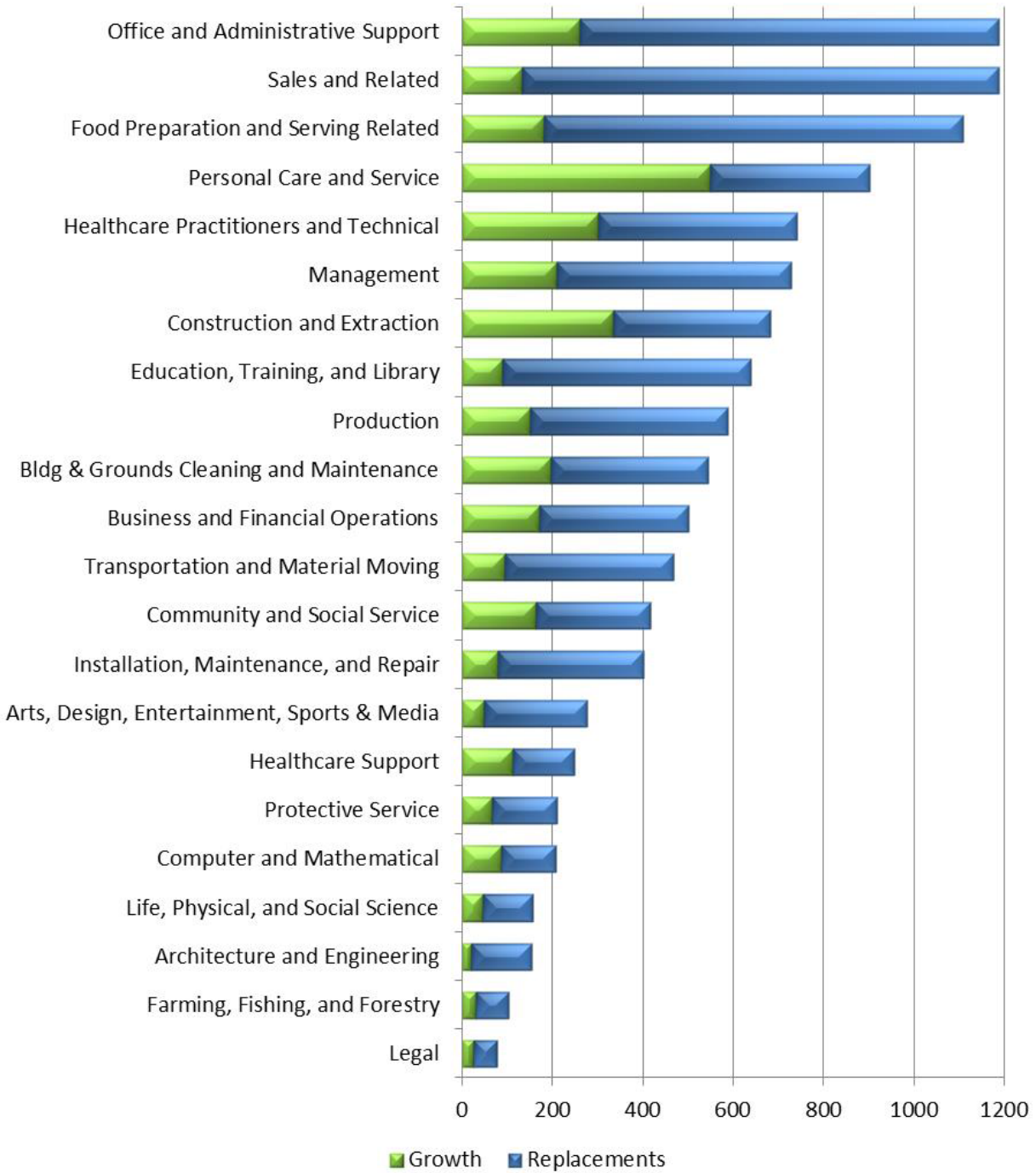
In creating an equitable and inclusive system, Vermont must recruit, train and create opportunities in non-traditional jobs for women and other under-served and under-represented populations,

including, but not limited to, women, minorities, low income individuals, under-skilled male and female youth, and women and men who are first generation post-secondary students. Similarly, new and existing training programs and grant initiatives should also support and, as appropriate, prioritize these populations.

A key factor in ensuring a competitive economy is to engage Vermont's youth in career exploration and job shadowing, internships, career and technical education, pre-apprenticeships, and programs that promote education and life-long learning opportunities. Vermont must also focus education, training and job programs that promote women and minorities into all job fields, that eliminate the pay gap for women and minorities, and look to best practices in other states showing results in reducing the employment and economic disparities faced by women and minorities. Vermont's workforce system must adopt actionable ideas to build up and out programs and initiatives that focus on gender and pay equity.

Vermont's WIOA plan is in clear alignment with the postsecondary attainment goal and strategy discussions taking place over the past year with support from a Lumina Foundation State Policy Academy Grant. A diverse group of stakeholder representatives including Vermont's Agency of Commerce and Community Development, Department of Labor, Agency of Education, employer representatives, K-12 and higher education leaders recommended the goal that by 2025, 70% of Vermont's working age adults will possess postsecondary degrees or credentials of value. Among the populations identified by the working group as in need of additional state strategies to support attainment are the over 60,000 working-age Vermonters with some college education but no degree or credential of value, and first-generation, low-income Vermont high school students. Only 37.3% of economically disadvantaged high school graduates continue on to college, and the gap in postsecondary continuation rates between first-generation and non-first-generation students exceeds 20% in 8 of Vermont's 14 counties, with overall rates for male first-generation youth the lowest of any subpopulation. Developing clear career pathways from technical education programs through credentials and degrees in Vermont's priority economic development sectors, and awarding credit for prior knowledge and employment-based education, are two of the top strategies identified by the working group for further development.

Annual Openings by Major Occupational Group



III. WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT, EDUCATION AND TRAINING ACTIVITIES ANALYSIS

In Vermont workforce development activities under the WIOA are performed by the Vermont Department of Labor (Title I & III), Agency of Education (Title II), and Agency of Human Services (Title IV).

DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

Workforce Development Activities

The Vermont Department of Labor's Workforce Development Division offers Vermont businesses and employees comprehensive services. For businesses, we offer job registration into our Vermont Job Link system, applicant searches, screening and job matching, hiring events, job fairs, current labor market information, programs for interns, apprentices and OJTs, tax credits, programs for layoff avoidance, rapid response services, short-term compensation programs, grants for job training for new and incumbent workers, and assistance with employment and labor law questions. For job seekers, services include skill assessment, skill training, labor market information, career counseling, and job placement assistance. VDOL serves all Vermonters. The Division provides an exceptional range of career resources. WIOA basic and career services (WIA core and intensive services), through the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, are provided, with programs focusing on at-risk out-of-school youth, disadvantaged adults and dislocated workers under Title I. The Wagner-Peyser Program under Title III provides all customers with employment services, labor market information, referrals to job opportunities, workshops and occupational skills development activities. Augmenting Title I and III services are the apprenticeship, migrant seasonal farm worker, Jobs for Veteran Services and SNAP and ABAWD employment programs. The VDOL through its efforts to systemically provide structured occupational pathways leading to high demand careers has sought and secured several federal grants that support this strategy. All services are provided through the 12 American Job Center / Career Resource Centers operated by the VDOL throughout the State. The VDOL, under the guidance of the SWDB, operates as the State's One-Stop Operator and administrator of these federal programs.

Youth

The VDOL ensures the required 14 program elements are made available to both in-school and out-of-school youth through partnerships with other providers.

- TUTORING, study skills training, instruction, and evidence-based dropout prevention and recovery strategies that lead to completion of the requirements for a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent (including a recognized certificate of attendance or similar document for individuals with disabilities) or for a recognized postsecondary credential;
- ALTERNATIVE SECONDARY SCHOOL SERVICES, or dropout recovery services, as appropriate;

- PAID AND UNPAID WORK EXPERIENCES that have as a component academic and occupational education, which may include—
 - summer employment opportunities and other employment opportunities available throughout the school year;
 - pre-apprenticeship programs;
 - internships and job shadowing; and
 - on-the-job training opportunities.
- OCCUPATIONAL SKILLS TRAINING, which shall include priority consideration for training programs that lead to recognized postsecondary credentials that are aligned with in-demand industry sectors or occupations in the local area.
- EDUCATION offered concurrently with and in the same context as workforce preparation activities and training for a specific occupation or occupational cluster;
- LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT opportunities, which may include community service and peer-centered activities encouraging responsibility and other positive social and civic behaviors, as appropriate;
- SUPPORTIVE SERVICES e.g. Driver Education including the road test, Transportation, Child Care, Work Clothing and Equipment, etc.;
- ADULT MENTORING for the period of participation and a subsequent period, for a total of not less than 12 months, e.g. one to one mentoring, Big Brother/Big Sister programs;
- FOLLOW-UP SERVICES for not less than 12 months after the completion of participation, as appropriate; updated on a quarterly basis from date of exit. Any service listed in the fourteen program elements may be considered as a follow up service as well as job retention and career advancement services;
- COMPREHENSIVE GUIDANCE AND COUNSELING , which may include drug and alcohol abuse counseling, and referral, as appropriate;
- FINANCIAL LITERACY EDUCATION such as helping participants create household budgets, initiate savings plans, manage credit and debt and navigate the financial aid process for post-secondary education;
- ENTREPRENEURIAL SKILLS training such as discussing characteristics of entrepreneurs, developing business ideas, creating a business plan and inviting local entrepreneurs to speak to youth.
- LABOR MARKET AND EMPLOYMENT INFORMATION services about in-demand industry sectors or occupations available in the local area, such as career awareness, career counseling, and career exploration services; and

- PREPARATION ACTIVITIES for transition to postsecondary education and training.
- The VDOL provides intensive case management, paid and unpaid support services, and follow up services for one full year after a youth exits. Additionally, VDOL places youth in work experience, summer employment opportunities, and on-the-job training, as appropriate. WIOA places increased emphasis on work-based learning and work experience opportunities for eligible youth. Work based activities that have academic and occupational education as a component will be integral to VDOL's youth program design.

Adult

The adult program is open to all individuals 18 years of age and older with priority given to veterans and individuals who are low income, recipients of public assistance and those who are basic skills deficient. The program provides career services to individuals ranging from basic labor exchange information to more individualized career coaching, occupational skills development and work based employment opportunities such as on-the-job training. The provision of a range of occupational skills pathways and employment based activities assists participants in gaining and/or retaining employment that will lead to economic self-sufficiency. The VDOL will continue to identify specific labor market needs in order to formulate and expand occupational credentialing through a lattice of stackable training opportunities. The systemic approach of providing a variety of training opportunities and credentialing pathways to in demand occupations offers a variety of entrance points for adult participants who are seeking challenging and sustaining work opportunities.

Dislocated Worker

The dislocated worker program is designed to meet employer needs by helping job seekers upgrade skills, obtain employment, obtain credentials, improve job retention and increase earnings. VDOL's dislocated worker program offers employment and training programs for eligible workers who are unemployed through no fault of their own or have received an official layoff notice. A description of the full range of services available through the one-stop system and how services can be accessed is made available to dislocated workers. An initial assessment including a basic review of the individual's work history, skills, training, education, career objective, and self-identified service needs is used to inform decisions on next steps such as scheduling additional career services. The program provides similar re-employment and training activities as the adult program. The driving emphasis is placed on providing timely intervention and immediate assistance to laid off individuals unlikely to return to the occupation they came from. Shepherding displaced workers through an assortment of timely and relevant training activities that lead to in demand occupations is paramount to the program's success.

Wagner-Peyser

The Wagner-Peyser funds are utilized by VT to support employment services for job seekers and business customers in the Vermont's American Job Center Network. The Vermont Network physically embodies the required coordination of core and local partner program services, as all programs are present at these locations across the State, and is operated under the concept of

universal accessibility. Title III funds support State staff, facilities, and information technology needed for partner program delivery at the American Job Centers and for improving the overall capacity of the workforce development system to match labor demand with labor supply. These funds are directed as necessary to best support the system and to most efficiently fulfill Federal mandates.

Vermont's AJC's provide activities that support the development of a competitive workforce, including appropriate recruitment services and special technical services for employers. Vermont's AJC's work with all individuals and other job seekers to obtain critical job search, assessment, and career guidance services that support them in obtaining and retaining employment. In addition, AJC's offer activities that assist employers with building skilled, competitive workforces through recruitment assistance, employment referrals, and other workforce solutions. AJC staff also assist in developing and disseminating regional workforce information and related resources, which provide both job seekers and employers with comprehensive and accessible economic and industry data to inform workforce and economic development activities.

The Vermont Department of Labor is working to establish more comprehensive "business needs" programs, teaming up with employers, chambers, regional workforce development and investment boards, trade associations, training and education partners, state agencies, SBDC, the Agency of Commerce/Department of Economic Development, and others to support small business and offer technical assistance and support for existing businesses. Assistance can range from providing technical assistance on programs, guiding them to resources, assisting with labor law explanation and compliance, helping with job development, advertising and recruitment for their vacancies, and assisting with specialized needs.

AGENCY OF EDUCATION

Workforce Development Activities

Adult Education and Literacy programs serve adults who are 16 years old or older and not enrolled in secondary school, and who lack a high school diploma or an equivalent, or lack equivalent skills; or who are English language learners. Instruction is provided from the lowest skill level in adult basic education to adult secondary education, as well as English to speakers of other languages in the basic skills of reading, writing, math, and speaking/listening. The purposes of the program are to assist individuals to increase their academic skills, to obtain a high school diploma or GED, to obtain employment, and to successfully enter post-secondary education or training.

Services are funded by federal and state grants awarded to eligible agencies via open funding competitions. Under WIA, the Agency of Education has funded 4 non-profit educational organizations to provide services in every county via 10 full-service adult learning centers and additional satellite offices, collectively branded as Learning Works.

Students served through Learning Works develop and engage in a personalized education plan, with career exploration included as a central component. Variable levels of instructional intensity are available to students, dependent on their skill level and specific educational needs. AEL

instruction is offered in applied contexts and the programs are flexible to accommodate learners' barriers to persist in their studies (e.g., evening hours, on-line assistance).

Students are eligible to earn a regular high school diploma from their town of residence through the flexible and innovative Vermont High School Completion Program. Students who come to adult education with a 9th grade equivalent in skills take, on average, 18 months to earn their high school diploma. Alternatively, students have the option of preparing to earn a GED certificate, which has been revised to align with the Vermont Common Core State Standards. This is also a useful educational option for some adult learners, as completing a computer-based test requires that they have developed basic technology skills.

AGENCY OF HUMAN SERVICES

I. VERMONT DIVISION OF VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION (DVR)

Workforce Development Activities

DVR provides employment services for individuals with disabilities in order to offset barriers to their employment. DVR serves individuals with any disability, with the exception of people with visual disabilities who are served by the Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired (DBVI). Services provided by DVR are highly individualized and can include a wide range of activities as long as they support an employment goal. After a determination of eligibility, DVR and the consumer develop an Individual Plan for Employment (IPE) which outlines the employment goal, the services to be provided, and the responsibilities of the consumer. A consumer is determined to have achieved an employment goal when they have been employed a minimum of 90 days and are stable on the job.

While all DVR services are highly individualized, DVR has developed some specific programs and initiatives to better meet workforce needs.

Creative Workforce Solutions (CWS)

DVR uses a dual customer approach that promotes meeting the needs of both employers and consumers. DVR's primary interface with the business community is through its business outreach program called Creative Workforce Solutions. CWS consists of 13 Business Account Managers housed in twelve Agency of Human Services' Districts, who coordinate with local employer outreach teams. DVR funds or partners with over 200 community non-profit staff who provide placement services for individuals with disabilities. Employer outreach by these providers is coordinated through the CWS Business Account Managers.

Pre-Employment Transition Services (PETS)

In order to meet the requirements of PETS, DVR has established a cadre of fourteen VR counselors assigned to work exclusively with students in high school. Each counselor has an assigned Youth Employment Specialist to develop real work-based learning experiences. DVR has the capacity to provide PETS services for eligible students in all 60 supervisory unions.

Supported Employment for Youth and Adults

DVR partners with the Division of Developmental Services and the Department of Mental Health to provide supported employment services for adults with developmental disabilities and youth with emotional behavioral disabilities.

Rehabilitation Services for the Deaf (RCD)

DVR has four Rehabilitation Counselors for the Deaf to provide specialized employment services to adults and students who are deaf or have hearing impairments.

Work Incentive and Benefits Planning

Approximately 30% of individuals in the DVR caseload receive Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) or Supplemental Security Income (SSI). Individuals on SSDI or SSI often need assistance understanding and managing the effects of earned income on their benefits. DVR Benefits Counselors provide this guidance to beneficiaries and assist them in taking advantage of available work incentives.

Short Term Industry Recognized Training

DVR data has indicated that consumers who complete industry recognized short-term certification programs achieve higher wage employment outcomes. DVR therefore sets aside a portion of the overall case service budget for consumers interested in these training programs

Progressive Employment

Progressive Employment allows individuals to make incremental steps towards employment through graduated experiences. These experiences range from job shadows and company tours to On the Job training agreements. DVR makes extensive use of work experiences in competitive settings to assist individuals in building their skills and gaining real work experience. Progressive Employment is also an excellent tool for employers to get to know potential employees before committing to a hire.

II. Vermont Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired (DBVI)

Workforce Development Activities

The DBVI provides specialized services for people who are blind or visually impaired using a rehabilitation model that starts when the person experiences vision loss. DBVI offers an array of services specifically designed for people who have lost visual function and independence. Given appropriate adaptive skills training and assistive technology instruction, many limitations due to blindness can be overcome. Quality of life, employment, dignity, and full integration are the focus of the program. DBVI practices a rehabilitation model that takes a holistic approach to working with the individual at the time of vision loss. The process begins with the individual and the DBVI Counselor working together to develop an Individualized Plan for Employment in order to achieve their highest level of independence and employment as possible. DBVI services help people reestablish control and ability to complete independent living tasks necessary to access employment and the community. The overall goal is to help individuals gain economic

independence by obtaining satisfying, well-paying jobs. This is accomplished through specialized instruction to build adaptive skills related to blindness and by building employment skills through vocational training and higher education. An individual has achieved an employment goal when they have been employed a minimum of 90 days and are stable on the job.

Vocational Rehabilitation Services

The goal of DBVI's vocational rehabilitation services is to help people with vision loss to retain, return, or secure employment. Each individual meets with a DBVI counselor to identify goals and develop a plan to reduce the limitations that result from a vision loss.

Transition Services

DBVI transition services provide high school students with opportunities for learning independent living and job skills. DBVI collaborates with several partners including the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, Vermont Associates for the Blind and Visually Impaired (VABVI), Vermont Youth Conservation Corps, ReSource, and the Gibney Family Foundation.

One specific transition program called LEAP (Learn, Earn, and Prosper) provides paid summer employment for youth in a residential setting. This program empowers students to take charge of their employment future by gaining early employment success that can be carried into future employment pursuits. The goal is for all graduates to enter college, obtain future training, or join the world of work. A new addition to the summer work experience is the requirement for students to secure internships in their local community. The goal of the internships is to make connections in the local community where jobs will eventually develop and to expand a summer experience into year-long career exploration. LEAP has completed its seventh successful year.

Technology

Maximizing the power of assistive technology is critical to people with vision loss. DBVI invests significant effort in staying current about new assistive technology, which will revolutionize employment access and eliminate other barriers caused by vision loss. Assistive technology plays a critical role in allowing an individual with a visual impairment to be connected with society, continue employment, and pursue a tremendous range of careers in mainstream society.

What Works

DBVI's customer satisfaction is its strength. These ratings consistently exceed 90% each year. Staff are described as responsive, easy to reach, and helping people meet their goals. Comments at each of the four Town Meetings acknowledged that DBVI staff and services "gave them hope."

Individuals who experience vision loss need to learn new adaptive skills, and DBVI strategies are designed to help people build these skills. In most situations, assistive technology is the key to opening the door for employment. Specialized software and hardware are often needed to access print, and specialized skills, including the use of specialized magnification and lighting, are needed to use the technology successfully. The combination of technology and the skills to use the technology helps individuals return to their jobs and community activities.

Our customers have used work experiences as a way to show employers that they can do the job. Many employers cannot conceive of how a blind person can do a particular job, until they learn that some simple, low cost accommodations make it possible. This is also a great opportunity for people to build employment skills and to learn about jobs they like or don't like.

DBVI also makes a strong commitment to help individuals succeed in post-secondary and vocational training programs. These degrees and certificates usually lead to better paying jobs.

For students, DBVI's process involves strong communication with a team including the student, family, school staff, and teachers of people with visual impairments. Each DBVI counselor guides students and teams to develop specific action steps depending on the path they will take toward either more training or directly into work. Our role is to help students make a smooth individual transition into the world of work.

STRENGTHS & CHALLENGES

A. Strengths of Workforce Development Activities

Vermont sees the following as strengths to the workforce development system in the state:

- **Intimate, Individualized Services** — core partner programs are highly accessible to individuals and program participants would rarely encounter wait times in program centers across the state. Additionally, the state has highly ranked education and training programs. For example, DVR has been ranked number one nationally in per capita individuals served, in employment per capita outcomes achieved, and in access to services for individuals with the most severe disabilities and determined eligible for Social Security disability benefits based on Ticket to Work participation rates.
- **Strong Employer Engagement** — The state workforce programs have a strong emphasis on the employer as a customer. These business services come through engagement with businesses, economic development partners, and community organizations and leaders. The DVR, through CWS has over 2,500 active employer accounts in a Salesforce Strong database. Additionally, the core partners have successful employer engagement opportunities such as the Vermont Tech Jam, an annual career fair/tech expo showcasing the state's most tech and bioscience companies, which provides a unique matchmaking opportunity for tech-based employers and job seekers.
- **Program Accessibility** — Core partner programs are already available statewide. Additionally, many required one-stop partners are already collocated within the twelve state career resource centers, including the following programs: unemployment, trade adjustment, jobs for veterans, wagner peyser, and registered apprenticeship. Because of the collocation of wagner-peyser services, all career resource center staff receive labor market information training that enables better informed services to program participants and information seeking customers.
- **Education Opportunities** — There are 27 colleges and universities in Vermont, including one research university, five universities conferring master's degrees, an art school, a

culinary school, a law school, and 14 undergraduate colleges conferring associate's and bachelor's degrees. These colleges are considered national leaders and this has resulted in a net positive migration of college-age people into Vermont.

B. Challenges of Workforce Development Activities

Vermont sees the following as challenges to the workforce development system in the state:

- **Rural Landscape** — although workforce programs are highly accessible, some areas of the state still suffer from a lack of physical and technological infrastructure that makes serving these populations more difficult. Additionally, outside of the larger municipalities, it can be difficult to amass populations with a common need and focus. Economic variable and job opportunities differ in each small region. The question of going to scale becomes a challenge.
- **Population Demographics** — As mentioned above, Vermont's population is aging and in some estimates declining. Although Vermont has one of the highest high school graduation rates, U.S. Census reports about 55,000 residents, over the age of 25, without a high school diploma. Additionally, many participants are seeking entry level employment.
- **Coordination and Collaboration** — Communication largely stems from personal relationships. However, state agencies and private sector organizations largely administer workforce development programs without coordination, common standards, or adequate measures of success.
- **Maintaining a Skilled Workforce** — According the Vermont's 2014 CEDS report, many employers in the state have difficulty recruiting individuals from outside the state due to: (1) a narrow range of employment alternatives; (2) a shortage of satisfactory employment opportunities for spouses; (3) a shortage of available and affordable housing; and (4) a relatively high cost of living compared with wages. Additionally, many graduates of the state's colleges move to other states to take advantage of job opportunities and, in some cases, to return to their home state or region.

CAPACITY

Vermont core partners have been successful in providing their individual services to Vermonters. This is evidenced by the recognition of our programs and the positive customer feedback from program participants. Examples include the national rankings of the DVR program services, the 95 percent overall customer satisfaction of the DBVI participants.

Despite the individual successes of Vermont's core partner programs, the Vermont workforce development system must improve to fulfil the needs of Vermont businesses, employers, employees, and job seekers. The State faces many challenges, including demographic shifts, funding constraints. Additionally, the Vermont workforce development system has created silos that do not always bring all sources to bear when providing services to individuals.

However, Vermont is in a unique position to improve its workforce development system under the WIOA. Because Vermont is a small state, the connections between the partner programs are already in place to expand coordination and collaboration among the workforce development system partners. Vermont must improve this cooperation to allow our nationally recognized partners to come together in supporting every program participant to ensure every Vermonter has the chance to be economically successful.

Additionally, the capacity and infrastructure is in place to help the state succeed. The program leaders are members of the SWDB and most are members of the Operating Committee. The state has numerous entry points into the state workforce development system, including the twelve career resource centers operated by the VDOL. Many required programs are already collocated within these state workforce development centers. What is left is for Vermont to continue to build and expand on its workforce development system. Continued coordination and communication, from the state down to the local level, must be further developed and maintained.

IV. STATE STRATEGIC VISION, GOALS AND STRATEGIES

VISION

The State's strategic vision is to create a workforce development system that is a highly visible and accessible network of programs and strategies designed to increase employment, retention, and earnings for all Vermonters. This system will meet the skill requirements of employers, enhance the productivity, competitiveness and life circumstances for all Vermonters, and result in an improved, diverse, and quality economy.

The State's Guiding Principles in administering this vision are:

- 1) The workforce system will support the workforce needs of all Vermonters, recognizing and addressing the unique needs of those with barriers to employment. The system will operate on the premise that any individual who wants to work, can work, given the right support.
- 2) Employers will be both leaders and partners in the design, development and implementation of the workforce development system. The workforce development system must be sufficiently flexible and responsive to meet the workforce needs of Vermont employers.
- 3) Sustained employment is the only viable route out of poverty for low income Vermonters. Therefore, the workforce development system will support pathways to employment at or above a livable wage.
- 4) Partners within the workforce development system will rely on the best available labor market information when making policy decisions, in order to ensure that Vermonters are being placed in the best position possible to succeed in the Vermont economy.

GOALS

This vision will be realized by achieving the following goals:

- 1) Maximize access to the workforce development system through seamless coordination among the different partners to provide a quality, consistent experience for all Vermonters.
- 2) The workforce development system will prioritize pathways to livable wage employment for all Vermonters, with an increased focus on low income Vermonters.
- 3) Strengthen the Vermont economy by increasing the number of women employed in the skilled trades, STEM fields, advanced manufacturing and other Vermont priority sectors.
- 4) Ensure all students who graduate from high school are college ready, career ready, or both. Increase the number of Vermonters who pursue and complete post-secondary education, training and career opportunities, with the education and specific skills necessary to keep Vermonters competitive in the economic sectors critical to the Vermont economy.
- 5) Align the workforce development system to the needs of employers, as well as job seekers, through systematic and ongoing engagement and partnership.

STRATEGIES

GOAL 1: Maximize access to the workforce development system through seamless coordination and communication among the different partners to provide a quality, consistent experience for all Vermonters.

Vermont is a small state with great partnerships between and across the different workforce development networks. Because of its size, most of the partners have known each other and worked together for many years. Despite this familiarity, the different networks have not fully operated in a coordinated manner that is most beneficial to the customers of the Vermont workforce development system. Breaking down this system of silos and creating a true network among the partners will help our customers reach their full potential.

Strategy A: Create a clearinghouse of all workforce and education training opportunities across the State (within two years).

Strategy B: Align programs and develop cross training of staff at all levels, including:

- Inter-agency training to ensure all staff are familiar with each other's programs.
- Training to recognize, address, and resolve implicit bias and stereotypes to ensure access to all Vermonters.

Strategy C: Increase focused communication among all service delivery points and partners. This will include:

- Development of common intake and joint referral processes.

- Exploring strategies for further co-location, driven by local needs.
- Develop a shared dashboard for interagency cooperation focused on co-enrollment.

Strategy D: Hold a regular series of workforce development summits or conferences, at least once per year, in order to:

- Foster existing statewide network relationships.
- Discuss best practices happening statewide and nationally.
- Determine what is and is not working.

GOAL 2: The workforce development system will prioritize pathways to livable wage employment for all Vermonters, with an increased focus on low income Vermonters.

Employment is the only reliable route out of poverty for low income Vermonters. The workforce development system must offer Vermonters in poverty opportunities to access pathways to jobs that offer livable wage (or above) and other benefits.

Strategy A: Develop effective approaches to connect those in poverty to the workforce development system. This will include:

- The expansion of existing, and development of new, partnerships with state agencies and community programs serving poor and disenfranchised populations, including people with disabilities, new Americans, women in poverty, displaced homemakers, people who are homeless, offenders and lower-skilled adult learners.
- Partnership with the Department of Children and Families (DCF) to provide workforce services for TANF beneficiaries, non-custodial parents who owe child support, and Able Bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWDs).
- Partnerships with state agencies and community programs serving youth who are at-risk and living in poverty, including youth with emotional behavioral disabilities served through the JOBS program.

Strategy B: Expand workforce development and training initiatives and programs for Vermonters in high-demand and high-wage jobs. This will include:

- The development and expansion of sector based training programs.
- The development and expansion of training, certification programs, and industry recognized credentials in high demand sectors.
- Ensuring Career Pathways have entrance points for lower-skilled adults that connect to adult education programs with outreach specific to this population.

Strategy C: Explore opportunities to address disincentives to work built into state and federal benefits programs, such as Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) or Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF).

- Seek federal waivers to test alternative benefit structures and work incentives to make work pay.
- Promote state policy adjustments designed to incentivize employment for individuals who receive public benefits.

Strategy D: Utilize the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Employment and Training (E&T) grant as comprehensive pilot to experiment on how the workforce system can effectively serve beneficiaries effectively.

- The SNAP E&T grant is a partnership between Vermont DCF, VDOL, DVR and Community College of Vermont to provide comprehensive return to work services for beneficiaries who are recent offenders, have substance abuse disorders, and/or are homeless. The partnership will test new strategies to support return to work for these populations who have significant barriers to employment.

GOAL 3: Strengthen the Vermont economy by increasing the number of Vermont women employed in the skilled trades, STEM fields, advanced manufacturing and other Vermont priority sectors.

Strategy A: Regularly collect, analyze, and report on labor market, workforce development, and training data by gender.

Strategy B: Work across Vermont State agencies and departments to identify and support education, training, or economic development initiatives to reduce occupational segregation in priority sectors.

Strategy C: Support employer efforts to improve gender balance in priority sectors.

Strategy D: Work across the education sectors to ensure that student personalized learning plans are informed by broad exposure to a full range of careers, include nontraditional careers for women.

GOAL 4: Ensure all students who graduate from high school are college ready, career ready, or both; increase the number of Vermonters who pursue and complete post-secondary education, training and career opportunities with the education and specific skills necessary to keep Vermonters competitive in the economic sectors critical to the Vermont economy.

The effort to increase college and career readiness for high school graduates has remained a priority for the State of Vermont, from the Governor's Strategic Plan in 2012 through the recent Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) of the Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development.

Vermont has a high high-school graduation rate, with flexible pathways to graduation for learners of traditional age and for adults (Act 77, 2013). Vermont has defined and adopted college and career readiness standards. These standards are being implemented throughout the education systems in the state. (Education Quality Standards, State Board of Education Rule 2000, 2014).

Strategy A: Create partnerships with K–12, including Career and Technical Education, adult and higher education, employers, state agencies, and other workforce development system partners, in order to:

- Establish and promote Career Pathways, focusing on priority pathways and ensuring focus on in-demand industries and occupations.

- Establish transition to post-secondary education and training programs in all regions to prepare underskilled out-of-school youth and adult learners for successful entry into and progress within post-secondary education and training programs within a career pathway.
- Connect skills learned in school with their application in the workplaces of the future; become a resource for students and schools in addressing Personalized Learning Plans and other career aspirations.
- Reach out to youth who are leaving school to engage them in workforce development opportunities, specifically WIOA youth and adult activities.
- Maximize effectiveness of the Pre-Employment Transitions Services (PETS).

GOAL 5: Align the workforce development system to the needs of employers, as well as job seekers, through systematic and ongoing engagement and partnership.

The workforce development system must serve two customers with equal energy, the job seeker/employee and the employer. In order to be in alignment with the workforce needs of employers, the workforce development system must be engaged at the state and local level with employers on an ongoing basis.

Strategy A: Establishment of protocols for VDOL and DVR to coordinate outreach and candidate referral to employers.

Strategy B: Promote the coordination of services from VDOL and DVR offered to employers to support a successful placement.

Strategy C: Expand existing and develop new joint VDOL and DVR marketing and outreach efforts to the employer community. This may include:

- Jointly sponsored career fairs and business recognition events.
- Regular meetings between VDOL and DVR employment staff to share contacts and local outreach activities.

Strategy D: Expand partnerships with the local workforce development leaders to identify skill gaps and develop training programs to meet the staffing needs of local businesses.

Strategy E: Expand the use of work experiences (progressive employment; OJT, internships, pre-apprenticeship, etc.) to help job seekers build skills that meet the local employer workforce demand.

Strategy F: Ensure that AEL partners are aware of State workforce needs, high-priority industries and employment sectors, and sectors with high employer demand so that they may incorporate this information into their ongoing work on personalized learning plans and career development with adult learners.

PERFORMANCE GOALS

The Unified Plan partners are continuing to discuss their prospective performance measures and goals with their respective federal partner(s) under WIOA title-funds. At this time, the WIOA final regulations are not yet available, and, as such, the unified partners are working under current performance measures which have been extended through June 30, 2016. However, the plan partners are working to anticipate their obligations and moving toward those between now and when the final regulations are issued.

ASSESSMENT

The State Workforce Development Board and its Operating Committees will assess and monitor the implementation and effectiveness of Vermont's strategic vision and goals. Frequent updates will be required of the core partners to ensure progress and understanding of the effectiveness of the plan. These committees will include business representatives to ensure the perspective of the business and industry community is reflected in the assessment of the effectiveness of the plan. Performance data and labor market information will be used to assess the larger and long-term impacts of the plan. A customer-centered survey will be developed to assess the immediate effectiveness of the one-stop delivery system.

OPERATIONAL PLANNING ELEMENTS

I. STATE STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION

STATE BOARD FUNCTIONS

The Vermont State Workforce Development Board (SWDB) advises the Governor on the development and implementation of a comprehensive, coordinated, and responsive workforce education and training system. Vermont is designated as a Single State Local Area, the SWDB is designated as the State and Local Workforce Development Board under the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act.

Under Section 101(d) of the WIOA, the SWDB assists the Governor in the following functions:

- The development, implementation, and modification of the State plan.
- Review of statewide policies, statewide programs, and of recommendations on actions that should be taken to align workforce development programs in a manner that supports a comprehensive and streamlined workforce development system, including the review and provision of comments on the State plan, if any, for programs and activities of one-stop partners that are not WIOA core programs;
- The development and continuous improvement of the workforce development system, including:
 - Identification of barriers and means for removing barriers to better coordinate, align, and avoid duplication among the programs and activities carried out through the system.
 - Development of strategies to support the use of career pathways for the purpose of providing individuals, including low-skilled adults, youth, and individuals with barriers to employment (including individuals with disabilities), with workforce investment activities, education, and supportive services to enter or retain employment.
 - Development of strategies for providing effective outreach to and improve access for individuals and employers who could benefit from services provided through the workforce development system.
 - Development and expansion of strategies for meeting the needs of employers, workers, and job seekers, particularly through industry or sector partnerships related to in-demand industry sectors and occupations.
 - Development and continuous improvement of the One-Stop Center delivery system, including providing assistance to the One-Stop Operator, One-Stop Partners, and providers with planning and delivery services, including training services and supportive services, to support effective delivery of service to workers, job seekers, and employers.
 - Development of strategies to support staff training and awareness across programs supported under the workforce development system.

- Development and updating of comprehensive state performance accountability measures, including state adjusted levels of performance, to assess the effectiveness of the core programs in the state.
- Identification and dissemination of information on best practices, including best practice for:
 - Effective operation of One-Stop Centers, relating to the use of business outreach, partnerships, and service delivery strategies, including strategies for serving individuals with barriers to employment.
 - Effective training programs that respond to real-time labor market analysis and effectively use of direct assessment and prior learning assessment to measure an individual's prior knowledge, skills, competencies, and experiences and evaluate such skills, and competencies for adaptability, to support efficient placement into employment or career pathways.
- Development and review of statewide policies affecting the coordinated provision of services through the state's One-Stop delivery system, including the development of:
 - Objective criteria and procedures for use in assessing the effectiveness and continuous improvement of One-Stop Centers.
 - Guidance for the allocation of One-Stop Center infrastructure funds.
 - Policies relating to the appropriate roles and contributions of entities carrying out One-Stop Partner programs within the One-Stop Delivery System, including approaches to facilitating equitable and efficient cost allocation in the system.
- Development of strategies for technological improvements to facilities access to, and improve the quality of, services and activities provided through the One-Stop delivery system, including such improvement to:
 - Enhance digital literacy skills.
 - Accelerate the acquisition of skills and recognized post-secondary credentials by participants.
 - Strengthen the professional development of providers and workforce professionals.
 - Ensure such technology is accessible to individuals with disabilities and individuals residing in remote areas.
- Development of strategies for aligning technology and data systems across One-Stop partner programs to enhance service delivery and improve efficiencies in reporting on performance accountability measures, including the design and implementation of common intake, data collection, case management information, performance accountability measurement and reporting processes, and the incorporation of local input into such design and implementation to improve coordination of services across One-Stop partner programs.
- Preparation of required annual reports.
- Development of the statewide workforce and labor market information system.
- Development of other policies that may promote statewide objectives for, and enhance the performance of, the workforce development system in the state.

In addition to the functions required under section 101(d) of the WIOA, the SWDB is tasked with the following duties:

- Conduct an ongoing public engagement process throughout the State that brings together employers and potential employees, including students, the unemployed, and incumbent employees seeking further training, to provide feedback and information concerning their workforce education and training needs; and
- Maintain familiarity with the federal Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) and other economic development planning processes, and coordinate workforce and education activities in the State, including the development and implementation of the State plan required under the Workforce Investment Act of 1998, with economic development planning processes occurring in the State, as appropriate.

The SWDB operates as a public board in Vermont enacted through 10 V.S.A. chapter 22A (Workforce Education and Training). The board meets at a minimum three times annually, with additional workgroups called when necessary. A majority of members is required to constitute a quorum and action taken requires a majority of the members present. The SWDB maintains official minutes and abides by sunshine and conflict of interest provisions.

The SWDB Chair and the Commissioner of the VDOL are authorized to establish work groups to facilitate the work of the Board. Currently there are two standing committees of the SWDB. The Operating Committee is a business-majority committee that also includes members from government, including the core partner agencies. The Operating Committee is tasked with the day-to-day operations of the SWDB. The committee is required to report in writing to the full SWDB on all decisions of the committee. This committee will allow for flexible decision making and more intimate monitoring of the implementation of this plan. Additionally, this will allow the full SWDB to focus on developing statewide policies, such as career pathways, at their meetings. Additionally, there is a youth council that is tasked with providing information to the SWDB and assisting with the planning, operational and other issues related to services for youth.

The SWDB Chair and Operating Committee shall appoint sub-committees, as necessary, to examine and make recommendations to the Board on best practices and strategies to connect employers to education and training providers to meet Vermont's workforce needs in high-demand industries and occupations. Any such sub-committees shall include representatives of businesses, secondary and higher education, career technical and adult technical education, eligible training providers, and state agencies and departments including those which are WIOA title fund recipients.

STATE STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION

In order for Vermont's workforce development system to succeed, and to ensure the accomplishment of the State's goals, the core partner must increase their communication and coordination in providing services to Vermonters. Specifically, the core partners must share resources, expertise, and information to better integrate and avoid the duplication of services. The core partners both understand this obligation and are committed to taking the steps necessary to

improve the workforce development system in Vermont and expand access and services to Vermonters.

A. CORE PROGRAM ACTIVITIES TO IMPLEMENT STATE STRATEGY

The VDOL, AOE, and DVR will work in partnership to carry out the goals of this State Plan. Most important to a successful implementation is the continued communication among the core partners at all levels of administration. In order to keep the communication lines open and to facilitate the implementation of this plan the partners will meet on a quarterly basis. Concurrently, the regional managers of each core program will schedule to meet on a regular basis to develop professional relationships, discuss best practices, and review compliance with the State Plan. The core partners will be responsible to ensure the regional offices are implementing the policies and procedures developed by the SWDB.

Additionally, the partners are committed to the following:

- Development of workforce training and education programs clearinghouse.
- Inter-agency training.
- Universal intake and referral.
- Co-enrollment of customers.
- Collaborative outreach and business services.

These activities are described in detail below.

B. ALIGNMENT WITH ACTIVITIES OUTSIDE THE PLAN

Once established, the core partners intend to expand the coordination and alignment of State strategies to include other workforce development partners, ensuring that all services are available to Vermonters, especially those with barriers to employment.

This will take the form of MOUs between the core partners and other State programs, including required one-stop partners. Additionally, the core partners hope to expand the use of a unified referral process with other partner programs to better facilitate co-case management.

Furthermore, the core partners intend to utilize the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, Education and Training grant to test new strategies to support return to work for the chronically underserved populations. This grant is a partnership between DCF, VDOL, DVR, and the Community College of Vermont to provide comprehensive return to work services for beneficiaries who are recent offenders, have substance abuse disorders, or are homeless.

The VDOL will partner with the Learning Works partner programs to increase success for registered apprenticeship program candidates in the State. This will include jointly establishing a minimum basic skills requirement for success in the apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship programs, and aligning this to approved standardized basic skills assessment instruments in use. Candidates can be advised of the importance of surpassing this skill level, and introduced to adult education and literacy programs for basic skills assessment and the accompanying instructional support to improve skills.

For example, it is noted that basic mathematics concepts represent barriers to completion for some participants enrolled in pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship programs. VDOL and Learning Works partners can work together to establish that all program participants have a certain minimum TABE math score for success in the program. When a candidate tests below the level, he or she can take advantage of relevant instructional support to build basic math skills through the adult education and literacy programs while they are engaged in the pre-apprenticeship or apprenticeship program; thus addressing a barrier to completion.

C. COORDINATION, ALIGNMENT, AND PROVISION OF SERVICES TO INDIVIDUALS

The Core Partners are each committed to providing comprehensive, high-quality, customer-centered services to Vermonters. This will require each partner to become familiar with each other's programs and services to ensure that a customer has all tools available to him or her, regardless of where he or she enters the workforce development system. In order to facilitate this, the partners are committed to the following activities to align services to individuals: cross training, common referral, and better communication.

The WIOA requires, and Vermont is committed to, a comprehensive one-stop delivery system. However, not all Vermonters engage the workforce development system through the American Job Centers. In order to ensure Vermonters have access to all available services, each partner is committed to a cross training program to familiarize staff with individual department program services. Cross training of staff will occur annually and on a regional basis. For new staff, orientation will include an introduction to all core partner programs and services. This cross training will help to facilitate a transition of customers from program to program for better education and training outcomes for individuals. This should also include training to identify, address, and resolve implicit bias and stereotypes to help expand access to all Vermonters.

Additionally, the core partners are committed to developing a universal referral process for common customers to be used for expanded and coordinated case management. There are areas of overlap in service that will be better coordinated with a common referral process. This common referral will follow the customer from program to program, identifying the services provided by each partner. As each partner becomes more familiar with each other's services, individuals will be able to access each program's services regardless of where they enter the workforce development system.

Finally, in order to facilitate coordinated service to individuals, each partner is committed to more effective communication among the partner programs. The partners are committed to a concentrated effort to share information and resources amongst each other. The partners plan to explore joint case management strategies similar to what is used with postsecondary education plans developed under the economic services department. In developing a plan, the customer must visit and discuss the plan with multiple state programs, i.e., Vermont Student Assistance Corporation, the VDOL, the DVR, and state educational institutions. The programs work in collaboration to ensure the participant's educational plan will provide the participant with the best opportunity to succeed. Additionally, each program must sign off of the plan in order for the participant to get final approval and funding. This type of collaboration must be expanded to other

areas of the workforce development system in order to ensure the success of Vermont participants and avoid the duplication of services.

D. COORDINATION, ALIGNMENT, AND PROVISION OF SERVICE TO EMPLOYERS

Employer engagement is just as important to the success of the Vermont workforce development system as are individual services. Both the VDOL and the DVR engage Vermont employers to meet their workforce needs. These activities must be better aligned and coordinated to ensure Vermont employers are getting the most out of Vermont's workforce development system. The VDOL and DVR are committed to coordinated employer outreach and marketing to ensure the needs of employers are being met.

Arguably the most important aspect of employer services is knowing the employer needs within the State. The mismatch in workforce skills was acknowledged as a major issue in the Economic Development Strategy produced by the Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development in 2014. The VDOL and ACCD, in consultation with other workforce development partners, are currently developing a workforce needs assessment to survey Vermont businesses to better understand the needs of employers in the State. This outreach should be conducted in consultation with the DVR in order to ensure the workforce needs of all employers are identified, including those employers who employ individuals with disabilities.

Additionally, both the VDOL and DVR will conduct job fairs, hiring events, and provide job seeker referrals in coordination. The VDOL and DVR will develop protocols to ensure that employer outreach is jointly conducted. Included among these protocols are joint job fairs and business recognition events, as well as holding regular meetings between the partner employment representatives to share contacts and local outreach activities.

The VDOL and DVR will further expand partnerships with local workforce development leaders. Although Vermont is a Single State Area with one SWDB, there are numerous local partners with extensive knowledge of local employers. The core partners intend to engage these local leaders to help in identifying skill gaps and developing training pipelines to meet the needs of local businesses.

E. PARTNER ENGAGEMENT WITH EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

Although Vermont's high school graduation rate is one of the best in the country, increasing college and career readiness, and learning and skill development among Vermonters remains a State priority. The core partners must continue to engage our educational institutions to ensure that a skilled and ready workforce is available for the high-demand occupations and industries. Schools must develop courses of study and work-based learning opportunities that align with real career and job opportunities.

The partners are committed to the use of accurate labor market information in order to promote a job-driven education and training system. Vermont's labor market information is developed by the VDOL Economic and Labor Market Division and has increase outreach to secondary and postsecondary institutions, including career and technical education programs and eligible training providers, to help them focus on current, accurate labor market information, as opposed to relying

on anecdotal information when determining program offerings. This will help to ensure that skills being taught are those relevant to the needs of the business community and necessary for Vermonters to succeed in the workforce.

This job-driven system should focus on high-demand, high-wage jobs. In order to identify and develop these career pathways, the core partners will collaborate on sector based training programs. This will require partnerships with educational providers throughout the state to ensure the education and training is available to those who seek it. In 2015, the Vermont Legislature passed Act 51 which requires the VDOL, ACCD, AOE, and the Vermont State Colleges to collaborate more closely to develop high school career and technical education programs of study, including adult and technical education programs, aligned with the needs of Vermont employers.

The core partners will work with local educational institutions, specifically secondary schools and adult education centers, to ensure that individuals who are leaving school are engaged in the workforce system as soon as possible. As opposed to waiting on individuals to enter the workforce system later, the core partners want to engage these individuals as soon as they leave school in order to ensure the continuity of career development.

F. PARTNER ENGAGEMENT WITH OTHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING PROVIDERS

Vermont has many key stakeholders involved in the workforce development system to create a comprehensive and effective system. The SWDB

The Vermont Legislature in 2014 the Vermont Legislature passed Act 199 requiring the Commissioner of Labor to develop “an integrated system of workforce education and training in Vermont.” Since that time, the VDOL has conducted comprehensive data collection on training and education programs throughout Vermont; engaged with other state agencies in collaborative reviews of state grant awards for training of new and incumbent workers; updated or written MOUs for data exchange and sharing; enhanced existing and supported new internship and apprenticeship programs; helped support and participate in a nationally-recognized program of registered apprenticeship that includes college credits attainment; upgraded the ETPL; led the work on the unified state plan; and successfully achieved \$6M in federal grants dedicated to workforce education, training, reemployment and apprenticeship. In addition, VDOL has helped ACCD, VTC and CCV, UVM, AHS and AoE with their grant applications and other work projects relating to workforce education and training.

In June, 2014, the Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development successfully authored a statewide comprehensive economic development strategy (CEDS) plan, thus propelling Vermont to be one of the few states in the nation to complete and have an approved CEDS. It was approved by Governor Shumlin and accepted by the EDA in July 2014. Participants in the CEDS outreach meetings repeatedly spoke of the challenge many Vermont entrepreneurs face in finding enough workers with the right skills to help businesses thrive. The state's current investments of more than \$1.5 billion in public education and additional tens of millions of dollars for workforce training are only partially succeeding in filling the skills gap.

The Agency identified, among the workforce and education priorities, the need for a workforce needs assessment. The SWDB Chair and members (particularly the business members), with the Vermont Department of Labor, the Vermont agencies of Commerce and Community Development and Education, are collaborating on an extensive on-line and in-person survey of Vermont business to better understand the needs of employers with respect to specific skills that are currently lacking in the Vermont workforce.

Vermont education and workforce development partners have been working to increase participation in education, stackable and industry-recognized credentials, and other measurable skill gains. According to the CEDS report, *“While there is a growing sentiment that not all high school students benefit to the same extent from higher education, and that its associated costs and debt burdens exceed resulting benefits, the general trend of greater college participation is driven by the reality that a college degree – associate’s, bachelor’s, or graduate – opens doors for higher-wage opportunities which are closed to those without those credentials. As a particular sub-goal, Vermont should place an emphasis on expanding higher education opportunities for students from lower income backgrounds”*.

Another focus area for Vermont is to improve career technical education and adult technical education. It is clear that technical education can provide effective and low-cost career training, and can open a wide array of work opportunities. In Vermont, there is a great demand for skilled persons in building and construction trades, advanced manufacturing, information technology, and health care related fields, as well as other sectors. The business community is in need of workers at all levels, from entry to professional. The Vermont Agency of Education is leading the efforts, and funding the work, for personal learning plans, career pathways, and cooperative learning and direction from its professional educators, in the K-12 system. The Vermont Department of Labor, Agency of Commerce, Vermont State College system (including Community College of Vermont), the Adult Technical Education Centers and their directors and staff, local workforce boards, non-profits, and workforce education and training providers, including those on the List of Eligible Training Providers, are working together to construct new and enhance existing skill-specific trainings that will lead to credentials, degrees, and/or direct unsubsidized employment opportunities.

Vermont state government, through both state and federal funding, currently spends more than \$60 million a year to deliver training to Vermonters, including, but not limited to, targeted populations such as veterans, dislocated workers, at-risk youth, trade adjusted workers, persons with disabilities, unemployed, under-employed, mature workers, persons with significant barriers to employment, low-income persons (including SNAP and ABAWD), corrections offender population, refugees and new Americans, and incumbent workers. Vermont core partners are committed to implementing a comprehensive workforce training system with:

- Assessment of individual participant’s skills
- Coordination with the business community to align training to existing and future vacancies
- An information and referral network for workforce training opportunities
- Credentials that are recognized and trusted by the employer community
- Continued evaluation of all training to ensure relevancy and continued improvements
- Targeted recruitment to bring more workers into Vermont’s labor market

- Assist entrepreneurial efforts that help start and grow business ventures, since Vermont is a state of small businesses (only 3% of the Vermont businesses have more than 50 employees).

G. LEVERAGING RESOURCES TO INCREASE EDUCATIONAL ACCESS

Vermont is committed to increasing access to education to all Vermonters and using every available resource to do so. The core partners intend to leverage WIOA, TAA, Vocational Rehabilitation, Pell Grants, public and private grants, and other resources to assist participants in their educational goals. Additionally, the core partners coordinate with the Vermont Student Assistance Corporation, which provides grants, loans, scholarships, career and education planning, and general information for those seeking educational opportunities in Vermont. The core partners will take advantage of the Vermont High School Completion Program that guarantees a high school diploma or equivalent to all Vermonters aged 16 and older with the use of State funding.

H. IMPROVING ACCESS TO POST-SECONDARY CREDENTIALS

The Vermont General Assembly recently enacted legislation requiring flexible pathways toward college and career readiness for all Vermont public students (Act 77, 2013). Several components of this legislation, already in implementation statewide, are directly relevant to improving access to post-secondary credentials for Vermonters. First, personalized learning plans for all middle and high school students are mandated to be in place. As of November 2015, all seventh and ninth grade students have a personalized learning plan in place. A core component of these learning plans, typically crafted with school advisee-advisor periods, will be discussion of relevant workforce opportunities for students along with educational pathways that are necessary to obtain such opportunities. The core partners will work together to ensure that relevant employment information, including the findings from the workforce assessment work, are made available to middle and high school educators so they may use this information to better inform students. Ensuring that graduating students have a clearer sense of exactly what type of post-high school educational credentials or high-quality certifications are necessary for specific jobs is critical to ensuring workforce success statewide.

Vermont also offers a robust, state-funded dual enrollment system to all high school students. Students are eligible to take two courses for college credit while they are still enrolled in high school, using these experiences to get a jump start, both experientially and financially, on their post-secondary endeavors. Some students are already leveraging these dual enrollment opportunities with work-based learning in apprenticeships and industry shadowing opportunities to develop quite sophisticated personalized learning plans that have them on their way to college completion and workforce success upon high school graduation. These models will be shared among the WIOA network in order to increase knowledge and logistics information regarding opportunities for students.

A third component of Act 77 fosters increased use of Career and Technical Education (CTE) coursework for all students, in an effort to enhance the technical and practical skills of Vermont's high school students and ultimate workforce. Discussed previously, our CTE system is working closely with the VDOL, Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development, and

Vermont Vocational Rehabilitation Services to better map CTE programmatic offerings with the Career Pathways designated as “high priority” for Vermont. This work involves developing non-duplicative sequences of secondary and postsecondary courses within a CTE program of study to ensure that students transition to postsecondary education without duplicating classes or requiring remedial coursework. It also involves developing clear, easy to understand systems of stackable credentials for students to learn and strive for. The AOE will regularly share with WIOA partners its list of industry-recognized certificates available via secondary and postsecondary CTE programs statewide.

I. COORDINATING WITH ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

At the State level, the Agency of Commerce and Community Development is represented on both the State Workforce Development Board and the SWDB Operating Committee through the Secretary of Commerce and Community Development. This ensures that policies and decisions regarding the State’s workforce development system are taking into account the strategies and expertise of the Agency. The core partners will be working with the ACCD to develop the training and universal referral process described in (A). Additionally, the ACCD administers one-stop partner programs that are included in the one-stop delivery system. The policies and strategies developed by the core partners will be expanded to include these additional programs. Finally, in developing this State Plan, the core partners incorporated provisions of the Vermont 2020 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy produced by the ACCD.

II. STATE OPERATING SYSTEMS AND POLICIES

STATE OPERATING SYSTEMS

Currently, the three core partners under the WIOA Unified Plan operate using different operating and data systems for their respective programs. These systems do not exchange real-time data and it is neither practical nor economically feasible, at this time, for the programs to integrate to a unified system.

However, open lines of communication exists between the partner programs at the State level through representation on the SWDB and its Operating Committee, as well as at the local level. The core partners are committed to developing local management teams and/or local partner meetings to further develop the communication on a local level. This includes the development of cross training of core partner staff.

Additionally, information is shared between the core partners through data sharing MOUs between and among workforce development partners to address co-enrollment and data collection and reporting. The VDOL’s Economic & Labor Market Information Division provides labor market information to all partners. Staff is available to provide labor market information, including presentations, workshops, products, and other services, to the SWDB, one-stop center, core partners, and community partners and employers.

Department of Labor

The VDOL's workforce development programs are predominantly administered by the Workforce Development Division. The VDOL operates the 12 Career Resource Centers located throughout the State. Additionally, VDOL manages Vermont's Labor Exchange System. Both labor exchange and case management are managed using the Vermont Job Link (VJL) through the American Job Link Alliance. VJL is VDOL's primary data collection and information exchange system. VJL provides client tracking, case management support, as well as providing federal reporting services. The system operates through a Citrix interface that provides the user with the flexibility to conduct job searches and receive referral to open positions. VDOL employees can access the system through any VDOL office as well on the road through a secure portal.

VJL collects and tracks data for the following programs: WIOA Title I youth, adult, and dislocated worker programs, including Vermont's Rapid Response activities; Trade Adjustment activities; Jobs for Veterans program; Migrant Seasonal Farmworker activities; and employment assistance services such as Re-Employment Services and Eligibility Assessment. Finally, VJL provides system support to Vermont's National Emergency Grants.

VDOL's Apprenticeship program utilizes a portion of our legacy system (IDEM) along with VJL to track and register apprenticeships.

Agency of Education

The AOE tracks the skill gains and secondary school graduation rates of participants through a web-based, relational database called Data Works. Data Works houses each AEL participant's engagement in postsecondary education and employment outcomes obtained through data matches with service provider partners.

Using Data Works, the AOE also tracks adult education and literacy provider training and activities. Providers are responsible for real-time data entry and are able to pull a range of reports to support program monitoring and improvement efforts. Data Works is aligned to the reporting parameters of the National Reporting System of the U.S. Department of Education and meets its assurances for data quality.

The AOE has an electronic communication system in place with the AEL field in the form of an e-mail distribution list. Similarly, distribution lists of principals, superintendents, and other key stakeholders are maintained by the AOE.

The Statewide Longitudinal Data System based out of the AOE is a possible future mechanism that could serve to support coordinated implementation of Vermont's workforce development strategies. It is a data system that will house student information from the early (elementary) years through secondary education and beyond. Currently, this system is in a development phase with piloting implementation to occur in 2016.

Vocational Rehabilitation

DVR and DBVI track all consumer services through the 911 case tracking system. This system collects demographic, service, expenditure, and case-flow data. The system is used for all required

federal reporting for both the DVR and DBVI programs. The system is managed by the DVR Program Evaluation Unit. This Unit matches 911 data to other administrative data sources such as the State Unemployment Insurance Wage Reporting System and the TANF system to coordinate and evaluate services across programs. DVR and DBVI are in the process of developing data sharing agreements with our core partners to allow matching of data for reporting outcomes under the WIOA common performance measures. The agreement hopes to allow the core partners to track co-enrollment across programs and coordination of services.

STATE POLICIES

The SWDB Operating Committee will lead the effort to develop state policies that will support the implementation of the State strategies. This will include policies and MOUs regarding co-enrollment, data sharing, and universal intake and referral. Policies and procedures will comply with all the requirements of federal and state laws and regulations. These will be disseminated to the core partners as well as other workforce development partners as they integrated into the workforce development system.

STATE AGENCY AND STATE BOARD OVERVIEW

State Agency Overview

Department of Labor

The VDOL is an independent department within the State government. The VDOL is led by a commissioner that reports directly to the governor. The VDOL has roughly 290 employees, with approximately 150 staff working from the central office located in Montpelier. Within the Department are the following divisions: Unemployment Insurance; Workforce Development; Worker's Compensation; VDOL Safety Division (VOSHA & Project Work-SAFE); Economic and Labor Market Information; and Wage and Hour and Employment Practices.

The VDOL administers multiple one-stop partner programs, including: the WIOA Title I youth, adult, and dislocated worker programs; Employment Services authorized under the Wagner-Peyser Act; Trade Adjustment Assistance activities authorized under the Trade Act; Jobs for Veterans State Grants programs; and Vermont's Unemployment Compensation programs.

VDOL maintains a central office located in Montpelier and oversees 12 regional offices offering job seekers and businesses recruitment and placement assistance. These American Job Centers (called Career Resource Centers) provide workforce development assistance to Vermonters.

Agency of Education

The Agency of Education is a standalone agency within the State government structure. The Agency is administered by a Secretary that reports to both the Governor and the State Board of Education.

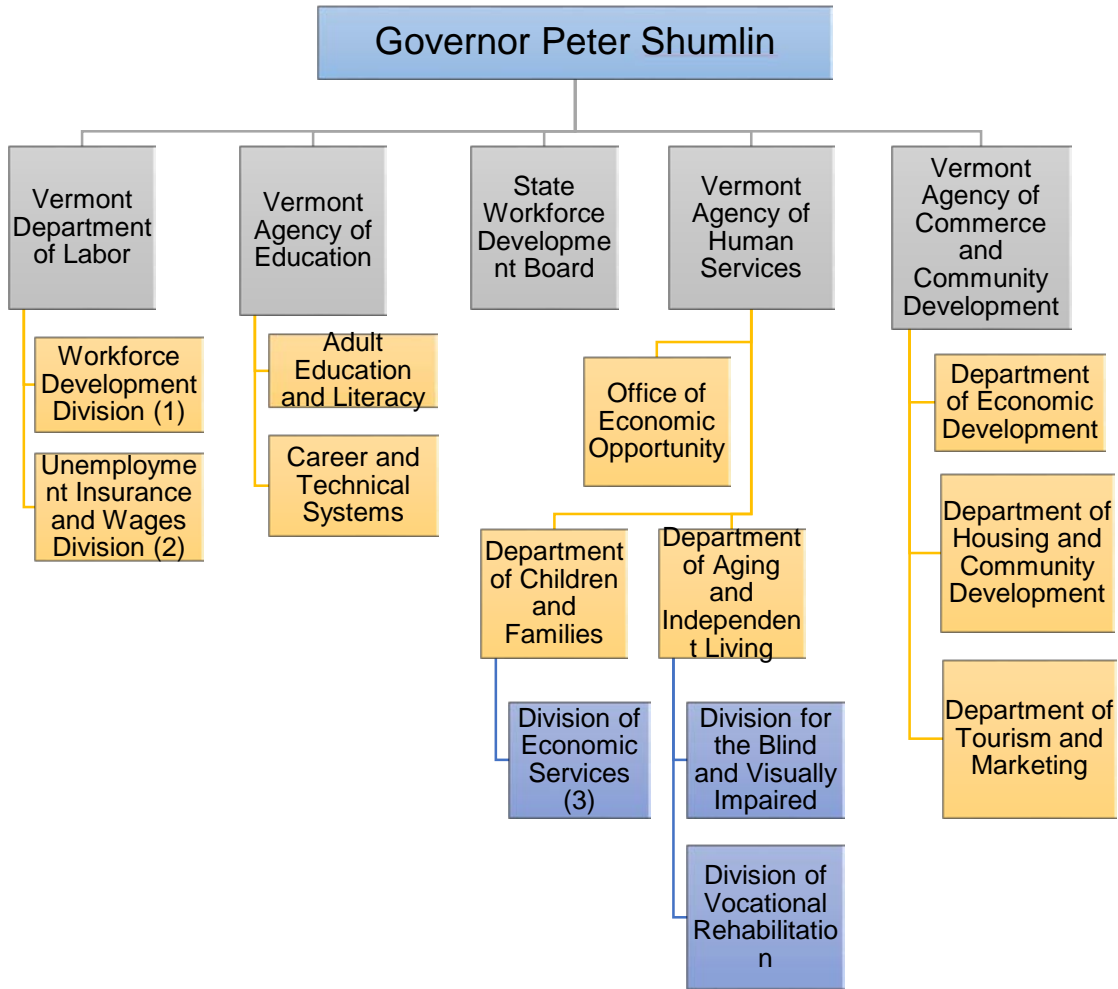
The AOE is authorized to manage the adult education and literacy system and receives federal and state funds for that purpose. Grants or contracts are awarded to eligible provider organizations, via an open Request for Proposal process, with funds distributed on the basis of county needs. The AOE Financial Services unit monitors all expenditures and billing, as well as other relevant financial operations for funding AEL services.

Currently, the AOE staff work with and supervise funding for four direct service providers, with ten full-service centers and several satellite locations statewide. The State Board of Education and AOE provide leadership, support, and oversight to ensure that Vermont public education system enables all students, including adult learners, to be successful. The Agency's vision is that every learner in Vermont completes his or her public education with the knowledge and skills necessary for success in college, continuing education, careers, and citizenship.

Vocational Rehabilitation

DVR and DBVI operate within the Vermont State Government. DVR and DBVI are housed under the umbrella of the Agency of Human Services (AHS). AHS oversees the Department of Disabilities, Aging and Independent Living (DAIL). DVR and DBVI are divisional units within DAIL. The DAIL Business Office provides the financial operations for both Divisions and is responsible for all federal finance reporting. DAIL also provides overall operational support to the Divisions, including IT support and legal services.

DVR has a central office and twelve offices statewide. The DVR Director supervises six regional managers, each managing two district offices. DVR has 70 VR counselors who operate through the 12 district offices. The DVR central office house program and operational managers and support staff for the Division. The Program Evaluation Unit is based in the DVR central office and is responsible for all DVR and DBVI reporting. DBVI has a central office and four district offices. The DBVI Director oversees four VR counselors and four rehabilitation associates located in the four district offices.



This chart is only intended to reflect workforce development partners at the state level. There are numerous other Vermont workforce development partners at both the state and local level consisting of various other programs and services that help Vermonters through education and training. It is the intent of the Vermont core partners to engage and work with these other partners to ensure that Vermonters have access to all education and training services available throughout the state.

State Board

The SWDB is a business majority council, appointed by the Governor, with members representing all sectors of the economy and all geographic regions of the State. In addition, council membership includes top officials from State agencies and higher education institutions, representatives of labor and the low-income community, and members of the Vermont Legislature. The Chair is appointed by the Governor from the business membership.

	Name(Title)- Company	Title	Company
1	Paul Biebel	President	Biebel Builders Inc.
2	Gregory Maguire	Plant Operations Manager	Revision Military
3	Dan DiBattista	Rutland Plant Leader	GE Aviation
4		position vacant	Rutland Regional Medical Center
5	Jen Kimmich	Owner	Alchemist Brewery
6	Janette Bombardier	Senior Location Executive	Global Foundries
7	Mary Lintermann	President	Cumberland Group
8	Chris Loso	President/CEO	Loso's Professional Janitorial Services, Inc.
9	Stephen Marsh	President/CEO	Community National Bank
10	Kent Eldridge	Director of HR	Mylan Corporation
11	Amanda Beraldi	CIO	Green Mountain Power (GMP)
12	Jerry Tarrant	COO	MyWebGrocer
13		position vacant	NSK Steering Systems
14	Jostein Solheim	CEO	Ben and Jerry's
15	Tom Torti	President	Lake Champlain Regional Chamber of Commerce
16	Don George	CEO	Blue Cross Blue Shield of Vermont
17	Jeffrey Wright	COO	Vermont Electric Coop

1			Greater Burlington Industrial
8	Frank Cioffi	President	Corporation (GBIC)
1			
9	Judy Geiger	Director of HR	Killington Resort
2			
0	Ric Cabot	President and CEO	Cabot Hosiery
2			
1	Ellen Kahler	Executive Director	VT Sustainable Jobs Fund
2			
2	Martin Thieret	Owner	Competitive Computing
2			
3	Suzanne McDowell	VP of HR	King Arthur Flour
2			
4	Sean Woodroffe	Senior Vice President & Chief People Officer	National Life
2			
5	Mike Lane	Former Founder and Executive	Dealer.com
2			
6	Laurie Gunn	VP of Human Resources	University of Vermont Medical Center
2			
7	Grant Spates	Owner	Spates Construction
2			
8	Governor Peter Shumlin	Governor	State of Vermont
2			
9	Rep. Kathleen Keenan	Representative	Vermont House of Representatives
3			
0	Senator Kevin Mullin	Senator	Vermont Senate
3			
1	Tom Sullivan	President	University of Vermont (UVM)
3			
2	Jeb Spaulding	Chancellor	Vermont State Colleges (VSC)
3			
3	Melissa Hersh	Assistant VP, Business Engagement	Champlain College
3			
4	Heather Bouchey	Deputy Secretary	Vermont Agency of Education
3			
5	Lynn Vera	Independent Equity Consultant	
3			
6	Jeff Wimette	Business Manager/Financial Secretary	International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers
3			
7	Dennis Labounty	Political Director	AFL-CIO
3			
8	Eileen Illuzzi	Director	North Country Career Center

3			
9	Dean Stearns	Principal	South Royalton School
4			
0	Tom Longstreth	Executive Director	ReSOURCE
4			
1	George Sabol	Director	Northlands Job Corps Center
4			
2	Pat Elmer	President/CEO	Associates for Training and Development
4			
3	Gerry Ghazi	President	Vermont HITEC, Inc.
4			
4	Scott Giles	President	Vermont Student Assistance Corporation (VSAC)
4			
5	Diane Dalmasse	Director	State of Vermont Division of Vocational Rehabilitation
4			
6	Joan Goldstein	Commissioner	Department of Economic Development
4			
7	Lisa Menard	Commissioner	Department of Corrections
4			
8	Annie Noonan	Commissioner	Vermont Department of Labor
4			
9	Hal Cohen	Secretary	Agency of Human Services
5			
0	Robert Bridges	Employment Coordinator	Employer Support of the Guard (ESGR)
5			
1	Chris Louras	Mayor	City of Rutland
5			
2	Rose Lucenti	Director of Workforce Development	Vermont Department of Labor
5			
3	Pixie Loomis	Executive Director	Vermont Adult Learning
5			
4	Lawrence Moose Lampman	Chief	Missisquoi Abenaki Council
5			
5	Rep. Tristan Toleno	State Representative	Vermont House of Representatives
5			
6	Pat Moulton	Secretary	Agency of Commerce and Community Development
5			
7	Becca Balint	Senator	Vermont Senate
5			
8	Joyce Judy	President	Community College of Vermont

5
9
6
0

The SWDB meets a minimum of three times per year. The Operating Committee was established to oversee the day-to-day operation of the SWDB. Additionally, workgroups are established by the Chair throughout the year to conduct business of the Board. The Vermont Department of Labor provides administrative and fiscal support to the SWDB, through its WIOA and state General Fund appropriations. This includes workforce and labor market information from the Economic & Labor Market Information Division of the VDOL. The USDOL, region 1 provides federal oversight and technical assistance to the VDOL.

ASSESSMENT OF PROGRAMS AND ONE-STOP PROGRAM PARTNERS

Vermont is a single state workforce area. Core partners will be assessed by the Operating Committee based on their WIOA performance accountability measures. This will include quarterly review of whether the core partner program is exceeding, meeting, or failing in their performance accountability measures. Additionally, the Operating Committee will look at whether the state is meeting the performance accountability measures across all programs for each indicator and across all indicators for each program. In instances where a core partner is failing to meet their performance accountability measures, the SWDB Operating Committee will work to provide technical assistance to improve the proficiency of the program as well as adjusting the program strategies as necessary. Additionally, the SWDB Operating Committee will develop a customer and business survey to assess the effectiveness of the one-stop delivery system, including the program offered through the system to better understand the strengths and weaknesses of the system and identify areas of improvement.

Performance Measures	VDOL ETA Acceptable PY 2013
WIA Adults	
Entered Employment	71.3%
Retention	78%
Avg Earnings	\$13,800
Credential	53.7%
WIA Dislocated Workers	
Entered Employment	85.5%
Retention	92.6%
Avg Earnings	\$15,700
Credentials	61.5%
Customer Satisfaction	

Participants	80%
Customers	80%
WIA Older Youth	
Entered Employment	50%
Retention	75%
Earnings Change	\$2,523
Credentials	32.60%
WIA Younger Youth	
Goal Attainment	70.1%
Diploma Attainment	50%
Retention	55%
W-P Labor Exchange (LEX)	
Entered Employment	61%
Retention	81%
Avg. Earnings	\$14,000

Performance Measures	VDOL ETA Acceptable PY 2014
WIA Adults	
Entered Employment	71.3%
Retention	82.6%
Average Earnings	\$12,500
Credentials	48%
WIA Dislocated Workers	
Entered Employment	83.3%
Retention	92.6%
Average Earnings	\$16,694
Credentials	56%
WIA Older Youth	
Entered Employment	53.9%
Credential	35%
Earnings Change	\$2,523
Retention	75%
WIA Younger Youth	
Skill Attainment	80%
Diploma or Equivalent Attainment	50%
Retention	55%
WIA Customer Satisfaction	

Participant Satisfaction	80%
Employer Satisfaction	80%
W-P Labor Exchange (LEX)	
Entered Employment	63%
Retention	83%
Average Earnings	\$14,000

The SWDB and the Operating Committee will work to develop plans on how to assess other workforce development programs that are offered through the Vermont one-stop delivery system. This may include a requirement that the one-stop delivery system partner programs submit their performance accountability reports to the SWDB as well as looking at the customer and business survey results to examine applicable partner program services.

EVALUATION

The State Workforce Development Board (SWDB) will engage with the WIOA funded programs and any program’s sub-contractor(s) to discuss and/or review (or help establish, as appropriate) evaluation metrics and methods, including, but not limited to: regular quality assurance checks and reviews; customer satisfaction surveys; review of all program compliance audits and reviews by the federal granting/oversight agencies; review of any audits or reports issued by a Vermont state government or legislative entity relating to the division, department or agency in relationship to WIOA funded programs and/or workforce training and education; effective data collection, including, but not limited to, specifically disaggregated data for gender that enables an analysis of the data with a lens of gender equity; and ensure that the WIOA funded program staff members are well trained and evaluated for helping to achieve performance and program goals.

The SWDB Chair and SWDB Operating Committee determine projects for the Board, including, but not limited to, research projects, youth engagement, mature workers initiatives, veterans hiring, and other projects that further the goals of a well-trained and engaged workforce. These projects will substantially involve the SWDB, the Vermont employer community, local workforce investment boards and regional development corporations, the unified and core partners, other state agencies and departments, the education community, and training providers.

DISTRIBUTION OF FUNDS FOR CORE PROGRAMS

Vermont as a single state workforce area has followed the federal requirements for distribution of funds. In TEGL 14-15 (March 04, 2016) USDOL advised that it was “exercising its transition authority provided in WIOA sec.503 to delay the requirement that Single-Area States include a local plan with their initial four-year State Plan submission until DOL provides guidance to those specific States”. Therefore, the Vermont Department of Labor, which operates as a Single-Area

State and as the State Workforce Administrator for WIOA title I funds, has been authorized by the Governor and the SWDB as the WIOA Title I fiscal agent responsible for the following duties:

- Receiving, transferring and drawing down of federal WIOA title I funds;
- Ensuring sustained fiscal integrity and accountability for expenditures of the funds;
- Responding to federal and state audit financial findings;
- Maintaining proper accounting records and adequate documentation; and
- Preparing required federal and state financial reports.

In any grant award, VDOL's process is transparent and involves representation from appropriate parties. For example, in our WIOA Youth SEO grants, VDOL has (1) a formal application process; (2) public notice through the State's bidding website; email notification to prior recipients; email notification to stakeholders and partners in the Youth services arena; (3) newspaper ads, as deemed appropriate; (4) review of the grant application by the WIOA Youth Council, the SWDB Chair or designee, and representatives of the Vermont agencies of Education and Commerce and Community Development, and the Vermont Department of Labor; (5) consistent scoring sheets; (6) review of applicant's labor law compliance before finalizing any award. In WIOA Adult and Dislocated Worker Program, VDOL works with the individual worker to identify skill or education gaps and support that person in training, education, credentialing, OJT, apprenticeship, and other measurable skill gains leading to unsubsidized employment. Those programs have traditionally engaged Vermont's educational institutions, technical education systems, eligible training providers, private training providers, and our Vermont employer community to make available to the individual the training and work experiences s/he needs. In some cases, grant awards have been made, and grant partnerships have been forged, to achieve these goals. For example, VDOL has funded career readiness programs with our community college system; construction training for at-risk youth with Youth Build and for women with Vermont Works for Women; and many other trainings and programs to provide key skills needed to be successful in the Vermont workforce.

In considering whether to fund a grant to an entity, or an individual's training request, VDOL considers the following: (1) the degree to which the provider has been successful in responding to individual customer needs and to the needs of the Vermont employers in that region (or statewide, if appropriate); (2) the ability and willingness of the provider to serve all VDOL's customers, clients and all populations, including those with significant barriers to employment; (3) the past effectiveness of the provider in complying with prior grant awards' criteria and in helping the person(s) achieve the skill, credential or unsubsidized employment, as applicable; (4) the extent to which the provider utilizes effective technology and training methods to increase the quality of the learning and the enhancement of the client's familiarity and proficiency with technology; (5) whether the grant proposal will duplicate services already existing in that region; and (6) the degree to which the grant proposal assists in furthering the goals set forth by the Governor's strategic plan, the SWDB's workforce development goals, and the needs of Vermont employers, VDOL customers and the workforce system.

The Vermont Department of Labor will be responsible for coordinating the Unified Partners' Annual Performance Report. Each Unified Partner will be responsible for their own reports as required by

WIOA and their federal funding source. Based upon the WIOA requirements to utilize wage record data for performance review and evaluation, Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development lead a process with the Department of Unemployment Assistance to discuss WIOA wage record matching needs of partner agencies and to design MOUs with the partners to wage record match Core Program Partner participants to develop baseline data for the WIOA Plan. The Massachusetts Workforce Development Board DUA will work with each of the Core Program partners to continue to meet performance accountability reporting requirements. Specific MOUs for ongoing wage matching are in progress.

Agency of Education

The AOE will run competitions for its funds under WIOA Title II using the procedures established by the State of Vermont for awarding grants or contracts and the guidance available from WIOA regulations.

Funds will be awarded to eligible providers of adult education and literacy services on a basis of two or more years for the purpose of establishing and operating programs that provide adult education and literacy activities within the service area of one or more particular counties, and in so doing to function as a required and valued partner in the regional One-Stop Center (also known in Vermont as Career Resource Centers) including as a partner in the development of regionally-relevant career pathways with specific entrance points for lower skilled adults.

As required by WIOA Title I B, local adult education and literacy activity proposals will be reviewed by the SWDB for alignment with the State plan using a procedure to be established by the SWDB and the Vermont AOE. Because Vermont operates as a Single State Local Area, local proposals will be reviewed by the SWDB for alignment.

The AOE will use these considerations for awarding grants or contracts as described in WIOA as pertinent to the proposed scope of work:

- The degree to which the provider would be responsive to regional needs of the workforce and serving individuals most in need of adult education and literacy activities.
- The ability of the provider to serve individuals with disabilities, including learning disabilities.
- Past effectiveness of the provider in improving literacy of individuals, especially those who have low levels of literacy, and past effectiveness in meeting established performance targets.
- The extent of alignment between proposed services and the regional strategies and goals of the workforce development system, and alignment with the services of the other one-stop partners.
- Whether the provider's program is of sufficient intensity and quality, and based on the most rigorous research available so that participants achieve substantial learning gains, and uses instructional practices that include the essential components of reading instruction.

- Whether the provider’s activities, including reading, writing, speaking, math, and English language acquisition instruction are based upon best practices and the most rigorous research available and appropriate.
- Whether the provider’s activities effectively use technology, services, and delivery systems possibly to include distance education in a manner sufficient to increase the amount and quality of the learning and how such technology, services, and systems lead to improved performance.
- Whether the provider’s activities provide learning in context, including through integrated education and training, so that an individual acquires the skills needed to transition to and complete postsecondary education and training programs, obtain and advance in employment leading to economic self-sufficiency, and to exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.
- Whether the provider’s activities are delivered by well training instructors and program staff who access high quality professional development opportunities, including via the Literacy Information and Communications System (LINCS).
- Whether the provider’s activities, for the development of career pathways, coordinate with other available education, training, and social service resources in the community and other One-Stop Center partners.
- Whether the provider’s activities offer flexible schedules and coordination with federal, state, and local support services that are necessary to enable individuals to attend and complete programs.
- Whether the provider maintains student records in Data Works, which has the capacity to report measurable participant outcomes and to monitor program performance.
- The degree and the effectiveness to which the provider would serve males and females equally, understanding the unique challenges of both genders when it comes to pursuing careers and education.
- Whether the provider collects and maintains key demographic information (e.g., gender, race/ethnicity) on participants so that measurable outcomes can be disaggregated by these factors.

In evaluating effectiveness, the AOE will use any guidance or regulation on this matter that may be forthcoming from the U.S. Department of Education, as well as analysis of past program performance with respect to serving the population of eligible adult learners based on information supplied in the request for proposal. A source of this information for analysis is Data Works, which is the established data and reporting mechanism for adult education and literacy programs in Vermont.

The AOE is subject to the State of Vermont’s rules and procedures regarding contracts and grants. The State’s rules specify the procedure for structuring, announcing, and holding public meetings regarding the funding opportunity and the procedures must be followed by the AOE, with the support of the Vermont Agency of Administration, to award Title II funds to eligible providers.

Vocational Rehabilitation

The State of Vermont distributes Title IV funding for Vocational Rehabilitation as follows: 78% to the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and 12% to the Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired. The funding distribution was established in the 1970s. Since then, the State has not been provided compelling data to alter the allocation in any way. The Division for the Blind is currently not in an Order of Selection and has funds to serve all eligible individuals. The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation is in an Order of Selection, but has had resources to routinely open the order in the last five years. Given the ability of both programs to serve eligible applicants, at this time the State is not considering any reallocation of Title IV funds.

PROGRAM DATA

Data Alignment and Integration

Currently, the three core partners under the WIOA operate using different data systems for their respective programs. These systems do not exchange real-time data and it is neither practical nor economically feasible, at this time, for the programs to integrate to a unified data system. All of the partners have a computerized case management system that meets the specific requirements of each program. To integrate to a unified system or adjust for a streamlined intake and service delivery system would require additional funding.

However, Vermont is committed to the goals of eliminating duplication of services and addressing the needs of common intake and case management. Therefore, the core partners are in discussions to increase the exchange of data to the maximum extent possible. The core partners are in the process of developing WIOA specific MOUs in order to exchange data, specify common intake, and track program participation. Additionally, data sharing MOUs will address the use of wage record data in order to successfully comply with WIOA performance accountability measures and state indicators of performance. The SWDB and core partners will continue to explore strategies and funding sources to achieve these goals.

Each core partner will use existing systems, updated as necessary, to gather the needed information for performance reporting as required by the WIOA. The VDOL will provide the required wage information for federal reporting purposes in compliance with applicable federal and state laws.

Assessment of Participants Post-Program Success

Vermont core partners will use the federal WIOA performance accountability measures for determining effectiveness for individuals served by the core partner programs. The core partner programs will provide post program follow-up services as appropriate and in accordance with the particular program's requirements. Additionally, business and customer satisfaction will be monitored using satisfaction surveys.

Use of Unemployment Insurance (UI) Wage Record Data

Vermont's Unemployment Insurance Division is located within the Vermont Department of Labor. The VDOL, UI Division provides employee wage data through MOUs with partner agencies. The

proposed WIOA regulations specifically require quarterly wage record information for reporting on WIOA performance accountability measures. As mentioned, the partners are in discussion to develop WIOA specific MOUs that will cover the sharing of data in order to comply with state and federal performance reporting.

Privacy Safeguards

The protection of privacy is of the utmost importance to the state of Vermont. In order to ensure to protection of participant privacy, the core partner programs agree to secure handling of data sharing information. Relevant MOUs between the core program partners shall require the security of all sensitive information and each partner shall ensure that the collection and use of information will be in compliance with all applicable federal and state laws. Each partner shall ensure that relevant information is only made available to authorized staff and information is only made available for the limited purpose necessary to perform a required responsibility.

PRIORITY OF SERVICE FOR VETERANS

Veterans under WIOA Section 3(63)(A) and 38 U.S.C. §101 receive priority of service in all federal Department of Labor-funded training programs under 38 U.S.C. §4215 and described in 20 C.F.R. §1010. Vermont is committed to serving all veterans throughout the state in helping to get the education and training he or she needs in order to be successful in post-military life. Additionally, Vermont is committed to providing all opportunities to veterans regardless of where he or she enters the workforce development system.

The staff at physical locations shall ask applicants to self-identify their veteran/JVSG covered person status at the point of entry in order to ensure he or she takes full advantage of their veteran's priority service. Point of entry includes physical locations, such as the American Job Centers, as well as web sites and other virtual service delivery resources provided to, or by the One-Stop Delivery System. In addition to identifying and notifying covered persons of their entitlement to priority of services, such covered persons shall be made aware of the full array of education and training programs and services available to them.

Federal law clearly states that priority of service means the right of eligible covered persons take precedent over eligible non-covered persons in obtaining services. Taking precedent means that, provided the covered person meets any and all eligibility requirements for a specific program:

- The covered person receives access to the service or resource earlier in time; or
- If the service or resource is limited, the covered person receives access to the service or resource instead of the non-covered person.

VDOL provides Veterans preference in job placement activities and the job referral process. Vermont's automated Labor Exchange System, Vermont Job Link, identifies veterans at point of entry. Job placement activities and resume searches are coded for Veteran's Priority Service.

For job placement, Veterans and covered persons have a two day advance on new job orders. Veterans and other covered persons see job postings on the same day they are processed. Only Veterans and other covered persons have resumes presented to self-service employers on the same

day they post a job. Additionally, VJL displays a symbol beside a veteran account for employers to easily identify and match veterans to open positions. VJL also provides queries enabling staff to search for newly registered veterans to ensure that these veterans are aware of the services and programs available to them and their priority of service within those programs.

Disabled Veteran's Outreach Program (DVOP) specialists provide intensive services to meet the employment needs of disabled and other eligible veterans. This intensive case-management approach individually tailors training and job placement opportunities for those who are economically or educationally disadvantaged, including homeless veterans and veterans with significant barriers to employment. Vermont has two fulltime and one halftime DVOP specialist to serve Vermont's Veteran and covered person population.

Local Veterans Employment Representatives conduct outreach to employers and engage in advocacy efforts with hiring executives to increase employment opportunities for veterans. These representative also monitor all job listings from federal contractors and agencies to ensure veterans receive priority of service in referrals to these positions. LVER staff conduct seminars for employers, job search workshops for veterans seeking employment, facilitate priority of service in regard to employment, training, and placement services furnished to veterans by all staff members.

All VDOL staff providing service to clients will continue to ensure that the guidelines set forth for Priority of Service to Veterans and other eligible covered persons is carried out in accordance with the requirements of our programs and grants. Questions concerning this policy should be addressed to the State's Veterans Program Manager.

WIOA re-affirms that veterans continue to receive priority of service in all DOL-funded training programs but that a "veteran must still meet each program's eligibility criteria". Veterans and eligible spouses, including widows and widowers as defined in the statute and regulations, are eligible for priority of service. The term "veteran" means a person who served at least one day in the active military, naval or air service, and who was discharged or released under conditions other than dishonorable. Active service includes full-time Federal service in the National Guard or a Reserve component. This definition of "active service" does not include full-time duty performed strictly for training purposes, nor does it include full-time active duty performed by National Guard personnel who are mobilized by State rather than Federal authorities.

Veterans' priority of service participants fall into one of the below priority categories

1) Recipients of public assistance

2) Other low-income individuals. The term "low income individuals" is defined in WIOA as an individual who:

- Receives, or in the past 6 months has received, or is a member of a family that is receiving or in the past 6 months has received, assistance through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), TANF, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), or income-based public assistance program;

or

- Receives an income or is a member of a family receiving an income that in relation to family size, is not in excess of the current USDOL 70% Lower Living Standard Income Level and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Poverty Guidelines or

- Is a homeless individual, or
- Is an individual with a disability whose own income meets the income requirements above, but who is a member of a family whose income does not meet this requirement.

3) Individuals who are basic skills deficient which” is defined to mean a youth or adult who is unable to compute or solve problems, or read, write, or speak English at a level necessary to function on the job, in the individual’s family, or in society. Vermont’s One Stop Operator is providing guidance for making this determination by defining it as an individual who meets any one of the following:

- Lacks a high school diploma or equivalency and is not enrolled in secondary education; or
- Scores below 9.0 grade level on allowable assessments or
- Is enrolled in Title II adult education (including enrolled for ESL); or
- Has poor English language skills

4) Individuals (non-covered persons) who do not meet the above priorities may be enrolled on a case by case basis with documented managerial approval. The WIOA eligible adult must meet one or more of the following categories of an individual with a barrier to employment:

- Displaced homemakers;
- Individuals with disabilities;
- Older individuals;
- Ex-offenders;
- Eligible migrant and seasonal farm workers;
- Single parents (including single pregnant women)

ADDRESSING THE ACCESSIBILITY OF THE ONE-STOP DELIVERY SYSTEM

The Vermont workforce development partners are currently in discussion to ensure that all employment education and training programs are available and accessible together through Vermont’s one-stop delivery system. This will include a combination of physical colocation, as well as virtual colocation, through Vermont’s twelve career resource centers. Collectively, these partners will provide resources to individuals in need of specific and specialized assistance in overcoming barriers to employment. Vermont’s career resource centers are fully accessible for individuals with disabilities and have access to a variety of specialized equipment to help these individuals.

The State’s One-Stop certification process for the career resource centers includes a review using the American’s with Disabilities Act checklist for Readily Achievable Barrier Removal. Furthermore, all of the partner programs require accessibility in both rented and state-owned properties.

ADDRESSING THE ACCESSIBILITY OF THE ONE-STOP DELIVERY SYSTEM FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

The Vermont Department of Labor as the SWDB-designated operator for the One-Stop System, will continue to support the needs of English Language Learners (ELL), through the following methods:

1. Continue to diversify our own workforce in the One Stops by hiring people of diverse ethnic, racial, cultural and socio-economic backgrounds.
2. Continue to provide no-cost (to the customer) translation services, in person and online, to our customers in all services.
3. Continue to require all VDOL staff to attend the mandated, annual staff training in non-discrimination/ non-harassment and diversity, presented by the State's Human Rights Commission and the VDOL's EEO Officer.
4. Continue our extensive outreach to Vermont's agricultural workers (migrant and seasonal, H2A, undocumented, and others) in conjunction with our current partnership with UVM Extension program, Migrant Justice, Vermont Housing and Community Development, VDOL Wage and Hour, VDOL MSFW and SWA, VDOL Legal Division, and others, and update the outreach and education materials that assist developed in partnership with the aforementioned organizations.
5. Continue to support our staff members' participation, including during regular work hours and non-work hours, in community organizations and events that engage with and support the needs, goals and awareness of the new American and ELL communities.
6. Continue to be a funding-sponsor of cultural events in the community.
7. Offer new trainings (in person and online) in topics such as cultural competency, white privilege, gender bias, and other relevant topics.
8. Create a program similar to the State of Maryland's New American Workforce Program, including, but not limited to:
 - a. New American/ELL webpage on our website, with tools to assist with skill assessment, job search and placement;
 - b. Enhance the VDOL's outreach and education materials (see #4, above);
 - c. Identify and advertise the training providers and classes for ESL educational opportunities;
 - d. Enhance VDOL's wage, hour and employment practices materials and services to help ELL ensure their rights in the workplace;
 - e. Train VDOL staff and partner agencies' staff to assist ELL in utilizing the programs and services of the state workforce system and other education, training and workforce development programs.

PROGRAM SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS

ADULT, DISLOCATED WORKER, AND YOUTH ACTIVITIES

GENERAL REQUIREMENTS

REGIONS AND LOCAL WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AREAS

Vermont operates as a Single State Local Area under the WIOA. Because of its size and population, the State does not designate regions or local workforce development areas. It is more efficient and equitable for Vermonters to have a similar statewide workforce development system. The SWDB ensures this system is available to all Vermonters throughout the State through the 12 one-stop centers located in the following areas: Barre, Bennington, Brattleboro, Burlington, Hartford/White River Junction, Middlebury, Morrisville, Newport, Rutland, St. Albans, Springfield, and St. Johnsbury.

The 12 one-stop centers are spread strategically throughout the State. Careful consideration was given in determining the location of these career resource centers. Specifically, these sites were chosen within the labor market areas of the State to better enhance access for both employers and job seekers in the area. The State is committed to providing equal service to all Vermonters, wherever he or she resides in the State. Thus, although as a Single State Local Area, Vermont is only required to operate one comprehensive one-stop center.

INFRASTRUCTURE FUNDING

The VDOL, as the One-Stop Operator, is working with the required one-stop partners to develop WIOA compliant MOUs regarding the operation of the Vermont one-stop delivery system. In the event there is an impasse between the one-stop partners in the development of one-stop infrastructure funding, the partners shall consult with the SWDB Operating Committee. The Chair of the SWDB shall attempt to mediate the impasse and is designated by the Governor to make the final determination.

STATEWIDE ACTIVITIES

The State shall follow all applicable federal and state regulations and guidance pertaining to the use of each individual funding source for workforce investment activities.

Governor's Set Aside Funding

Vermont shall utilize the reserve funds for the following activities:

- Assist state entities, one-stop partners and other stakeholders with the development, coordination implementation and alignment of services for statewide employment and

training activities, including: data systems, common intake forms and procedures; case management; information and services referrals; industry or sector partnerships; coordination of staff training; program development, technical assistance, fiscal and management accountability, monitoring and oversight of activities.

- Ensure effective service delivery strategies for workers and job seekers through career services including job counseling, job development, skill and aptitude assessment; education; job training; job search and placement assistance; support services; follow up services.
- Provide rapid response and layoff aversion activities statewide and in local areas.
- Assistance statewide and in local areas in the event of disaster, mass layoff, plant closings, or other events that result in increased unemployed individual in the state or local area.
- Coordinate and provide job training programs and activities for persons with significant barriers to employment including, but not limited to, persons with disabilities, unemployed, under-employed, veterans, persons on public assistance programs, women, minorities, at-risk youth, dislocated and trade adjusted workers and ex-offenders.
- Implement programs to increase the number of individuals training for and placed in non-traditional employment, including internships, work experiences, workforce preparation activities, pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship opportunities.
- Coordinate activities with state and regional economic development and regional planning activities.
- Coordinate and provide business services for Vermont employers; develop plans for effective outreach to and partnerships with Vermont businesses.
- Disseminate the list of eligible training providers, and information on OJT, customized training, incumbent worker training, internships, work experience or transitional jobs.
- Providing information on the costs, performance, physical and programmatic accessibility of training programs.
- Conducting evaluations authorized under section 116(e) and chapter 2 under 169(a).
- Implement programs to increase the number of women training for and placed in nontraditional, high-demand, high-paying fields.

Vermont may utilize some reserve funds for additional statewide employment and training activities including:

- Implementing innovative programs and strategies that align with real-time labor market analysis to meet employer needs, including worker-training programs; career pathway programs; developing remote access to services through the use of technology; financial

literacy programs; supporting job training through adult education system or through agricultural cooperative extension programs.

Rapid Response

The VDOL is currently working on developing a rapid response protocol.

The State uses its Rapid Response funds for the following purposes:

- Orientation and meetings for displaced workers, which include unemployment compensation, veteran's services, and training and labor exchange resources.
- Provide layoff aversion.
- Space for service delivery presentation.
- Publications, announcements, and resource materials.
- Customized job fairs for long term unemployed.
- Specialized hiring events.
- Customized workshops.

The VDOL has Rapid Response teams that is committed to a swift and inclusive response to any layoff or business closure in the State.

The VDOL finds out about business downsizes and closure in different ways, whether it's through public notifications or WARN notices, or simply employees walking in to a career resource center indicating they were displaced from their employment. In addition, because the VDOL houses both the UI compensation and workforce development divisions, the VDOL is able to get information regarding layoffs through UI claims filings. This information is communicated to the WDD in a timely manner. Then, the WDD begins an inquiry into whether there has been a layoff and whether there is a need for a rapid response event.

Regardless of how the VDOL discovers a layoff or closing, the Rapid Response team immediately mobilizes and begins planning rapid response activities. The local career resource center staff contact the employer to discuss relevant separation information and begin communication with the effected employees. Whether or not an employer is willing to work with the VDOL on their displaced employees does not have any impact on the timeliness or effectiveness of the rapid response team.

For every closure or layoff, the VDOL holds a rapid response outreach event. Depending on the number of effected workers, the outreach event can be held in the local office or, when necessary, at a location more accommodating. The VDOL coordinates with a system of partners to ensure the effected workers have quality information to quickly transition to new employment. This service delivery presentation includes the following: unemployment information, labor market information, workforce development information, as well as information from the community partners, healthcare, and the state college system.

Using Rapid Response funds, the VDOL holds specialized hiring events and provides customized employment service plans to address the needs of affected workers and the long term unemployed. These specialized events are connection points to gather employers, job seekers, and community

partners, such as educational providers, in the same location. These events are usually for specific sector employers to help affected workers quickly transition into new employment but also allow the VDOL to incorporate layoff aversion strategies by targeting employers who need workers and connecting them with individuals who can take advantage of the workforce development system to transition into new employment.

Natural Disaster Coordination

The Department of Public Safety is the lead state agency in Vermont for disaster response activities throughout the State.

In the case of natural disasters, the State starts with default WIOA dislocated worker and national dislocated worker grant guidelines. Vermont has recent experience in responding to a major natural disaster during Hurricane Irene in 2011. The most important aspect in a disaster relief effort is the coordination with partner agencies to provide an effective response. During Irene, the VDOL reached out and coordinated with local disaster relief centers, municipalities, and local businesses to identify needs and resources. In doing so, the VDOL provided information on disaster unemployment insurance, national disaster grant funding, and what services these resource allow the VDOL to provide. Additionally, the VDOL recruited unemployed Vermonters to create work crews that were placed around the State to provide anything from clean up services and equipment to administrative services such as payroll.

In the event of another natural disaster, the VDOL would implement a similar playbook to that done in the past regarding VDOL Rapid Response and National Dislocated Worker Grant services.

Trade Adjustment Assistance

Because VDOL administers the Trade Adjustment Assistance Act services, the VDOL is able to quickly address the needs of trade-affected workers. The Rapid Response program operates in essentially the same manner whether a TAA petition is involved or not. Conducting any service delivery presentation, during a Rapid Response event the VDOL works with the affected employees to determine whether or not they are trade-affected workers. When the VDOL receives information that the workers are trade-affected, the workers are notified in writing (both through the mail and through local publications). Additionally, the VDOL holds a Trade Adjustment Assistance meetings with the affected workers to explain the benefits they are entitled to. The VDOL files the petition on behalf of the workers and works to ensure that the affected workers have every service available to him or her. Those services include, but are not limited to, effective case management through the provision of various basic and individualized career services in the American Job Centers as a co enrolled participant under the WIOA dislocated worker program. The focus is on retraining workers determined to need further skills to obtain employment in emerging in-demand occupations.

ADULT AND DISLOCATED WORKER PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

ALTERNATIVE TRAINING MODELS

The State utilizes alternative training models as part of its job training strategy, including on-the-job training, incumbent worker training, and customized training. However, there is no one-size fits all model that works for every training situation. Thus, Vermont utilizes these strategies based on the current needs of employers and based on the workforce industry. For these alternative models, the VDOL works with the employer to develop a training contract to ensure the needs of the employer and employee(s) are met. The contract document is intended to be comprehensive to ensure that both the employee receives high quality training and the employer receives a highly qualified employee. This includes heavy case management of the participant, including weekly communication with the participant and monthly on-site visits to ensure the grant document is being implemented.

The VDOL is preparing to implement an innovative incumbent worker training program, which will delivery skill enhancement activities and occupation specific training to the incumbent workforce as part of a broad layoff aversion strategy. This program will be structured to meet the employer and business training objectives by enhancing the skills of existing employees, resulting in increased employee productivity and leading to company growth. This program will directly benefit incumbent workers and their employers in meeting skill demands in support of regional economic development.

REGISTERED APPRENTICESHIP

The VDOL, through the State Apprenticeship Council, is the registration agency for apprenticeship in Vermont.

The Registered Apprenticeship program continues to be one of VDOL's most effective workforce training models. The combination of technical classroom instruction and paid, hands-on training under a qualified employer sponsor, ensures that training is relevant, current, and directly tied to employment. Apprenticeship is supported by a combination of state general fund and "special funds" that consist of employer-paid tuition for classroom instruction. Dislocated workers and unemployed individuals, including adults and youth, are encouraged to apply for apprenticeship opportunities through various job fairs and career center activities. Many registered apprentice program sponsor recruit publically through VDOL's AJC network for apprenticeships. Apprenticeship staff also meet with school guidance counselors throughout Vermont and one career day events that are usually hold annually to introduce high school students to apprenticeship in a variety of different traditional and non-traditional trades. These events allow individuals to explore careers related to their individual strengths, skills, and talent related to apprenticeable occupations.

The VDOL uses OJT contracts as a useful tool to place eligible workers into apprenticeship programs.

VDOL is working in cooperation with the Agency of Education, specifically the Adult Education programs, to ensure that registered apprenticeship participants receive basic remedial education while participating in the on-the-job training to ensure that he or she is prepared to enter employment at the conclusion of the apprenticeship program. Additionally, the VDOL will work with AOE to ensure that information regarding registered apprenticeships, including pre-apprenticeships, is being shared in the Vermont adult and technical education centers.

TRAINING PROVIDER ELIGIBILITY PROCEDURE

The VDOL developed a WIOA Training Providers Eligibility Procedures. This was shared with Vermont's eligible training providers. The VDOL is reaching out to apprentice sponsors to determine their interest in joining the Vermont Eligible Training Provider List. Registered Apprenticeship programs are not required to submit applications for inclusion on the Eligible Training Provider List but will be subject to reporting requirements as determined by the VDOL in consultation with the SWDB.

State Training Provider Eligibility Procedure can be found in attachment C.

YOUTH PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

Providing Youth Program Elements

The State of Vermont is a Single State Local Area. Under the WIA, the VDOL operated under a waiver that waived the requirement to competitively bid the ten required youth elements. The VDOL is able to partner with local community providers to ensure that all program elements are provided at no cost to the Youth Program. This allowed the VDOL to ensure that participants had access to the same or similar types of services throughout the State.

Vermont's WIOA youth program fosters integrated systems, coordinated services, career pathways, and multiple forms of engagement with businesses to benefit all youth. These ends recognize that career and personal success is a result of lifelong learning and continued growth in skills and abilities.

Every individual meeting the criteria for an in-school or out-of-school youth eligibility may participate in the above services, if formally enrolled in the program and the service is found appropriate through the participant's assessment and individual service strategy:

- Tutoring, study skills training, instruction, and evidence-based dropout prevention and recovery strategies that lead to a high school diploma or its recognized equivalent or postsecondary credential;
- Alternative secondary school services or dropout recovery services;
- Paid and unpaid work experiences that have academic and occupational education as a component, such as summer and non-seasonal employment, pre-apprenticeship programs, internships and job shadowing, and on-the-job training in the private for-profit or nonprofit sectors;

- Occupational skills training, which includes priority consideration for training programs that lead to recognized postsecondary credentials in in-demand industries or occupations in the local area;
- Education offered concurrently with and in the same context as workforce preparation activities and training for a specific occupation;
- Leadership development opportunities, including community service and peer-centered activities encouraging responsibility and other positive social and civic behaviors;
- Supportive services, such as linkages to community services, assistance with transportation, child and dependent care, assistance with housing, needs-related payments, assistance with educational testing, reasonable accommodations for youth with disabilities, referrals to health care, and assistance with uniforms or other appropriate work attire and tools;
- Adult mentoring for at least 12 months;
- Follow-up services for not less than 12 months after completing participation;
- Comprehensive guidance and counseling, such as drug and alcohol abuse, as well as referrals to counseling, as appropriate;
- Financial literacy education;
- Entrepreneurial skills training;
- Services providing labor market and employment information about in-demand industry sectors or occupations available in the local area, such as career awareness, career counseling, and career exploration services; and
- Activities that help youth prepare for and transition to post-secondary education and training.

There is no entity that can provide every required element of a youth program to all areas of the State. The VDOL, through partnerships across the State, is able to ensure that each program element is made available to all youth throughout the State. A VDOL case manager reviews the required program elements with each youth participant to determine the appropriate program services to provide. The case manager then works with local community providers to ensure that the services are available to the participant. This allows the VDOL to ensure that all program elements are offered to all youth participants across the State.

These partnerships allow the VDOL to use funds in the youth program to focus on job training for youth participants. The VDOL spends youth funds to pay for work experiences, on-the-job training, tuition, and summer employment opportunities. This allows the participants to explore career opportunities and to learn the soft skills necessary to succeed in the workplace.

When funds are available the VDOL does provide competitive grants for summer employment opportunities. In doing this, the VDOL uses the State request for proposal process and posts the grant award on the VDOL and Department of Buildings and General Services' websites, as well as notifying known entities that serve at risk youth. These summer employment opportunities are required to include an academic component and to provide alternative methods for learning. This program was designed to help the most at risk youth by providing them with summer opportunities in order to keep them from dangerous activities and continue their academic progression.

In awarding the summer employment opportunities, the SWDB Youth Council reviews and discusses the proposals and makes a recommendation to the Chair of the SWDB and the Commissioner of Labor.

The VDOL recognizes that successful implementation of WIOA's purposes rests on youth programs that reconnect out-of-school youth to education and jobs. The out-of-school youth population consists in large part of high school dropouts who are likely to face significant barriers to employment. As required by WIOA, VDOL will expend a minimum of 75 percent of the youth formula funds on serving out-of-school youth. Youth who are no longer in the public school system and are seeking to enter the labor market may face extraordinary barriers. The VDOL works to design services that:

- Acknowledge the challenges and characteristics of inexperienced jobseekers;
- Obtain and use information concerning the conditions of employment affecting youth and labor laws restricting their employment;
- Develop and maintain effective relationships with schools, colleges, and other training providers; and
- Develop employment opportunities for youth with career potential.

Needs Additional Assistance

The VDOL has developed a "Needs Additional Assistance" policy.

Needs Additional Assistance policy can be found at attachment B.

School Definitions

The State of Vermont does not have a universal definition for "alternative school." Nor does the State have a universal definition of what it means to be "attending school" or "not attending school." In Vermont, much of the public school planning and operation is directed at the local, municipal level. This results in a variety of "alternative schools" throughout the State without a single uniform definition. Additionally, Vermont requires compulsory school attendance until the age of 16.

However, the Agency of Education maintains a directory of approved and recognized independent schools, approved tutorial and distance learning schools, pregnant and parenting programs and state operated facilities. The VDOL intends to use this directory as a tool in making the assessment of whether a youth participant is or is not attending school in the state. The core partners are working together to develop a common definition of "attending school" that will work for the workforce development system in order to ensure equal services for all Vermonters and to avoid the duplication of services.

Basic Skills Deficient Definition

The State will utilize the federal WIOA definitions for "basic skills deficient."

SINGLE-AREA STATE REQUIREMENTS

Vermont has been designated as a single state workforce development area under this State Plan. To ensure federal compliance, the State Plan includes the following Local Plan elements:

Expand Access

The SWDB is committed to expanding access for eligible individuals through the following activities:

- Development of a universal referral form and data sharing agreements among the core partners in order to better facilitate co-enrollment among participants.
- Cross training among core partners to ensure that individuals being served at any point within the workforce development system have access to all available services. Training will ensure that females are being equally served within the workforce development system.
- Expanding existing and developing new career pathways.
- Expanding services offered within the One-Stop Delivery System.

Description of Strategies and Services for Employers

Vermont businesses receive value-added assistance through an integrated workforce system. Businesses must have access to pools of job seekers at all levels of education and experience, allowing potential employers to tailor new hires to the requirements of the job. The VDOL is committed to ensuring businesses have the resources and services they need in order to maintain a successful workforce in the state.

Close ties to the local labor market enable Vermont's 12 regional AJCs to conduct outreach by working with local businesses to provide opportunities for work experiences, internships and on-the-job training. This allows low-skilled workers to build skill sets relevant to the current market. Additionally, VDOL's service delivery structure is well positioned to work with other community partners, such as economic development organizations, to expand opportunities to all customers.

Vermont's AJC staff are committed to providing businesses access to customized service options that address their specific business needs. The VDOL offer a range of services designed to help employers with hiring and training needs that maximize their competitiveness, including:

- Applicant recruitment, screening and referral;
- Listing and maintaining job orders through VJL;
- Assistance with and participation in job fairs;
- Information resources (e.g. labor market and business statistics, UI);
- Testing and prescreening job candidates;
- Basic employment skills training and referral to education and training providers;
- Customized training;
- Assistance with and information on the Work Opportunity Tax Credit; and

- Rapid response and downsizing assistance in the event of closings or mass layoffs, which may include aversion activities.

(1) a description of the Strategic Planning Elements:

For a description of the Strategic Planning Elements (found page 4) of this State Plan, please refer to that section, which include an analysis of the economic conditions of the State and the SWDB's strategic vision of the State's workforce development system.

(2) a description of the workforce development system in the State that identifies the programs that are included in that system:

As mentioned in the State Plan, Vermont's workforce development system is administered by three primary (core) partners, the Vermont Department of Labor, the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation, and the Agency of Education. These partners operate under different State agencies and departments with different locations and systems. The VDOL is the State workforce education and training leader and is responsible for the administration of the State's 12 American Job Centers, called Career Resource Centers in Vermont. The DVR provides employment services for individuals with disabilities that are barriers to employment. The DVR operates under the umbrella of the Agency of Human Services, with a central office and 12 regional offices statewide. The Agency of Education administers the Vermont Adult Education and Literacy Program through four non-profit educational organizations that provide services in every county via ten full-service adult learning centers with additional satellite offices.

Because Vermont is a single state workforce area the core partners are committed to implementation of the State strategic vision and goals outlined in this State Plan. The core partners serve on the State Workforce Development Board and are members of the Operating Committee. Strategies to support the alignment and provision of services to Vermonters are included in the State Plan.

(3) a description of how the entities carrying out the core programs will expand access to employment, training, and education for eligible individuals:

For a description of how the entities carrying out the core programs will expand access, refer to the Operational Planning elements of this State Plan.

(4) a description of the strategies and services that will be used in order to meet the of employers and businesses:

For a description of the strategies and services that are used to meet the needs of employers and businesses, refer to the Operational Planning elements (found page 38) of this State Plan.

(5) a description of how the State Board will coordinate workforce investment activities with economic development activities carried out in the region:

The Governor has designated Vermont as a single state workforce area and, therefore, has not designated local areas or regions within the State.

(6) a description of the one-stop delivery system:

The Vermont one-stop delivery system is administered by the VDOL through the 12 American Job Centers located throughout the state. These career resource centers were strategically placed based on labor market information with an eye towards ensuring access to all Vermonters. Although Vermont is only required to maintain one comprehensive one-stop center, the SWDB/VDOL is committed to ensuring that all Vermonters have access to a one-stop delivery system regardless of where he or she is located in the State. The VDOL, as the One-Stop Operator, is committed to providing all workforce development services to all career resource centers through either physical or virtual co-location.

As mentioned in the State Plan, the core partners are working towards the creation of a true One-Stop delivery system. Currently, most of the WIOA required partners are co-located in the Vermont career resource centers. The VDOL is working with the WIOA required partners to ensure that their programs are accessible in the career resource centers. Depending on the individual career resource center, this may include physical colocation, virtual colocation, or a combination of both.

(A) The State Board will ensure the continuous improvement of eligible providers through the annual review of the eligible training provider applications. The training providers are required to report performance information. As part of this annual review the One-Stop Operator will ensure that only training programs that relate to in-demand industry occupations.

(B) One of the challenges facing the workforce development system is the rural landscape of the State. Some areas lack necessary physical and technological infrastructure that makes serving these areas difficult. Additionally, the climate of New England, with harsh winters, makes travel difficult at times. This is compounded by a lack of statewide public transportation. Despite these challenges, the State Board is committed to providing services to all areas of the state. This is done through the twelve career resource centers located throughout the state. Participants are not required to meet with staff within the Career Resource Centers which allows staff to interact with participants at locations convenient to the participant. Additionally, the Vermont Job Link and state unemployment system are accessible online.

(C) The SWDB, VDOL, and one-stop partners are committed to ensuring accessibility to the workforce development system, including individuals with disabilities. The accessibility of the workforce development system is addressed in the State Plan.

(D) The VDOL is working with the other state workforce development partners regarding the one-stop delivery system and the partners' contributions to such system. This will be developed through a collaborative process and will be reflected in the required one-stop partner MOUs.

(7) a description and assessment of the type and availability of adult and dislocated worker employment and training activities:

For a description of the type and availability of adult and dislocated work activities, refer to the State Plan section regarding adult and dislocated worker program requirements.

(8) a description of how the State Board will coordinate workforce investment activities with statewide rapid response activities:

As the WIOA Title I administrator, the VDOL is able to ensure the alignment and coordination of funds and activities of WIOA adult and dislocated worker programs with the statewide rapid response activities. Rapid response outreach events, including any job fair or hiring event, are administered by the same division responsible for administering the WIOA adult and dislocated worker programs. This allows the VDOL to bring all WIOA Title I program resources to bear in responding to a layoff or facility closure. When conducting these rapid response events, the affected workers are informed of the workforce development services available to them and the ability of the Career Resource Center staff to assist individuals with re-employment. Additionally, this allows the VDOL to combine dislocated worker activities with TAA activities for those trade-affected workers, helping to avoid the duplication of services.

(9) a description and assessment of the type and availability of youth workforce investment activities:

For a description of Vermont's youth workforce investment activities, refer to the State Plan section regarding youth program requirements.

(10) a description of how the State Board will coordinate education and workforce investment activities with relevant secondary and postsecondary education programs and activities to coordinate strategies, enhance services, and avoid duplication:

For a description of how the State Board envisions the workforce development activities with education programs, refer to the Operational Planning Elements section of this State Plan.

(11) a description of how the State Board will coordinate workforce investment activities with the provision of transportation, including public transportation, and other appropriate supportive services:

Due to the geographic and rural nature of the State, Vermont does not maintain a robust public transportation system. Because of this, the discussion regarding transportation and the expansion of public transportation is an on-going discussion throughout the State.

Individual case managers coordinate with other workforce development partners to provide support services to those individuals in need. This usually involves a patchwork of support services from the different partners to address the specific needs of the particular individual.

(12) a description of plans and strategies for, and assurances concerning, maximizing coordination of services provided by the State employment service under the Wagner-Peyser Act, to improve service delivery and avoid duplication of services:

As explained in the Wagner-Peyser section of this State Plan, the Wagner-Peyser employment service program is administered by the VDOL. The employment services provided under the Wagner-Peyser Act is the foundational program on which other workforce development programs operate. Individuals seeking services in career resource centers, interact with Wagner-Peyser staff. The service delivery system already in place maximizes coordination of the Wagner-Peyser

employment services with the other workforce development programs offered through the Vermont career resource centers. For a further description of how Vermont will maximize Wagner-Peyser resources, please refer to the Wagner-Peyser section of this State Plan.

(13) a description of how the State Board will coordinate workforce investment activities with the provision of adult education and literacy activities:

As mentioned above in the State Plan, the VDOL and the Agency of Education will work together as core partners to ensure the implementation of the SWDB's strategic vision and goals for the Vermont workforce development system. Prior to awarding Title II funds, the Board will be given a chance to review applications the AOE has identified for funding, in order to ensure compliance with the State Plan.

(14) a description of the replicated cooperative agreements with the State unit administering programs under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973:

As mentioned above in the State Plan, the core partners are working together to develop universal intake procedures, develop cross training of staff, increase cooperative efforts to employers, and develop data sharing agreements. This will allow the workforce development system to enhance the provision of services to individuals with disabilities among other workforce development participants.

(15) an identification of the entity responsible for the disbursement of grant funds, as determined by the Governor:

For the adult, dislocated worker, and youth program funds administered under title I of the WIOA, the VDOL has been designated as the State's fiscal agent by the Governor and the SWDB. As the WIOA Title I fiscal agent, the VDOL Commissioner is responsible for the management, drawing down, transferring, and reporting on federal and state funds administered for these programs. As required by the SWDB Operator MOU with the VDOL, the VDOL is responsible for the following functions:

- Receiving, transferring, and drawing down of WIOA title I funds;
- Ensuring sustained fiscal integrity and accountability for expenditures of funds;
- Responding to federal and state audit financial findings;
- Maintaining proper accounting records and adequate documentation; and
- Preparing required federal and state financial reports.

The VDOL must adhere to all federal and state requirements regarding the use of these funds, including the establishment and operation of a fiscal and management accountability information system, as required by federal law.

(16) a description of the competitive process to be used to award the subgrants and contracts for adult, dislocated worker, and youth activities:

Vermont has been designated as a single state workforce area in this State Plan and, therefore, does not award subgrants and contracts to local areas.

The VDOL has been designated by the SWDB as the One-Stop Operator in an MOU. The VDOL will continue to provide services through the 12 Career Resource Centers in compliance with all federal and state laws and regulations.

As described in the Youth Program section of this Plan, the VDOL is the only entity in the State that maintains the infrastructure to provide all youth program elements statewide. This ensures that Vermont youth, regardless of where they are located within the State, are provided the same level of services. Vermont does provide WIOA Summer Employment Opportunities under the youth program to provide youth with paid work experiences. The VDOL has developed a procedure for awarding these grants.

(17) a description of the local levels of performance:

Vermont has been designated as a single state workforce area in this State Plan. Per the WIOA section 107(c)(4)(B)(iii), Vermont is not required to meet and report on a set of local performance accountability measures.

(18) a description of the actions the local board will take toward becoming or remaining a high-performing board:

Vermont has been designated as a single state workforce area in this State Plan. The State Board operates as the State and Local Board for federal WIOA purposes. The Vermont Board has engaged the presidents and CEOs of the State's most prestigious businesses to serve on the Board. While only required to meet three times a year, the Board meets on average, every other month. The Board has established the Operating Council to ensure that the Board is nimble and able to respond quickly to emerging workforce development needs. The Board has the benefit of guidance from the Agency of Commerce and Community Development Comprehensive Economic Development Report. The Board begins all meetings with a presentation from the VDOL Labor Market Information Division. This ensures that the Board is continuously informed of the labor market landscape of the State. The Board is working towards the establishment of sub-committees, similar to the existing youth council.

(19) a description of how training services will be provided in accordance with the WIOA:

Training services are provided to eligible training providers as required by the federal WIOA and the State eligible training provider procedure.

(20) a description of the process used to provide an opportunity for public comment and input into the development of the State Plan:

The State workforce investment board is a public body that must comply with Vermont's Open Meeting Laws, 1 V.S.A. §§ 310 — 314. Additionally, the SWDB is required to make available to the public information regarding the State Plan, 10 V.S.A. § 541a. In the time of developing the State Plan, the SWDB held two full Board meetings, as well as additional workgroups. Any workgroup meeting ensures the participation of business leaders and labor organizations. Additionally, the core partners held informational meetings during the development of the State

Plan to seek participation from workforce development partners. Finally, the State Plan was posted online for 30 days, and made available in hard copy, prior to submission.

(21) a description of how one-stop centers are implementing and transitioning to an integrated, technology-enabled intake and case management information system:

As mentioned above, the 12 career resource centers are operated by the VDOL. All VDOL programs, which includes WIOA Title I adult, dislocated worker, and youth programs and other one-stop partner programs, operate using the Vermont Job Link intake and case management system. This system is an integrated, technology-enabled system that provides individuals with access to labor market information and job training opportunities. As mentioned above, it is not practical, nor economically feasible, for the other core workforce development partners to abandon their intake and case management systems to move to a unified system. Instead, the core partners are working together to develop a universal referral process and will work through data sharing MOUs to help facilitate co-enrollment and avoid the duplication of services.

WAIVER REQUESTS

The US Department of Labor recently advised that they may consider waiver requests under WIOA 2014, and, as such, the partners in this Unified Plan may be requesting waivers relating to their specific programs.

WAGNER-PEYSER ACT PROGRAM (EMPLOYMENT SERVICES)

EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

Vermont is in a unique position to implement the WIOA provisions relating to the Wagner-Peyser Act employment services because in Vermont the employment services are administered by the VDOL, the same department responsible for implementation of most other workforce development system partners, including the adult, dislocated worker, and youth programs. The VDOL uses the Wagner-Peyser Act employment services as the foundation on which its other workforce development programs are built upon. The labor market information provided by the employment services allows all individuals who come into contact with the workforce development system to have access to the Wagner-Peyser services. There is no need to move to a collocation of Wagner-Peyser and other workforce development partners because the WP employment services are already in house.

Employment Service Professional Staff Development

The VDOL has developed written policies and procedures for training in employment services available through the Career Resource Centers. Wagner Peyser employment service training is essential to all VDOL staff working in the Career Resource Centers located throughout the State. The Workforce Development Division is dedicated to having a skilled and well trained workforce. All VDOL workforce development staff receive training on Wagner-Peyser employment services as part of their orientation as a new employee. Additional statewide training for all staff is scheduled on at least an annual basis, but more often when training needs are identified or there are changes to policies and procedures. With regard to training, the state noted that a broad range of topics will be covered. Experienced and trained VDOL staff members from each regional office will assist their co-workers in their respective centers and provide additional technical assistance and training in Wagner Peyser employment service activities.

Core partners will participate in cross training as described in the Operational Planning section of this State Plan.

Unemployment Compensation Claims

The Vermont unemployment compensation programs are run by the VDOL. This allows the career resource centers easy access to the Vermont unemployment compensation system. Any individual who needs to gather information or access to Vermont unemployment compensation can do so through any Vermont career resource center. While there is no unemployment insurance staff

physically located within any career resource center, the VDOL operates a claim center which allows for real-time virtual collocation. The career resource center staff has the ability to immediately access an unemployment compensation staff member to assist an individual in filing a UI claim.

Career resource center staff are continuously trained on the UI claims process and given information on the state UI programs in order to ensure that our staff is able to assist individuals in filing UI claims through the career resource centers.

As for providing unemployment insurance claimants with workforce information, every individual who files for unemployment compensation must register with Vermont Job Link, the VDOL management information system. Vermont Job Link provides labor market information and whether they qualify for any of the workforce development training programs. Additionally, a user can set up his or her job link account to provide weekly information on job availability. In using this tool, when an individual files his or her weekly unemployment compensation claim an informational page interacts with the screen showing the locations of any VDOL workforce event, such as a hiring event, job fair, or special training session. This can also be used to access information on VDOL's workforce development programs, such as WIOA adult and dislocated worker programs.

Reemployment Assistance to UI Claimants

The reemployment of Unemployment Insurance claimants and the reduction of erroneous unemployment insurance payments continue to be top priorities for the Vermont Department of Labor. In 2010, the Vermont General Assembly mandated that the Vermont Department of Labor prioritize services to unemployment claimants by enacting into law that "the department of labor shall implement reemployment services in district offices. The department shall implement a policy that prioritizes claimant for services in the regional offices." In addition, Vermont's Governor, Peter Shumlin, has made re-employment and jobs a key part of his administration's agenda.

Last year, the VDOL completed its transition from the traditional REA/RESEA program design to the new RESEA program. This new program design has been fully implemented in all twelve career resource centers in the State. The Vermont RESEA program builds on the close working relationship between the VDOL Unemployment Insurance Division and its Workforce Development Division. The RESEA program connects UI claimants, at the outset of their unemployment, with reemployment and training services by specifically linking them to services through Vermont's career resource centers with a focus on claimant reemployment. This core program design has been shown to increase participant's competitive advantage by returning claimants to work for up to an average of at least two weeks earlier, thereby reducing the average duration of their claim.

Specifically, the RESEA program is based on the following main elements: the close working relationship between the VDOL Divisions; the selection of participants within the fifth week of

filing, once deemed monetarily eligible; service to the priority population; identification of needs through in-person eligibility reviews at the career resource center locations; the requirement for claimants to register in the Vermont Job Link system; and consecutive interface with claimants through in-person follow up activities.

The program is designed to ensure that claimants have access to the full array of services available at the career resource centers while also ensure claimants comply with all the UI eligibility requirements. All RESEA services are provided by UI RESEA Career Development Facilitators as well as appropriately trained career resource center staff. The workforce development staff provides each RESEA claimant with a full array of reemployment services, labor market information, and completes a comprehensive assessment of needs and/or work action plan. The UI staff provides program management as well as conducts continuous eligibility review, work search verification and ongoing case management activities.

Communication and UI Support

Vermont law (21 V.S.A. chapter 17) allows the Commissioner of Labor to require that individuals receiving unemployment compensation benefits also register with the State's employment services. Under this authority the VDOL does require that individuals who receive unemployment compensation benefits register within the Vermont Job Link system.

In using Wagner-Payser employment service funds the VDOL provides the following services through the career resource centers:

- Job assessment, referrals, and development;
- Skills assessment;
- Workforce development workshops, including interview and resume building workshops;
- Business outreach;
- Hiring events and job fairs;
- Labor market information;
- Core and intensive services to individuals.

As mentioned above, the Wagner-Peyser employment services programs are the foundation of the Vermont career resource centers. When an individual accesses any career resource center he or she will first interact with a Wagner-Peyser staff. The Wagner-Peyser staff will do an initial needs assessment with the individual to determine his or her immediate needs. Based on this needs assessment, the individual can be referred to other workforce education and training programs, regardless of whether they are physically or virtually collocated within the career resource center. As mentioned in this state plan, the core partners to the workforce development system are working together to develop a universal referral process in order to facilitate program referrals and avoid duplication of services.

AGRICULTURAL OUTREACH PLAN

Each State agency must develop an AOP every four years as part of the Unified or Combined State Plan required under sections 102 or 103 of WIOA. The AOP must include—

***Assessment of Need.* Provide an assessment of the unique needs of farmworkers in the area based on past and projected agricultural and farmworker activity in the State. Such needs may include but are not limited to: employment, training, and housing.**

An assessment of the agricultural activity in the State means: 1) identifying the top five labor-intensive crops, the months of heavy activity, and the geographic area of prime activity; 2) Summarize the agricultural employers' needs in the State (i.e. are they predominantly hiring local or foreign workers, are they expressing that there is a scarcity in the agricultural workforce); and 3) Identifying any economic, natural, or other factors that are affecting agriculture in the State or any projected factors that will affect agriculture in the State.

Agriculture has long been an important part of Vermont's economy. The industry has a tremendous direct and indirect economic impact on the state and as such, has been. Some of Vermont's top commodities are: Dairy, Maple Syrup, Apples, Assorted Field Crops and Strawberries. Heavy activity months are late March into April through early October. The majority of agricultural activity continues to be from the small family farm producers. With the nature of the agricultural business in the State of Vermont, as described above, there will not be a population of migrant workers traveling to harvest the crops in this program year. The workers will come from the local community and return to their permanent residence in the same day.

There is a growing trend towards business diversity, by the producers in the State of Vermont. This trend has caused confusion amongst the agricultural employers with respect to the basic labor laws, Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA), particularly in the use of the overtime exemption for and definition of agricultural workers. With the increase in diversity for the agricultural employers comes the complication of meeting the requirements of the FLSA and meeting the Federal guidelines for agricultural employment being investigated by the United States Department of Labor (USDOL) Wage & Hour.

The Vermont Department of Labor has worked with the Agency of Agriculture and the private sector to provide informational meetings on the labor laws for agricultural employers. The partnership with the Agency of Agriculture and offering employer information sessions has identified additional agricultural employers and the opportunity to provide an explanation of services for employers.

The Vermont Department of Labor, and the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, plan to offer more Agricultural Employer information sessions throughout the year to assist employers adapt to the changing market while following the labor regulations. Another topic of concern, as younger

workers and college students enter the agriculture workforce are the regulations regarding internships.

The continued efforts to create and strengthen relationships between VDOL and other Agencies, Non-profit and private organizations like: NOFA, Ben and Jerry's, The Consulate General of Mexico, Migrant Justice, Migrant Education and the Vermont Farm Health Taskforce, will continue to develop a more complete and comprehensive outreach plan into both the Employer and Farmworker populations.

An assessment of the unique needs of farmworkers means summarizing

MSFW characteristics (including if they are predominantly from certain countries, what language(s) they speak, the approximate number of MSFWs in the State during peak season and during low season, and whether they tend to be migrant, seasonal, or year-round farmworkers). This information must take into account data supplied by WIOA Section 167 National Farmworker Jobs Program (NFJP) grantees, other MSFW organizations, employer organizations, and State and/or Federal agency data sources such as the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the

U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) Employment and Training Administration.

A review of the previous year's Migrant Seasonal Farm Worker (MSFW) activity in the State indicates the MSFW activity in Vermont is extremely low. At the end of the 4th quarter of PY2015, 8 of the approximately 31,000 registrants in the Vermont Joblink (VJL) MIS system identified themselves as MSFWs. Vermont also saw approximately 30 MSFW's from Puerto Rico responding to H-2A job orders. The majority of identified crop workers (about 500) in the state are through the H-2A program and as so, are not included in the MSFW count. The number of domestic MSFWs in Vermont is difficult to estimate and could be understated as some of these workers cannot be located or may be incorrectly self-reported in the Vermont MIS Vermont Joblink. Some of the workers may meet the guidelines of seasonal farm workers, that number is anticipated to be approximately 100 or less. This takes into account information from PathStone, the National Farmworkers Jobs Program (NFJP), Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) section 167 grantee.

The number of H-2A workers is expected to continue to increase. It is anticipated that approximately 70 job orders will be placed to hire approximately 500 to 550 workers to work primarily with the crop activity in vegetables, strawberries, raspberries, blueberries, and apples. As of the end of September, 2015, 70 job orders have been processed and 55 pre-occupational housing inspections have been completed for a total of 509 workers.

***Outreach Activities.* The local offices outreach activities must be designed to meet the needs of MSFWs in the State and to locate and contact MSFWs who are not being**

reached through normal intake activities. Describe the State agency's proposed strategies for:

Contacting farmworkers who are not being reached by the normal intake activities conducted by the employment service offices.

The Vermont Department of Labor (VDOL) will conduct outreach services to the agricultural workers mainly through the State Monitor Advocate. The VDOL State Monitor Advocate (SMA) will continue to unify and coordinate the federally required labor exchange activities of the MSFW Outreach Program, the Foreign Labor Certification (FLC) Program and the State Monitor Advocate system requirements. Coordination of these MSFW-centered programs will allow VDOL to increase productivity of Wagner – Peysner funded activities and to more accurately evaluate and report services provided to agricultural workers and employers.

A permanent, part-time State Monitor Advocate is assigned by VDOL to perform the following:

Monitoring Duties:

Conduct agency-wide and on-going review of state-wide delivery of services and protections afforded to MSFWs.

Coordinate efforts to assure that all VDOL American Job Center (AJC) offices are reviewed at least once a year.

Consult with state and local offices to ensure accurate reporting of MSFW-related information.

Review proposed state Employment Service (ES) directives, manuals and operating instructions relating to MSFWs.

Participate in Federal monitoring reviews.

Review and report on at least a quarterly basis, all agency statistical data through the LEARS reporting system and other MSFW-related data.

Responsible for all MSFW program reporting to the Regional USDOL as required or requested.

Prepare an annual summary report of statewide services to MSFWs for the State Workforce Agency (SWA).

Advocacy Duties:

Oversee the operation and performance of the ES Complaint system.

Review the state agency's MSFW Outreach plan.

Review the outreach workers monthly outreach summaries.

Serve as an advocate to improve services to MSFWs within the ES.

Field Duties:

Conduct frequent field visits to the working and living areas of MSFWs to verify ES were provided.

Meet and work with community-based organizations and other employment-related agencies to coordinate other services to MSFWs.

Raise issues as appropriate to ensure that the development of new systems/strategies for service delivery include meeting the needs of MSFW customers.

The monitoring reviews which are performed by the SMA take place in the VDOL AJCs and are further assurance that local systems are in compliance with the equity indicators and minimum service levels for MSFWs.

Providing technical assistance to outreach workers. Technical assistance must include trainings, conferences, additional resources, and increased collaboration with other organizations on topics such as one-stop center services (i.e. availability of referrals to training, supportive services, and career services, as well as specific employment opportunities), the employment service complaint system, information on the other organizations serving MSFWs in the area, and a basic summary of farmworker rights, including their rights with respect to the terms and conditions of employment.

Training will be provided to all VDOL Career Resource Center staff by the SMA. VDOL will work with partner organizations to inform them of MSFWs in the area and programs and services provided.

Increasing outreach worker training and awareness across core programs including the Unemployment Insurance (UI) program and the training on identification of UI eligibility issues.

Outreach Workers will be trained on core programs along with specialty trainings designed to help them in their specific jobs. Training will be provided in the areas of resume development, customer service, sales and career development facilitator.

Providing VDOL staff outreach workers professional development activities to ensure they are able to provide high quality services to both jobseekers and employers.

Professional development opportunities are available for VDOL outreach staff such as resume writing certification, career development facilitator certification and other training options.

Coordinating outreach efforts with NFJP grantees as well as with public and private community service agencies and MSFW groups.

Coordination with NFJP grantees will take place with SMA to provide services. VDOL SMA will coordinate visits with Pathstone to locations across the state. The coordination of outreach efforts with the NFJP grantees includes the VDOL SMA working in conjunction with the NFJP regional field representatives in the designated regions.

VDOL partners with other agencies across the state of Vermont that also target the MSFW population, such organizations include National Farmworker Jobs Program (NFJP) 167 Grantee – Pathstone Corporation, Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Migrant Justice, Ben and Jerry’s and the University of Vermont Extension Service Migrant Education Program.

In addition, staff will continue to foster cooperation with other governmental and community-based organizations in providing information and promoting the MSFW program at appropriate meetings and through other avenues. The State Monitor Advocate is also a member of the Vermont Farm Health Taskforce.

The farm workers will be contacted at their living, gathering or other assembly areas by outreach workers. An explanation of workforce services available to MSFWs, including the availability of referrals to agricultural and nonagricultural employment, training, and supportive services, and other job development services will be provided in a language readily understood by them.

Each outreach worker will maintain a log of daily contacts which will include the number of MSFWs contacted and details of assistance provided. The name of the individual contacted will be recorded in all cases where an application for work is taken, a referral to a job is made, and/or a complaint is filed. Detailed reports relative to the number of MSFWs, their office of registration, and services provided can be retrieved through the reporting section of VJL after an account is established for the worker.

Outreach workers will be familiar with working and living conditions of the migrant and seasonal farm workers. If they observe, have reason to believe, or are in receipt of information regarding a suspected violation of employment related laws or employment service regulations by an employer, the outreach worker shall document the suspected violation and provide the information to the corresponding VDOL Regional Manager. They will provide assistance in the preparation of job service and non-job service complaints. Complaints will be recorded using the Employment Services (ES) Complaint Log, and resolved using the ES Complaint System.

Services provided to farmworkers and agricultural employers through the one-stop delivery system. Describe the State agency's proposed strategies for:

Providing the full range of employment and training services to the agricultural community, both farmworkers and agricultural employers, through the one-stop delivery system. This includes:

How career and training services required under WIOA Title I will be provided to MSFWs through the one-stop centers;

How the State serves agricultural employers and how it intends to improve such services.

Outreach workers will inform MSFWs of and refer them to verified employment opportunities and the Employment Services Complaint System. Outreach workers will encourage the MSFWs to utilize the VDOL Career Resource Centers to obtain the full range of employment services; however, on-site assistance will also be offered in the preparation of applications, on a limited basis.

Outreach workers will refer individual MSFWs, or family members, who may be eligible, to WIOA and supportive services VDOL Career Resource Centers or other appropriate agencies. Further, the outreach workers will make follow-up contacts as necessary and appropriate to provide, to the maximum extent possible, the foregoing described services. MSFWs also will be shown how to use VJL, an Internet-based workforce data management and service delivery system. Through VJL, MSFWs can establish a Wagner- Peysner application and apply for jobs.

In the event that lack of English language skills is identified as a barrier to services, and/or training, translation services will be offered in the VDOL AJCs. Pathstone is also a partner of the VDOL Career Resource Centers and provides additional services to migrants and seasonal farm workers. In the coming program year, efforts will be initiated to establish closer cooperation and service collaboration with partners, such as the state's WIOA Section 167 NFJP grantee, to ensure greater alignment of intensive and training services to MSFWs.

Extensive outreach to agricultural employers is an on-going process. This is critical to maintaining interpersonal contact with the employers.

Examples of services provided to agricultural employers by VDOL staff include:

Local, regional and national recruitment assistance

Screening job applicants

Connection and coordination of services with government and community agencies

Technical assistance with foreign labor certification

Soliciting and filling job orders

Disseminating information on farm-related rules and regulations

Conducting prevailing wage and prevailing practice surveys

Providing Pre-Occupancy inspections of migrant housing as required for H-2A applications
Referring complaints to proper enforcement agencies
Assisting employers in obtaining work-related posters and notices
Participating in agricultural related meetings and notifying farmers of these meetings

Many contacts with agricultural employers are made as a result of referrals from other agencies such as the Vermont Agency of Agriculture or other Farm Associations, as well as by word-of-mouth from other workers or farmers. Continued efforts will be made in the upcoming year to increase the market penetration of agricultural employers.

The most basic service provided to agricultural employers is the filling of job openings. Job orders from agricultural employers are entered in VJL and qualified candidates are referred. All H-2A order users are mandated to take all qualified United States referrals through the workforce system. In addition, training is being provided to VDOL Career Resource Center staff throughout the state to encourage local domestic U.S. workers to apply for H-2A jobs.

Other services include housing inspections of H-2A camps. The SMA will also perform field checks and communicate with the Chicago National Processing Center in addressing matters relative to any H-2A deficiencies.

The Employment Services staff will strive to meet and exceed federal program requirements with respect to equity and minimum service level indicators of compliance.

Marketing the employment service complaint system to farmworkers and other farmworker advocacy groups.

VDOL will market the complaint system to farmers utilizing field staff along with a poster for posting onsite.

Marketing the Agricultural Recruitment System to agricultural employers and how it intends to improve such publicity.

Services available to farmers and farmworkers are available online at www.labor.vermont.gov that shows phone numbers and services provided to agricultural employers.

Other Requirements.

Collaboration. Describe any collaborative agreements the SWA has with other MSFW service providers including NFJP grantees and other service providers. Describe how the

SWA intends to build upon/increase collaboration with existing partners and in establishing new partners over the next four years (including any approximate timelines for establishing agreements or building upon existing agreements).

VDOL does not have any formal agreements with providers. However, we have collaboration efforts with Migrant Justice, Migrant Education, and are currently renewing an MOU with Pathstone.

Review and Public Comment. In developing the AOP, the SWA must solicit information and suggestions from NFJP grantees, other appropriate MSFW groups, public agencies, agricultural employer organizations, and other interested organizations. In addition, at least 45 calendar days before submitting its final AOP, the SWA must provide a proposed plan to NFJP grantees, public agencies, agricultural employer organizations, and other organizations expressing an interest and allow at least 30 days for review and comment. The SWA must: 1) Consider any comments received in formulating its final proposed AOP; 2) Inform all commenting parties in writing whether their comments have been incorporated and, if not, the reasons therefore; and 3) Transmit the comments and recommendations received and its responses with the submission of the AOP.

The AOP must include a statement confirming NFJP grantees, other appropriate MSFW groups, public agencies, agricultural employer organizations and other interested employer organizations have been given an opportunity to comment on the AOP. Include the list of organizations from which information and suggestions were solicited, any comments received, and responses to those comments.

NFJP grantees, other appropriate MSFW groups, public agencies, agricultural employer organization, and other interested employer organizations were given 30 days to review and comment on the AOP. Comments were solicited from the following organizations:

Pathstone Corporation

Migrant Education

Migrant Justice

Vermont Tree Fruit Growers Association

Northeast Organic Farmers Association (NOFA)

State Representative Alyson Eastman from Book-Ends Associates

Vermont Agency of Agriculture

This statement will be updated to reflect comments received, and responses to those comments.

Data Assessment. Review the previous four years Wagner-Peyser data reports on performance. Note whether the State has been meeting its goals to provide MSFWs quantitatively proportionate services as compared to non-MSFWs. If it has not met these goals, explain why the State believes such goals were not met and how the State intends to improve its provision of services in order to meet such goals.

Statewide assessments have shown an opportunity to increase services directly provided to migrants. The state has had some success in referrals to employment, referrals to supportive services and MSFW placed in jobs. The opportunity for improvement in referrals for career guidance, job development, referral to staff assisted services and placement in non-agricultural jobs definitely exist.

Assessment of progress. The plan must include an explanation of what was achieved based on the previous AOP, what was not achieved and an explanation as to why the State believes the goals were not achieved, and how the State intends to remedy the gaps of achievement in the coming year.

Vermont has no significant offices. The VDOL SMA has continued to build working relationships statewide with entities to help serve migrant workers. The state plans to continue to look for effective ways to serve the migrant and farm communities.

State Monitor Advocate. The plan must contain a statement confirming the State Monitor Advocate has reviewed and approved the AOP.

In accordance with 20 CFR Subpart B, 653.107, the State Monitor Advocate participated in the preparation of the agricultural plan and has been afforded the opportunity to approve and comment on the plan.

ADULT EDUCATION AND LITERACY PROGRAMS

DRAFT VI. Program-Specific Requirements for Core Programs

Adult Education and Literacy Programs

The purpose of AEL programs under AEFLA (WIOA Title II) is to assist adults in both becoming literate and obtaining the knowledge and skills necessary for employment and economic self-sufficiency; to assist those adults who are parents or family members in obtaining the education and skills necessary to become full partners in the educational development of their children and lead to sustainable improvements in the economic opportunities for their families; to assist adults in attaining a secondary school diploma and in the transition to postsecondary education and training, including through career pathways; and to assist immigrants and other individuals who are English language learners in improving their reading, writing, speaking, and comprehension skills in English, math, and acquiring an understanding of the American system of government and citizenship. Career pathways align and integrate education (including both AEL and English for Speakers of Other Languages), job training, counseling and support services in order to create accelerated educational and career opportunities that enable learners to secure employment in high-demand occupations.

AEL programs accomplish these purposes by providing high-quality instruction and education services, and through the mechanism of cultivating and maintaining strong partnerships with other workforce development programs (e.g., regional career centers, Vermont State Colleges) as well as with other WIOA-required partners (e.g., Departments of Labor, Vocational Rehabilitation) at the One-Stop Centers, otherwise known in Vermont as Career Resource Centers or American Job Centers.

By definition an eligible AEL learner is at least 16 years old; not enrolled or required to be enrolled in secondary school; and is basic skills deficient, does not have a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent, and has not achieved an equivalent level of education; or is an English language learner. An individual with a high school diploma who is basic skills deficient is also eligible.

Vermont Vision for AEL within WIOA

AEL is a strong and valued partner in the workforce development system at state and regional levels. AEL is a central component of the education system in Vermont, providing personalized, flexible pathways to secondary school graduation, and working with eligible adult learners from the most basic skill levels and up. AEL works with its education and workforce development system partners to help adult learners by assisting them in obtaining high school diplomas or their equivalent and also providing critical guidance about postsecondary transition and training through career pathways. AEL provides education in the context of regionally-relevant employment opportunities; wherever possible, basic skills instruction is integrated with occupational skills training as supplied by partners in the workforce

development system. This results in good jobs, not just any jobs, for adult learners. With respect to WIOA, AEL has a critical role to play in providing essential work-readiness “stepping stone” activities (building on hard *and* soft work skills) for the disconnected, most-in-need, unskilled youth and adults targeted by this legislation.

At the state and regional levels, AEL addresses barriers to entry, success, and completion in career pathways for adult learners who are nontraditional and may be considered difficult to serve. Some strategies include but are not limited to the following:

- Put our basic skills assessment expertise and structure to use for the purpose of establishing with our partners in the workforce development system minimum skill levels for entry and success in specific industry trainings, credentials, and certificates; provide instruction to eligible learners as needed to bolster basic skills and help them transition to new opportunities.
- Within the role of AEL as providers of contextualized basic skills instruction, increase students’ readiness for postsecondary education and training through a career pathway without need for post-secondary level remediation courses; use strategies such as College and Career Readiness Standards-aligned instruction and programming, and evidence-based program designs such as Bridge to College.
- Explore solutions with Vocational Rehabilitation and other partners to increase postsecondary and workplace opportunities for eligible learners as they progress along Career Pathways, including greater understanding and formal documentation of relevant disabilities and improved access to necessary accommodations under the Americans with Disabilities Act.
- Support our partners in the state and workforce development system in addressing the high costs of post-secondary education for students in Vermont.

A. Aligning of content standards

The Vermont AOE has committed to the implementation of college and career readiness standards for all students. This means the adoption of the *Common Core State Standards* for its K-12 public schools, and the [*College and Career Readiness Standards for Adult Education \(CCRS\)*](#). The CCRS is

an exact subset of the *Common Core State Standards* that has been winnowed and validated for applicability to adult learners by expert panels commissioned at the national level. Both documents define three “key advances” or “instructional shifts” each for the broad content areas of English language arts/ literacy and mathematics for adults functioning from the most basic level through high school completion. English language arts/literacy standards specify skills in reading, writing, speaking and listening, language, and reading foundational skills.

By virtue of the origin of the CCRS in *Common Core State Standards*, the standards are aligned.

Implementation of these standards within AEL is an ongoing process of professional development and program improvement, led by the state office with local program engagement. In FY15, AEL providers engaged in five days of statewide training over the year to

explore and understand the six instructional shifts. In FY16, AEL providers focused on the implementation of the English Language Arts/ Literacy standards via four more days of training and additional work, to support local processes of lesson and classroom materials review and revision, observation of teaching, and revamping assignments. This training and implementation process is otherwise known as “Standards in Action.” Standards-based teaching strategies were supported in FY15 through six days of statewide training and follow-up within a national training course called “Adult Numeracy Instruction Professional Development.” The Standards in Action protocols will be launched through statewide training for the mathematics standards.

B. Local activities: how funded, scope, content, organization of local activities

The Vermont AOE will run competitions for its funds under WIOA Title II using the procedures established by the State of Vermont for awarding grants or contracts, and the guidance available in the final WIOA regulations as expected to be published by the US Departments of Education and Labor in 2016. The funds will be awarded to eligible providers of services on a basis of two or more years for the purpose of establishing AEL and operating programs that provide some or all of the WIOA Title II activities as warranted by demographic data within the service area of one or more particular counties. In so doing, AEL programs will function as a required and valued partner in the regional One-Stop Center (also known in Vermont as local American Job Centers or Career Resource Centers), including functioning as a partner in the development of regionally-relevant career pathways that reflect employer engagement. Career pathways will have specific entrance points for lower skilled adults, but will also map out additional entrance and exit points (e.g., postsecondary education and job opportunities) for adult learners. There will be a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed between the operator of the One-Stop Centers and each of its required partners. Adult education programs will adhere to the MOU established between the One-Stop Center operator (Vermont DOL) and the Vermont AOE.

Local activities may include some or all of the following:

- AEL;
- workplace AEL activities;
- family literacy activities;
- English language acquisition (ESOL) activities;
- Integrated English literacy and civics education (IEL/CE), and/or civics education and engagement for all adult learners served;
- workforce preparation activities (to impart employability skills which are a combination of basic academic skills, critical thinking, digital literacy, and self-management skills); and
- integrated education and training that provides AEL activities concurrently and contextually with both workforce preparation activities and workforce training for a specific, regionally-relevant occupation or occupational cluster, and is for the purpose of educational and career advancement.
- focus on digital literacy and/or distance education and credentials.

As required by WIOA Title I B, local AEL activities proposals will be reviewed by the State Workforce Investment Board for alignment to the State Plan using a procedure to be established by the State Workforce Investment Board and the Vermont AOE. Because Vermont operates as a single service area in its Workforce Investment Board structure, local proposals will be reviewed by the State Workforce Investment Board for alignment.

The Vermont AOE will use these considerations for awarding grants or contracts as described in WIOA as pertinent to the proposed scope of work:

1. the degree to which the provider would be responsive to regional needs of the workforce and serving individuals most in need of AEL activities;
2. the ability of the provider to serve individuals with disabilities, including learning disabilities;
3. past effectiveness of the provider in improving literacy of individuals especially who have low levels of literacy, and past effectiveness in meeting established performance targets;
4. the extent of alignment between proposed services and the regional strategies and goals of the workforce development system, and alignment with the services of the other one-stop partners;
5. whether the provider's program is of sufficient intensity and quality, and based on the most rigorous research available so that participants achieve substantial learning gains, and uses instructional practices that include the essential components of reading instruction;
6. whether the provider's activities, including reading, writing, speaking, math and English language acquisition instruction are based on best practices based on most rigorous research available and appropriate;
7. whether the provider's activities effectively use technology, services, and delivery systems, possibly to include distance education in a manner sufficient to increase the amount and quality of learning and how such technology, services, and systems lead to improved performance;
8. whether the provider's activities provide learning in context, including through integrated education and training, so that an individual acquires the skills needed to transition to and complete postsecondary education and training programs, obtain and advance in employment leading to economic self-sufficiency, and to exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship;
9. whether the provider's activities are delivered by well-trained instructors and program staff who access high quality professional development opportunities, including via the Literacy Information and Communication System (LINCS);
10. whether the provider's activities, for the development of career pathways, coordinate with other available education, training, and social service resources in the community and other one-stop center partners;

11. whether the provider’s activities offer flexible schedules and coordination with Federal, state, and local support services that are necessary to enable individuals to attend and complete programs;
12. whether the provider maintains student records in DataWorks which has the capacity to report measurable participant outcomes and to monitor program performance.
13. the degree and the effectiveness to which the provider would serve males and females equally, understanding the unique challenges of both genders when it comes to pursuing careers and education.
14. whether the provider collects and maintains key demographic information (e.g., gender, race/ethnicity) on participants so that measurable outcomes can be disaggregated by these factors.

In addition local activities will include:

- Systematic outreach and recruitment to target populations.
- Intake and enrollment procedures that welcome learners and establish a strong commitment, support, and clear expectations for each learner's AEL participation, making full use of education plans and enabling learners to make fully informed decisions regarding program options.
- Basic skills (ABE, ASE, and ESOL) instruction that is standards-based
 - provides sufficient intensity and duration for substantive skill building and engages learners in continuing participation;
 - uses varied instructional approaches in response to varied learning styles;
 - engages learners in ongoing assessment and documentation of their skill gains;
 - is provided by trained and qualified instructional staff.
- Student skill assessments and credentials through:
 - State approved standardized testing in reading, writing, mathematics, ESOL for baseline and post-assessment of skill levels;
 - formal and informal assessments used by teachers and learners during instruction for ongoing guidance and documentation of learning;
- Guidance, coaching, and support services that support student persistence and progress, including such support for postsecondary transitions

C. Corrections education and other education of institutionalized individuals

The Community High School of Vermont is operated by the Vermont Department of Corrections, and as an independent school approved by the Vermont AOE, also operates under the regulations of the Vermont AOE in service of its learners at multiple sites around the state who are enrolled in the school.

It serves all persons under the custody of the Commissioner of Corrections, including those who are incarcerated, on parole or on probation. Three distinct populations within the Vermont Department of Corrections receive Corrections Education services:

1. Those individuals, regardless of educational level, who do not have academic, social or technical skills that will allow them to successfully participate in the community upon release,
2. Persons who have not completed secondary education which supports the right of every Vermonter to an education regardless of their age, and
3. All persons who are under the age of 23 and have not received their diploma.

WIOA Title II funds are for serving eligible students who are not enrolled in a school. WIOA Title II Programs for Corrections Education and other Institutionalized Individuals must be prioritized for individuals who are likely to leave the correctional institution within five years of participation in the educational program.

AEL services are available to adults in the Corrections system who have been released on parole. Referrals are routinely made as learners transition from Community High School of Vermont (DOC) to the community. A referral protocol has been established between the Vermont AOE and the staff of the Community High School of Vermont describing how institutionalized persons (engaged in Probation and Parole) but not enrolled in the Community High School of Vermont who are seeking adult basic education or adult secondary education should be referred to the local AEL provider organization. At that point of engagement with the local adult education provider, the students are eligible for the range of services afforded any adult learner.

D. Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education Program

Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education (IEL/CE) is defined as “education services provided to English language learners who are adults, including professionals with degrees and credentials in their native countries, that enables such adults to achieve competency in the English language and acquire the basic and more advanced skills needed to function effectively as parents, workers, and citizens in the United States. Such services shall include instruction in literacy and English language acquisition and instruction on the rights and responsibilities of citizenship and civic participation, and may include workforce training.”

IEL/CE funds are allocated to States by the federal government using a model that takes into account need for services that references adult English language learner demographics for a state and immigration patterns. It is anticipated that the Vermont AOE will receive the established minimum as it historically has, \$60,000 per year; this amount is to be distributed in one or more grants or contracts to provide IEL/CE services through an open competition for funding.

The Vermont AOE will request formal proposals from local service providers eligible for funding under WIOA Title II to provide the services of IEL/CE with a priority focus on serving communities with significant concentrations of adult English language learners, and operating

in partnership with established programs so as to supplement and not supplant existing efforts while accomplishing the purpose of IEL/CE.

IEL/CE programs will be delivered in combination with integrated education and training activities. They will prepare adults who are English language learners for and place such adults in unsubsidized employment in in-demand industries and occupations that lead to economic self-sufficiency. They will integrate with the local WFDS and its functions including engaging employers at the local One-Stop center as an adult education partner in order to carry out the activities of the program.

IEL/CE will not be provided in every county or community through this funding source. The RFP will be shaped by an in-state demographic data analysis, environmental scan of existing programs and funding sources outside of WIOA Title II, and ability to work with partners to accomplish the purposes of IEL/CE, as demonstrated in the funding competition.

In consideration of proposals for Integrated English Language and Civics Education funds, the Vermont AOE will consider:

- whether the local area has a demonstrated need for additional English language acquisition programs and civics education programs;
- whether the program makes use of highly trained instructors including those who hold degrees, credentials, or coursework in teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL).

In addition to these considerations for funding are those that are common to all AEL providers as pertinent to the proposed scope of work to provide IEL/CE:

1. past effectiveness of the provider in improving literacy of individuals especially who have low levels of literacy, and past effectiveness in meeting established performance targets (also in line with the anticipated details in the final WIOA regulations);
2. the extent of alignment between proposed services and the regional strategies and goals of the workforce development system, and alignment with the services of the other one-stop partners;
3. whether the provider's program is of sufficient intensity and quality, and based on the most rigorous research available so that participants achieve substantial learning gains, and uses instructional practices that include the essential components of reading instruction;
4. whether the provider's activities, including reading, writing, speaking, and English language acquisition instruction are based on best practices based on most rigorous research available and appropriate;
5. whether the provider's activities effectively use technology, services, and delivery systems, possibly to include distance education in a manner sufficient to increase the amount and quality of learning and how such technology, services, and systems lead to improved performance;

6. whether the provider’s activities provide learning in context, including through integrated education and training, so that an individual acquires the skills needed to transition to and complete postsecondary education and training programs, obtain and advance in employment leading to economic self-sufficiency, and to exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship;
7. whether the provider’s activities are delivered by well-trained instructors and program staff who access high quality professional development opportunities, including via the Literacy Information and Communication System (LINCS);
8. whether the provider’s activities, for the development of career pathways, coordinate with other available education, training, and social service resources in the community and other one-stop center partners;
9. whether the provider’s activities offer flexible schedules and coordination with Federal, state, and local support services that are necessary to enable individuals to attend and complete programs;
10. whether the provider maintains student records in DataWorks which has the capacity to report measurable participant outcomes and to monitor program performance.

E. State Leadership activities

State Leadership activity requirements are well-defined in WIOA Title II Section 223. The funds are intended to be used to develop or enhance the adult education system in Vermont. The Vermont AOE will be responsible for using the modest funds allotted to carry out the *required* State Leadership activities as follows:

- Align AEL activities with other core partners and one-stop partners, to implement the strategy identified in the vision for the workforce development system in Vermont, as described in an earlier chapter within this Unified State Plan. Achieving this alignment will require communication and working in concert with our partners at the Vermont DOL and the Vermont DVR at the state level. in light of our common strategic vision for the workforce development system. In particular, the workforce development system goal of “seamless coordination amongst the workforce development system partners” will require joint cross-training of One-Stop Center staff for common intake and joint referral processes, with the AEL contribution to this effort considered a State Leadership activity. This will include support for cross-core-program efforts on the development of career pathways that provide access to employment and training services for individuals in AEL activities; and support for promoting an understanding in the field of the development and use of Integrated Education and Training models in partnership with employers; and support for implementing evidence-based program models that facilitate learners’ successful transitions to post-secondary education.
- Provide and/or oversee high quality professional development programs designed to improve instruction, including the essential components of reading instruction through an evidence-based reading training such as Student Achievement in Reading (STAR) or similar; instruction related to the specific needs of adult learners

as determined by a needs assessment of the field; and dissemination of information about promising practices related to such professional development programs.

- Provide technical assistance to AEL providers including
 - Dissemination of instructional and programmatic practices based on the most rigorous or scientifically valid research available and appropriate, in reading, writing, speaking, mathematics, English language acquisition programs (ESOL), distance education, and staff training;
 - Support for the role of adult education providers as one-stop partners to provide access to employment, education, training, and postsecondary guidance services;
 - Assistance in the use of technology, including for staff training, to adult education providers, especially the use of technology to improve system efficiencies.
- Monitor and evaluate the quality of and the improvement in AEL activities and disseminate information about models and proven or promising practices within Vermont and beyond.

The Vermont AOE will be responsible to carry out *permissible* State Leadership activities as follows so long as funding permits:

- Maintaining active membership in the New England Literacy Resource Center, as well as active partnership in the Literacy Information and Communication System (LINCS) in order to foster collaboration amongst other agencies and minimize duplication of effort.
- Disseminating models and content for integrated education and training and career pathways, including those that address opportunities available directly after high school completion, requiring middle skills employment, and/or significant postsecondary educational and occupational training .
- The provision of assistance to AEL providers in meeting the State-adjusted levels of performance, commonly known as performance targets, via technical assistance, desk monitoring, ongoing communication, site visits and targeted professional development and program improvement activities.
- Continuing our work on standards implementation, including the use of aligned and approved assessments when available, so that students are prepared for college and careers as a result of their participation in AEL.

F. Assessing Quality. The Vermont AOE will assess the quality of providers of AEL activities under Title II in the following ways:

In partnership with adult education providers, the Vermont AOE will continue to collect data from its adult education providers pertaining to student demographics, outcomes, and program performance in a relational, web-based database. The Vermont AOE will track and report follow-up performance measures relating to employment and post-secondary entrance through data sharing agreements with the core partners. Of notable importance to us is increasing the number of low skilled students served in AEL activities in Vermont, and helping students achieve measurable skill gains particularly at the lower skill levels.

Historically, skill gains for adult education students with skills at the secondary school level in Vermont have compared favorably to those in other states. In contrast, skill gains for students at the lower skill levels have not been favorable as compared to other states.

Vermont is developing a State Longitudinal Data System (SLDS), which will eventually house the AEL database (DataWorks). Existing elements will be modified and/or added to as needed in order to meet the needs under WIOA and the Unified State Plan.

To be accountable for the public investment in the learners that we serve, to communicate our efforts more transparently, and to be able to acknowledge our strengths and successes, the Vermont AOE will establish a particular, simplified report. (The full range of other reports will continue to be available in real time to programs.) It will be made available in real time to adult education providers, and local results will be posted semiannually to the VT AOE's website. In plain language it will show the number of students served, the distribution of levels and skill gains, results against the common performance indicators, and other basic information determined to be relevant to assessing quality.

Based on this common public reference Vermont AOE will establish on-going and regular (quarterly) communication about program performance with adult education providers with achieving target levels of performance as a primary goal. The annual performance targets are anticipated to be set in a climate of realistic continuous program improvement. Program performance that is on target will be acknowledged and celebrated. Program performance that does not meet targets will receive the timely attention of the Vermont AOE. A program improvement plan will be established in collaboration with the local provider.

Targeted technical assistance, further training and support in relation to these plans of improvement will be delivered to the program. High quality professional development opportunities, as required within State Leadership activities, are to be aligned with areas of program need based on their performance. Past performance will be taken into account in awarding funds as required through AEFLA funding competitions managed by the Vermont AOE.

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAMS

Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Unified and Combined State Plan Requirements

VI. Program-Specific Requirements for Core State Plan Programs

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION

Federal Fiscal Year 2017

(a) Input of State Rehabilitation Council.

Input provided by the State Rehabilitation Council

The State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) and DVR continue to enjoy a collaborative working relationship. SRC members are invited to participate on various DVR planning and implementation committees. The DVR Director provides quarterly written and oral updates on programs, activities, and outcomes. In addition, DVR Program Managers, Regional Managers and field staff frequently make presentations to the full SRC and gather feedback and suggestions to improve services. The following is a summary of the SRC's activities taken directly from the 2015 SRC annual report. For more information on the VT SRC and a copy of this report go to www.VTSRC.org

2015 SRC Steering Committee Report by Adam Leonard, SRC Vice-Chair

The Vermont State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) Steering Committee is charged with the task of considering and deciding upon necessary SRC business between meetings of the full Council. The Committee set agendas for the full Council meetings taking into consideration topics most pertinent and timely to the operation of the SRC. The Steering Committee achieved its goal and guided the VT SRC to a very productive year.

The most pertinent area of focus for this year's committee was the impact of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) on Vermont VR. The Steering Committee organized some fantastic presentations from VR staff at the full member meetings, regarding the impact of Pre-Employment Transition Services (PETS) and the new Common Performance Measures.

Another area of focus for the Steering Committee was SRC membership. In 2015 the SRC had 6 members resign and 3 members whose terms ended. The Steering Committee worked with SRC Coordinator Rebekah Stephens, to find new members to replace those leaving the committee. The Steering Committee commends Rebekah's diligence and effort in securing new members and has happily welcomed 4 new members already this year.

Finally, the Steering Committee worked on planning the 2015 VT SRC annual retreat. The Committee is excited to have created an agenda that combines opportunities for the SRC members to connect and build relationships, with opportunities to celebrate 2015 successes and plan for 2016 priorities.

Also of note, is the recognition of the SRC chairperson, Kerry White. The Steering Committee would like to extend a special thank you for her leadership and guidance this year.

2015 SRC Policy & Procedures Committee Report by Kerry White, P&P Committee Chair

The Policy and Procedures Committee traditionally reviews and revises the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) policies on a three-year cycle; this allows work on other tasks

including spending guidelines and a periodic review of the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) By-Laws.

The Policy and Procedure Committee chose to refrain from revising chapters in anticipation of the finalized federal regulations formulated in response to WIOA (Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014). The committee members speculated that the new regulations would likely have an impact on the DVR policies and procedures manual.

The Policy and Procedure committee discussed the possibility of submitting comments regarding the proposed regulations. After reviewing the proposed comments made by DVR, the SRC made the decision to support those comments.

The Policy and Procedure committee took the opportunity to discuss which term should now be used for individuals utilizing the services of DVR. The committee preferred the term “eligible individual”, and for a person not eligible for services to be termed “applicant”.

DVR made all the recommended changes on the previously reviewed eleven chapters; Chapter 104-Division of the Blind and Visually Impaired, Chapter 107-Ticket to Work, Chapter 202-Eligibility, Chapter 203-Individual Plan for Employment, Chapter 205-Post Employment Services, Chapter 207-Authorization and Approval of Expenditures, Chapter 208-Expenditures in Status, Chapter 301-Counseling and Guidance, Chapter 305-Personal Services, Chapter 310-Supported Employment, Chapter 311-Training.

The completed chapters were made available for public comment. Updated chapters are available for review on the DVR website and are provided in a new viewing format that makes them easily accessible to individuals with visual impairments. In addition, they clearly outline what is policy and what is guidance. All future chapters will be made available in this format. The Policy and Procedure Committee is looking forward to continuing to review and revise chapters in 2016 in a manner consistent with the new WIOA regulations.

The Policy and Procedure Committee seeks to foster policies and procedures that will provide successful attainment and retention of employment for individuals with disabilities who seek assistance from DVR. The Committee has open, candid discussions about the policies and procedures and strives to produce high quality material for use by DVR staff and the individuals seeking their assistance.

As Chair of the Policies and Procedures Committee, I would like to thank DVR and the Committee members for their dedication and hard work. It has been a pleasure working with each of you.

2015 SRC Advocacy, Outreach & Education Committee Report by Sarah Launderville, AOE Committee Chair

National advocacy issues have been the focus of discussion for the AOE Committee as the Workforce Innovation & Opportunity Act (WIOA) moved into implementation during 2015. The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) is remaining within the Rehabilitation Services Administration; however a unified state plan will be developed between DVR, Department of Labor, and the Agency of Education. The challenges around this and the desire to maintain the current level of DVR services will guide conversations in 2016.

While the Committee focused on the bigger national picture, issues closer to home were also explored. Discussions around offering basic Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) training for DVR and Vermont Association of Business, Industry and Rehabilitation (VABIR) staff took place in early 2015. ADA training sessions were offered in November and December 2015. The Committee members also discussed corrections as a barrier to employment for DVR consumers, and how Creative Workforce Solutions has had a positive effect on this issue.

2015 saw the fruition of ongoing advocacy efforts in the approval of mandates to enhance the work incentives of the Medicaid for Working Persons with Disabilities (MWPD) program. After years of advocacy on the part of many dedicated individuals, the Vermont Legislature signed S. 138 into law.

Education is a big part of the Committee's focus, and to that end Committee members along with DVR staff spent a day at the Statehouse interacting with legislators.

The AOE Committee is dedicated to ensuring the level of services offered to DVR consumers remains consistent with an ever present goal towards improvement. With this in mind, the Committee members set some broad goals for 2016.

Committee members have developed an action plan that will allow AOE to be mindful of the Medicaid budget, ensure that ground is not lost with the new WIOA regulations, review the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program's (SNAP) work requirements, and monitor the national implementation of Pre-Employment Transition Services (PETS).

I would like to thank all of the Committee members for their hard work and dedication. The last 6 years have been a wonderful experience for me. I have enjoyed working with all of you!

2015 SRC Performance Review Committee Report by Adam Leonard, PR Committee Chair

The Vermont State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) Performance Review (PR) Committee is responsible for reviewing, analyzing and advising the Vermont Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) on its performance in fulfilling its mission and responsibilities. To that end, the PR Committee focused its efforts this year in three distinct areas: researching the expunging of criminal records and its impact on VR, discussing feedback received at the VR annual retreat in the SRC informational session, and examining VT VR's Order of Selection Process.

In February of 2015 the committee revisited a concern brought up during a panel discussion on mental health disability closures in June 2014. It was shared that Vermont's process for expunging criminal records is rather arduous and often negatively impacts the ability of VR

clients to obtain employment. Following robust discussion it was decided that the AOE committee would take on the further exploration of this topic.

The PR Committee also spent time reviewing feedback received during a breakout session at VT VR's annual retreat. Of particular interest was feedback that VR staff lacked regular communication on what was happening within the SRC. Takeaways from this discussion were that while this was not necessarily the opinion of all staff, enhanced communication between the SRC and VR counselors would be welcomed. To that end, the PR committee developed a newsletter to be shared quarterly with VR staff to allow them insight into the SRC's work and priorities.

In June 2015, the PR committee examined data for cases served according to Order of Selection (OOS). The data reviewed was for the period FFY 2012 to present. An unexpected data point discovered during this process was that VR is spending, on average, the same amount of money on Category 3 cases as they are on Category 1 and 2 cases. As a result, VT VR decided to research changing their OOS process. Any changes proposed by VR will be shared with and reviewed by the PR committee.

Looking forward to 2016, the PR committee anticipates being actively involved in the changes VR will be making in response to the new WIOA regulations. We are excited to partner with VR in successfully achieving the new standards that have been established.

SRC Comments on State Plan Goals and Priorities

Historically the Vermont SRC and DVR have worked together to produce the state plan and the DVR needs assessment. The SRC Performance Review committee was the designated working group to partner with DVR staff on the development of the state plan. The committee was particularly instrumental in developing the goals and priorities, and the proposed new Order of Selection categories. The full SRC met on December 3rd, 2015 to review the draft plan. The draft plan was approved for public comment by consensus.

The designated State unit's response to the Council's input and recommendations

No response required

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

Not Applicable

(b) Request for Waiver of State Wideness.

Vermont DVR is not requesting a waiver of state wideness.

(c) Cooperative Agreements with Agencies Not Carrying Out Activities Under the Statewide

Workforce Development System.

Federal, State and local agencies and programs

Vermont DVR participated in a joint grant application with the Department of Children and Families, the Department of Labor and Community College of Vermont to serve SNAP Beneficiaries. The grant is a SNAP Employment and Training grant designed to target beneficiaries who are recent offenders, individuals with substance abuse disorders and/or are homeless. The design will implement a clinical assessment to determine which beneficiaries are potentially eligible for DVR services. The design models the coordinated approach to services envisioned under WIOA. The project will be enrolling individuals in FFY 17.

Vermont DVR has a partnership with its Employee Assistance Program (EAP); the Vermont Association of Business, Industry and Rehabilitation (VABIR); and the State of Vermont Office of Child Support (OCS), to serve non-custodial parents with disabilities. The program, called Work4Kids, is offered in 10 counties with designated VR Counselors in each region.

VR Counselors provide a range of services to help Work4Kids participants obtain and sustain employment so they can consistently meet their child support obligations. These services include vocational and other assessments, creating an individualized plan to address potential barriers to employment, counseling and guidance, and referral to other service providers when appropriate. In addition, each VR Counselor works with an Employment Consultant (VABIR), who provides assistance in work search, job placement and post employment services. For individuals presenting multiple barriers to employment, an individualized service model is utilized. The approach focuses on progressive steps to employment including company tours, informational interviews, work experiences, community service placements, work assessments, and job shadowing.

A large number of non-custodial parents with disabilities have never been helped in any way by the State. Reaching out to and assisting this population has produced positive outcomes. DVR has assisted many Work 4 Kids participants in securing employment. To date, non-custodial parents referred to the Work4Kids program are paying approximately five times the amount of child support compared with those not referred to the program.

Vermont DVR has been assisting individuals to apply for Social Security disability benefits for more than a decade. Assistance has focused on individuals with very severe disabilities, often undiagnosed and untreated, that prevent them from being successful in employment. The goal is to assist those with severe disabilities to receive a more stable source of support that allows them to pursue treatment options that may lead to reengagement with DVR to work on employment goals. Populations being served are those receiving TANF benefits, those on DVR caseloads, offenders exiting prison, non-custodial parents engaged in the Work4Kids program, and individuals receiving General Assistance, an emergency benefit program for individuals with medical and other barriers to employment.

In FFY 2015, 202 individuals were successful applicants for Social Security disability benefits. There are 9 full-time equivalent Social Security Specialists providing services to the TANF

and General Assistance populations, our VR clients, and individuals within the prison facilities in Vermont.

In addition to Social Security assistance, DVR serves offenders with disabilities to achieve employment. Employment is a critical component to prevent recidivism and to assist offenders released from prison in successful reintegration into their communities. DVR has designated VR Counselors in each district office to serve as a single point of contact for the Department of Corrections.

Currently there is one Offender Reentry Employment Specialist based in Burlington who is dedicated to employment assistance to offenders with disabilities. Jointly funded by VR and the Department of Corrections, this specialist runs employment groups and does one-on-one job placement for individuals exiting jail or who are on probation.

Assistive Technology

The State Assistive Technology (AT) program is housed within the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation as part of the Department of Disabilities Aging and Independent Living (DAIL). The AT staff are housed in DVR and receive operational and business office support through DAIL. DVR provides funding for AT services for eligible consumers that are not covered under the Tech Act.

Programs carried out by the Under Secretary for Rural Development and the Department of Agriculture

None

Non-educational Agencies out of school youth

DVR has a long standing agreement with the Department of Mental Health, Children's Unit, Department of Corrections, and Department for Children and Families to fund the JOBS program. The JOBS program is a supported employment program serving youth with emotional behavioral disabilities ages 14 to 26. The partnering departments provide the state general fund match for the Medicaid Global Commitment to fund the ongoing support services. The JOBS programs are housed within the Designated Community Mental Health Agencies in the twelve Agency of Human Services Districts.

State use contracting programs

None

(d) Coordination with Education Officials. Describe:

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.

DVR has created a Transition Unit in VR Central Office. This unit is staffed by a Transition Program Director and Coordinator who support all transition activities statewide. The DVR Transition Unit and DVR Director routinely meet with Vermont Agency of Education staff to coordinate services.

Vermont DVR has a long standing commitment to serve students in transition. Since 2002, the number of transition-aged youth served by DVR has more than doubled, and the percent of all DVR rehabilitation closures has increased from 23% to 31% in FFY15.

Youth age 14 - 24 served* and achieved a successful employment outcome since 2002:

<u>FFY</u>	<u>Youth Served</u>	<u>Percent of All Served</u>	<u>Youth Rehabs</u>	<u>Percent of All Rehabs</u>
2002	1,224	25%	285	23%
2003	1,405	26%	307	23%
2004	1,534	28%	349	26%
2005	1,633	29%	371	26%
2006	1,672	30%	399	27%
2007	1,687	31%	394	27%
2008	1,895	34%	461	30%
2009	2,121	34%	451	30%
2010	2,338	34%	454	30%
2011	2,489	34%	479	30%
2012	2,556	34%	524	29%
2013	2,523	35%	613	34%
2014	2,557	35%	588	31%
2015	2,642	37%	590	31%

*"Served" is defined as having an open case with an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) during the year (this does not include individuals in referral or application status).

With the passage of WIOA in October 2014, DVR built on their existing infrastructure for transition- aged youth, to implement Pre-Employment Transition Services (PETS). To meet PETS requirements, DVR has implemented a bold strategy to create a continuum of services for youth from high school to adult life. Specifically, DVR has implemented the following:

Dedicated In School DVR Counselors Providing PETS

DVR has reassigned 14 DVR Counselors to form a team serving exclusively in-school students and focusing on Pre-Employment Transition Services activities as required in WIOA. This change went into effect on July 1, 2015. The 14 in-school Transition Counselors are operating out of all twelve DVR district offices and cover all sixty Vermont high school districts. Four of these counselors have been designated Senior Transition Counselors, and provide peer support to a “pod” of other counselors in a variety of local VR offices. These counselors work directly with all Vermont high schools plus a variety of technical centers, and alternative and independent schools. Transition Counselors have dedicated caseloads and they now meet with students in their local high schools as early as their freshman year, focusing on both short and long-term goals. Counselors also serve as a community resource to the schools, they collaborate with interagency partnerships, and they work as catalysts for change to improve the transition process for youth with disabilities. Additionally, all Transition Counselors now have iPhones and laptops to use as capacity and counseling tools.

Dedicated Young Adult Counselors Serving Youth Post High School Exit

DVR wanted to be sure the agency had capacity to serve youth who received PETS at the point they exited high school. Therefore a new team of 14 DVR Counselors has been reassigned to work with young adults (graduated or left school for any reason through their twenties). The in school Transition Counselors will coordinate with the Young Adult Counselors each spring to facilitate transition of VR consumers from the student to the adult caseloads.

Dedicated CRP Services; The Youth Employment Specialist Model

In order to provide PETS, DVR determined we needed specialized employment placement services designed to meet the needs of students. Therefore, DVR created the Youth Employment Specialist model, and contracted with the Vermont Association of Business Industry and Rehabilitation (VABIR) for youth employment services in Vermont. VABIR provides 14 Youth Employment Specialists to support the Pre-employment Transition Services (PETS) work of the DVR Transition Counselors in all areas of the state. The YES staff and the in school VR counselor work as a team with each high school. The teams meet on a quarterly basis with the DVR Transition Program Director. Both the DVR Transition Counselors and YES staff received initial joint training by TransCen, Inc. in October 2015, and will be working with an outside contractor to create and implement a technical assistance plan for the upcoming year.

Summer Opportunities for Students

DVR has begun to expand summer activities that will enhance and expand on activities facilitated by the VR Transition Counselor and Youth Employment Specialist during the school year. The types of summer activities will range from group career exploration and workshops for freshman, to work-based opportunities like unpaid, subsidized and competitive short term employment, for sophomores and juniors. In the summer of 2015 a number of activities were offered, including farm and community work with the Vermont Youth Conservation Core in three areas of the state. DVR will be expanding the offerings for summer 2016 to have more of a statewide focus.

JOBS Program Expansion

The JOBS program provides supported employment services for youth with severe emotional and behavioral disabilities. The programs are operated through local community mental health agencies. Beginning July 1, 2015, the JOBS Program expanded the eligibility of youth to include students who have not yet graduated from high school as part of PETS implementation. JOBS staff and the in school Transition Counselors coordinate outreach and services with the local high schools.

Benefits Planning for Students

The Benefits Counseling team is working to develop strategies, practices, and tools specific to students and their families. This will ensure they have access to accurate and appropriate benefits information that will allow them to make informed decisions around employment and education choices. DVR Benefits Counselors will utilize knowledge gained from prior experiences in working with students, as well as available technical assistance resources, to work closely the DVR Transition Counselors in their regions. These teams will identify eligible individuals for referral, and find creative ways to engage students and their families in benefits planning in order to enhance students' possibilities of employment and their development of independent living skills.

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

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

The DVR Director and DVR Transition Unit meet quarterly with the Special Education Director of the Vermont Agency of Education and AOE Transition staff, to coordinate the annual Transition Conference, to discuss support and collaboration regarding improvement for Indicators 13 and 14, and to stay coordinated on other transition issues. AOE Transition staff provide ongoing technical assistance to the DVR Transition Counselors, and the DVR Transition Counselors coordinate information and education with schools in their local service areas, including AOE staff attending the monthly DVR Transition Counselor meeting at least once a year. Additionally, VR now has a signed Inter-Agency Agreement between VR and AOE.

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

All DVR Transition Counselors use the *Guide to Secondary Transition services: Helping Students with Disabilities Move From School to Work*, with special educators in each of the high schools they serve. They also use the *Transition Counselor Role and Responsibilities* for guidance. They facilitate a “meet and greet” in the fall with special educators to identify specific needs, issues and obstacles in their schools, and create a plan to address them. Local Core Transition Team meetings are being reinstated around the state to support the work of PETS in WIOA.

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

Financial responsibilities for services provided to students with disabilities are addressed in the Interagency Agreement between the Agency of Human Services and the Department of Education as signed in June 2005. That agreement states: “For eligible students, DVR will pay for services to the extent that funds are available at the time the services are needed, including assistive technology services and devices, that are identified in an approved IPE in keeping with DVR’s order of selection for services that:

- (1) Are consistent with the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and implementing regulations including but not limited to 34 C.F.R. §361.53; the IDEA, including but not limited to 34 C.F.R. §§300.5, 300.6, 300.347(b), and 300.348; the Assistive Technology Act of 2004, PL 108-364; and Vermont State Plan; and
- (2) Promote or facilitate the accomplishment of vocational rehabilitation goals and any intermediate rehabilitation objectives identified in the student’s IPE to ensure the student’s successful transition to employment, post-secondary education, or training within 12 months of the student’s exit from school.”

The Agency of Education remains responsible for ensuring a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) for all students with disabilities. The Agreement goes on to state: “The IDEA does not limit the responsibility of non-educational agencies from providing or paying for some or all of the costs of FAPE to children with disabilities. However, this shall not be construed to expand or otherwise alter state and/or federal law requirements imposed on any non-education agency.”

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

As noted, DVR has now established a cadre of 14 in school Transition Counselors who serve all sixty public high schools in the state. We expect their presence in the schools working with students as young as aged 14, will greatly improve the early identification of students who need transition services. Also as noted, DVR has established a cadre of Young Adult Counselors to facilitate transition of students from PETS to the adult DVR program. The DVR Transition Unit also coordinates with the Division of Developmental Services (DDS) to identify students who are likely to need transitional support into the adult developmental disabilities program.

(e) Cooperative Agreements with Private Nonprofit Organizations.

DVR maintains Social Security Administration, Ticket to Work cooperative agreements with most of the private non-profit employment service providers in the state. Agreements exist with all community mental health and developmental services agencies. In the spring of 2008, DVR negotiated a new Ticket to Work cooperative agreement with the agencies in anticipation of the new regulations to be published later that year. The new agreement has been in place since July 1, 2008 and has generated significant new revenue for providers that help beneficiaries earn at higher levels.

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

DVR has a well established agreement with the Vermont Development Disabilities Services Division (DDSD) to provide extended services for individuals with developmental disabilities. The primary source of funding for extended services for individuals with developmental disabilities is Home and Community-based Medicaid Waiver funds. In FY 2016, DVR will fund 14 programs serving people with developmental disabilities. DVR provides \$1,016,364 in Section 110 funding to support the upfront placement and support costs. DDSD provides the ongoing extended supports through Home and Community Based Medicaid Waiver funding.

DVR funds supported employment services for youth with emotional/behavioral disabilities in partnership with the Department of Mental Health, Children's Division. The JOBS programs are a model for serving this high needs and high risk population. DVR provides the upfront job placement and support through grants to community agencies. The extended supports are provided through Medicaid Global Commitment funds.

In prior fiscal years, DVR also had an agreement with the Department of Mental Health to provide extended services for adults with significant mental illness served through the Community Rehabilitation and Treatment Program (CRT). In July 2015, DVR decided to reallocate the VR grant funds to Pre-Employment Transition Services in order to meet the federal mandate. The CRT programs continue to provide supported employment services using a Medicaid case rate funding model. DVR continues to partner with the CRT programs to provide VR services at the local level.

For individuals with other disabilities, no state funding for extended services exists in Vermont. As a result there are limited options for providing extended services for individuals with brain injuries, sensory disabilities, severe learning disabilities and other disabilities. There are some limited options to use Social Security Administration Impairment Related Work Expenses or Plans to Achieve Self Support. These options however, are only feasible in a minority of cases.

(g) Coordination with Employers.

DUAL CUSTOMER DESIGN

Vermont's dual-customer approach considers both individuals with disabilities *and* the business community as key customers of the Vocational Rehabilitative program. To that end, Vermont DVR has established a cadre of Business Account Managers across the state whose primary responsibilities are to develop and sustain relationships with the businesses in their respective communities. The Business Account Managers also facilitate local Employment Teams made up of the various employment programs serving Vermonters with disabilities. The Employment Teams are designed to improve collaboration between programs and streamline employer outreach in order to maximize resources and increase opportunities for candidates served by the Vocational Rehabilitation program.

In addition to the Business Account Managers, Vermont DVR contracts Employment Consultants who provide placement services and assistance to individual candidates, including retention services. These

Employment Consultants, in concert with their respective Business Account Managers, are in the community developing contacts and establishing relationships with businesses of all sizes. Due to the rural nature of Vermont, and the fact that trusting relationships are built over time, Vermont has successfully developed ways to track employer engagement.

EMPLOYER DATA

Tracking employer outreach is maintained utilizing Salesforce, a Customer Relations Management (CRM) solution used by many large corporations. All Business Account Managers and Employment Consultants enter information into this system. The information is transparent to everyone and only business information, not client information, is captured. To track employer engagement, the following information is gathered:

Opportunities:

Opportunities are defined as any activity, paid or un-paid, offered by a particular business. These activities range from informational interviews and job shadows, to short-term work experiences and paid employment. All opportunities are captured for each business.

Contacts:

Contacts are defined as the individuals in a business with whom Employment Consultants and/or Business Account Managers have developed a relationship. In many cases these contacts are Hiring Managers, Owners and Supervisors.

Activities:

Each time an Employment Consultant or Business Account Manager interacts with a contact, an activity note is entered into Salesforce. This allows all Employment Team members to see a running history of conversations and activities with that business.

IMPLICATIONS FOR DVR CUSTOMERS

Business outreach has been a priority for Vermont DVR because:

- (1) In developing relationships over time, we are able to position ourselves as a staffing service with a variety of options for businesses to consider;
- (2) Coordinated business outreach, captured in Salesforce, allows for greater variety in the kinds of businesses we are meeting, and the concurrent variety in opportunities for DVR candidates;
- (3) Gathering information on businesses willing to offer worksite experiences, company tours, and informational interview, will better support career exploration and skill development for both adults and students;
- (4) Our business partners can support Pre-Employment Transition Services activities in schools, including practice interviews, company tours and overviews, and identifying summer employment opportunities;
- (5) Business partners can support the work of our in-school Transition Counselors, providing information on industry trends, skill requirements and other factors related to particular employment sectors;
- (6) By engaging businesses in working with students, the students will have a better understanding of their local labor market through work experiences, job shadows and paid employment. This in turn should prepare them for transition to either post-secondary education or employment.

(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:

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

Historically, DVR and the State Medicaid Agency, the Vermont Department of Health Access (DVHA), have not had a formal established working relationship. The two agencies have periodically collaborated around a variety of issues including the provision and payment for assistive technology services. However this has been on an ad hoc basis. Once the WIOA regulations are finalized, DVR will seek technical assistance from RSA on developing a formal MOU to outline the working relationship going forward. We anticipate a more formal partnership will yield additional opportunities to develop employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

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

The partnership between the Developmental Disabilities Services Division (DDSD) and Vocational Rehabilitation is well established. VR and DDSD braid funding to promote a joint Supported Employment effort to meet Federal rules and guidelines. VR policies and procedures instruct counselors to open a case for DDSD consumers who may require long-term services regardless of level of disability. This joint partnership utilizes Title 110 and VI-B funding to provide Supported Employment grant funding for each DDSD provider. DDSD provides the individual long term employment support through Medicaid Waiver funding. The DVR grant model braided with Medicaid Waiver funding has yielded better outcomes than a fee-for-service approach, and both employment rate and new employment placement numbers have risen across the state through this partnered effort. DVR and DDSD leadership meet at least quarterly to maintain the partnership.

The State agency responsible for providing mental health services.

While Vermont Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) no longer has a formal contractual program with Designated Agencies (DAs) to deliver and meet outcomes for mental health services, VR continues to partner with the Department of Mental Health (DMH) to support services that may voluntarily be adopted by regions and programs. DMH executes a formal grant agreement with DAs to fund supported employment services across Community Rehabilitation and Treatment (CRT) programs through a case-rate arrangement. While VR no longer has a grant relationship with DAs in the CRT programs, VR continues to partner with DMH by maintaining an identified VR liaison for each DA, as well as offering VABIR Employment Consultant services to assist shared CRT/VR consumers. VR and DMH meet monthly to review the partnered activities that may best support CRT programs, and are exploring joint-funded pilot options to better serve youth with severe mental illness.

(i) Comprehensive System of Personnel Development; Data System on Personnel and Personnel Development.

Data System on Personnel and Personnel Development

Qualified Personnel Needs.

DVR has a total of 126 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) staff positions. The Division operates using a matrix management structure headed by the Division Director. The breakdown of staff is as follows:

Full Time Equivalents	Position Titles and Functions
1	Division Director

6.8	Senior Central Office Managers including the Field Services Manager, Employment Services Manager, Quality Assurance and Business Systems Manager, Staff Development and Training Coordinator, DVR Administrative Services Manager, Budget and Policy Manager, and the Transition Program Director
7	Regional Managers overseeing the 12 district offices
14	DVR Transition Counselors serving an in-school youth caseload
13	DVR Young Adult Counselors serving a youth caseload
30	DVR Counselors Serving an adult and BOND caseload
7	Benefits Counselors
4	Rehabilitation Counselors for the Deaf
15.5	Program Techs and Administrative Support Staff
12	Employee Assistance Manager and Specialists
6	Special Project Coordinators
2	Data Management and Program Evaluation Staff
3	Business Account Managers
2	Assistive Technology Staff and Manager
3	Miscellaneous Central Office Staff

DVR served 9,618 consumers in FFY 2015, or 76 consumers for each FTE. DVR assesses the ability to provide an adequate supply of qualified State rehabilitation professionals and paraprofessional personnel through analyzing customer data collected on a yearly basis and comparing it to staff capacity to provide services adequately. DVR collects data related to caseload size, number of referrals received, applications submitted, cases certified, plans created, and training and employment outcomes at individual, district, regional and statewide levels. This analysis informs the number of positions designated to each geographic area and the design and delivery of services. This analysis and subsequent staffing decisions, related to assurance of adequate personnel development, are completed with the oversight of the DVR Senior Management team and the input of the DVR Regional Management team.

Projections of personnel that will be needed in five years to meet the demand of the number of individuals to be served are static. This is due in part to the way the DVR program is structured, which will allow an increasing number of individuals to receive quality service with the existing personnel. All State rehabilitation personnel will continue to obtain the required level of education and training within established timeframes and with adequate supervision to ensure quality service delivery.

Personnel Development.

Vermont has no accredited graduate school offering a master's degree in Rehabilitation Counseling. To meet the Comprehensive System for Professional Development (CSPD) standards, a counselor needs either a master's degree in Rehabilitation Counseling or a master's degree in a related field plus completion of four additional core rehabilitation courses.

Assumption College, University of Massachusetts, and Springfield College of Human Services typically have a range of 35-45 students who graduate with a master's or CAG degree in Rehabilitation Counseling per year. These graduates would be qualified to fill counseling vacancies without additional coursework. New England colleges, which offer degrees in Social Work, Special Education School Guidance, Mental Health Counseling, or Community Mental Health Services, also produce qualified graduates.

Currently one (1) student is enrolled at Springfield College of Human Services, one (1) student is enrolled at Johnson State College of VT, two (2) students are enrolled with UMass-Boston, and six (6) students are enrolled at Assumption College. Of these staff students, two (2) are pursuing their Masters Degrees in Mental Health Counseling and are also taking the required core courses. The remainders of the staff students already have master's degrees and are only enrolled in the required core courses. In the prior year, one (1) staff person completed a master's degree in Rehabilitation through Assumption College and obtained certification as a Rehabilitation Counselor. Additionally, two(2) other staff who already met the educational requirements through a related degree and core course completion, are participating in a voluntary three-year master's degree program in Rehabilitation Counseling through the University of Southern Maine, with the goal of obtaining Rehabilitation certifications as a Rehabilitation Counselors upon completion.

Plan for Recruitment, Preparation, and Retention of Qualified Personnel

DVR recruits qualified personnel through Assumption College, University of Massachusetts, and Springfield College of Human Services, who have received a master's degree in Rehabilitation Counseling. These graduates meet the highest standard of education and are able to obtain certification at the highest level for this field. DVR also recruits qualified personnel in a related field such as Social Work, Special Education, School Guidance, Mental Health Counseling, or Community Mental Health Services from New England colleges, by posting positions on internal employment pages of the various college websites. All of these graduates are candidates for counseling vacancies if they are willing to complete the four core rehabilitation courses.

State personnel policies require DVR to consider qualified applicants on the Reduction in Force list before other applicants. DVR advertises openings through the State recruitment system, through local newspapers, on-line on www.CareerBuilder.com or www.Indeed.com and by listing openings through college placement services. Assumption College, University of Massachusetts, and Springfield College of Human Services advertise counselor openings by forwarding job opportunities to their list of recent graduates.

When recruiting staff to serve a specific population such as the deaf and hard of hearing, additional recruitment efforts are employed to reach professionals within that community and associated training programs. The state of Vermont is an equal opportunity employer and there is emphasis on recruiting and hiring individuals with disabilities. We encourage DVR consumers to apply for posted positions and obtain education necessary to be competitive and DVR also promotes close working partnerships with the Vermont Center for Independent Living, designated Mental Health

Agencies, the Refugee Resettlement program, Vermont Works for Women and other organizations who serve people with disabilities and/or are of a minority status.

Personnel Standards

The Division follows standards set forth in the Comprehensive System for Professional Development (CSPD). This prescribes a national standard for vocational rehabilitation counselor qualifications. This standard gives highest priority to counselors with a master's degree in Rehabilitation Counseling. The second level of priority is for counselors with related degrees in Social Work, Psychology, Mental Health Counseling or Special Education. This group must complete four additional courses to meet the standard: Foundations of Rehabilitation, Career Counseling, Vocational Assessment, and Medical and Psychosocial Aspects of Disability. When unable to recruit qualified candidates that meet the two highest levels, DVR hires counselors with bachelor's degrees and supports their graduate training through our RSA training grant. Though not required by the Division or by RSA, some counselors continue on to become Certified Rehabilitation Counselors (CRC) through the Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification.

The following is a breakdown of the educational plans for DVR staff. These plans fall into a three-category system, based on the availability of existing financial resources and are consistent with any national or State-approved or recognized requirements that apply to the profession or discipline in which personnel are providing VR services.

Category 1: Staff who meet the highest standards for education and/or certification: Staff in this category have completed a master's degree in Rehabilitation Counseling and/or have received certification as a Rehabilitation Counselor. DVR currently has ten (10) staff or 16% who are in this category.

Category 2: Staff who do not yet meet the highest standards and are currently enrolled in an approved graduate or undergraduate program: Staff in this category are pursuing a master's degree in Rehabilitation Counseling or a related field and have additional supervision and oversight. DVR currently has two (2) staff or 3% who are in this category.

Category 3: Staff who have graduate degrees in counseling or a related field and are required to take four core rehabilitation courses in order to comply with the CSPD requirements: DVR currently has nine (9) staff or 14% who are in this category.

The percentage of our current counselors having met the CSPD standard through Categories 1 and 3 is 83%, which is 53 Counselors out of 64. Two more staff are scheduled to complete the CSPD requirement by mid-May 2016.

The timelines for meeting graduate training are written into the job specifications, which all candidates have access to on the State of Vermont Department of Human Resources website. Counselors are required to meet the standard within three years. All training information related to core courses and completion of master degrees is stored on a spreadsheet maintained by the Division's Staff Development and Training Coordinator. Supervisors are given quarterly updates to monitor progress.

DVR staff upon hire, are required to attend a 30 hour DVR services training program taught by the Staff Development and Training Coordinator. This training covers DVR's Policies and Procedures Manual, the full vocational rehabilitation process from referral to successful closure, effective caseload management, collaboration with partners providing employment services, and all other aspects of the vocational rehabilitation.

Staff Development

Staff development opportunities are provided annually to ensure all personnel receive appropriate and adequate training in multiple categories that include assessment, vocational counseling, job placement, and rehabilitation technology.

DVR staff receive training related to assessment through webinars and in-person training offered by the Staff Development and Training Coordinator and Assessment Champion team, which is comprised of staff who are knowledgeable about administration, interpretation, and application of various vocational assessments. This team also reviews assessment tools on a yearly basis to identify those that are no longer relevant or those that need to be included in the DVR Assessment Inventory, which is a selection of assessment tools used to assess a person's interests, values, aptitudes, and skills. Skillful interviewing also serves as a form of assessment and DVR staff and contracted partners receive introductory and advanced training in Motivational Interviewing to enhance this skill set.

Motivational Interviewing (MI) training was introduced to DVR with comprehensive training for all staff in 2014. In alignment with the goals of the initiative, internal trainers are now in place statewide and provide monthly training for district staff. Statewide introductory and advanced MI trainings are offered quarterly for all new staff.

Motivational Interviewing is a counseling approach that enhances counseling skills in many arenas and is an especially good fit for vocational rehabilitation counseling. Nationally, Motivational Interviewing is being used by many State Vocational Rehabilitation Agencies/Departments to provide services and effectively engage consumers in making changes that improve their lives. MI is a person-centered approach with a focus on client choice, self-efficacy, and autonomy. This practice is especially useful for consumers with disabilities. There are also well-established results available regarding its effectiveness with those who experience substance abuse issues as disabling conditions. A high number of DVR consumers struggle with substance and alcohol addiction, which reinforces the relevance of having staff trained in MI techniques and practice.

Sustainability of this initiative is underway and will occur through ongoing development of the internal DVR MI trainers to ensure training is available to all DVR staff and meets the training requirements of those providing direct service. The internal DVR MI trainers have already received additional MI focused facilitation training and next steps include advanced audio-recording coding and scoring training. This will allow the MI trainers to evaluate staff level of proficiency in use of MI skills, strategies, and approach in the vocational counseling process with

fidelity to the model/approach and design training and support that responds to the area needing development.

Staff development related to job placement is provided through several venues. Newly hired contracted staff who provide placement services, participate in a required online training program, created in collaboration by DVR and Community College of Vermont. Internal structures that ensure development of knowledge related to the labor market and effective job placement include regularly scheduled meetings hosted by the DVR funded Business Account Managers. One such meeting is comprised of employment staff connected by Creative Workforce Solutions, a DVR initiated collaboration of Agency of Human Services funded employment programs, which promotes cooperative job placement and employer relationships.

Training related to rehabilitation technology is provided initially through the DVR services training program for new hires. Additional training and staff development is provided in collaboration with the Assistive Technology Program through on-site, video conferenced, and webinar based trainings, information sessions, and regularly scheduled staff meetings.

A specific staff group, the DVR Benefit Counselors, receive specialized training to ensure the provision of quality services in working with customers who receive monetary or medical benefits. Ongoing training and support is provided by a DVR Project Manager. The local Social Security Administration (SSA) Area Work Incentives Coordinator provides quarterly trainings to the Benefits Counselors on a variety of SSA Work Incentives issues. SSA also provides training and technical assistance for Benefits Counselors through contracts with Cornell and Virginia Commonwealth University. DVR is the SSA Work Incentives Planning and Assistance grantee for the State of Vermont. The six Benefits Counselors working under that project are certified by SSA as Certified Work Incentive Counselors (CWIC). To achieve certification, Benefits Counselors must attend a week-long training and complete a comprehensive “take home” assignment that is evaluated by Virginia Commonwealth University staff.

Procedures for the acquisition and dissemination of significant knowledge from research and other sources to designated State unit professionals and paraprofessionals. The DVR training coordinators are the primary hub for dissemination of research and training resources to field staff. Program managers, including the Transition Services Manager, the Employment Services Manager and the Benefits Counseling Program Coordinator collect and disseminate information from local and national resources. Program managers and staff are encouraged to become members of national organizations in their fields. Organizations like the National Skills Coalition or the National Association of Benefits Planning and Work Incentive Counseling (NABWIS) and excellent resources for managers and front line staff.

Personnel to address individual communication needs

The Agency of Human Services has a contract with the Association of Africans Living in VT for on-site interpretation and translation services. If an appropriate interpreter is not available, the VT

Refugee Resettlement Program has a contract with Language Learning Enterprise Inc. in Washington D.C. which provides telephonic interpretation.

Coordination of personnel development under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

The DVR Director and other senior managers meet quarterly with the Deputy Commissioner of the Agency of Education (AOE) and the Special Education Director to coordinate activities and trainings, especially around transition issues. DVR and AOE have a long history of co-sponsoring trainings and conferences for frontline staff.

(j) Statewide Assessment.

Provide an assessment of the rehabilitation needs of individuals with disabilities residing within the State.

The Rehabilitation Act (1973) requires the Vermont Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) and the Vermont State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) to jointly conduct a needs assessment every three years. The assessment is intended to form the basis for the DVR annual State plan and strategic planning activities.

The 2014 DVR and SRC Needs Assessment focused particularly on the VR services needs of the following populations:

- (A) Individuals with the most significant disabilities, particularly their need for supported employment;
- (B) Individuals with disabilities who are minorities, including refugees;
- (C) Individuals who have been unserved or underserved by DVR;
- (D) Individuals with disabilities served through the statewide Workforce Investment System.

The 2014 Needs Assessment did not include an assessment of (E) *Individuals who are youth with disabilities and students with disabilities, including, as appropriate, their need for pre-employment transition services or other transition services.* The reason the 2014 Needs Assessment did not include this population is that the assessment preceded the passage of WIOA and was not required at the time. DVR plans to conduct a comprehensive assessment of the needs of this population in the next comprehensive needs assessment scheduled for 2017.

A comprehensive report of the results of the Vermont DVR and SRC Needs Assessment was submitted in 2014. The report includes data from a variety of sources, including DVR's Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) reporting database, information from the United States Census Bureau, the American Community Survey, as well as surveys conducted by DVR. Although not specifically designed to assess unmet needs, these surveys assisted DVR in determining ways to better serve individuals with disabilities, thereby making its services more

accessible and welcoming to populations that may not be currently served. The three surveys conducted by DVR are:

Consumer Satisfaction Survey- In the spring of 2013, DVR contracted with Market Decisions, a research firm based in Maine, to survey a random sampling of DVR consumers. A total of 735 individuals completed the survey by telephone or mail, and the response rate was 44%.

Partner Survey-In the fall of 2012, prior to a major two-day retreat for all VR and VABIR staff, VR contracted with GC Consulting to assess the effectiveness and quality of its relationships with strategic partners. Interviews were done with 20 collaborating partners.

Baldrige Survey-The Baldrige Survey measures the organizational maturity of the organization as compared to other organizations across the country. Although primarily designed for private business, many government agencies have embraced the Baldrige evaluation process to improve organizational performance processes and results, to share best practices, and to guide strategic planning. In the spring of 2013, DVR conducted its third Baldrige survey. DVR staff at all levels of the organization participated in the survey, as did our VABIR partners and the State Rehabilitation Council. In all there were 223 responses, representing a 95% response rate.

Based on the data gathered and discussions with the State Rehabilitation Council, DVR Senior and Regional Managers, and the DVR Implementation Team (I-Team), the following are the key findings of the 2014 VT DVR and SRC Needs Assessment. (*not in priority order*):

The need for an increased attention to the employment needs of the mature worker.

Data used in the Needs Assessment indicates the number of individuals over age 55 is rising in Vermont, but DVR shows no similar increase in the number of rehabilitation closures in this age range. Many of the mature workers will experience age-related disabilities and may benefit from placement services to find appropriate jobs based on their priorities, interests, skills and abilities and from Assistive Technology to remain employed.

The need to ensure the continued high quality of DVR's customer service.

Based on the most recent Consumer Satisfaction Survey (2013), DVR experienced a small dip in satisfaction levels with various aspects of DVR services. DVR customers expressed some dissatisfaction with the effectiveness of employment services, the speed at which they received services, the support and understanding of DVR services, and the paperwork that is required. The Partner Survey (2012) and the Baldrige Survey (2013) also identified the need for improvement in many of the same customer service issues identified in the Consumer Satisfaction Survey. The VR I-Team has begun to analyze consumer satisfaction with the orientation process to determine ways to improve this process. Additional evaluation of areas that contributed to the small dip in customer satisfaction will be conducted through targeted focus groups across the state.

The need for increased outreach to individuals with physical disabilities.

According to DVR data, the number of individuals with a physical disability has decreased as the number of VR consumers with psychiatric and substance disorders increased. The number of closures of individuals with physical disabilities has dropped by 6% since 2009, and the percentage

of all closures has dropped by 16%. In addition, ACS data indicates that individuals with ambulatory disabilities have a higher rate of unemployment. The Baldrige survey indicated the need to improve marketing and outreach to specific consumer groups, and DVR feels that diversity in the caseload will benefit employers by being able to offer them candidates who may have qualifications for certain types of jobs. DVR has done some outreach to the medical community but not in a consistent way.

The need for improved supported employment services to individuals with psychiatric disorders.

DVR data indicates employment outcomes for individuals with psychiatric disorders has steadily declined since 2001, both in the Community Rehabilitation and Treatment (CRT) programs and in the general DVR program. There may be several contributing factors, such as the decline in CRT employment staff, the aging demographic, and competing priorities of community partner agencies. There is certainly a need to further explore the reasons for this decline in order to solve this problem.

The need to improve community rehabilitation programs.

The Vermont Association of Business, Industry and Rehabilitation (VABIR) is the primary CRP for Vermont DVR. Based on feedback from both VABIR and VR staff in the Baldrige Survey, a need to improve partner programs, primarily VABIR, was identified in the areas of personnel performance, our ability to receive data, resolution of local issues, and their efforts at process improvement and consumer satisfaction. VABIR embraces continuous improvement, and VR and VABIR management regularly meet to discuss areas of mutual concern. Specific issues identified will need to be addressed.

The need for sector-based training and collaboration with technical centers.

Training programs, particularly for youth who are not planning to go to college, are inconsistently available across the State. Technical Centers connected to high schools sometimes offer adult training and some have been willing to work with employers to develop sector-based training programs. A more systematic approach to training would be helpful to ensure that employers are able to hire skilled workers for available positions within their companies.

The need for a comprehensive quality assurance system.

VR is developing a quality assurance system that has a schedule of activities that will ensure a cycle of continuous improvement. VR is part of a New England regional effort to develop such a system that can be adapted to each state. The system would organize the relationship among organizational goals and objectives; measures; a program evaluation system; data analysis; and dissemination and communication strategies.

DVR has developed a new case record format to be used by all Counselors, Regional Managers, and Administrative Support staff, with implementation slated for February 2016. DVR will also implement a new, more consistent case review process with both district and central office components, starting March 2016. Both processes will include the use of a single, standardized case record review tool, and are designed to achieve the following:

- (A) Address systemic compliance challenges from audit findings.

- (B) Give staff support and guidance around complying with the law and regulations that authorize the DVR program.
- (C) Serve as a program management tool to identify individual & district strengths, challenges, themes and training needs. Feedback from the Baldrige survey suggested that the analysis of data in a more consistent way would be helpful in prioritizing VR program needs and its budget.

The SRC's Performance Review Committee was also suggested as being a necessary part of the quality assurance system.

The need for long term support and case management services for individuals not eligible for other programs.

The need for case management support for individuals not eligible for services that would provide this support has been a long standing goal. However DVR has not been able to secure funding for this initiative. The need has increased since the 2008 recession and cuts in discretionary funding. Individuals with TBI, developmental disabilities with IQ levels in the 70 to 80 range, and other individuals with significant disabilities who require ongoing case management are among the populations targeted for this support. DVR Counselors find themselves the service of last resort for individuals who receive no ongoing case management in their communities.

The need to respond to the increasing number of consumers with substance abuse issues.

Between 2009 and 2013 there was a 27% increase in individuals closed with a reported substance abuse issue. This represents 14% of all individuals closed and reflects the increased incidence of substance abuse in the State as a whole. Field staff report significant challenges in engaging and serving individuals with substance abuse issues, including lack of adequate community treatment programs; poor communication with the programs that do exist; and the dramatic increase in opiate addiction.

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

The Baldrige Survey conducted in 2013, identified the need for improvement in several areas in the community rehabilitation programs, primarily VABIR. Those areas were personnel performance; receiving appropriate data reports; conflict resolution; process improvement; and customer satisfaction.

DVR provides grants to Vermont's Designated Agencies for employment services for individuals with developmental disabilities and individuals with severe and persistent mental illness. Easter Seals also has a small presence in Vermont. However, because of the rural nature of State with many areas of sparse population, there are very few CRPs in Vermont. DVR primarily relies on VABIR to provide placement services to its customers. Currently, Vermont does not need to develop new CRPs to provide services for eligible individuals.

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

As noted earlier, the 2014 Vermont Needs Assessment did not include this component because the assessment preceded the passage of WIOA. Vermont will include this assessment in the comprehensive needs assessment scheduled for 2017.

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

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

Based on the American Community Survey (ACS) for 2014, DVR estimates that there are 45,430 Vermonters between the ages of 16 and 64 with a disability. All of these people are potentially eligible for services under this Plan.

The number of eligible individuals who will receive services under the VR Program; the Supported Employment Program; and each priority category, if under an order of selection.

An estimated 9,659 individuals will receive VR Program services in FFY 2016 with funds provided under either Part B of Title I of the Act or under Part B of Title VI. Since DVR operates under an Order of Selection for Services, it is anticipated that 9,021 Priority Category 1 customers will be served; 605 Priority Category 2 customers; and 33 Priority Category 3 customers.

The following table shows the number of individuals served in the past two years and the number DVR anticipates serving during the current and next fiscal years:

	Actual 2014	FFY	Actual 2015	FFY	Projected FFY 2016	Projected FFY 2017
Category 1						
# Served	9,394		8,957		9,021	9,104
# Closed 28	1,245		1,659		1,681	1,784
# Rehabs	1,717		1,741		1,842	1,935
Category 2						
# Served	720		639		605	582
# Closed 28	115		130		134	147
# Rehabs	148		175		160	156
Category 3						
# Served	37		22		33	36
# Closed 28	6		8		9	9
# Rehabs	8		6		9	9
Total Served	10,151		9,618		9,659	9,723
Total Rehabs	1,873		1,922		2,010	2,100

For FY 2017 we estimate that 800 individuals will receive supported employment services through DVR. This number does not include individuals receiving extended supported employment services funded through Medicaid and other non-VR funding sources.

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

There are no individuals on the waiting list for services due to order of selection

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.

Total costs to serve individuals in all three categories will be approximately \$20,167,195.00. Estimated costs of services for each category are:

	Title I	Title VI-B
Priority Category 1	\$18,567,000	\$287,064
Priority Category 2	\$1,245,210	\$0
Priority Category 3	\$67,921	\$0
TOTALS	\$19,880,131	\$287,067

(I) State’s Goals and Priorities.

Based on the DVR/SRC Needs Assessment completed in April of 2014, DVR and the SRC have established targets for FFY 2017 for DVR’s Strategic Plan goals. DVR and the SRC have also established goals and priorities in response to the new mandates and requirements included in the Workforce Innovation and Improvement Act (WIOA). In particular, DVR and the SRC established goals and priorities related to the implementation of Pre-Employment Transition Services. All DVR goals and priorities are established within the Division’s long established strategic themes as follows:

- *Organizational Effectiveness*
- *Valued and Empowered Employees*
- *Prepared Job Seekers*
- *Collaborative Partnerships*

FY 2017 Goals and Priorities

DVR will implement highly effective Pre-Employment Transition Services (PETS) for students statewide.

FFY 2017 Measures:

- The percentage of high schools statewide that have at least one student actively participating in PETS through DVR.
- The percentage of all potentially eligible students statewide who are participating in PETS through DVR.

FFY 2017 Targets:

- 90% of high schools statewide will have at least one student participating in PETS through DVR.
- DVR has just started to implement PETS in a comprehensive and strategic manner in FFY 16. We intend to use FFY 16 and FFY 17 to establish baseline data on the percentage of the total potentially eligible population participating in PETS.

(1) DVR will align services to support consumers in achieving the WIOA Common Performance Outcomes Measures:

FFY 2017 Measures:

- Employment retention six months and twelve months post closure
- Median earnings six months post closure
- Credential attainment rate
- Measureable skills gains
- Employer engagement

FFY 2017 Targets: The targets are entered in the Common Performance Measures section of the unified plan.

(2) In addition to the Common Performance Measures, DVR will continue to assist more Vermonters with a disability achieve an employment outcome.

FY 2017 Measure: The number of individuals who achieve an employment outcome (status 26).

FY 2017 Target: More individuals will achieve an employment outcome in FY 2017 than did in FY 2016

(3) DVR will effectively serve employers through Creative Workforce Solutions (CWS).

FFY 2017 Measure: Employer engagement with DVR as tracked through the CWS Salesforce account management system.

FFY 2017 Target: DVR will maintain active relationships with 2,500 employers statewide during the fiscal year.

(4) Consumer satisfaction with DVR services will be maintained or increase.

FFY 2017 Measure: Bi-annual consumer satisfaction survey.

FFY 2017 Target: DVR will achieve an 86% or better overall consumer satisfaction rating. Consumers reported an 83% overall satisfaction rating in the most recent survey (2013).

(5) DVR will implement the Alliance Enterprises AWARE electronic case management system to support staff in providing high quality VR services.

FFY 2017 Measure: Staff satisfaction with the AWARE Implementation

FFY 2017 Targets:

- More than 70% of staff will report they are satisfied or very satisfied with the implementation of the AWARE case management system three months post operationalization.
- More than 90% of Staff will report they are satisfied or very satisfied with the AWARE system one year after implementation (twelve months post operationalization)

(6) DVR staff will be satisfied with their jobs and have the training, tools and support they need to be effective.

FFY 2017 Measure: Bi-annual Staff Survey

- Overall staff satisfaction
- Staff response to the question “Do you have the information you need to do your job?”
- Staff response to the question “Do you have adequate training to do your job?”

FFY 2017 Targets:

- More than 90% of staff will report they are satisfied or very satisfied with their jobs.
- More than 85% of staff will report they have the information they need to do their jobs.
- More than 80% of staff will report they had adequate training to do their jobs.

(7) DVR will continue to seek funding for services for the following under served populations in the state:

- Individuals with measured IQs between 70 and 80
- Individuals with TBI
- Individuals with psychiatric disabilities
- Individuals with other significant disabilities who require case management services
- Individuals exiting the correctional system
- Individuals with alcohol/substance abuse dependence/abuse disorders (AODA)
- Individuals with disabilities who are veterans
- Individuals with disabilities who are not primary English speakers
- Individuals age 65 and older

FFY 2017 Measures: DVR will track and report the results of specific initiatives related to these populations.

FFY 2017 Targets: None

(8) DVR will improve the outcomes for supported employment programs serving adults with developmental disabilities. This includes students served under Pre-Employment Transition Services.

FFY 2017 Measures:

- Total number of consumers achieving a successful employment outcome (VR 26 closure).
- Total number of people employed within the Developmental Services Program.
- Total number of students receiving PETS services through supported employment.

FFY 2017 Targets

- Total successful employment outcomes: 250
- Total number of people employed: 1,150
- Total number served through PETS: Baseline to be established in FFY 2016 and FFY 2017.

(10) DVR will improve the outcomes for students and youth with emotional/behavioral disabilities served through the JOBS Supported Employment Programs

FFY 2017 Measures:

- Total number of consumers achieving a successful employment outcome (VR 26 closure).
- Total number of students receiving PETS services through JOBS supported employment.
- Total number of consumers achieving a successful employment outcome (VR 26 closure).

FFY 2017 Targets

- Total successful employment outcomes: 250
- Total number served through PETS: Baseline to be established in FFY 2016 and FFY 2017.

(m) Order of Selection.

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

Vermont continues to operate under the order of selection established in FFY 1999. With the approval of the State Rehabilitation Council, the Category definitions have been rewritten in FFY 2017 to clarify the intent of the Rehabilitation Act to serve those most in need of services. These Category definitions replace the definitions that were in the FFY 2015 State Plan.

Priority Category 1: Individuals who have been determined eligible for Social Security Administration, Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI). To meet the Priority 1 category the applicant must intend to achieve an employment outcome that is consistent with their unique strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities, interests and informed choice.

Priority Category 2: Individuals who have been determined by DVR to have significant disabilities, are those who have at least one area of functional loss requiring multiple services over a period of 6 months or more, either for the provision of a required service, or for the duration of the use of a provided good. To meet the Priority 2 category the applicant must intend to achieve an employment outcome that is consistent with their unique strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities, interests and informed choice.

Priority Category 3: Individuals who have been determined by DVR to have non-significant disabilities are those who have one or more areas of functional loss not requiring multiple services over a period of 6 months or more. To meet the Priority 3 category the applicant must intend to achieve an employment outcome that is consistent with their unique strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities, interests and informed choice.

The justification for the order.

DVR made the above changes to the definitions of Category 1 and 2 because the old definition did not provide sufficient clarity for counselors. As a result, a high proportion of eligible individuals were found to be eligible under Category 1. By using the federal definitions of eligibility for SSI and SSDI, we believe we are ensuring only individuals who have the most severe disabilities are included in Category 1.

DVR is retaining the FFY 15 definition of Category 3. In FFY 15, DVR did not have enough funds to offer paid services to Priority Category 3 customers at the time they were determined eligible. At the end of every quarter, DVR and the SRC reviewed the number of Priority Category 3

customers who had been determined eligible in each quarter since services were last provided to these individuals. Based on resources available at the time of review, a determination was made on whether or not to serve Category 3 customers. If the decision is made to provide paid services to Category 3 customers, all of the individuals determined eligible within the quarter are eligible for services regardless of their service needs.

DVR does a good job of getting the maximum services for consumers out of the available resources. DVR increased the number of employment outcomes from 443 in 1991 to 1,917 for FFY 2015, an increase of over 300 percent and a 25% increase from FFY 2010. This was achieved without any significant increase in funding. As an agency we understand how to provide services efficiently and economically. We also have aggressively pursued funding from other sources, in particular through grants and SSA Reimbursement and Ticket to Work payments. With recent re-allotment and a grant to serve individuals with disabilities receiving General Assistance, VR has been able to increase its capacity to serve more Vermonters. VR continues however, to seek additional funds to sustain current initiatives.

The service and outcome goals.

For FFY 2017, we expect individuals found eligible under Priority Categories 1 and 2 will receive the full range of services available under the vocational rehabilitation program.

The time within which these goals may be achieved for individuals within each priority category

DVR does not set any timeline for the achievement of an employment goal once an individual has met the order of selection.

How individuals with the most severe disabilities are selected for services before all other individuals with disabilities

As noted in the justification, DVR will use Social Security Administration SSI/SSDI eligibility as the definition of the most severely disabled. By using the federal definitions of eligibility for SSI and SSDI, we believe we are ensuring only individuals who have the most severe disabilities are included in Category 1.

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.

Vermont DVR has elected to serve eligible individuals, regardless of the order of selection, who require specific services or equipment to maintain employment.

(n) Goals and Plans for Distribution of Title VI-B Funds.

Goals and Priorities.

For FFY 2017 DVR will use the entire VI-B funding allotment of \$290,000 to fund the JOBS supported employment program serving youth with severe emotional/behavioral disabilities. The Vermont DVR commitment to supported employment extends far beyond the funds provided under Title VI-B. In FFY 2017 DVR plans to commit about \$1.2 million in Title 110 funds for supported employment for adults with developmental disabilities. In addition DVR plans to commit \$400,000 in Title 110 to the JOBS program.

Activities conducted with reserved funds pursuant to section 603 (d) for youth with the most severe disabilities.

DVR has committed VI-B funding for youth to the JOBS program, because that program is specifically designed to serve eligible youth with the most severe disabilities.

(A) Provision of extended services

DVR will fund extended services for youth served through the JOBS for up to four years as allowed under WIOA. As noted DVR, uses Title 110 to supplement funding for JOBS and to fund supported employment for youth and adults with developmental disabilities. As authorized under, WIOA DVR will fund extended services for up to four years for eligible youth with developmental disabilities.

(B) Leveraging of funding for extended services and expanded supported employment for youth

As noted in Section (F) DVR has a partnership with the Department of Mental Health (DMH) to provide extended services for youth and adults with psychiatric disabilities. The JOBS program uses Medicaid Global Commitment funds to provide extended supports post DVR closure. In addition the adult mental health program can provide ongoing support through the Medicaid Case rate for individuals eligible for the Community Rehabilitation and Treatment (CRT) program or out patient Medicaid Case Management services.

Also as noted in Section (F) DVR has a partnership with the Vermont Development Disabilities Services Division (DDSD) to provide extended services for individuals with developmental disabilities. The primary source of funding for extended services for individuals with developmental disabilities is Home and Community-based Medicaid Waiver funds.

(o) Strategies to Achieve the Goals and Priorities

In Section (l) of the State Plan, DVR outlined its goals and priorities for FFY 2017. The ten strategic goals established by DVR and the SRC are as follows:

1. DVR will implement highly effective Pre-Employment Transition Services (PETS) for students statewide.
2. DVR align services to support consumers achieve the WIOA Common Performance Outcomes Measures.

3. In addition to the Common Performance Measures, DVR will continue to assist more Vermonters with a disability achieve an employment outcome.
4. DVR will effectively serve employers through Creative Workforce Solutions (CWS).
5. Consumer satisfaction with DVR services will be maintained or increased.
6. DVR will implement the Alliance Enterprises AWARE electronic case management system to support staff in providing high quality VR services.
7. DVR staff will be satisfied with their jobs and have the training, tools and support they need to be effective.
8. DVR will continue to seek funding for services for under served populations in the state.
9. DVR will improve the outcomes for supported employment programs serving adults with developmental disabilities. This includes students served under Pre-Employment Transition Services.
10. DVR will improve the outcomes for students and youth with emotional/behavioral disabilities served through the JOBS Supported Employment Programs.

The following are the strategies that will be implemented by Vermont DVR to achieve one or more of the goals and priorities. Each strategy is linked to the goals and priorities it is intended to address.

Strategy 1: Realign DVR capacity to effectively provide Pre-Employment Transition Services (PETS) for students. Goals 1, 2, 3 and 10.

Vermont DVR has developed a comprehensive strategy to implement PETS in the state. While implementation started in the spring of 2015, we expect it will take two or more years to fully operationalize. The following are the primary activities.

- A. Vermont DVR has implemented an in school Transition Counselor model providing PETS services. DVR has reassigned 20% of the programs VR counseling capacity (14.5 FTEs) to work exclusively with students. This provides coverage to all 60 supervisory unions and high schools in the state.
- B. DVR has worked with its primary CRP VABIR to implement the Youth Employment Specialist (YES) model. A full time YES will be paired with each in school VR counselor to provide a range of PETS services including the development of real work based learning experiences.
- C. DVR has reassigned supported employment resources to serve high school students who need supported employment services. PETS services will be provided through the JOBS supported employment programs serving students with psychiatric disabilities and the Developmental Services supported employment programs serving individuals with developmental disabilities,
- D. DVR will implement self advocacy services for students through a grant agreement the Vermont Center for Independent Living (VCIL)

- E. DVR will implement benefits planning for students. DVR has six Certified Work Incentive Counselors (CWICs) on staff. The CWICS will provide benefits planning for students who receive SSI as part of PETS.
- F. DVR will expand substantially summer youth employment opportunities for students through the Vermont Youth Conservation Corporation and other vendors.

Strategy 2: Realign DVR capacity to provide effective transition services for youth and young adults post high school exit. Goals 2 and 3

DVR believes PETS will only be effective if there is an infrastructure of VR services at the point students exit high school. To this end DVR has created an infrastructure of young adult/youth transition services including:

- A. The creation of Young Adult VR counselors serving youth post high school through their early twenties. DVR has reassigned 20% of the programs VR counseling capacity (14.5 FTEs) to work exclusively with young adults. This is a one to one match with the VR Transition Counselors providing PETS. The Young Adult Counselors will coordinate with the Transition Counselors to facilitate the transition of students exiting high school into adult DVR services.
- B. Implement Young Adult Employment Specialist model. DVR will establish specialized young adult placement services through our primary CRP VABIR. These services will be designed to meet the specific needs and interests of recently transitioned youth and younger adults.
- C. DVR will expand JOBS Program serving young adults with emotional/behavioral disabilities post high school exit.

Strategy 3: Expand training opportunities in industry recognized certifications that result in higher wage job opportunities for DVR consumers. Goal 2, 3 and 5

Over the last two years DVR has set aside funds specifically to support consumers access training for industry recognized certifications in high demand and higher wage fields. Data suggests consumers who participate in these trainings exit the program with higher wage jobs. Also the skills and qualifications consumers achieve also are meeting the demands of local employers. Therefore DVR plans to improve and expand these opportunities as follows:

- A. DVR will increase the funds set aside for industry recognized trainings and expanding the types of training programs the training funds that can be accessed through the set aside.
- B. DVR will develop partnerships with employers, the Vermont Department of Labor, local Workforce Investment boards to expand the number of type of training opportunities available.
- C. DVR will track consumer participation and outcomes to determine which training programs are the most effective.

Strategy 4: Implement the AWARE comprehensive case management system. All Goals and Priorities

DVR currently has a legacy case tracking system that is totally inadequate to meet the case management and data reporting and evaluation needs of the program. In order to meet the goals of the program and the intent of WIOA, DVR must have a modern and effective case management system. DVR recognizes that implementation of AWARE will be a major systems change for the program and therefore will implement with the following strategies:

- A. Assign a full time DVR Project Manager (Lisa Young) to manage the overall implementation from a programmatic perspective.
- B. Establish work teams with substantial field staff representation to ensure staff have a strong voice and buy in to the project.
- C. Ensure the AWARE adapted in a way that is consistent with the DVR four strategic themes

Strategy 5: Explore strategies to assist DVR consumers retain and advance in employment. Goals 2 and 5

DVR recognizes one of the goals of WIOA is help consumers retain employment and develop career pathways to higher wage employment. The DVR management team had a two day retreat to consider strategies to achieve this goal. One for those approaches is to engage consumers post closure to determine if they could benefit from additional services to help them advance in their current employment. These might include:

- A. Explore use of post-employment services to support DVR consumers advance in their current employment or access a new higher wage.
- B. Explore outreach to closed cases to determine if individuals could benefits from re-engagement with DVR.

Strategy 6: Expand employer outreach and engagement efforts through Creative Workforce Solutions (CWS) to effectively meet the needs of employers. Goals 2, 3, 4, 5, 9 and 10

As described in Section (g) of the State Plan CWS is the primary employer outreach and engagement infrastructure for DVR. CWS and in particular the Business Account Managers have been a very effective approach to engaging employers and developing employment opportunities for DVR consumers. DVR will expand these efforts through the following strategies:

- A. Seek opportunities to coordinate employer engagement with the Vermont Department of Labor
- B. Analyze Salesforce account management data to determine if there are industry sectors that are underrepresented. Develop strategies to engage those sectors in partnership with local employers.
- C. Build on and expand employer events such as Job Fairs, employer breakfasts and business recognition events designed to engage employers.

Strategy 7: Coordinate efforts with the Agency of Education (AOE) and the Department of Labor (VDOL) to ensure individuals with disabilities have access to other components of the workforce system. Goals 2, 3, 5, 9 and 10

As noted in the Unified Section of the plan, DVR will be working closely with VDOL and AOE to ensure DVR consumers have access to all the workforce development opportunities available in their communities. DVR will be implementing a number of strategies to make this happen including the following:

- A. The development of joint training programs in high demand and high wage sectors
- B. Developing systems to promote co-enrollment across programs to support consumer employment goals
- C. Actual or virtual co-location of DVR and VDOL staff
- D. Cross training of VDOL, DVR and AOE staff

Strategy 8: Provide training to community rehabilitation program staff through the Community College of Vermont, online Community Employment Specialist certification. Goals 1, 2, 3, 4, 9, 10

A major challenge for the CRPs and supported employment programs is high staff turnover and staff training. To help address this issue DVR has partnered with Community College of Vermont to create an online training and certification program for employment specialist staff. The program meets the requirements for ACRE certification. The system has recently completed beta testing. In FFY 2017 DVR expects to go to go to full implementation. In order to achieve maximum effectiveness DVR will implement the training program using the following strategies:

- A. Through partnerships with providers and other state agencies encourage universal participation for all employment specialist staff.
- B. Consider contract incentives for CRP and supported employment programs to have all staff certified.
- C. Work with the Department of Mental Health and the Division of Developmental Services to promote the program among their supported employment providers

Strategy 9: DVR will work with the Department of Children and Families (DCF) to implement the SNAP project designed to improve employment outcomes for adults with disabilities who are; homeless, recent offenders and/or have substance abuse disorders. Goal 8

DVR is a partner with the Vermont Department for Children and Families (DCF) in an SNAP Employment and Training grant demonstration project. The project targets three underserved populations, individuals who are homeless, recent offenders and individuals who have substance abuse disorders. Based on field experience, we expect a high proportion of these individuals to be

eligible for DVR services. The project includes as core partners, the Vermont Department of Labor (VDOL), Community College of Vermont and the Community Action agencies. The core design includes a team approach to serving these challenging populations. DVR will provide clinical assessment of participants to identify barriers to employment including but not limited to disability. Individuals determined potentially eligible, will be referred to DVR. We expect the project to model the type of workforce collaboration envisioned by WIOA.

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

Evaluation of the extent the program Goals were achieved

Goal and Priority 1: Consumer satisfaction with DVR services will increase.

Measure: Biennial consumer satisfaction survey.

Target: In the 2013 survey DVR showed a marked decrease in consumer satisfaction at 83%. DVR will

increase overall consumer satisfaction at or above the 2011 level of 91% in the FFY 15 survey.

Actual Data for 2015: The consumer satisfaction survey was scheduled for the spring of 2015. However during that time period, DVR was implementing a major caseload redistribution in response to the new Pre-Employment Transition Services (PETS) requirement. In order to meet the PETS requirement, DVR created a cadre of counselors to serve exclusively students and a cadre of counselors to serve exclusively young adults. This required a major reassignment of caseloads across the program. DVR determined that it would not be appropriate to conduct a satisfaction survey during such a transition. Therefore the survey has been postponed until early spring 2016.

Goal and Priority 2: Consumer earnings will increase beyond the rate of inflation.

Measures: RSA Performance Indicator 1.5: DVR wages compared to state average, and 1.6: own income as primary source of support.

Targets:

RSA Performance Indicator 1.5: DVR consumer wages will increase from 60% of state average in 2013 to

62% of state average in 2015.

RSA Performance Indicator 1.6: DVR will increase the percentage of consumers achieving self-support from 46.5% in 2013 to 47.5% in 2015.

Actual Data for FFY 2015:

RSA Performance Indicator 1.5 for FFY 2015: 57%, compared to 60% in FFY 2013. The federal standard is 52%.

RSA Performance Indicator 1.6 for FFY 2015: 46.7%, compared to 46.5%, in 2013. The federal standard is 53%

As indicated in last year's State Plan, DVR has not been able to meet the federal standard for consumer earnings although we have seen a steady rise in percentage points. We have analyzed this issue over the years and found that two Vermont VR practices impact this measure:

- The high proportion of consumers served through supported employment. Many of the individuals served through supported employment programs have very significant developmental or mental health disabilities. A high proportion work very part-time to supplement their benefits.
- DVR serves a significant proportion of consumers who are already working and who are already self-supporting. These individuals cannot be included in the calculation.

To meet this standard DVR would have to reduce the number of individuals served in these two categories. We do not believe this would be the right thing to do.

Goal and Priority 3: More consumers will be employed and the rate at which consumers maintain employment will increase.

Measures:

RSA Performance Indicator 1.2: Percentage of DVR consumers achieving an employment outcome.

Vermont Unemployment Insurance wage data to track employment retention post-DVR closure.

Targets:

RSA Performance Indicator 1.2: DVR consumers achieving an employment outcome will increase from 60% in 2013 to 62% in 2015.

Percentage of DVR consumers who retain employment two years post-closure will remain stable at 65%.

Actual Data for FFY 2015

RSA Performance Indicator 1.2: DVR consumers achieving an employment outcome for FFY 2015 was 51.7%. The federal standard is 55.8%.

Percentage of DVR consumers who retain employment two years post-closure: For the period of 2013-2015, 65% of VR consumers closed successfully were still employed after 2 years.

DVR implemented a significant caseload shift in FFY 15 in order to meet the new Pre-Employment proportion of cases than in prior years. This resulted in a high number of cases being closed in status 28. We believe this was a discrete event in response to the new federal mandate and not the indication of a trend.

Goal and Priority 4: Vermont employers will increase their use of DVR as an employment agency through Creative Workforce Solutions (CWS).

Measure: DVR tracking of employer contacts and employers hiring DVR consumers statewide.

Targets: DVR will maintain ongoing relationships with 2,500 employers across the state of Vermont, an increase from 2,025 in FFY 13.

Actual Data for FFY 2015: In FFY 2015 CWS had active ongoing relationships with 2,283 employers statewide.

We believe the implementation of dedicated Business Account Managers (BAM) and the local CWS employment teams, has increased DVR employer engagement statewide. Having BAM staff dedicated solely to employer outreach and tracked in Salesforce has proven a highly effective strategy.

Goal and Priority 5: DVR employees will be satisfied with their jobs.

Measures: Results from biennial DVR staff satisfaction survey.

Targets: DVR will maintain or exceed the 2012 staff satisfaction rate of 93.8%.

Actual Data for FFY 2015: With the implementation of WIOA and PETS, DVR decided to delay the staff satisfaction survey until the spring of 2016.

Goal and Priority 6: All DVR staff will have the skills and competencies to do their jobs.

Measures: Feedback from staff on biennial DVR staff satisfaction survey.

Targets: In 2012, 88% of staff said they had enough information to do their jobs. This will increase to 93% in 2015.

Actual Data for FFY 2015: With the implementation of WIOA and PETS DVR decided to delay the staff satisfaction survey to the spring of 2016.

Goal and Priority 7: Increase capacity to serve un-served or underserved populations, specifically:

- Individuals with measured IQs between 70 and 80
- Individuals with TBI
- Individuals with psychiatric disabilities
- Individuals in the Autism Spectrum range of disorders
- Individuals with other significant disabilities who require case management services
- Individuals exiting the correctional system
- Individuals with alcohol/substance dependence/abuse disorders (AODA)
- Individuals with disabilities who are veterans
- Individuals with disabilities who are not primary English speakers

Measures:

Implementation of services targeted at underserved populations.

Targets for FFY 2015

- Increase the rehabilitation rate of AODA consumers from 54% (FFY 2013) to 58% by FFY 2015.
- Increase the post plan closures for eligible veterans from 164 in FFY 2013 to 200 by FFY 2015.
- Increase the number of post plan closures for individuals with disabilities who are not primary English speakers from 33 in FFY 2013 to 45 by FFY 2015.
- Increase the proportion of closures for people over 65 from 1% of all closures in FFY 2013 to 3% of all closures in FFY 2015.

Actual Outcomes:

- The rehabilitation rate of AODA consumers: 48% of FFY 2015 cases closed from plan status with a primary disability source of 2 or 18, achieved an employment outcome (26 closure).
- Number of post-plan closures for eligible veterans: 128 veterans closed from plan status in FFY 2015.
- Individuals with disabilities who are not primary English speakers: 51 individuals closed from plan status in FFY 2015 were not primary English speakers.
- The proportion of closures for individuals 65 and over as a percentage of all closures: Actual FFY 2015 2%.

It should be noted that the Pre-Employment Transition Services mandate went into effect during this fiscal year. We believe the major programmatic reorganization that was precipitated by PETS affected all of the above measures.

Evaluation of the extent the supported employment goals were achieved

Goal and Priority 8: DVR will work to improve the outcomes of community-supported employment providers serving individuals with developmental disabilities.

Measures:

Number of status 26 closures achieved through the supported employment programs.

Total number of people with developmental disabilities employed with supports.

Targets:

Maintain the Status 26 closure goal for State Fiscal Year 2015: 200

In State Fiscal Year 2013 a total of 1,088 people were working in supported employment programs. This will increase to 1,120 by SFY 2015.

Actual Outcomes:

Actual number of status 26 closures for SFY 15: 245

Number of people with developmental disabilities employed with supports was 1,112 for SFY 2015.

Goal and Priority 9: DVR will work to improve the outcomes of community providers serving individuals with severe mental illness.

Measures:

Number of status 26 closures achieved through supported employment programs for adults with psychiatric disabilities.

Total number of people with psychiatric disabilities employed with supports.

Targets:

26 closure goal for State Fiscal Year 2015: 143

Number of people working in supported employment programs will increase from 526 in SFY 2013 to 550 by SFY 2015.

Actual Outcomes:

Actual SFY 2015: Total number of 26 closures: 149

Number of people working in supported employment programs for SFY 2015: Data is not available at the time of writing.

The VR program's performance under Section 116 of WIOA

As the Common Performance measures have not been implemented there is no data to report at this time.

How funds reserved for innovation and expansion (I&E) were utilized

During the past year the most significant DVR innovation and expansion was related to Pre-Employment Transition Services. As noted in other sections of the plan, DVR substantially expanded services for students. DVR requested technical guidance from RSA regarding if funds assigned to PETS could also be considered as I&E. RSA was not able to provide a response because the regulations were still pending. DVR used I&E funds to support the organizational consultant costs to assist DVR manage the substantial programmatic change related to PETS. I&E funds were also used to support the SRC, who had a substantial role in the implementation of PETS as well as other aspects of the state plan.

DVR has used I&E funds to implement motivational interviewing as a core strategy to improve consumer outcomes and satisfaction with the program. Sustainability of this initiative is underway and will occur through ongoing development of the internal DVR MI trainers to ensure training is available to all DVR staff and meets the training requirements of those providing direct service. The internal DVR MI trainers have already received additional MI focused facilitation training and next steps include advanced audio-recording coding and scoring training. This will allow the MI trainers to evaluate staff level of proficiency in use of MI skills, strategies, and approach in the vocational counseling process with fidelity to the model/approach and design training and support that responds to the area needing

DVR continues to support the consolidated and coordinated approach to employment services under a single entity called Creative Workforce Solutions (CWS). The goal of CWS is to provide equal access to meaningful work in the competitive job market for all AHS program participants. It also offers employers a point of contact for coordinated job development and placement services across AHS programs. This model has proved very beneficial to AHS participants, a very high percentage of whom have disabilities.

Additionally, DVR has had tremendous success with the use of Progressive Employment, which is a series of employment options to introduce employers to our customers and provide those individuals with a way to increase their work experience, add to their resumes, explore career options, and develop skills. Employers are not required to commit to a hire, and individuals are

do not have to commit to a permanent job. Progressive employment options range from a job shadow or company tour to short-term work experiences to OJT placements. Data shows a very positive effect on outcomes, as shown by the increase in 26 closures in the last several years despite a poor economy. This model is the focus of a NIDRR grant to export this employment strategy nationally.

(q) Quality, Scope, and Extent of Supported Employment Services.

Individuals with Developmental Disabilities

DVR works closely with the Developmental Disabilities Services Division (DDSD) to provide supported employment services and DVR funds are viewed, along with Medicaid funds, as an integral part of the overall employment budget for individuals with developmental disabilities. This funding braids DVR funding with individual Medicaid Waiver funds to create a seamless structure of upfront and ongoing support. DVR funds are specifically allocated to provide assessment, training, and placement services until closure, with Medicaid Waiver funds providing the necessary long-term follow-up.

DVR and DDSD only support individual integrated competitive supported employment. The State does not support any sheltered work or congregate work settings. The most recent employment rate data not for individuals with developmental disabilities (SFY14) showed a 47% employment rate for working age adults in the DDSD system. Employment placements that resulted in a VR employment outcome were up in State Fiscal Year 2015 to 245 individuals from 223 the prior year.

DVR and DDSD have no supported employment workshops since Vermont closed its last workshop for individuals with developmental disabilities in 2002. That same year, Vermont was ranked #1 in the nation in the number of people with developmental disabilities who received supported employment to work per 100,000 of the state population.¹ In the past two years, the numbers of individuals with developmental disabilities employed in competitive jobs have continued to increase.

Adults with Significant Mental Illness

DVR has historically worked closely with DMH to support the integration of employment into the broad array of clinical mental health services available to individuals with significant mental health issues. Similar to its relationship with DDSD, DVR funding was braided with the DMH Community Rehabilitation and Treatment (CRT) Medicaid case rate to provide a seamless structure of upfront and ongoing support.

Up until SFY 2016, DVR funds have been specifically allocated to provide assessment, training, and placement services until closure, with the CRT Medicaid case rate funds providing the necessary long-term follow-up. Starting in SFY 16 DVR decided to reallocate the \$700,000 in

Title 110 funds committed to adult mental health to the JOBS program. This decision was made to enable DVR to come into compliance requirement with the Pre-Employment Transition Services (PETS) requirement. In order to meet the 15% PETS expenditure target, DVR had to reassign funds from adult services to services for students and youth. This was a very difficult decision for DVR and we are greatly saddened the impact on supported employment services for adults with mental illness.

While DVR no longer has a formal contractual program with the CRT programs to deliver supported employment services, DVR continues to partner with CRT programs at the local level. Many CRT programs have sustained their supported employment services despite the loss of VR funding. Local VR offices continue to provide services for CRT consumers that supplement their Medicaid funded services.

DVR and DMH continue to work together at the state level, to support evidence based supported employment. Vermont was the first state to pilot a Johnson and Johnson-Dartmouth initiative, now in 13 states, which continues to demonstrate that adherence to the principles of evidence based supported employment are key to increasing employment rates.

The JOBS Program is an innovative supported employment and intensive case management service for Youth with emotional and behavioral disturbances (EBD) that uses work as a means to reach this

Youth with Emotional and Behavioral Disturbances

The JOBS Program is an innovative supported employment and intensive case management service for Youth with emotional and behavioral disturbances (EBD) that uses work as a means to reach this challenging population. As a result of a unique partnership between the Department of Mental Health's Corrections, the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, and contract agencies, the JOBS Program is operational in twelve (12) sites across the state.

The JOBS is funded through a combination of Global Commitment (Medicaid funds) and a VR grant for a total of \$2.15m, with about 62% coming from VocRehab Federal 110 Funds. In SFY 2015, 522 youth were served through this program.

JOBS involves employers and the business community in meeting the needs of youth through intensive job development, placement, and on and off-site training support. JOBS differs from other traditional job development employment models by providing intensive case management services to assist young people in meeting other areas of need in their lives, e.g., dealing with legal issues, homelessness, drug/alcohol abuse, transportation and probation and parole.

Within this model, DVR funds are used to provide the employment focus and upfront employment assessment, training, and placement services, while the case management and ongoing support is provided through state general funds (contributed by the different state departments noted above) which are matched to Medicaid through a fee-for-service arrangement with the CAFU in DMH.

In 2015 all JOBS programs were tasked with creating and implementing a plan to serve enrolled high school aged youth, in order to meet the PETS requirements of the federal WIOA. This expansion of JOBS programs was achieved using additional monies from DVR's 110 funds. .

Starting in July, 2011, the local JOBS Programs, along with other community supported employment programs funded through AHS, were given participant employment goals that they were required to achieve. If they exceeded the stated goal, they would receive bonus funds from VocRehab; if they failed to meet the goal, funds would be withheld. For the state fiscal year that ended in June 2015, all JOBS programs either met or exceeded their employment goals, with all but one receiving bonus funds.

Individuals with Traumatic Brain Injury

DVR also works with the Developmental Disabilities Services Division (DDSD) to provide seamless employment support to individuals with Traumatic Brain Injury. Similar to the collaboration that serves individuals with developmental disabilities, the DVR funds are used for the up-front assessment, employment individuals training, and placement services, while individual Medicaid waiver funds are used to provide the ongoing support.

¹ The State of the States in Developmental Disabilities: 2002 Study Summary, Coleman Institute for Cognitive Disabilities & Department of Psychiatry, University of Colorado, January 2004.

² Vermont Mental Health Performance Indicator Project, Vocational Rehabilitation and CRT Employment, November, 2002.

Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Unified and Combined State Plan Requirements

VI. Program-Specific Requirements for Core State Plan Programs

Vermont Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired

Federal Fiscal Year 2017

(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.

Report of the Vermont State Rehabilitation Council for the Blind and Visually Impaired

Introduction:

The SRC has had a very productive year. Again the past year has seen excellent collaboration between all services for the blind and visually impaired. Three highlights that stand out are the Town Hall Meetings, development of the Employment Guide, and a new cafeteria for the Randolph Shepherd Program.

- The SRC Council felt that the Town Hall Meeting results were very important as it brought us closer to the consumers and their needs.
- The Randolph Shepherd Program has resulted in helping to expand job opportunities for Vermont's blind and visually impaired.
- The Employment Guide, designed by the DBVI staff and Council to explain the DBVI "products" offered to consumers was completed.

Election of officers:

Chair: Robert Lanoue

Vice-chair: Harriet Hall,

Executive Committee Members- at-Large: Donna Stratton and Patty Shane.

Committee assignments:

Membership: Tom Frank

Outreach: Peggy Howard

Policies and Procedures: Kerry White

Committee activities:

Membership: Pam Schirner has been approved for membership.

Outreach: Represented the blind and visually impaired on Vermont Disability Day and participated throughout the state on White Cane Awareness Day. The Employment Guide to explain the products of DBVI was completed and is now being used throughout the state.

Policy and Procedure: The policy and procedure document has been reviewed and small changes have been made. It has been approved by the Council.

Reports:

VABVI:

- Children's Services is working with students to implement on-line testing.
- Met with DBVI Counselors to collaborate on transitional services and eligibility.
- Held a successful Tech Fair with many excellent vendors.
- Announced that "White Cane Awareness" Day was successful throughout the state.

VT Special Services Library:

- Started recordings for talking books with local volunteers.
- Demonstration on downloading availability by using a new cartridge cable.
- Working with the VABVI to start book clubs throughout the state with 12-14 members per club.
- A new currency reader is available to Vermont consumers through the library
- Theresa Faust has accepted another position in Ocala Florida and Jennifer Hart will be joining the council to represent the library.

DBVI:

- Openings were announced and filled for two positions in DBVI. Jean Palmer was hired as Counselor and Taya Tarr was hired as a Rehabilitation Associate in Burlington.
- The council reviewed questions on the annual needs assessment survey.
- The updated three-year plan was shared with the Council.
- The Council was informed of the 2015 Rehabilitation Administrative Services review of the state plan.
- Four regional town hall meetings and the results of a closure and a customer satisfaction survey were reviewed by the Council. Goals and strategies of the three year plan are being revised based on these results. The updated three-year plan is shared with the Council.
- A meeting was held with the Agency of Education to discuss transition of students with disabilities with implementation of independent living skills being introduced into the curriculum to be included in the IEP.
- A second café, sponsored by the Randolph Shepherd Program will be opening at the Court House in Burlington.
- An all-day staff-SRC workshop was held based on Steven Covey's "Seven Habits of Highly Successful People" and was run by Jennifer Cohen.
- The Perkins School for the Blind presented a program on software accessibility and user-friendly data bases to VABVI and DBVI staff.
- The DBVI staff will have a workshop and discussion on various eye conditions by Darick Wright from the Perkins School for the Blind.

It was announced that 15% of the DBVI budget is going toward student transition or independent living.

SRC Chair:

- Attended an AHS meeting on housing.
 - Arranged for the Vermont Council for the Blind to use the DBVI web site for announcements.
 - Served on the interview committee for hiring the new DBVI Counselor and a Rehabilitation Associate.
 - Attended an informational session and later the launch of a new curriculum called "INCLUDE".
- for all students to learn about disabilities.
- Attended all four town meetings throughout the state.

Working together:

The SRC and DBVI staff participated in a one-day training to learn about the Seven Habits of Highly Effective People authored by Stephen Covey. This training was designed to help the SRC and staff learn important habits that will be used during the year as we work together to evaluate performance data and update goals, strategies, and actions. The workshop teaches some specific

techniques for evaluating information, planning, and carrying out a plan. It also contains specific tools for working together to discuss issues by including a variety of perspectives to create solutions that are collaborative.

Submitted by Robert Lanoue, Chairperson, Vermont SRC

Input from SRC at the End of Year Combined Meeting with DBVI Staff (June 25, 2015):

The SRC worked closely with DBVI in many areas this year. They include: Hiring new staff; Policies and Procedures; Planning; Evaluating Town Meeting results, Closure Survey results; Customer Satisfaction results, Outreach; White Cane Events; and Consumer Driven Events.

The following is an exchange of updates including input from DBVI staff and the SRC. DBVI staff will present and will look to the SRC for their viewpoints. The focus will be on our products and whether consumers are better off as a result of receiving our services. And whether or not they feel that our services were delivered well (timely, accurate and useful)?

Strategy 1: DBVI will collaborate with Creative Workforce Solutions to find employment in accordance with the customer's interests and qualifications. (Nancy Lacroix/Amanda Barrett)

The first and most valuable strategy we have is progressive employment.

This is where the employer can try the client out at no cost to them for up to 240 hours of service. This allows the employer to see if the client can do the job and if they are a good fit for the position.

We help our clients with resume building and cover letters.

We do practice interviewing and where to look for jobs. We also provide our consumers with job leads.

We approach employers, in person and in writing, with our progressive employment initiative to give employers the incentive to try our clients. We also educate the employer with ways our clients can do the job through technology.

We give our clients ideas on the types of jobs they can do with the skills they have. We talk about training options and the advantage of going to college.

We provide a client centered approach to seeking employment where our clients can grow and learn about themselves while developing their career goal.

VABIR? That question gets asked in the general public outside of the DBVI network and by consumers alike. The informational literature that is handed out describes VABIR as a non-profit helping individuals achieve employment goals.

Nancy touched upon progressive employment and the various forms this make take as a means for consumers to secure employment. To go more in-depth describing the steps both small and large that are taken to achieve employment.

Some consumers' access VABIR services to receive assistance with updating a resume, refresh interview skills, and generally speaking obtain employment in a stream line efficient manner. The consumer's skill set and work experience often determine the pace. **A few case examples that demonstrate how small milestones are the pyramid for success:**

A career RN nurse with 25 + years of experience lost vision suddenly. As the primary breadwinner for her family her identity and self-worth were directly tied to her career. This consumer is still in the process of adjusting to her blindness. Small milestones have been for her to go to The Carroll Center for the Blind, access training with JAWS, build confidence with typing, become facile with adaptive technology, building a resume, and attending a health career fair. At the career fair an employer discussed the possibility of job carving a position once the consumer gains a level of confidence with JAWS and technology. Consumers making an effort to network has proven to be successful.

A consumer with no work experience and limited soft skills is looking for part time work opportunities. A resume that focuses on education, technology skills, and skills gained as a homemaker process is slow yet organized and focused. Building, attending DOL workshops on interviewing and completion of mock interviews, clothes shopping for proper interview attire, discussions on proper workplace etiquette, then on to progressive employment: job shadows which will lead to work experiences with the end goal of a hire.

As demonstrated the path to success is set at the consumers pace determined by skill sets while encouraging positive change to guide the consumer towards progressive employment. Often the "climb up the mountain" is not straight forward. The goal may be employment but employment is typically the means to reach the much larger personal goal of being better off in life whether it be moving out of subsidized housing, take annual vacations, or to have a healthy sense of accomplishment and success.

SRC Suggestions:

Steve Pouliot: The Hadley School for the Blind has some online resources for typing classes.

Pam Schirner: What we could do to enhance the experiences of folks who are young and/or unmotivated is have more time. Pam had one consumer who worked for 40 hours/week at the café over the course of a year. Now this consumer works at Costco (for three years now) and rides his bike to work. He is a success and he will work the rest of his life. Pam struggles with the fact that we don't always get enough time. There is one 20 year old working at the courthouse, who has been there for almost a year and he has changed entirely. His level of confidence is so much higher. We need another level of work experience that lasts a year.

Fred: There is a 240 hours rule for work experiences. The Department of Labor enforces this: it is supposed to be a pro-employee law.

*There may be some wiggle room if this is considered a long-term training or something along that line to lengthen the work experience feel. We could develop within DBVI a training center with Pam (through the Randolph-Sheppard program). Our consumers learn so much about themselves, etc.

Strategy 2: DBVI will promote employment by educating employers and providing opportunities for increased exposure to people who are blind or visually impaired. This will address “Societies reaction to blindness.” (Melissa Hoellerich)

DBVI has promoted employment by educating employers at various events throughout the year. Examples as follow: Employer Recognition Breakfast; Employer Awards at recognition breakfast; Employers nominated and awarded to the Governor’s Council (GCEPD); White Cane Day panel discussions on public access tv; videos showcasing employers and employees (DBVI clients) on DBVI website; DBVI staff at local chamber of commerce business shows, chamber mixers, and job fairs.

Our goal is normalizing the experience of blind individuals working in a variety of jobs. Exposing employers to the technology (CCTV’s Braille, JAWS), white cane, and other worksite accommodations.

Clients are better off because they are empowered, confident, and have vocational hopes, dreams, and goals. Clients see others being successful on the job and in the community. Employers are better off because they have a diversified work force with capable, committed, and reliable employees.

SRC Suggestions:

Make a video of Heidi Viens working at the Courthouse Café.

Every office has an iPad with videos of our consumers and brings these to meetings, job fairs, etc.

Tom: Uses Jaws, Magic, touch-typing—has a sign next to his desk that says, “If I have a far away dumb look on my face, it is just because I’m listening to my computer in my left ear.”

Bob: Community TV (having something made up in advance and sending it to each and every community tv, once a month for educational purposes).

Bob has been seeing his eye doctor for eight years and they just mentioned VABVI to him this year.

Peggy: We should have one meeting dedicated to figuring out who can reach out to who (optometrists, ophthalmologists, doctors). We could create a brochure targeted at doctors, specifically.

Rebecca: Primary Care Doctors maybe should be the target.

October is disability awareness month—reach out to business journals & pitch consumer success stories. It is also DBVI’s month in the Agency of Human Services (AHS) newsletter.

Strategy 3: DBVI will create Consumer Driven Events to assist individuals as they prepare for employment. (Peggy Howard)

What we know: People in Vermont who have vision loss often experience isolation. Individuals are empowered when DBVI provides opportunities for people with vision impairment to meet and

share experiences. A natural positive energy is experienced by participants when they participate in consumer driven events. An opportunity to hear the voice of the consumer decreases ambiguity and increases communication. Hope is enhanced through discussion on planning for the future and becoming involved in the process.

Great Expectation: voices and choices for the future. DBVI will continue to support 2 groups per year for our consumers who are transitioning from high school, attend college, are participating in job training, and working toward vocational goals. Overview, challenges and suggestions from SRC.

Employment support group (to be developed) Overview, challenges, suggestions from SRC.

Other: Consumer driven events. Input and suggestions from SRC.

SRC Suggestions:

There is always the challenge of people volunteering for something and then having nothing actually happen.

Taya: provide more support to the different groups.

Melissa: the local apple store does trainings.

Jean: There are non-profits that run groups all the time.

Finding an employer where social media and outreach are part of the job.

Talk to some of these companies, what kinds of skills are they looking for.

The challenge is DBVI can't be involved in the social media directly.

Key: What's the next step to sustain the motivation developed at Great Expectations?

Strategy 4: DBVI will create opportunities for access to information. (Mike Goldberg)

DAIL is updating all of the websites in the department including the DBVI web site. The goal is to have the information presented in a user friendly and accessible manner with easy access to other DAIL websites. Keeping the information updated and of interest to a variety of users including consumers, families, employers, providers and information seekers. Create potential opportunities for individuals to connect and interact by including available links on the web site. Highlight consumer success stories. Keep information up to date and relevant. Information on events and recreational opportunities will remain a priority. Simple effective navigation and increased use by various customers is the goal.

SRC Suggestions:

The website is on our brochures, business cards.

Mike: We could send out a mass mailing/emailing to all consumers about our new website.

Strategy 5: DBVI will address transportation challenges. (Rebecca Bezanson)

I am currently appointed to the SILC and represent DBVI. A part of my SILC responsibilities is participating on their Transportation Committee. Currently the SILC is in collaboration with the Vermont Agency of Transportation to assess the transportation needs of Vermonters with physical conditions that limit their mobility. We hope to expand this collaboration to include other disabilities that limit mobility and transportation options in the future- like sensory disabilities, such as blindness.

We also collected stories from consumers and service providers about how rules can be barriers or unreasonable hurdles to accessing transportation- such a notice minimums and rules about vehicles in the household. The SILC is working on ideas about how to hold transportation programs accountable for informing customers about choices, rights and responsibilities.

The SILC has also been in dialogue with other states about their successes with transportation in hopes of getting ideas about options that could be successfully implemented in Vermont

In addition, we are learning how to develop Personal Transportation Plans and how to show others how to develop and use their own Personal Transportation Plans.

2) People are better off because of this strategy because of increased attention and momentum regarding transportation. Questions have been answered and clarification provided which allows for better understanding and access to transportation. We hope that these efforts will have many more benefits in the future with increased positive impact.

3) The commitment to this strategy is strong and ongoing. Transportation is a complex topic and a huge barrier for most of our consumers and critical for most in regard to employment, independence and quality of life.

4) Challenges- funding, rural state circumstances, various individual needs, multiple programs, varying rules, regional systems

SRC Suggestions:

Tom: Do counselors talk to consumers about transportation a lot?

Mike: The conversation starts early—friends and family, who they might be able to carpool with, etc. or more concrete plans if a specific job has been identified.

Harriet: Now a RCT driver can take you to Barton to catch the bus to go to Walmart. SILC is also working hard to get a bus from White River to Newport. Working with AARP.

VABIR BAM's are working on a grant to obtain transportation for consumers in the Burlington area.

Steve: SSTA has all their drivers paid hourly along with their mileage, which makes it hard for VABVI to find volunteer drivers. Planning on getting Vicki Vest on the radio shows discussing VABVI's need for volunteer drivers.

Strategy 6: DBVI will improve communication with customers regarding expectations for DBVI services. (Fred Jones)

Fred discussed the importance of creating new products like the employment services guide. Fred will be meeting with staff to determine the next customer-centered culture products for the year.

Strategy 8: DBVI will increase capacity to serve underserved populations through the implementation of special projects. (Jean Palmer)

Underserved consumers include:

Refugees and non-english-speakers – a growing population in VT and the Burlington area. We know that the two main organizations that work with these consumers (VT Refugee Resettlement and Association of Africans Living in VT) know about DBVI, because we have received referrals recently. Many other cultures do not value “independence” the way Americans do, so find it horrifying that a BVI person would learn IL skills or employment skills. Especially if it is an elder, the expectation is that they will be cared for by their families. DBVI works to respect these cultural beliefs, while also holding out the option of learning some more skills for independence.

Transition Youth – DBVI has long had regular communication with VABVI Children’s Services so that all 16 year olds who are on TVI caseloads are identified to the DBVI counselor in their region. Sometimes this referral process has not gone perfectly, but on the whole, in-school youth are being referred to counselors before they graduate. New WIOA requirement to spend 15% of our funds on high school youth (or lose it) has made it more of a priority for both DBVI and general Voc Rehab counselors to actively work with these youth.

DeafBlind consumers – Can get this label without being totally deaf and blind. Some deafblind use ASL, some don’t. Totally deaf and blind is a very low incidence disability in VT but very high need. A Support Service Provider (SSP) interprets the world so consumers can be integrated into work and community life, by using tactile ASL and other methods to communicate the environment. There are not enough SSPs in VT, because there are few funding mechanisms, so consumers are left isolated in their homes way too much. Fred says that Pennsylvania pays for SSP hours through Medicaid. VT should research this.

Blind consumers are not required to get developmental services.

Strategy 9: DBVI will continue to become an administratively efficient organization by finding efficient and user friendly ways to complete paperwork for staff and customers. (Mike Goldberg)

DBVI is partnering with the General Vocational Rehabilitation agency to purchase and modify an automated case management system to perform all of the documentation, reporting, financial and data requirements of the vocational rehabilitation and independent living programs. This will allow counselors and case managers to complete their paperwork and case management responsibilities in an efficient and effective manner leading to more time available for direct communication with

consumers. It is planned that this “Aware” system will be available for use in February of 2017. It is presently used in over 30 state agencies across the country, is fully accessible and is widely considered the best system of its kind available.

Strategy 10: DBVI will systematically recognize exemplary staff performance using an evaluation system based on core competencies and development of SMART goals. (Fred Jones)

Fred discussed the use of creating SMART goals with staff. Each staff will have personal goals that align with division goals.

Strategy 11: DBVI will explore outreach strategies to increase applicants and diversify the DBVI caseload. (Paul Putnam/Taya Tarr/Rebecca Bezanson)

Burlington Region:

I attended the UVM Job Fair with Ira Chomsky and Nancy Lacroix to demonstrate adaptive technology that could be used at a job site. Spoke at The Lions Club about our services and what we can provide.

Rest of 2015: Connect with optometrists and ophthalmologists in the Burlington Region and provide them with brochures and business cards.

Primary Care refer to DBVI.

1) Springfield’s outreach strategy is to get as many people as possible to understand what we do and generate referrals. We are available to agencies/ groups that request us to speak and present. Annually we collaborate with Vermont Adaptive on a summer event and with VABVI on a White Cane Awareness event. On a regular basis we make connections and refresh relationships with Senior Solutions, doctors, schools, community health teams, VABVI, employers, vendors, Creative Workforce Solutions, etc. We share out brochure and direct people to check out our website which Mike is the content manager of and keeps updated. We try hard and have at least an annual discussion about new ways to connect with people and get the word out and also try to figure out ways to connect with new or underserved populations.

2) People are better off because more people are familiar with us, so they are more likely to make referrals, which gives us the opportunity to serve people in need.

3) Our commitment to this strategy is strong and intact. Without outreach, often times people go without knowledge and choices related to needed services. Our goal is to assist all people in Vermont that are blind or visually impaired in accessing the services that they need.

4) Challenges- Time, busy staff, not knowing what we don’t know.

Carol proposed the idea of creating a monthly newsletter for providers and making presentations to appropriate providers and services groups in the region. Senior communities with independent living might need services and we could do some outreach at these events.

Whether someone refers to VABVI or DBVI doesn't really matter, we will refer to each other as needed.

Jennifer Hart: two full-time staff at the Special Services Library. At the Disability Awareness Day, the library shared a table with DBVI/VABVI. Jennifer would love to be included if there are events DBVI/VABVI is attending.

Strategy 12: DBVI staff will have the tools to deliver services quickly to DBVI customers. (Fred Jones/Peggy Howard)

DBVI staff will have tools to deliver services quickly to DBVI customers.

DBVI's goal is to ensure we have qualified personnel to provide a high standard and expertise for working with people who have a visual impairment. The State plan outlines a Comprehensive System of Personnel Development as mandated by RSA. DBVI meets regularly with Alicia Wein the vocational Rehabilitation Human Resources Manager to ensure RSA standards. DBVI put an emphasis on hearing the voice of the customer and a Customer Centered Culture.

How this is accomplished:

- New Staff Training
- Opportunities for higher education
- Personnel standards
- Individual Development Plans
- Customer Centered Culture
- The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People
- Other trainings attended
- Future Plans

Strategy 13: DBVI will implement strategies designed to enable DBVI customers to access higher wage employment through short-term training. (Fred Jones)

Fred discussed the importance of having more consumer's complete short-term training. He discussed the possibility of working closely with vocational tech centers and explained that the new WIOA (Workforce Initiative Opportunity Act) law will measure how many people obtain certificates and degrees.

SRC Suggestions:

Pam: Student finished LEAP last year and is now staying in VT. Essex Tech will be having her back for the second year. There wasn't enough relationship building last year with her peers and there will be this year. Essex Tech is modifying the second year for her since she doesn't have classes to attend (looking for a day long work experience for her). This individual is also considering getting a degree in business to open her own bakery.

Melissa: doing a demonstration of how a visually impaired student can navigate a kitchen with adaptive technology.

Strategy 15: DBVI will partner with the Vermont Department of Labor to provide employment training options for dual DBVI/DOL customers. (Jean Palmer/Melissa Hoellerich)

Rose is the director of the resource center at Department of Labor (DOL) and we should invite her to a DBVI staff meeting and try to encourage some communication; develop a better understanding of how to access the training funds at DOL.

Strategy 16: DBVI will provide technology training for people who need to prepare for a job or succeed at a current job. (John Young)

Fred and John would go to each region once a month and use the conference room space. John would talk to consumers about technology. They will also explore the possibility of using Twitter to communicate important assistive technology information to DBVI consumers.

Strategy 14: DBVI will implement activities designed to reduce the number of individuals who are closed in a status 28 (not employed). (Fred Jones)

DBVI director discussed the importance of analyzing the different reason for Status 28 closures. The main reasons currently are consumers are no longer interested in services or DBVI is unable to locate or contact the person.

DBVI will be measured by this in the future (RSA). There are many reasons why someone might end up closing as a Status 28.

Results of Public Meeting—DBVI State Plan (Held January 26, 2016)

There were no comments either in-person or submitted in writing for the Public Hearing this year.

DBVI Response to SRC Input:

- DBVI and the SRC worked collaboratively to review Statewide Assessment and update Goals and Priorities.
- The SRC and DBVI agree that educating the public about blindness is very important. Two new success story videos were created and on the DBVI website www.dbvi.vermont.gov. The SRC gave ideas about how to proceed with success stories.
- The SRC reviewed and gave input on the DBVI section of the statewide assessment, new goals and strategies, and WIOA Unified Plan.

(b) Request for Waiver of State Wideness.

Vermont DBVI is not requesting a waiver of state wideness.

(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;
- (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) Non-educational agencies serving out-of-school youth; and
- (5) State use contracting programs.

At this time DBVI has no cooperative agreements with agencies of this description.

(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: 12 Sec. 102(b)(2)(D)(iii) of WIOA 26
 - (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.

Interagency Agreement with Vermont Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired and the Vermont Agency of Education as required by the Rehabilitative Services Administration

September 2014

*See Below for Details

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PURPOSE

Section 101(a)(11)(D) of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and 34 CFR 361.22 (b) requires that the State Plan for Titles I and VI-B provide information on the coordination of transition services between state Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired with the state educational agency. The agreement, at a minimum, must provide for (1) consultation and technical assistance to assist educational agencies in planning for the transition of students with disabilities from school to post-school activities, including vocational rehabilitation services; (2) transition planning by personnel of the designated State agency and education personnel for students with disabilities that facilitates the development and completion of the IEP; (3) the roles and responsibilities, including financial responsibilities, of each agency; and (4) procedures for outreach to and identification of students with disabilities who need transition services.

There is currently in existence an Interagency Agreement between Vermont Agency of Education (AOE) and Agency Of Human Services (AHS), as required by IDEA, dated June 2005. The Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired (DBVI) is part of that agreement. This agreement is between AOE and DBVI and is specific to DBVI activities.

MISSION/GUIDING PRINCIPLES

AOE, the local education agencies (LEA) and AHS, of which DBVI is a part, work together to assure that children and youth with disabilities, ages 3-22, receive services for which they are eligible in a timely and coordinated manner. Ultimate responsibility to ensure a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) to students with disabilities lies with AOE and responsibility to provide a FAPE lies with the LEA. AHS is responsible for supporting students and their families toward successful outcomes in their broader functioning consistent with federal law including 34 CFR §300.142 as well as state law. These agencies will work together to assure the needs of eligible students with disabilities are met, services are coordinated and integrated, funds are efficiently used, and a dispute resolution process is in place to resolve interagency policy and funding disputes when a conflict occurs.

In recognition of the importance of providing a smooth transition from education to adult life, transition services for eligible students will be community-driven, involve a comprehensive system including AHS, AOE, employers, the workforce system and youth and their families. These services will be provided with the intent to increase the number of youth who are blind or visually impaired entering employment, further education, and independent or supported living.

AREAS OF AGREEMENT

I. COORDINATION OF SERVICES

DBVI Transition Service Coordination for Students who are blind or visually impaired in Vermont's High Schools

1. *DBVI Services for Students who are blind or visually impaired*

DBVI is committed to the successful transition of young adults who are blind or visually impaired from school to work or further education or training. DBVI is required under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended by the Workforce Investment Act of 1998, see 29 U.S.C. §720 et seq. and pertinent federal regulation, see 34 CFR §361.22; the IDEA, and pertinent federal regulation, see 34 CFR §§300.347 (b) and 300.348; and the Assistive Technology Act of 2004, see 29 U.S.C. §3001 et seq., to coordinate policies and procedures with education officials that facilitate the transition of students who are blind or visually impaired from the receipt of educational services in school to the receipt of vocational rehabilitation services from the DBVI agency.

"Transition services" are defined as a coordinated set of activities for a child with a disability that (a) is designed to be within a results-oriented process, that is focused on improving the academic and functional achievement of the child with a disability to facilitate the child's movement from school to post-school activities, including post-secondary education, vocational education, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation; b) is based on the individual child's needs, taking into account the child's strengths, preferences, and interests; and (c) includes instruction, related services, community experiences, the development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives, and, when appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation.

2. *DBVI Counselors*

DBVI Counselors work with high school students who are blind or visually impaired. DBVI Counselors are specially trained in blindness as it relates to vocational rehabilitation.

3. *Early Identification*

DBVI Counselors will maintain at least annual contact with the General VR Transition Counselors who cover the schools in their region to ensure early identification of blind

or visually impaired students who: are in special education; are receiving 504 accommodations; are receiving regular education services, who may be eligible for DBVI transition services. DBVI Counselors will meet at a minimum in the beginning and in the spring of each school year with the Teachers of the Visually Impaired, Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist, and Certified Vision Rehabilitation Therapist in their region to ensure early identification of students who are blind or visually impaired. This early identification occurs at the age required by federal and state law and includes formal DBVI involvement in IEP/Transition Team meetings and in 504 plan meetings, as requested by the school staff, student or families. DBVI Counselors will communicate with appropriate school staff including Special Education Case Managers and 504 Coordinators. DBVI will provide brochures to schools for distribution to students who are blind or visually impaired and their families. Additionally, local Core Transition Teams and other partners will provide the DBVI Counselor with a forum to discuss projections of numbers of students who will need transition services from DBVI.

Outreach activities by DBVI, will include:

- a) Sharing the DBVI Brochure with Special Education staff, students and their families;
- b) Sharing the DBVI Brochure with all Teachers of the Visually Impaired in Vermont;
- c) Sending an introduction letter to all blind or visually impaired high school students and their families explaining DBVI transition services;
- d) Finding ways to identify out-of-school youth and students at risk for dropping out of school;
- e) Visits with Special Education Administrators at their regional meeting at least annually; and
- f) Meeting with families and students at the local DBVI office or other settings at the choice of families and students.

The DBVI Counselor's role in this early identification is primarily guidance and assistance during the transition planning process. The Counselor may also assist the school IEP and 504 team members in their transition planning. These activities may include:

- a) Consultation with special educators, other school staff, and community partners about post-secondary education and employment options;
- b) Be a resource for school transition teams regarding local community services and long term supports;
- c) Provide guidance and assistance in IEP and transition planning to the school IEP team members;
- d) Provide clarification and guidance to the school IEP team on whether or not a

- student would qualify for DBVI services;
- e) Provide tools and technical assistance to the school IEP team to properly assess students interests and vocational goals; and
 - f) Provide orientation and explanation about DBVI services to student and family.

Once a student and family express interest in pursuing DBVI services, the DBVI Counselor will take an application.

4. Referrals to DBVI

Consultation should intensify when a student is two years from graduation. DBVI should initiate intake at least 18 months before the student is scheduled to graduate or exit from high school. Students at risk for dropping out or students with complex needs may be considered for earlier intake.

DBVI will not serve persons under age 18 without the permission of a parent, guardian, or legal representative unless they are emancipated.

Once a student or youth is found eligible for DBVI services, services provided may include:

- a) counseling and consultation about the development of the Individual Plan for Employment (IPE) that is coordinated with the IEP or 504 plan;
- b) vocational assessment;
- c) job development;
- d) progressive employment activities and training; and
- e) other paid services.

The IPE must be developed and written before the student leaves school.

5. Purchased Services

The DBVI Counselor shall make the school IEP and 504 Team aware of the scope of DBVI services available, including financial assistance for post-secondary education.

As determined on an individual basis, DBVI may provide for Assistive Technology, (AT), services and devices for a DBVI-eligible student in the semester before exiting school and entering post-secondary education or training. The AT services must meet the following criteria:

- a) they are part of an IEP or 504 plan with coordinated transition goals;
- b) they are part of an approved IPE; and
- c) they are necessary to accomplish a successful transition to employment, post-secondary education or training.

During the student's Transition Year (nine months before exiting school), DBVI may support Employment Specialist services on a job site, which is expected to continue post-graduation. DBVI may pay for an Employment Specialist for up to twelve (12) months if ongoing supports have been negotiated with a long-term services provider (e.g., mental health agency, DDAS, private provider, or through the use of natural supports).

As determined by the DBVI Counselor, services may be provided prior to the last year in school if essential to the IPE goals and/or their development and there are no other funding options. As determined by the Counselor, other time-limited services may be purchased consistent with the comparable services and benefits requirement of 34 CFR §361.53.

II. FINANCIAL RESPONSIBILITY OF DBVI

For eligible students, DBVI will pay for services to the extent that funds are available at the time the services are needed, including assistive technology services and devices that are identified in an approved IPE in keeping with DBVI's policies:

- a) are consistent with the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and implementing regulations including but not limited to 34 C.F.R. §361.53; the IDEA, including but not limited to 34 C.F.R. §§300.5, 300.6, 300.347(b), and 300.348; the Assistive Technology Act of 2004, PL 108-364; and Vermont State Plan; and
- b) promote or facilitate the accomplishment of vocational rehabilitation goals and any intermediate rehabilitation objectives identified in the student's IPE to ensure the student's successful transition to employment, post-secondary education, or training.

1. Other Funding Obligations

For all other services that may be considered special education and related services, financial responsibility will be assigned consistent with federal law including 34 C.F.R. § 300.142, state law and the following understanding:

- a) AOE shall be responsible to ensure a FAPE to students with disabilities and LEAs shall be responsible to provide a FAPE.
- b) The AOE will work with LEAs to maximize receipt of federal Medicaid dollars available for reimbursement of medically related services provided to Medicaid-eligible students.
- c) The AOE will identify best practices concerning cost containment and the provision of FAPE consistent with 16 V.S.A. §2959b. AOE will provide technical assistance in this area to LEAs.
- d) The IDEA does not limit the responsibility of non-educational agencies from providing or paying for some or all of the costs of FAPE to children with disabilities. However, this shall not be construed to expand or otherwise alter state and/or federal law requirements imposed on any non-education agency.

2. *Conditions and Terms of Reimbursement*

If the local DBVI office fails to provide or pay for services for which they are responsible, the LEA (or state agency responsible for developing the child's IEP) shall provide or pay for these services to the child in a timely manner. The LEA or state agency may then claim reimbursement for the services from DBVI and DBVI shall reimburse the LEA or state agency in accordance with the terms of this agreement.

III. DISPUTE RESOLUTION RELATIVE TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THIS INTERAGENCY AGREEMENT

Where the local DBVI office and LEA are unable to resolve any of the issues pursuant to this agreement, a referral may be made to the AOE secondary transition staff and DBVI Central Office for resolution. AOE Secondary Transition staff includes: the State Director of Special Education; Special Education Consultant for Post-Secondary Transition Specialist; Director for Integrated Support for Learning Team; others designated by the AOE Secretary. DBVI Central Office staff include: DBVI Director and others designated by DBVI Director.

Where this staff is unable to resolve a dispute, the Secretary of AOE and the Division Director of DBVI may resolve the issues and render a written decision.

Nothing in this agreement shall be construed to limit any existing substantive or procedural protections of state or federal law or regulations.

IV. QUARTERLY REVIEW

The secondary transition staff at AOE (described above) and the DBVI Director or their designees will meet at least quarterly to review existing data and evaluate the

implementation of this agreement in order to improve the results for eligible children who are blind or visually impaired and the operations of local and regional teams of educators and human services providers.

Additionally, DBVI and AOE will look for opportunities to collaborate to support the attainment of vocational and post-secondary training goals for students who are blind or visually impaired in all Vermont high schools.

V. NON-DISCRIMINATION

The parties shall comply with all applicable state and federal non-discrimination laws and regulations including the Americans with Disabilities Act, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and Vermont's Public Accommodations Act.

VI. AMENDMENTS OR MODIFICATIONS

Any provision in this agreement may be rendered null and void by changes in federal or state law that prevent either or both parties from fulfilling the terms of the agreement. If this circumstance should arise, each party agrees to notify the other as soon as reasonably possible.

During the term of the agreement, either party that is a signatory to this agreement may submit a written request to amend or modify this memorandum. When such a request is made, the parties shall meet without unnecessary delay to consider the proposed amendment.

VII. TERM

This agreement in its present form or as modified shall be effective as of the date of signing and shall remain in effect for five years. The agreement shall be reviewed annually by the parties and may be extended by the mutual written agreement of the parties. Prior to the expiration of the agreement the parties shall meet to negotiate and execute a successor agreement. In the event a successor agreement is not in place when this agreement is due to expire, this agreement will remain in effect until a successor agreement is concluded.

Fred Jones, DBVI Director

Rebecca Holcombe, Secretary, AOE

Signed 9/29/2014 by Fred Jones

Signed 9/26/2014 by Rebecca Holcombe

Date

Date

(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:

DBVI maintains agreements and contracts with two non-profit organizations and CRPs in particular. The Vermont Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired (VABVI) provides direct teaching and rehabilitation training to Vermonters who are visually impaired. They are the only other organization in Vermont providing Orientation and Mobility and Vision Rehabilitation services to individuals who are blind or visually impaired. Due to the close working nature and cooperation there are no duplication of services. DBVI also works closely with The Vermont Association of Business Industry and Rehabilitation (VABIR) to provide job development and soft skills training by Employment Consultants.

(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.

The VT DBVI chooses to send the majority of its funding (\$30,000 of \$36,000) for supported employment to support the system of the General VR Supported Employment coordination. In this fashion DBVI has access to all the agreements for Supported Employment services agreed to by VR, such as agreements with the Division of Disability Services, TBI services, the Department of Mental Health and the local CRTs.

Because of its small size and the fact that it serves a low incidence population DBVI feels that it can serve the few individuals seeking supported employment best in the above manner. Most individuals who qualify for supported employment and are visually impaired are served by other agencies as their primary disability has identified as other than vision impairment. The small amount of funding that DBVI does keep can be used to support job coaches and similar services in the rare cases that are on DBVI's caseload.

Below is an explanation of the General Vocational Rehabilitation Arrangements and Cooperative Agreements for the Provision of Supported Employment Services.

DVR has a well-established agreement with the Vermont Development Disabilities Services Division (DDSD) to provide extended services for individuals with developmental disabilities. The primary source of funding for extended services for individuals with developmental disabilities is Home and Community-based Medicaid Waiver funds. In FY 2016, DVR will fund 14 programs serving people with developmental disabilities. DVR provides \$1,016,364 in Section 110 funding to support the upfront placement and support costs. DDSD provides the ongoing extended supports through Home and Community Based Medicaid Waiver funding.

DVR funds supported employment services for youth with emotional/behavioral disabilities in partnership with the Department of Mental Health, Children's Division. The JOBS programs are a model for serving this high needs and high risk population. DVR provides the upfront job placement and support through grants to community agencies. The extended supports are provided through Medicaid Global Commitment funds.

For individuals with other disabilities, no state funding for extended services exists in Vermont. As a result there are limited options for providing extended services for individuals with brain injuries, sensory disabilities, severe learning disabilities and other disabilities. There are some limited options to use Social Security Administration Impairment Related Work Expenses or Plans to Achieve Self Support. These options however, are only feasible in a minority of cases.

(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.

DBVI collaborates with General Vocational Rehabilitation in efforts to establish relationships with Vermont businesses. This coordinated approach is desired by the businesses and creates meaningful points of contact. Below is a description of the approach established by General VR and used by DBVI.

DUAL CUSTOMER DESIGN

Vermont's dual-customer approach considers both individuals with disabilities *and* the business community as key customers of the Vocational Rehabilitation program. To that end, Vermont DVR has established a cadre of Business Account Managers across the state whose primary responsibility is to develop and sustain relationships with the businesses in their respective communities. The Business Account Managers also facilitate local Employment Teams made up of the various employment programs serving Vermonters with disabilities. The Employment Teams are designed to improve collaboration between programs and streamline employer outreach in order to maximize resources and increase opportunities for candidates served by the Vocational Rehabilitation program.

In addition to the Business Account Managers, Vermont DVR and DBVI contracts Employment Consultants, who provide placement services and assistance, including retention services, to individual candidates. These Employment Consultants, in concert with their respective Business Account Managers, are in the community developing contacts and establishing relationships with businesses of all sizes. Due to the rural nature of Vermont, and the fact that trusting relationships are developed over time, Vermont has developed ways to track employer engagement over time.

EMPLOYER DATA

Tracking of employer outreach is maintained utilizing Salesforce, a Customer Relations Management (CRM) solution used by many large corporations. All Business Account Managers and Employment Consultants enter information into this system (only business information is captured, there is no client information and the information is transparent to everyone). To track employer engagement, the following information is gathered:

Opportunities:

Opportunities are defined as any activity, paid or un-paid, offered by a particular business. These activities range from informational interviews and job shadows to short-term work experiences and paid employment. All opportunities are captured for each business.

Contacts:

Contacts are defined as the individuals in a business with whom Employment Consultants and/or Business Account Managers have developed a relationship. In many cases these contacts are Hiring Managers, Owners and Supervisors.

Activities:

Each time an Employment Consultant or Business Account Manager interacts with a contact, an activity note is entered into Salesforce. This allows all Employment Team members to see a running history of conversations and activities with that business.

IMPLICATIONS FOR DVR CUSTOMERS

Business outreach has been a priority for Vermont DVR because:

1. In developing relationships over time, we are able to position ourselves as a staffing service with a variety of options for businesses to consider;
2. Coordinated business outreach, captured in Salesforce, allows for greater variety in the kinds of businesses we are meeting, and the concurrent variety in opportunities for DVR candidates;
3. Gathering information on businesses willing to offer worksite experiences, company tours, informational interviews... etc., will better support career exploration and skill development for both adults and students;
4. Our business partners can support Pre-Employment Transition Services activities in schools, including practice interviews, company tours and overviews, and identifying summer employment opportunities;

5. Business partners can support the work of our In-School Transition Counselors, providing information on industry trends, skill requirements and other factors related to particular employment sectors;
6. By engaging businesses in working with students, the students will have a better understanding of their local labor market through work experiences, job shadows and paid employment. This in turn should prepare them for transition to either post-secondary education or employment.

(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:

(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.

(i) Comprehensive System of Personnel Development; Data System on Personnel and Personnel Development

(1) Data System on Personnel and Personnel Development

(A) Qualified Personnel Needs

The Vermont Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired (DBVI) operates in the Department of Disabilities, Aging, and Independent Living (DAIL) in the Agency of Human Services (AHS). DBVI employs 10 full time positions and one half time position.

DBVI is organized to allow a structure for advancement based on increased skills and job responsibilities. DBVI operates under a structure that allows for increased professional abilities, improved services and knowledgeable management by recognizing the individual skills within.

At this time DBVI has sufficient VR counselor capacity to meet the needs of vocational rehabilitation clients. Each of the four regional offices has one counselor and one rehab associate positions. The four regional offices are Burlington, Montpelier, Rutland, and Springfield. The director of DBVI, assistive technology trainer, and the administrative assistant work out of the central office that is temporarily located in Williston. Presently DBVI has 3 job developers. This service is contracted through Vermont Association of Business Industry and Rehabilitation. Technology services are provided by the assistive technology trainer and a contracted professional rehabilitation technology expert. Overall supervision is provided by the division director.

Row	Job Title	Total positions	Current vacancies	Projected vacancies over the next 5 years
1	Blind Services Director	1	0	0
2	Administrative Assistant	.5	0	0
3	Senior Rehabilitation Counselor	2	0	0
4	Rehabilitation Counselor	2	0	0
5	Rehabilitation Associated I	3	0	0
6	Rehabilitation Associate II	0	0	0
7	Rehabilitation Associate III	1	0	0
8	Adaptive Technology Trainer	1	0	0

Under the Department of Disabilities, Aging and Independent Living, DBVI collaborates with the Vermont Division of Vocational Rehabilitation for: Staff Development and Training Coordination, Transition Services, Benefits Counseling, Supported Employment, and the business office.

In FFY 2015 DBVI Counselors served an average of 87 consumers annually. It appears that DBVI will serve a similar average of consumers per Counselor for FFY 2016. At this time DBVI has maintained a high level of performance. Staffing levels are sufficient.

Projections of personnel that will be needed in five years to meet the demand of the number of individuals to be served are static. This is due in part to the way the DBVI program is structured, which will allow for fluctuation or increases in the number of individuals while continuing to provide quality service.

(B) Personnel Development

Vermont has no accredited graduate school offering a master's degree in Rehabilitation Counseling. To meet the Comprehensive System for Professional Development (CSPD) standards, a counselor needs either a master's degree in Rehabilitation Counseling or a master's degree in a related field plus completion of four additional core rehabilitation courses.

Assumption College, University of Massachusetts, and Springfield College of Human Services typically have a range of 35-45 students who graduate with a master's or CAG degree in Rehabilitation Counseling per year. These graduates would be qualified to fill counseling vacancies without additional coursework. New England colleges, which offer degrees in Social Work, Special Education, School Guidance, Mental Health Counseling, or Community Mental Health Services, also produce qualified graduates with the requirement to complete the four additional core rehabilitation courses.

Presently, all DBVI rehabilitation counselors have met the educational requirements. One (1) DBVI rehabilitation associate and our administrative assistant (.5) are enrolled voluntarily in a master's degree program in Rehabilitation Counseling through the University of Southern Maine's (USM) on-line, distance learning program funded by an RSA long-term training grant to USM.

In the past year, one (1) DBVI rehabilitation counselor completed the CSPD required rehabilitation courses as of December 2015.

(2) Plan for Recruitment, Preparation and Retention of Qualified Personnel

DBVI recruits qualified personnel through Assumption College, University of Massachusetts, and Springfield College of Human Services who have received a master's degree in Rehabilitation Counseling. These graduates meet the highest standard of education and are able to obtain certification at the highest level for this field. DBVI also recruits qualified personnel in a related field such as Social Work, Special Education, School Guidance, Mental Health Counseling, or Community Mental Health Services from New England colleges by posting positions on internal employment pages of the various college websites. All of these graduates are candidates for counseling vacancies if they are willing to complete the four core rehabilitation courses.

DBVI recruits professionals with an expertise in rehabilitation and knowledge of visual diagnosis and the implications of visual disability. State personnel policies require DBVI to consider qualified applicants on the Reduction in Force list before other applicants. DBVI advertises openings through the State recruitment system, through local newspapers, on-line on www.CareerBuilder.com or wwwIndeed.com and recruits personnel and individuals with disabilities and minority backgrounds to ensure a diverse qualified professional staff. DBVI constantly checks its caseload for interested and appropriately skilled individuals to provide services to Vermonters with vision impairments. DBVI ensures a high standard of qualified personnel with training directed toward an expertise for working with people with visual impairment. This is done through close collaboration with the Vermont Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired.

Rehabilitation Associates are recruited with a strong preference given to those with Bachelor's degrees and a strong commitment to blind services. Rehabilitation Associates with a bachelor's degree are encouraged to take the CSPD required Masters level courses. They are encouraged to pursue a master's level program in preparation for retention of qualified personnel. Through flexible work schedules and approved time off, DBVI makes it as convenient as possible to pursue degrees and education. DBVI will continue to support staff members who want to further their relevant education, as this will benefit the whole staff through projects and shared information. DBVI supports the staff and its professional development through public recognition and opportunities for job advancement through a developed career ladder within the division.

New staff participates in a training program that covers information appropriate to serving individuals who have vision loss. Trainings address the implications of visual loss and services such as orientation and mobility, rehabilitation teaching, and low vision service. In addition, training and consultation occurs with our rehabilitation technology consultant on an ongoing basis.

(3) Personnel Standards

(A) Standards that are consistent national or State-approved certification, licensing, registration.

DBVI follows the same standard used by the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation to be in compliance with Section 101(a)(7) of the Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1992. This requires State Vocational Rehabilitation agencies to establish qualified personnel standards for rehabilitation personnel. This addresses the qualifications necessary to meet the highest standards which are required in the State of Vermont. DBVI follows standards set forth in the Comprehensive System for Professional Development (CSPD). This prescribes a national standard for vocational rehabilitation counselor qualifications. This standard gives highest priority to counselors with a master's degree in rehabilitation counseling. The second level of priority is for counselors with related degrees in social work, psychology, mental health counseling or special education. This group must complete four additional courses to meet the standard: Foundations of Rehabilitation, Career Counseling, Vocational Assessment, and Medical and Psychosocial Aspects of Disability.

All efforts are made to hire new Counselors into this standard. When this is not possible, new hires are required, by written agreement, to attain the standard in a reasonable amount of time. The availability of on-line course work should allow any new hires to reasonably take the four “core” courses or any other course work they would need to reach this standard.

DBVI has a standard of Bachelor’s degree for new Rehabilitation Associates. This standard lays the groundwork for moving Associates into graduate programs, helping to assure DBVI of maintaining qualified staff.

Presently all DBVI Rehab counselor positions are filled by qualified professionals. All staff receives extensive training to help them learn and understand services for visually impaired individuals and the implication caused by visual loss. Training provided is focused around meeting with other highly trained vision professionals both within DBVI and from our sister agency, the Vermont Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired. All new employees receive training with a qualified rehabilitation therapist, a low vision therapist and orientation and mobility instructor. In addition they are scheduled to meet with our rehabilitation technology specialist to learn about how adaptive equipment can enhance job opportunities. They will meet with professionals from Vermont Association of Business Rehabilitation and Industry to learn about job placement. The performance expectations of all newly hired staff are to meet all the expected standards established for the position.

DBVI allows for a flexible working schedule, makes training assistance available, supports state, regional and national learning options and is strongly supportive of the time, effort, and commitment expended by each staff member to establish and maintain educational standards.

DBVI encourages the use of training funds for staff to use to attain and maintain professional standards and to maintain and enhance their professional capabilities. To maintain training and skill levels, DBVI constantly seeks and distributes information and training opportunities for staff at the regional and national level. DBVI maintains current educational material through journals, Internet sites and information gathered at conferences and trainings. DBVI works with the Staff Development and Training Coordination at DVR to ensure inclusion in opportunities offered by educational institutions for vocational rehabilitation professionals. Opportunities for on-line and distance learning are also available.

With a small staff, that includes four Rehabilitation Counselors and four Rehabilitation Associates, DBVI can easily assess training and staff development needs.

(B) Understanding labor force and the needs of individuals with disabilities

DBVI will ensure that personnel have a 21st century understanding of the evolving labor force and the needs of individuals with disabilities by using skills previously learned during training, presented by, Dr. Paul Harrington from the Center for Labor Market Studies at Northeastern University and the VT Department of Labor. This training provided counselors with information and skills to match the needs of their consumers with the needs of the local labor market. Training enhanced counselor’s ability to interpret labor market information to assist their consumers to

make informed career decisions and effectively work as a team with job placement staff. Counselors are better able to identify training and post-secondary education options that are in demand in the local labor market. Staff are aware of trainings available for high wage, high demand and high growth job opportunities for their visually impaired clients. DBVI will stay current in understanding the evolving labor market through collaboration with the Department of Labor and by maintaining a close relationship with VABIR (Vermont Association of Business Industry and Rehabilitation).

(4) Staff Development:

(A) A system of staff development with respect to assessment, vocational counseling, job placement and rehabilitation technology>

The main objective in staff development at the Division for the Blind will focus on assessment, vocational counseling, job placement and rehabilitation technology in relation to visual impairment. Training for counselors will focus on the essentials of a comprehensive vocational assessment. This will address aspects of how a person with a visual impairment can access independence and achieve a high standard of independence. Our mission to, “support Vermonters who are blind or visually impaired in their efforts to achieve or sustain their economic independence, self-reliance, and social integration to a level consistent with their interests, abilities, and informed choice”.

Every year each DBVI employee meets with the division director to discuss their IDP (Individual Development Plan). Meeting’s focus on how each employee can contribute to DBVI’s goals and strategies; improve customer satisfaction; and support policies, philosophy, competencies and future vision. In addition, the purpose of the IDP is to ensure that each DBVI employee receive appropriate and adequate training to meet the professional standards and requirements of their position. Discussions with the DBVI director allow employees an opportunity to identify their career ladder. DBVI staff are given opportunities to take on higher level duties backed by participation in education and training programs. This can lead to a higher step grade as determined by the VT Department of Human Resources.

DBVI has a partnership with the vocational rehabilitation Staff Development and Training Coordinator. DBVI meets with the Coordinator monthly to advise DBVI on upcoming trainings available within the Agency of Human Services and DVR and to work with DBVI on goals as outlined in the five year Vermont VR-Blind in-Service Training Grant. The Coordinator advises DBVI about trainings that meet the RSA standards. Needed trainings are determined through IDP developed by DBVI staff. DBVI staff are encouraged to participate in training opportunities to increase leadership, partnering and collaboration skills that lead to increasing employment opportunities for people who are blind and visually impaired.

DBVI continues to expand projects directed toward our younger transition aged students and young adults. The project Great Expectations-Voces and Choices for the Future, Is a collaborative effort by DBVI, VABVI and VABIR. The purpose of the project is to increase employment skills and job seeking skills, promote positive mentoring, networking, obtain feedback from clients to

improve services and to empower self-advocacy and self-reliance. This is accomplished through a series of planning meeting and seminars. DBVI will research and look at new ways to provide and increase services for transition aged youth.

DBVI staff receives ongoing training through local and regional in-state programs to stay current on: The National Library Services, Vermont Youth Conservation Corps, Deaf and Hard of Hearing Resources, Diversity and numerous others. DBVI staff is especially diligent about perusing pertinent journals and research and disseminating relevant articles and information via the internet, at monthly staff meetings and through in-person collaborations. The DBVI central office maintains subscriptions to several noted journals in the field (e.g., Journal of Visual Impairment and Blindness).

Through attendance at combined meetings, in-service training, and direct staff contact DBVI continues to seek ways to improve and enhance collaboration with other agencies. Many DBVI trainings are in collaboration with the general Vocational Rehabilitation agency in the Department of Disabilities Aging and Independent Living (DAIL). DBVI has greatly enhanced its collaboration with other organizations to the benefit of this division. In particular, the LEAP program for summer youth employment is a model of cooperation. This involves DBVI (provider of consumers, funding), Vermont Youth Conservation Corps (infrastructure, staff), Resource (jobs, staff), Linking Learning to Life (follow-up, e-mentoring), VT Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired (IL training, transition staff) and the Gibney Family Foundation (funding). This is a unique residential program providing youth with vision impairments a summer employment opportunity, a community service experience and an independent living experience in an urban setting and a new option for a wilderness setting. DBVI is active with the Job Development Coalitions throughout the State of Vermont because of our work with Vermont Association of Business Industry and Rehabilitation (VABIR). VABIR staff set up trial work experiences and on the job trainings. They explain financial incentives and ADA information. This program helps to provide a service to employers for long lasting job matches.

(B) Acquisition and dissemination of significant knowledge from other sources.

DBVI uses a management model developed by Robin Lawton. This model supports a strong belief and process for a "Customer Centered Culture". With training, guidance and consultation from Robin Lawton, DBVI continues the process of looking at customer satisfaction and organizational performance. When using this method of management it helps us to identify the "voice of the customer". DBVI has incorporated this model of management into our service delivery. Training has been provided to our SRC, the Vermont Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired and the DBVI staff. The main dimensions of the model are: Focus on the customer, Eliminate ambiguity, Include customer priorities, Empower the end user, Define success, Reduce ambiguity of language, Link customer and operational priorities, Integrate and leverage existing initiatives, Focus on improvement, Address outcome first, process last, Satisfy strategic objectives as well as operations, Improve knowledge products first, Emphasize sustainability of new practices, and Challenge traditional assumptions. Using this model DBVI strives to improve customer satisfaction as we decrease ambiguity and improve communication. It allows a method to measure

successful outcomes based on the "voice of the customer". This past year DBVI in collaboration with our SRC, set up 4 town meetings to allow a process for hearing the voice of the customer. This allowed DBVI a way to collect and analyze information that is being used in the development of DBVI's strategic planning.

Training and consultation provided by Robin Lawton allowed DBVI staff to improve a method for providing quality customer satisfaction and a higher level of performance. Using strategies from the Customer Centered Culture, DBVI created "Your Guide to Employment Services". The guide is a folder of information that is used during the Initial Interview with a customer. It contains customer friendly language that explains who we are, our process, examples of successful clients and the types of services that a person can expect from participating in the employment program. This welcome packet given to customers provides information to increase communication and clarity by finding a common language. DBVI uses input from our customers to ensure information is accessible, comprehensive, empowering, understandable and informative. DBVI continues to develop new tools and enhance the Guide to Employment Services.

This past fiscal year the entire DBVI staff participated in a series of Franklin Covey trainings. Together, DBVI staff studied "The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People". This style of management has been incorporated into the team as it enhances effectiveness, responsibility, personal growth and vision. Our team building approach uses a win-win philosophy, which helps to increase understanding and communication. DBVI supports creative cooperation toward team building. Teams are more effective in analyzing, improving and providing services for people who are visually impaired. The DBVI Division Director is meeting with teams around the State to discuss personal and team vision statements. The 7 Habits of Effective People, and the Customer Centered Culture have a core similarity in that both emphasize "Start with the end in mind" or "Address outcome first, process last".

Motivational Interviewing-DBVI has partnered with VR to provide training in Motivational Interviewing. Several staff have completed training session. This training allows an opportunity for staff to receive feedback and support using the counseling techniques used. In addition monthly video conferences are being offered from May 2014 through December 2015 with the consultant, Manthey Consulting, to ensure ongoing skill development. A select number of staff will receive an additional four-day, train-the-trainer session to ensure sustainability of the approach within the organization. Staff will have the opportunity to attend or host coaching circles. Skills will be shared with existing and new staff as they enter the organization.

DBVI makes arrangements each year with Darick Wright, Low Vision and Orientation and Mobility Specialist from Umass Boston. Trainings are arranged for DBVI staff to provide a workshop on Visual Impairment. This annual training provide new staff with valuable information regarding functional low vision assessment. Trainings address reading and interpreting eye reports and relating them to functional ability in the work place. Darick Wright presents information on environmental assessments for clients work sites and how to determine functional limitations. Information is presented on different types of visual diagnosis and how this impacts an individual's performance.

Vermont Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired hosts an annual technology fair for DBVI professionals and DBVI clients. This is a hands on opportunity to explore adaptive devices. Electronic magnification, computer software, Illuminated canes, talking glucose meters, kitchen aids, hand held magnification, telescopic devices, writing aids and large print items will be demonstrated.

DBVI management will work toward providing an opportunity to have staff attend the Northeast Chapter of the Association for the Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired (NE/AER). NE/AER supports professionals who provide education and rehabilitation to individuals with visual impairments. Presentations will inform and educate attendees in all areas of vision education and rehabilitation of clients, young and old. Areas covered are: Computer program, apps supporting Independent Living Skills, medical advancements, expanded core and common core curriculum for transition aged students, psychosocial aspects of vision loss, new approaches to teaching O&M skills.

DBVI staff will continue to participate in trainings on relevant assessments needed for persons with visual impairment. These trainings will be presented by qualified vision professionals. Training will address new and relevant assistive technology for people who are blind and visually impaired and job analysis used to determine the need for a technology assessment and training. Ongoing consultation is available for staffs overall basic understanding of adaptive technology and how it can enhance an individual's job performance. Coordination and communication with low vision optometrists to enhance visual function in an employment situation is ongoing.

(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 the native language of applicants or eligible individuals who have limited English speaking ability or in appropriate modes of communication with applicants or eligible individuals.

The Division for the Blind operates under the State of Vermont Agency of Human Services. The Agency of Human Services has clear policy regarding access to programs as needed to ensure meaningful access to persons with limited English proficiency. Information regarding policy can be accessed at:

<http://www.intra.ahs.state.vt.us/limited-english-proficiency>

This policy applies to all Agency Departments, offices and employees. It is the policy of the Agency of Human Services to provide language assistance as may be needed to ensure meaningful access to our programs. Each department and offices will take steps to provide assistance so that persons seeking services may communicate effectively with program providers and with Agency and department staff.

Departments must take steps to ensure persons seeking services are able to understand which services and benefits are available to them, and how they may best receive them.

The LEP information provides resources and links to resources dealing with written, face-to-face and over the phone communication with individuals for whom English is not the primary language. DBVI is also able to use an agency contract for phone and written translation of almost any language in the world. DBVI makes use of an on-line contact for interpreters of ASL for those consumers who are deaf.

(6) Coordination of Personnel Development Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act

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 Improvement Act.

At this time DBVI is working to update a cooperative agreement with the new Agency of Education. DBVI has maintained cooperative agreements with the Department of Education, VABVI and the Department of Labor. These agreements are meant to work toward a system of comprehensive and unduplicated services for youth and adults with vision impairments in Vermont. These agreements also provide for cross training among the staffs of the various organizations. Areas covered include employment, education and disability. In this way DBVI and the other partners work to ensure that all partner programs are accessible and available to DBVI consumers. DBVI is in constant contact with the staff of VABVI who has been working with a contract from the Vermont Department of Education to provide services under IDEA. DBVI counselors are in close communication with VR transition counselors. Together DBVI and VR collaborate in training and outreach for disabled students.

(j) Statewide Assessment.

Complete results of the FFY 12 to FFY 2015 Statewide Assessment can be found at:

www.dbvi.vermont.gov/whats-new/statewide-assessment/

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.

Working Age Adults

Using numbers from the 2013 Prevalence report from the American Community Survey-One Year Estimate, DBVI estimates that there are approximately 6,506 Vermonters of working age (18-64) who are blind or severely visually impaired (meaning even with correction they are not able to easily read the newspaper). DBVI provides RSA defined services to approximately 5.3% of these individuals annually (350 in FFY115).

<http://www.afb.org/info/blindness-statistics/state-specific-statistical-information/vermont/235>

Projections for Vermont based on extrapolations from National Data: September 2013 Current Population Survey for all working age adults (16 to 64 years of age) who responded "yes" to the question "Is anyone blind or does anyone have serious difficulty seeing even when wearing glasses?"

<http://www.afb.org/section.aspx?SectionID=15&TopicID=413&SubTopicID=177>

- Of the approximately 12,842 people with vision loss in VT, it is estimated that 6,506 are working age adults (16 to 64 years of age—2013 ACS).
- Using the BLS national survey that shows 56% of those working age adults were not actively looking for work. This means we can estimate that **3,643** (of the 6,506 working age) are identified as **"not in the labor force."**
- Using the BLS national survey that shows 44% of working age adults are actually considered "in the labor force." This means we can estimate **2,862** (of the 6,506 working age) are included **in the "labor force."**
- Using the BLS national survey that shows 13.4% of the labor force is unemployed. This means we can estimate **384** (of the approximate 2,862 working age in labor force) **are unemployed.**
- Using the BLS national survey that shows 38% of all working age were identified as employed. This means we can estimate that **2,472** (of the 6,506 working age) are identified as **employed.**

***Employment Data Pertaining to Working Age Adults with Vision Loss (16 to 64 Years of Age)** <http://www.afb.org/info/blindness-statistics/interpreting-bls-employment-data/24>

Vermont Disability Status Report 2013

2013 Disability Status Report: Vermont Visually Impaired

<http://www.disabilitystatistics.org/index.cfm>

(Produced by Cornell from the American Community Survey)

Prevalence of Disutility

- All Ages=13,800 (2.2% of 621,100)
- Ages 16-20= 500 (1.1% of 46,100)
- Ages 21-64= 6,100 (1.7% of 366,900)
- Ages 65-74= 1,500 (2.6% of 60,400)

Employed

- Ages 21-64= 2,300 (38.5% of 6,100)

Percentage Not Working but Actively Looking for Employment

- Ages 21-64= 100 (3.0% of 3,700)

Full Time Full Year Employment Rate

- Ages 21-64= 1,900 (30.8% of 6,100)

Median Earnings

- Ages 21-64= \$34,400 (MOE +/-12,370—base population=2,000)

Median Household Income

- Ages 21-64= \$30,200 (MOE +/-15,280—base population=5,000)

Poverty Rate

- Ages 21-64= 1,400 (22.9%—base population=6,100)

SSI Recipients

- Ages 21-64= 1,000 (17.2%—base population=6,100)

High School Diploma Only or Equivalent

- Ages 21-64= 2,000 (33.7%—base population=6,100)

Some College/Associates Degree Only

- Ages 21-64= 2,700 (45.0%—base population=6,100)

Bachelor's Degree or More

- Ages 21-64= 900 (14.5%—base population=6,100)

Health Insurance

- Ages 21-64= 5,600 (93.0%—base population=6,100)

*The confidence level includes a very large range based on the very low number of people surveyed. The data are, however, useful for overall planning.

DBVI Projections for Cost Per Employment Outcome FFY 2016:

- The cost per employment outcome will remain at the \$18,000 to \$19,000 level.
- Employment outcomes will increase to 75.

Measure 6 - Cost Per Employment Outcome	FY2009	FY2010	FY2011	FY2012	FFY 2013
FY allocation	\$1,225,409	\$1,308,899	\$1,376,899	\$1,233,526	\$1,311,588
Employment outcomes	75	81	69	68	70
Cost per employment outcome (allocation/employment outcomes)	\$16,338.79	\$16,159.25	\$19,955.06	\$18,140.09	\$18,736.71

DBVI Projections for Expenditure Rate FFY 2016:

- Assessment, Counseling, Guidance and Placement will be at the \$950,000 level.
- Total expenditures will be at the \$1,800,000 level.
- Total Section 110 Funds Expended on Services will be at the \$650,000 level.

Measure 7 - Consumer Expenditure Rate	FY2009	FY2010	FY2011	FY2012	FFY 2013
Assessment, Counseling, Guidance and Placement	\$708,848	\$787,863	\$784,571	\$805,115	\$913,971
Total Expenditures (I-4)	\$1,628,971	\$1,802,481	\$1,646,676	\$1,781,059	\$1,887,622
Total Section 110 Funds Expended on Services	\$637,207	\$736,442	\$561,317	\$630,236	\$621,521

Case status information - Shows the flow of individuals through the program; from the RSA-113	FY2009	FY2010	FY2011	FY2012	FFY 2013
Total Applicants beginning and during the fiscal year	135	143	101	128	122
Total eligible individuals at the beginning and during the fiscal year	117	133	104	131	128
Individuals in plan receiving services beginning and during the fiscal year	340	335	307	323	346

DBVI Projections for Case Status Information FFY 2016:

- The number of new plans will be 100.
- The number of individuals served through supported employment will be 10.
- The number of new applications to increase to 110.

New Applications (RSA 113)

FFY 2011—88

FFY 2012—111

FFY 2013—105

FFY 2014—112

FFY 2015—102

Number Served (02 status or higher-AP)

FFY 2011—401

FFY 2012—424

FFY 2013—434

FFY 2014—394

FFY 2015—391

Achieve Employment Outcome (RSA 113)

FFY 2011—69

FFY 2012—68

FFY 2013—70

FFY 2014—74

FFY 2015—90

Competitively Employed:

FFY 2011—49

FFY 2012—53

FFY 2013—46

FFY 2014—51

FFY 2015—57

Caseload Activity and Cost of Services

Total number of Individuals and Expenditures for Services (from RSA 2):

FFY 2011—373 individuals received purchased services for cost of \$556,959 (Excludes Post Employment)

FFY 2012--384 individuals received purchased services for cost of \$692,733 (Excludes Post Employment)

FFY 2013--328 individuals received purchased services for cost of \$621,521 (Excludes Post Employment)

Services Provided by DBVI Personnel (from RSA 2):

Assessment, Counseling, Guidance, and Placement

FFY 2011--\$784,571

FFY 2012--\$805,115

FFY 2013—\$913,971

FFY 2014—\$844,885

FFY 2015--\$863,383

Number of Employment Plans Developed (RSA 113):

FFY 2011—83

FFY 2012—106

FFY 2013—98

FFY 2014—96

FFY 2015—111

Supported Employment

FFY 2011—4

FFY 2012—10

FFY 2013—7

FFY 2014—10

FFY 2015—10

—

Total Section 110 Funds Expended on Service (RSA 2):

FFY 2011—\$561,317

FFY 2012—\$630,236

FFY 2013—\$621,521

FFY 2014--\$643,503

FFY 2015--\$852,930

(I) State’s 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.

DBVI Goals and Strategies 2016

FFY 2016 Goals and Priorities	FFY 2016 Measures	FFY 2017 Targets
1. Economic Independence <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Livable wage job and income • Stay employed at least 6 months • Stay employed one year or more 	% Employment 2nd quarter after exit % Employment 4th quarter after exit	% Employment 2nd quarter after exit % Employment 4th quarter after exit (*Baseline determined in FFY 2016 and 2017. Part of WIOA Common Performance Measures)
2. Economic Independence <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Credential Attainment • Measurable employment skill gains 	% Credential Attainment % Measurable employment skill gains	% Credential Attainment % Measurable employment skill gains (*Baseline determined in FFY 2016 and 2017. Part of WIOA Common Performance Measures)

FFY 2016 Goals and Priorities	FFY 2016 Measures	FFY 2017 Targets
3. High school students within 6 months of graduation or exit from HS will obtain a job, or attend vocational training or college.	Within 6 months after graduation or exiting High school: % of individuals with a job % of individuals attending vocational training % of individuals attending college	Within 6 months after graduation or exiting High school: % of individuals with a job % of individuals attending vocational training % of individuals attending college
4. Consumer satisfaction with DBVI services will increase. Continue to create a Customer-Centered Culture.	Triennial consumer satisfaction survey.	DBVI will maintain overall consumer satisfaction at or above the 92% level (2015).
5. Consumer earnings will increase beyond the rate of inflation.	RSA Performance Indicator 1.5: DBVI wages compared to state average, and 1.6: own income as primary source of support.	1.5: DBVI consumer wages will increase from 79% in 2015 of state average to 82% of state average. 1.6: DBVI will increase the difference between percent self-supporting at closure and application from 31% in 2015 to 32%.
6. More consumers will be employed.	RSA Performance Indicator 1.2: Percentage of DBVI consumers achieving an employment outcome.	1.2: DBVI consumers achieving an employment outcome will increase from 73% in 2015 to 78%.

FFY 2016 Goals and Priorities	FFY 2016 Measures	FFY 2017 Targets
<p>7. Increase capacity to serve un-served or underserved populations; specifically:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deaf-Blind • Minority • Individuals who are transition age (14-24) • General Outreach to increase number of individuals served 	<p>Implementation of services targeted at underserved populations.</p>	<p>Increase the number of Deaf-Blind served from 3 in FFY 2015 to 5.</p> <p>Increase the percentage of transition age youth served to 22% from 21% in FFY 2015.</p> <p>Increase the percentage of high school students served to 7% from 6% in FFY 2015.</p> <p>Increase the number of individuals served who are minorities from 7 FFY 2015 to 9.</p>
<p>8. DBVI will work in collaboration with Creative Workforce Solutions and the DOL to ensure people who are blind or visually impaired have access to services through progressive employment opportunities and the state workforce investment system.</p>	<p>Increase the number of individuals served by both DBVI and DOL.</p> <p>As indicated on the DBVI tracking database (105-R)</p>	<p>DBVI will have a total of 10 customers who are served by DBVI and DOL together.</p>
<p>9. DBVI will work to improve the outcomes of community supported employment providers serving individuals with developmental disabilities.</p>	<p>Number of 26 closures achieved through the supported employment programs.</p>	<p>In FFY 2015 DBVI served and collaborated with General VR for a total of 8 people working in the supported employment programs. This will increase to 10.</p>

FFY 2016 Goals and Priorities	FFY 2016 Measures	FFY 2017 Targets
10. DBVI will work to improve the outcomes of community providers to build adaptive blindness skills.	Number of 26 closures achieved with assistance of VABVI services.	<p>In FFY 2015, a total of 92 cases closed where the individual had received services from VABVI, and 68 of these cases successfully achieved a 26 closure (Rehab Rate= 75 %).</p> <p>*Target is to stay within the 70-80% range. Increased from 40% in FFY 2011.</p>
11. DBVI will work to improve the outcomes of community providers to build skills for the workforce.	Number of 26 closures achieved with assistance of VABIR services.	<p>In FFY 2015, a total of 41 cases closed where the individual had received services from VABIR, and 29 of these cases successfully achieved a 26 closure (Rehab Rate= 71 %).</p> <p>*Target is to stay within the 70-80% range. Increased from 40% in FFY 2011.</p>

The SRC met on December 17, 2015 for final review and approval of these goals and priorities. Their input is documented in the Statewide Assessment and Input of the SRC sections.

(m) Order of Selection.

Not applicable.

(n) Goals and Plans for Distribution of Title VI-B 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.

DBVI realizes that it serves customers with significant disabilities who at times require vocational support beyond the scope of DBVI's standard services. It is for this reason that DBVI maintains a "Memorandum of Understanding" (MOU) with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR). This MOU describes how funds will be utilized and services provided in the area of supported employment. Thus consumers who may require intensive services, beyond vision impairment issues, to acquire or maintain employment can be provided with the needed support.

This MOU provides \$30,000 of Title VI, Part B funds to DVR's Supported Employment Program. In exchange DBVI is able to have consumers avail themselves of a comprehensive and established program providing statewide coverage and the expertise of supported employment providers.

Because of the multiple barriers that some DBVI consumers face, the DVR Supported Employment Coordinator helps to determine the most appropriate agency for those with multiple disabilities. DVR may be the more appropriate agency for DBVI consumers in cases where multiple disabilities are present. This coordination, with extensive knowledge of statewide resources, particularly in areas of psychiatric and developmental disability services, can provide technical assistance and the ability to provide to DBVI staff and consumers the best combination of resources.

DBVI has a separate grant award of \$6,000 of Title VI, Part B funds to provide short-term support services to qualified consumers. This allows the provision for a contract with a support person, job coach on the job site, or enrollment in a specific program to obtain job skills.

(o) Strategies to Achieve the Goals and Priorities.

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.

DBVI Employment Strategies FFY 2016-2018

Strategy 1: DBVI will collaborate with Creative Workforce Solutions to find employment in accordance with the customer's interests and qualifications.

Goal and Priority Area Addressed: 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 9, and 12

Actions added from FFY16 needs assessment

- Create technology guidelines for the workplace/work experience
- Create worksite preparation guidelines to make sure appropriate accommodations are accessible before the work experience begins.
- Create short-term vocational assessment opportunities by placing individuals at ReSource or the Café to learn about their skills.

Actions added from FFY13 needs assessment

- Establish clear goals with VABIR staff to increase the number of Employment Outcomes, Work Experiences, OJT, and Volunteer Opportunities as tracked in the CWS database.
- Expand opportunities in the Randolph-Sheppard Business Enterprise Program.

Strategy 2: All high school students who are blind or visually impaired will complete a DBVI Action Plan Transition form with their DBVI Counselor and IEP or 504 team.

Goal and Priority Area Addressed: 4

Actions added from FFY16 needs assessment

- Each DBVI Counselor will meet at the beginning of the school year with the Teachers of the Visually Impaired in their region to create a plan for opening eligible students in the DBVI VR program..
- Each DBVI Counselor will meet with the General VR Transition Counselor in their region.
- A DBVI Action Plan Transition form will be completed and updated annually for all eligible students..
- Participate in statewide Core Transition Teams. aContinue to increase student participation in the summer Learn Earn and Prosper (LEAP) summer work experiences and Employment Development Retreats during the school year.

Strategy 3: DBVI will promote employment by educating employers and providing opportunities for increased exposure to people who are blind or visually impaired. This will address “Societies reaction to blindness.”

Goal and Priority Area Addressed: 9

Actions added from FFY16 needs assessment

- Create products to bring and teach employers to understand the assistive equipment
- Create a network of ambassadors who demonstrate their assistive technology or canes and demonstrate to the employers about how they use technology to complete work tasks and travel independently.

Actions added from FFY13 needs assessment

- Create a video of people working at their job.

- Find opportunities to show the film “Going Blind” to employer groups at Chambers, Rotary’s, and public libraries.
- Find opportunities to teach employer groups about assistive technology.
- Encourage employers to visit the DBVI website.
- Explore the idea of connecting employers through discussion group.
- Work closely with GCEPD to promote employment of people with disabilities.
- Create educational activities for White Cane Day and Disability Awareness Month in October.
- Create a PSA involving an employed individual and company.
- Offer Simulations to demonstrate—“what is it like to be blind?”

Strategy 4: DBVI will create Consumer Driven Events to assist individuals as they prepare for employment.

Goal and Priority Area Addressed: 5

Actions added from FFY16 needs assessment

- Continue Great Expectations consumer driven events twice/year.
- Create workshops to develop interpersonal and employment skills
- Employment support groups (starting January 2016)

Actions added from FFY13 needs assessment

- Create networking events.
- Opportunities to practice interview and job readiness skills.
- Create peer mentoring opportunities for adjustment to blindness and technology.

Strategy 5: DBVI will create opportunities for access to information.

Goal and Priority Area Addressed: 5

Action added from FFY16 needs assessment

- Create opportunities for Peer to Peer Technology Instruction

Actions added from FFY13 needs assessment

- DBVI will continue to expand the information on the website and will work with the SRC for ideas.
- Use Customer-Centered Culture to determine “what types of information customers really want”?

Strategy 6: DBVI will address transportation challenges.

Goal and Priority Area Addressed: 11

Action added from FFY16 needs assessment

- Consider policy to pay for mileage and time of VABVI drivers in order to have a network of drivers available to meet transportation needs

Actions added from FFY13 needs assessment

- Participate in system level planning.
- Assist VABVI to increase the number of volunteer drivers—build data base.
- Promote the option for DBVI to pay for the first 60 days of a ride to the job.

Strategy 7: DBVI will improve communication with customers regarding expectations for DBVI services.

Goal and Priority Areas Addressed: 5

Actions added from FFY 16needs assessment

- DBVI will create an assessment instrument that is used just prior to services and when services end to identify the progress an individual made during their time working with DBVI. This will help DBVI report how the DBVI program assisted individuals to improve their circumstances in areas they report as becoming “better off.”

Actions added from FFY 13 needs assessment

- DBVI will develop a consistent statewide orientation to DBVI services which will be implemented in all four regional offices.
- DBVI will work within the principles of Customer-Centered Culture to make sure we are answering the question: “What does the consumer really want?”

- DBVI will continually evaluate timeliness, accuracy, and ease of obtaining services. DBVI will establish an ongoing closure survey. Results will be shared and evaluated with the SRC on an ongoing basis.
- Ask customers to evaluate DBVI products using the Customer-Centered Culture model.
- Implement a closure survey that can be sent to all closed cases in FFY 13.

Strategy 8: DBVI will increase capacity to serve underserved populations through the implementation of special projects.

Goal and Priority Area: 8

Actions added from FFY16 needs assessment

- Develop a set of outreach materials to be used at events across the state including outreach to minorities and underserved populations.

Actions added from FFY13 needs assessment

- Create and support Deaf-Blind SSP project.
- Coordinate with VR Transition Counselors, and the Teachers of the Visually Impaired to increase the number of transition students served. Create some documents that explain what DBVI can offer.
- Create a statewide system to track all visually impaired students as they graduate high school.
- Add 5-hours / week to the job developer position in Burlington to expand outreach efforts.

Strategy 9: DBVI will explore outreach strategies to increase applicants and diversify the DBVI caseload.

Goal and Priority Areas: 8

Actions added from FFY16 needs assessment

- Educate providers about the importance of timely referrals.
- Outreach to developmental services and mental health agencies that typically do not referred to DBVI.

Actions added from FFY13 needs assessment

- Each DBVI region will create an outreach plan for the year that includes outreach to minorities and other underserved or underrepresented individuals in each region.
- The job developer in Burlington will use an additional 5-hours/week to build relationships with community groups of minority populations.

Strategy 10: DBVI staff will have the tools to deliver services quickly to DBVI customers.

Goal and Priority Areas: 1 and 9

Actions added from FFY16 needs assessment

- DBVI will work with the job driven technical assistance center to learn new and innovative ways to prepare individuals for the workforce.

Actions added from FFY13 needs assessment

- DBVI will explore the use of purchasing laptops for staff to do their job more efficiently.
- DBVI will explore professional development opportunities with the TACE Center.

Strategy 11: DBVI will implement strategies designed to enable DBVI customers to access higher wage employment through short-term training.

Goal and Priority Areas: 1, 2, 3, 6, and 9

Actions added from FFY16 needs assessment

- DBVI will work closely with vocational technical education centers in Vermont to help high school students and adults prepare for the workforce.
- Establish relationships with vocational centers to get consumers trained for positions in the area
- Attend State Technical Education Director's Meeting

Actions added from FFY13 needs assessment

- Evaluate the impact of progressive employment on outcomes.
- Track education and training opportunities that lead to degrees or credentials.
- Establish working relationships with Vocational Tech Centers and track participation.

Strategy 12: DBVI will implement activities designed to reduce the number of individuals who are closed in a status 28 (not employed).

Goal and Priority Areas: 1 and 7

Actions added from FFY13 needs assessment

- DBVI will conduct a comprehensive evaluation of status 28 closures to identify any specific trends or issues that DBVI needs to address.

Strategy 13: DBVI will partner with the Vermont Department of Labor to provide employment training options for dual DBVI/DOL customers.

Goal and Priority Areas: 2 and 9

Actions added from FFY13 needs assessment

- DBVI will work closely with DOL to create and implement the Unified Plan with a common mission and vision to include all Vermonters in the workforce.

Actions added from FFY16 needs assessment

- DBVI will establish a system for tracking participation of DBVI customers who utilize DOL services and training.
- DBVI will work with CWS local teams and DOL to obtain employment needs of companies and then match DBVI customers with specific training.
- DBVI will invite DOL to a staff meeting to discuss collaboration ideas.

Strategy 14: DBVI will provide technology training for people who need to prepare for a job or succeed at a current job.

Goal and Priority Areas: 2 & 12

Actions added from FFY16 needs assessment

- Create a menu of training options ranging from expert training to independent study
- Create Peer to Peer Technology Instruction

Actions added from FFY13 needs assessment

- DBVI will problem solve to make job sites accessible through technology training. Use a team approach for a given situation including customer, job developer, counselor, job site technology evaluation, and training.
- DBVI will increase the number of people who use the training service to make the crossover to Windows 7 and Office 2010 using Tandem and Go-To-Manage as a training tool.
- DBVI will educate customers about Tandem and Go-To-Manage by putting training examples on the website including mp3 recordings and success stories.
- DBVI will assist customers to continuously improve work related technology skills like using the internet, Microsoft Office, M312, and Adobe documents so they can do their job in the most efficient way.
- DBVI will create a system for establishing technology training goals that are adjusted quarterly as necessary.

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

Evaluation and Report of Progress

(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.

Evaluation and Report of Progress

DBVI Goals and Strategies 2013

FFY 2013 Goals and Priorities	FFY 2013 Measures	FFY 2013 Targets
12. Consumer satisfaction with DBVI services will increase. Continue to create a Customer-Centered Culture.	Triennial consumer satisfaction survey.	DBVI will maintain overall consumer satisfaction at or above the 92% level (2011).
Update: Statewide random survey conducted by Market Decisions in FFY 2015 showed 95% Overall Satisfaction.		
13. Consumer earnings will increase beyond the rate of inflation.	RSA Performance Indicator 1.5: DBVI wages compared to state average, and 1.6: own income as primary source of support.	1.5: DBVI consumer wages will increase from 80% in 2010 of state average to 82% of state average in 2013. 1.6: DBVI will increase the difference between percent self-supporting at closure and application from 16% in 2010 to 19% in 2013.
<p>Update Indicator 1.5: 2011— 82% of the state average. 2012—75% of the state average. 2013—79% of the state average. 2014—81% of the state average. 2015—79% of the state average.</p> <p>Update Indicator 1.6: 2011—18% difference between percent self-supporting at closure and application. 2012—12% difference between percent self-supporting at closure and application. 2013—18.1% difference between percent self-supporting at closure and application. 2014—27% difference between percent self-supporting at closure and application. 2015—31% difference between percent self-supporting at closure and application.</p>		
14. More customers will be employed.	RSA Performance Indicator 1.2: Percentage of DBVI consumers achieving an employment outcome. Increase rehab rate.	1.2: DBVI consumers achieving an employment outcome will increase from 71% in 2010 to 73% in 2013. DBVI rehab rate will increase from 73% in 2010 to 77% in 2013.

FFY 2013 Goals and Priorities	FFY 2013 Measures	FFY 2013 Targets
<p>Update Indicator 1.2: 2011—75% 2012—77% 2013—80.2% 2014—79% 2015—73%</p>		
<p>15. Serve more transition age students.</p>	<p>Percentage of DBVI caseload</p>	<p>DBVI will increase the transition age population served from 21% in 2010 to 22% in 2013.</p>
<p>Update: 2011—22% of the total population served. This includes 7 out of 353 youth under age 25 at application were served in FFY 2013 (this includes cases in status 02 and above, but not cases open only in post-employment). 2012—21% of the total population served. This includes 75 out of 363 youth under age 25 at application were served in FFY 2013 (this includes cases in status 02 and above, but not cases open only in post-employment). 2013—20% of the total population served. This includes 74 out of 375 youth under age 25 at application were served in FFY 2013 (this includes cases in status 02 and above, but not cases open only in post-employment). 2014—20% of the total population served. This includes 76 youth under age 25 at application served out of 387 individuals served in FFY 2014 (this includes cases in status 02 and above, but not cases open only in post-employment). 2014— 4% of the total population served. This includes 15 high school students out of 387 individuals served in FFY 2014 (this includes cases in status 02 and above, but not cases open only in post-employment). 2015—21% of the total population served. This includes 78 youth under age 25 at application served out of 372 individuals served in FFY 2015 (this includes cases in status 02 and above, but not cases open only in post-employment). 2015— 6% of the total population served. This includes 21 high school students out of 372 individuals served in FFY 2015 (this includes cases in status 02 and above, but not cases open only in post-employment).</p>		
<p>16. DBVI employees will be satisfied with their jobs.</p>	<p>Results from biennial DAIL/DBVI staff satisfaction survey.</p>	<p>DBVI staff satisfaction will be maintained at (2011 rating) or higher.</p>

FFY 2013 Goals and Priorities	FFY 2013 Measures	FFY 2013 Targets
17. All DBVI staff will have the skills and competencies to do their jobs.	Feedback from staff on biennial DBVI staff satisfaction survey.	In 2011 90% of staff said they had enough information to do their jobs. This will be maintained at (2011 rating) or higher.
18. Increase capacity to serve un-served or underserved populations; specifically: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deaf-Blind • Minority • Individuals who are transition age (14-24). 	Implementation of services targeted at underserved populations.	Partner with the Vermont Center for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing to support training of Support Service Providers in Vermont. Increase the percentage of transition age youth served to 14%. Increase the number of individuals served who are minorities from 5 in FFY 2011 to 10 in FFY 2013.

FFY 2013 Goals and Priorities	FFY 2013 Measures	FFY 2013 Targets
<p>Update Deaf-Blind SSP: 2011—DBVI provided a grant to VCDHH to provide training to build the capacity to provide SSP services in Vermont. The VT Coalition for Disability Rights made this a platform item to request state general fund to pay for this service. 2012—0 persons served. 2013—1 person served. The pilot SSP project is on hold because the Center for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing is longer in business and they were going to coordinate the project. 2014—3 persons served. 2015—3 person served.</p> <p>Update - Number of Transition Age Youth: 2011—See #4 above. 2012—See #4 above. 2013—See #4 above. 2014— See #4 above. 2015— See #4 above.</p> <p>Update – Number of Minorities Served 2012—the number of individuals served was 4. Ratio of minority service rate to non-minority service rate = .80 2013—the number of individuals served was 6. Ratio of minority service rate to non-minority service rate = .88 2014—the number of individuals served was 8. Ratio of minority service rate to non-minority service rate = 1.20 (all minority clients were served (100%) compared to 84% of non-minorities served. 2015—the number of individuals served was 7. Ratio of minority service rate to non-minority service rate = .83</p>		
<p>19. DBVI will work in collaboration with Creative Workforce Solutions and the DOL to ensure people who are blind or visually impaired have access to services through progressive employment opportunities and the state workforce investment system.</p>	<p>As indicated on the DBVI tracking database (105-R)</p>	<p>By the end of FFY 2013 DBVI will have a total of 8 customers who are served by DBVI and DOL together.</p>
<p>Update—Served by DOL: 2012—Two individuals also had services provided by One-Stop. 2013—Three individuals also had services provided by One-Stop. 2014—Two individuals also had services provided by One-Stop. 2015—Three individuals also had services provided by One-Stop.</p>		

FFY 2013 Goals and Priorities	FFY 2013 Measures	FFY 2013 Targets
<p>20. DBVI will work to improve the outcomes of community supported employment providers serving individuals with developmental disabilities.</p>	<p>Number of 26 closures achieved through the supported employment programs.</p> <p>Total number of people who are blind or visually impaired and have developmental disabilities employed with supports.</p>	<p>In Federal Fiscal Year 2011 DBVI served or collaborated with General VR for a total of 4 people who were working in supported employment programs. This will increase to 6 by Federal Fiscal Year 2013.</p>
<p>Update – Supported Employment: 2012—Four individuals received supported employment services through a designated agency. 2013—Four individuals received supported employment services through a designated agency. 2014—Six individuals received supported employment services through a designated agency. 2015—Six individuals received supported employment services through a designated agency.</p>		
<p>21. DBVI will work to improve the outcomes of community providers serving individuals who are blind or visually impaired.</p>	<p>Number of 26 closures achieved with assistance of VABIR and VABVI services.</p> <p>Number of 26 closures achieved with assistance of VABIR and VABVI services.</p>	<p>In Federal Fiscal Year 2011 a total of 50 people received services from VABIR and 20 successfully achieved a 26 closure (Rehab Rate=40%). This will increase to a rehab rate of 50% by Federal Fiscal Year 2013.</p> <p>In State Fiscal Year 2011 a total of 100 people received services from VABVI and 40 successfully achieved a 26 closure (Rehab Rate=40%). This will increase to a rehab rate of 50% by Federal Fiscal Year 2013.</p>

FFY 2013 Goals and Priorities	FFY 2013 Measures	FFY 2013 Targets
<p>Update – Closures with VABIR Services 2012—a total of 27 cases closed where the individual had received services from VABIR, and 22 of these cases successfully achieved a 26 closure (Rehab Rate= 81 %). 2013—a total of 26 cases closed where the individual had received services from VABIR, and 22 of these cases successfully achieved a 26 closure (Rehab Rate= 81 %). 2014—a total of 29 cases closed where the individual had received services from VABIR, and 20 of these cases successfully achieved a 26 closure (Rehab Rate= 71 %). 2015—a total of 41 cases closed where the individual had received services from VABIR, and 29 of these cases successfully achieved a 26 closure (Rehab Rate= 71 %).</p> <p>Update – Closures with VABVI Services: 2012—a total of 52 cases closed where the individual had received services from VABVI, and 40 of these cases successfully achieved a 26 closure (Rehab Rate= 84 %). 2013—a total of 57 cases closed where the individual had received services from VABVI, and 49 of these cases successfully achieved a 26 closure (Rehab Rate= 86%). 2014—a total of 73 cases closed where the individual had received services from VABVI, and 52 of these cases successfully achieved a 26 closure (Rehab Rate= 76 %). 2015—a total of 92 cases closed where the individual had received services from VABVI, and 68 of these cases successfully achieved a 26 closure (Rehab Rate= 75 %).</p>		

Evaluation of DBVI Employment Strategies FFY 2015

Strategy 1: DBVI will collaborate with Creative Workforce Solutions to find employment in accordance with the customer’s interests and qualifications.

Goal and Priority Area Addressed: 3 and 8

Actions:

- Establish clear goals with VABIR staff to increase the number of Employment Outcomes, Work Experiences, OJT, and Volunteer Opportunities as tracked in the CWS database.
- Expand opportunities in the Randolph-Sheppard Business Enterprise Program.

Update 2015:

- DBVI has worked closely with VR, DOL, and AOE to create a Unified Plan under WIOA. This will result in expanded employment opportunities and results for individuals who are blind or visually impaired.
- In FFY 2015 the DBVI Director joined the Governor’s Committee of Employment of People with Disabilities.

Strategy 2: DBVI will promote employment by educating employers and providing opportunities for increased exposure to people who are blind or visually impaired. This will address “Societies reaction to blindness.”

Goal and Priority Area Addressed: 3

Actions:

- Create a video of people working at their job.

Update 2015:

This past year DBVI presented at:

- VABVI PALS groups
- Disability Awareness Day at the Vermont State House
- Central Vermont Job Fair
- Lamoille Valley Job Fair
- Vermont Adaptive Ski and Sports (VASS) Four summer events
- Central Vermont Home Health
- Springfield Community Health Team
- Vermont Optometrist Association Convention
- UVM Disability Day (For future Doctors)
- Bellows Falls Optometrist
- Johnson State College
- Vocational Rehabilitation regional offices
- Regional White Cane Awareness Day marches around the State of Vermont
- Rutland Business Recognition Breakfast
- Rutland Chamber of commerce
- Rutland Council on Aging
- Regional Core Transition Team Meetings
- Regional workforce Boards

In addition to the above presentations, DBVI continually sends out information and brochures to local optometrist, ophthalmologist, Regional Area Agencies on Aging, diabetic educators, Elderly living Centers and Colleges and training programs.

- DBVI cosponsored White Cane Awareness Events across the state during the month of October.

Strategy 3: DBVI will create Consumer Driven Events to assist individuals as they prepare for employment.

Goal and Priority Area Addressed: 1, 2, and 3

Actions:

- Create networking events.

Update 2015:

- DBVI held two statewide consumer driven events in the ongoing “Great Expectations” series of workshops. The theme this year was “self-awareness.” The agenda included several peer lead panel discussions about how self-awareness leading to employment.

Strategy 4: DBVI will create opportunities for access to information.

Goal and Priority Area Addressed: 2 and 3

Actions:

- DBVI will continue to expand the information on the website and will work with the SRC for ideas.

Update 2015:

- The newly designed DBVI website will launch early 2016 on a new platform.

Strategy 5: DBVI will address transportation challenges.

Goal and Priority Area Addressed: 3

Actions:

- Participate in system level planning.
- Assist VABVI to increase the number of volunteer drivers—build data base.
- Promote the option for DBVI to pay for the first 60 days of a ride to the job.

Update 2015:

- The pilot with the Vermont Transportation Agency to assess the transportation needs for people who are deaf and blind has been delayed due to the recent closing of the Vermont Association for the Deaf who were planning to host the project.

Strategy 6: DBVI will improve communication with customers regarding expectations for DBVI services.

Goal and Priority Areas Addressed: 1

Actions:

- DBVI will develop a consistent statewide orientation to DBVI services which will be implemented in all four regional offices.

Update 2015:

- DBVI contracted with Market Decisions to conduct a statewide customer satisfaction survey.
- As a follow-up to DBVI's Employment Guide to Services, DBVI is currently developing a pre and post checklist to collect evidence of how people are "Better Off" as a result of working with DBVI. This will be completed by June 2016.

Strategy 7: DBVI will increase communication within DBVI through implementation of videoconferencing in all four regions and central office.

Goal and Priority Areas Addressed: 5 and 6

Actions:

- DBVI will implement videoconferencing technology in all four DBVI district offices and central office. This technology will be used for staff meetings and trainings (complete).

Strategy 8: DBVI will increase capacity to serve underserved populations through the implementation of special projects.

Goal and Priority Area: 7

Actions:

- Create a statewide system to track all visually impaired students as they graduate high school.
- Add 5-hours / week to the job developer position in Burlington to expand outreach efforts.
- Create and support Deaf-Blind SSP project.

Update 2015:

- The pilot with the Vermont Transportation Agency to assess the transportation needs for people who are deaf and blind has been delayed due to the recent closing of the Vermont Association for the Deaf who were planning to host the project.
- DBVI staff had a statewide meeting to coordinate with VR Transition Counselors, and the Teachers of the Visually Impaired to increase the number of transition students served. Create some documents that explain what DBVI can offer.
- The Learn Earn and Prosper (LEAP) employment program for youth has expanded from summer to year-round sessions. Two workshops were held during school vacation to provide direct instructions for Pre-Employment Transition Skills for high school students.

Strategy 9: DBVI will continue to become an administratively efficient organization by finding efficient and user friendly ways to complete paperwork for staff and customers.

Goal and Priority Areas: All

Actions:

- DBVI and DVR will continue efforts to create an automated case management system to be completed in FFY 2013.

Update 2015:

DBVI and VR are in the process of finalizing a contract for a case management system.

Strategy 10: DBVI will systematically recognize exemplary staff performance using an evaluation system based on core competencies and development of SMART goals.

Goal and Priority Areas: 5 & 6

Actions:

- DBVI supervisors will work with each staff member to create SMART goals connected to the DBVI strategic plan.

- DBVI supervisors will work with each staff member to establish development opportunities for the 5 DBVI Core Competencies.
- Each staff will have an Individual Development Plan.

Update 2015:

- Each staff has identified individual development opportunities as they relate to DBVI strategies.

Strategy 11: DBVI will explore outreach strategies to increase applicants and diversify the DBVI caseload.

Goal and Priority Areas: 3 and 7

Actions:

- Each DBVI region will create an outreach plan for the year.

Update 2015:

This past year DBVI presented at:

- VABVI PALS groups
- Disability Awareness Day at the Vermont State House
- Central Vermont Job Fair
- Lamoille Valley Job Fair
- Vermont Adaptive Ski and Sports (VASS) Four summer events
- Central Vermont Home Health
- Springfield Community Health Team
- Vermont Optometrist Association Convention
- UVM Disability Day (For future Doctors)
- Bellows Falls Optometrist
- Johnson State College
- Vocational Rehabilitation regional offices
- Regional White Cane Awareness Day marches around the State of Vermont
- Rutland Business Recognition Breakfast
- Rutland Chamber of commerce
- Rutland Council on Aging
- Regional Core Transition Team Meetings
- Regional workforce Boards
- In addition to the above presentations, DBVI continually sends out information and brochures to local optometrist, ophthalmologist, Regional Area Agencies on Aging, diabetic educators, Elderly living Centers and Colleges and training programs.
- UVM Job Fair
- Lions Club
- Johnson State college
- Windsor, White River Junction, Lebanon Optometrist
- Springfield Community Health Team
- Rutland Community Access

Strategy 12: DBVI staff will have the tools to deliver services quickly to DBVI customers.

Goal and Priority Areas: 1

Actions:

- DBVI will explore the use of purchasing laptops for staff to do their job more efficiently.
- DBVI will explore professional development opportunities with the TACE Center.

Update 2015:

DBVI held a Low Vision workshop for staff in May 2015 in White River Jct. The presenter, Darick Wright is a low vision expert from Perkins. The goal is for DBVI staff to have current knowledge about trends in low vision and a solid understanding of environmental factors for different eye conditions.

Strategy 13: DBVI will implement strategies designed to enable DBVI customers to access higher wage employment through short-term training.

Goal and Priority Areas: 1, 2, 3, & 8

Actions:

- Evaluate the impact of progressive employment on outcomes.

Update 2015:

DBVI continues to work closely with VABIR to create progressive employment opportunities. 2012—a total of 27 cases closed where the individual had received services from VABIR, and 22 of these cases successfully achieved a 26 closure (Rehab Rate= 81 %). 2013—a total of 26 cases closed where the individual had received services from VABIR, and 22 of these cases successfully achieved a 26 closure (Rehab Rate= 81 %). 2014—a total of 29 cases closed where the individual had received services from VABIR, and 20 of these cases successfully achieved a 26 closure (Rehab Rate= 71 %). 2015—a total of 41 cases closed where the individual had received services from VABIR, and 29 of these cases successfully achieved a 26 closure (Rehab Rate= 71 %).

Strategy 14: DBVI will implement activities designed to reduce the number of individuals who are closed in a status 28 (not employed).

Goal and Priority Areas: 1, and 3

Actions:

- DBVI will conduct a comprehensive evaluation of status 28 closures to identify any specific trends or issues that DBVI needs to address.

Update 2015:

FFY 2015, the reason closed for cases that had a plan, but closed unsuccessfully (i.e., status 28 closures) were:

Reason Closed	Cases
---------------	-------

Unable to locate or contact	17
Disability too significant for VR	2
No Longer Interested In Services	6
Death	8
Transferred to another agency	2
All other reasons	1

Strategy 15: DBVI will partner with the Vermont Department of Labor to provide employment training options for dual DBVI/DOL customers.

Goal and Priority Areas: 3 & 8

Actions:

- DBVI will establish a system for tracking participation of DBVI customers who utilize DOL services and training.
- DBVI will work with CWS local teams and DOL to obtain employment needs of companies and then match DBVI customers with specific training.
- DBVI will invite DOL to a staff meeting to discuss collaboration ideas.

Update 2015:

- DBVI has worked closely with DOL under WIOA to develop our Unified Plan which will lead to more employment and training opportunities for individuals who are blind or visually impaired.

Strategy 16: DBVI will provide technology training for people who need to prepare for a job or succeed at a current job.

Goal and Priority Areas: 2 & 3

Actions:

- DBVI will problem solve to make job sites accessible through technology training. Use a team approach for a given situation including customer, job developer, counselor, job site technology evaluation, and training.
- DBVI will increase the number of people who use the training service to make the crossover to Windows 7 and Office 2010 using Tandem and Go-To-Manage as a training tool.
- DBVI will educate customers about Tandem and Go-To-Manage by putting training examples on the website including mp3 recordings and success stories.
- DBVI will assist customers to continuously improve work related technology skills like using the internet, Microsoft Office, M312, and Adobe documents so they can do their job in the most efficient way.

Update 2015:

DBVI purchased a curriculum from Apex that includes a module for using screen readers and screen enlargement software with Microsoft products. It includes lesson plans, student practice, and assessments. The materials are being used with several customers and are producing good results.

- DBVI will create a system for establishing technology training goals that are adjusted quarterly as necessary.

Standards and Indicators-

DBVI met 5 of the 6 indicators in Standard 1 and met all 3 of the Primary indicators in FFY 2013. The Indicators not met was 1.6. Indicator 1.1 measures the number of successful closures in a two year period compared to the average for the prior 2 year period. This increased by 20 in FFY 2015 (144 to 164). The history for Homemaker closures is:

FFY 2011=29% (20 of 69)

FFY 2012=20% (14 of 68)

FFY 2013=27% (19 of 70)

FFY 2014=23% (17 of 74)

FFY 2015=33% (30 of 60)

Indicator 1.6 measures the difference between the percentage who report their own income as the largest single source of economic support at the time they exit the VR program and the percentage who report their own income as the largest single source of support at the time they apply for VR services. This is the same standard missed the prior year. DBVI believes our lower percentage this year is based on two factors. One reason is that many customers are beginning self-employment. Many people have turned to this option due to the tough economic climate and limited number of jobs. The other reason is the high percentage of job saves again this year. DBVI has a strong commitment to working with customers who are currently employed so that they won't lose their jobs as they experience vision loss.

All other Standards and Indicators were met in FFY 2015. See updates above for details.

Innovation and Expansion:

General Program Information

The Learn, Earn, and Prosper (LEAP) program provides youth, 16-24 years old, who are blind or visually impaired the opportunity to gain the skills needed to become independent, confident, and productive young adults. The goal of this program is to increase the employable skills of youth in transition which will help lead to meaningful employment. The LEAP program is a great balance of learning new skills and enjoying all that Vermont's outdoors has to offer in the summertime — for instance sailing, hiking, and visiting the local Farmer's Market!

In 2015, 17 Corps Members and Interns representing 6 states participated in the LEAP program and over the course of 4-8 weeks they learned how to:

- Cook delicious meals
- Create a budget
- Use a cash register, repair computers and/or serve customers in retail and food service settings
- Take public transportation

- Create lasting friendships
- Kayak on Lake Champlain
- Build a community
- Have FUN!!

In 2016 we will offer four distinct LEAP programs: the LEAP Crew for youth 16-22 and the LEAP Internship for youth 18-24.

LEAP Crew

The LEAP Crew is an intensive residential program where a team of 6-8 Corps Members have a chance to practice living independently under the guidance of two experienced ReSOURCE Crew Leaders. Members learn how to cook meals, shop for groceries, budget money, use public transportation, do laundry, and live as a community -- all while making friends and sharing new experiences!

LEAP Corps Members work at one of two job placements three days a week, work with the Farm at VYCC two days a week and participate in weekly career and college readiness workshops. Weekends are spent as a crew exploring all the Burlington area has to offer: canoeing, hiking, swimming, attending a play, visiting the museum, practicing yoga, taking art classes, etc.

Throughout this whole experience the crew lives in an apartment on the UVM campus where they can practice independent living skills, such as learning to buy groceries, cooking healthy meals, doing laundry and sharing chores around the apartment.

ReSOURCE

One of the job training sites for the LEAP Crew is ReSOURCE. At ReSOURCE, Corps Members receive job training which in turn helps ReSOURCE to continue its mission of teaching individuals in transition valuable job skills and technical training. Many tasks and projects must be completed in order to help ReSOURCE run efficiently and effectively. To learn more visit www.resourcevt.org.

Corps members may receive job training in one or more areas including customer service, working in the home goods store, disassembling computers, small appliance repair, carpentry, and office administration.

Overlook Café

The Overlook Café is a Randolph Sheppard site and serves as the other LEAP Crew training site. At the Overlook Café Corps Members learn job skills including customer service, food preparation, menu pricing, cash register use, and office administration.

The Farm at VYCC

One day a week the LEAP Crew travels to Richmond, VT to work with Farm Crew. The LEAP crew works as a team to weed gardens, harvest and wash vegetables, weigh and pack weekly Health Care Shares and prepare for the Farmer's Market. In 2016, the Farm at VYCC will also be

an option for a three day a week work experience, similar to ReSOURCE and the Overlook Café above, for LEAP participants. <http://www.farmatvycc.org/>

Professional Development Fridays

Every Friday LEAP Crew participates in workshops provided by different organizations in Burlington. These workshops cover essential career skills such as interviewing, budgeting, and resume writing, public speaking, planning for college, a personality test, and more.

WoRD - Writing, Reading and Discussion

Built into each day is one hour for the VYCC educational program, WoRD. Using a compilation of articles and essays, crews read aloud about important environmental and social issues that are relevant both locally and nationally. The crew then engages in thoughtful discussion and spends time journaling on the topic. The goal of WoRD is to explore new topics and help participants articulate their thoughts and opinions in a safe environment. WoRD books are available electronically and in large print and Braille.

LEAP Corps Member Job Description

Responsibilities

- Work hard as part of a team
- Participate in all activities, including WoRD, group training exercises, and community activities
- Respect fellow crew members and the natural environment
- Share all cooking and cleaning duties
- Complete safe, high quality work on all projects
- Abide by all VYCC rules and policies

Qualifications

- 16 - 24 years of age
- Strong desire to join ReSOURCE and work with others
- Ability to follow directions and independently complete tasks
- Willingness to learn, receive feedback, and work hard

LEAP Internship Program

The LEAP Internship Program is built upon the foundation of the LEAP Crew. Youth will have the opportunity to continue building their transferable job skills and independent living skills in a supportive environment. Four interns will work and live in Burlington under the guidance of a trained Crew Leader. Each intern will have an independent work site and will take public transportation to and from work to further prepare for competitive employment. Staff will work with interns on an individual basis throughout the application process to find a worksite that meets their work goals.

Nights and weekends in the LEAP Internship Program will be spent as a group with interns having the opportunity to explore Burlington and continue developing their independent living skills. Interns will take yoga, attend a play, visit museums, try rock climbing, visit the Farmer's Market and explore the city. Interns help support each other through these new experiences and

they will be able to meet with the LEAP Corps Members for weekly potluck dinners to share about their experiences and build a larger community.

Throughout the internship, participants will be encouraged to progressively take on more independent tasks at the worksite and to take on more responsibility for aspects of community living such as meal planning, grocery shopping, community involvement, planning weekend activities and organizing chore charts.

Internship sites in the past two years have included the Sara Holbrook Community Center, King St. Youth, the Farm at VYCC, VT Fresh Foods, The Flynn Theatre, Small Dog Electronics, the Courthouse Café, Maple Wind Farm, ReSOURCE, South Burlington Parks and Recreation, and more.

Intern Job Description

Responsibilities

- Work hard as part of a team
- Participate in all VYCC activities, including WoRD, group training exercises, and community activities
- Respect fellow Interns and the natural environment
- Share all cooking and cleaning duties
- Complete high quality work
- Abide by all VYCC rules and policies
- Abide by all worksite specific policies

Qualifications

- 18 - 24 years of age
- Strong desire to join the VYCC and work with others
- Ability to work independently with minimal direct supervision
- Ability to follow directions and independently complete tasks
- Willingness to learn, receive feedback, and work hard

Professional Growth Workshops

This program will focus on developing students' professional skills so that they are more prepared to enter the workforce when they graduate. During the school year, students meet to learn professional skills which will allow them to be successful in their vocation. Workshops have focused on workplace relationships, networking and developing resources, and learning how to interview. We intend to plan and facilitate workshops in the future which will teach workplace assistive technology, financing emotional intelligence, and more.

In 2016, LEAP will execute 3 Professional Growth Workshops working with a total of 24 youth who are blind and visually impaired. We will provide reports to DBVI counselors to track student progress, give observations and make recommendations. We will also follow up with students before and after workshops to be sure they are working on their career goals.

Mentoring Program

LEAP will launch an exciting new leadership development program in 2016 which develops and structures meaningful mentorship between youth and adults who are blind and visually impaired. The program will create curriculum (guided by the Expanded Core Curriculum) for leaders and their mentees to follow in order to create success. Adults successful in the workplace will be paired with transitional aged youth to help guide them towards their career goals.

Quotes from Crew Members

“Before I joined LEAP I sat around over the summer. I had nothing to do. But since joining I have had a fun filled summer and get to meet new people. Since I’ve been here we have done a lot including work on the farm. I’ve done farming before but not on that large of a scale. If I didn’t join the LEAP Crew I wouldn’t be active. I would be sitting on my couch watching T.V. LEAP changed that because now I’m out working and having fun and making new friends.”

“Before LEAP, I was lacking teambuilding skills. I was always a loner in a group. I have been getting better at that. I never worked at a store before and now I am getting some experience. Since I came here I have been learning so much. I used to not like being in groups. I liked working at ReSOURCE and on the Farm at VYCC. I am having a very prosperous summer.”

“Best overall Moment...Definitely this last week. We had some turbulence but we all became friends on some level. Isn’t that what LEAP is all about? All these different people living together for a month and making it work. Now that is an accomplishment!

Results-Based Accountability

Performance Measures

Employment Rate: The percentage of people served by DBVI who have achieved an employment outcome successfully attained vocational goal for a minimum of 90 days.

	<i>2010</i>	<i>2011</i>	<i>2012</i>	<i>2013</i>	<i>2014</i>	<i>2015</i>	<i>National Standard</i>
Employment Rate	71%	75%	77%	80%	79%	73%	67.11%

Earnings Compared to State Average: Average hourly earnings of people who exit DBVI as a percentage of state earnings average.

	<i>2011</i>	<i>2012</i>	<i>2013</i>	<i>2014</i>	<i>2015</i>	<i>National Standard</i>
<i>% of earning compared to state average</i>	82%	75%	79%	81%	79%	59%

Customer Satisfaction:

	<i>2003 Market Decisions Survey (Formal)</i>	<i>2011 Market Decisions Survey (Formal)</i>	<i>2013 Closure Survey (Ongoing Informal)</i>	<i>2014 Closure Survey (Ongoing Informal)</i>	<i>2015 Market Decisions Survey (Formal)</i>
Overall Satisfaction with services received	93%	92%			95%
Services provided met expectations	93%	90%			85%
Staff were helpful to achieve vocational goals	98%	95%			96%
DBVI delivered services well for me			92%	91%	89%
I did get the results I wanted from DBVI			93%	89%	94%

Story Behind the Curve

DBVI’s primary indicators show a strong rehabilitation rate for people who are blind or visually impaired. While these results are above the national average in all areas, DBVI’s objective is to help all customers reach their employment goals. For this reason, DBVI’s SFY2015 research agenda includes an analysis to determine why some individuals did not obtain employment.

DBVI also expects to help individuals get the best paying job possible. We realize that many individuals decide to develop their own small business, which meets their lifestyle needs, but may not have a strong income return in the beginning. Our research agenda also includes a look at what types of professions individuals are choosing and the incomes they are earning.

Vision loss causes a sharp initial decrease in independence and ability to do regular tasks previously done with normal vision. The DBVI program provides the opportunity for people to learn new adaptive skills to overcome functional limitations due to vision loss; the process may take months or years. Informal closure surveys show the top two services that help ‘turn the curve’ in building skills are Low Vision and Assistive Technology equipment and instruction. After individuals learn skills and use adaptive equipment, they can resume many activities and function more independently in the community and at work. Over 90% of DBVI customers surveyed at closure identified their attainment of new adaptive skills as the most important factor in their success. Customers share many examples of how their new skills have helped them adapt to vision loss, maintain employment, and improve their quality of life. They are better off because they can now:

- Obtain their employment goals.
- Access printed material with the use of assistive technology.
- Travel independently on the job and in the community with the use of the white cane.
- Use special magnification and lighting to access information on the job and at home.

Quotes include:

- “The best thing that happened to me while working with DBVI was that I got a CCTV to help me with my written material that I need to access for my job. I also learned how to use magnifiers as well.”
- “I learned how to use a laptop and screen magnification to help me access information I need. It is great to have this new skill for my job. “
- “Without the DBVI assistance with surgery I would have lost my vision and my job.”
- “I learned to use assistive technology that allowed me the freedom to continue to run my business.”
- “I learned how to adapt and adjust to being a newly blind person. I can’t begin to tell you how valuable this experience was for me.”

Results of a statewide random survey (conducted by Market Decisions) of all DBVI customers in 2015 indicated:

- 95%--Overall, percentage of customers satisfied with the DBVI program.
- 95%--Customers satisfied with the services they received.
- 96%--Customers indicated that the staff were very or somewhat helpful in helping them to achieve their vocational rehabilitation goals.
- 94%--Customers indicated that the services they received helped them become more generally **“Independent.”**
- 94%--Customers agreed that they were **“Better Off,”** overall, as a result of the services they received from DBVI.

Partners

DBVI considers the people we serve as partners. This year we conducted Town Meeting events in each of our 4 regions. The goal was to hear the “Voice of the Customer” about the results they expect from our program.

We also work closely with the State Rehabilitation Council, appointed by the Governor. The SRC partners with DBVI to evaluate data and to develop goals and strategies.

DBVI is encouraged that our partnership with the Vermont Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired is helping customers to build the adaptive skills they need on the job and in the community. We are also encouraged that progressive employment strategies and our partnership with the Vermont Association for Business, Industry, and Rehabilitation (VABIR) is helping DBVI to partner effectively with businesses to provide opportunities for blind or visually impaired workers to demonstrate their abilities in the workplace.

The DBVI partnership with ReSource and the Vermont Youth Conservation Corps is helping students and young adults build the skills they need in the workplace. VYCC helps DBVI run a summer youth employment program that provides the opportunity for students to learn employment skills and Independent Living Skills. These early employment experiences help build the confidence needed to succeed in college, in vocational training, and in the workplace.

What Works

DBVI's customer satisfaction is a strength. These ratings consistently exceed 90% each year. Staff are described as responsive, easy to reach, and helping people meet their goals. Comments at each of the 4 Town Meetings acknowledged that DBVI staff and services "gave them hope."

Individuals who experience vision loss need to learn new adaptive skills, and DBVI strategies are designed to help people build these skills. In most situations, assistive technology is the key to opening the door for employment. Specialized software and hardware are often needed to access print, and specialized skills (including the use of specialized magnification and lighting) are needed to use the technology successfully. The combination of technology and the skills to use the technology helps individuals return to their jobs and community activities.

Our customers have used work experiences as a way to show employers that they can do the job. Many employers cannot conceive of how a blind person can do a particular job, until they learn that some simple low cost accommodations make it possible. This is also a great opportunity for people to build employment skills and to learn about jobs they like or don't like.

DBVI also makes a strong commitment to help individuals succeed in post-secondary and vocational training programs. These degrees and certificates usually lead to better paying jobs.

For students, DBVI's process involves strong communication with a team including the student, families, school staff, and Teachers of the Visually Impaired. Each DBVI counselor guides students and teams to develop specific action steps depending on the path they will take toward either more training or directly into work. Our role is to help students make a smooth individual transition into the world of work.

Action Plan

DBVI staff and the State Rehabilitation Council have reviewed the 2014 Town Meeting results, the 2015 statewide customer satisfaction survey, and other performance data and have revised goals and strategies that were approved by the SRC in December 2015.

Our research agenda continues to include a close look at data about customers who did not achieve employment in FFY 2015. Staff will be investigating what new strategies might be needed for those who were not successful. This may include strategies to educate employers about the skills these individuals can bring to the workplace. It also may involve finding new strategies to help individuals build the specific skills that are needed by employers.

DBVI has a commitment to customer-centered culture that continues to guide staff in making continuous improvements: listening to the voice of our customers, using this information along with performance measures to improve our current products and develop new ones. The new plan with updated goals and strategies was completed and approved by the SRC in December 2015.

(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.

As part of a Memorandum of Understanding DBVI has access to the General Vocational Rehabilitation Services described below.

General VR Quality, Scope, and Extent of Supported Employment Services

Individuals with Developmental Disabilities

DVR works closely with the Developmental Disabilities Services Division (DDSD) to provide supported employment services and DVR funds are viewed, along with Medicaid funds, as an integral part of the overall employment budget for individuals with developmental disabilities. This funding braids DVR funding with individual Medicaid Waiver funds to create a seamless structure of upfront and ongoing support. DVR funds are specifically allocated to provide assessment, training, and placement services until closure, with Medicaid Waiver funds providing the necessary long-term follow-up.

DVR and DDSD only support individual integrated competitive supported employment. The State does not support any sheltered work or congregate work settings. The most recent employment rate data for individuals with developmental disabilities (SFY14) showed a 47% employment rate for working age adults in the DDSD system. Employment placements that resulted in a VR employment outcome were up in State Fiscal Year 2015 to 245 individuals from 223 the prior year.

DVR and DDSD have no supported employment workshops since Vermont closed its last workshop for individuals with developmental disabilities in 2002. That same year, Vermont was ranked #1 in the nation in the number of people with developmental disabilities who received supported employment to work per 100,000 of the state population.¹ In the past two years, the numbers of individuals with developmental disabilities employed in competitive jobs have continued to increase.

ATTACHMENTS

- A) State Workforce Development Board Members
- B) Needs Additional Assistance Policy
- C) Eligible Training Provider Procedure

State Workforce Development Board Members

	Name(Title)-Company	Title	Company
1	Paul Biebel	President	Biebel Builders Inc.
2	Gregory Maguire	Plant Operations Manager	Revision Military
3	Dan DiBattista	Rutland Plant Leader	GE Aviation
4		position vacant	Rutland Regional Medical Center
5	Jen Kimmich	Owner	Alchemist Brewery
6	Janette Bombardier	Senior Location Executive	Global Foundries
7	Mary Lintermann	President	Cumberland Group
8	Chris Loso	President/CEO	Loso's Professional Janitorial Services, Inc.
9	Stephen Marsh	President/CEO	Community National Bank
10	Kent Eldridge	Director of HR	Mylan Corporation
11	Amanda Beraldi	CIO	Green Mountain Power (GMP)
12	Jerry Tarrant	COO	MyWebGrocer
13		position vacant	NSK Steering Systems
14	Jostein Solheim	CEO	Ben and Jerry's
15	Tom Torti	President	Lake Champlain Regional Chamber of Commerce
16	Don George	CEO	Blue Cross Blue Shield of Vermont
17	Jeffrey Wright	COO	Vermont Electric Coop
18	Frank Cioffi	President	Greater Burlington Industrial Corporation (GBIC)
19	Judy Geiger	Director of HR	Killington Resort
20	Ric Cabot	President and CEO	Cabot Hosiery
21	Ellen Kahler	Executive Director	VT Sustainable Jobs Fund
22	Martin Thieret	Owner	Competitive Computing
23	Suzanne McDowell	VP of HR	King Arthur Flour
24	Sean Woodroffe	Senior Vice President & Chief People Officer	National Life
25	Mike Lane	Former Founder and Executive	Dealer.com
26	Laurie Gunn	VP of Human Resources	University of Vermont Medical Center
27	Grant Spates	Owner	Spates Construction
28	Governor Peter Shumlin	Governor	State of Vermont
29	Rep. Kathleen Keenan	Representative	Vermont House of Representatives
30	Senator Kevin Mullin	Senator	Vermont Senate
31	Tom Sullivan	President	University of Vermont (UVM)
32	Jeb Spaulding	Chancellor	Vermont State Colleges (VSC)
33	Melissa Hersh	Assistant VP, Business Engagement	Champlain College
34	Heather Bouchey	Deputy Secretary	Vermont Agency of Education
35	Lynn Vera	Independent Equity Consultant	
36	Jeff Wimetete	Business Manager/Financial Secretary	International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers
37	Dennis Labounty	Political Director	AFL-CIO
38	Eileen Illuzzi	Director	North Country Career Center
39	Dean Stearns	Principal	South Royalton School
40	Tom Longstreth	Executive Director	ReSOURCE
41	George Sabol	Director	Northlands Job Corps Center
42	Pat Elmer	President/CEO	Associates for Training and Development
43	Gerry Ghazi	President	Vermont HITEC, Inc.
44	Scott Giles	President	Vermont Student Assistance Corporation (VSAC)
45	Diane Dalmasse	Director	State of Vermont Division of Vocational Rehabilitation
46	Joan Goldstein	Commissioner	Department of Economic Development
47	Lisa Menard	Commissioner	Department of Corrections
48	Annie Noonan	Commissioner	Vermont Department of Labor
49	Hal Cohen	Secretary	Agency of Human Services
50	Robert Bridges	Employment Coordinator	Employer Support of the Guard (ESGR)
51	Chris Louras	Mayor	City of Rutland
52	Rose Lucenti	Director of Workforce Development	Vermont Department of Labor
53	Pixie Loomis	Executive Director	Vermont Adult Learning
54	Lawrence Moose Lampman	Chair	Missisquoi Abenaki Council
55	Rep. Tristan Toleno	State Representative	Vermont House of Representatives
56	Pat Moulton	Secretary	Agency of Commerce and Community Development
57	Becca Balint	Senator	Vermont Senate
58	Joyce Judy	President	Community College of Vermont

An individual who requires additional assistance to complete an educational program or to secure and hold employment.

Must meet at least one of the barriers listed below:	Definition	Acceptable Documentation
Incarcerated parent/legal guardian	Youth with a parent or legal guardian who is currently or has been incarcerated within the past 5 years	Letter or other documentation from Department of corrections or the court system; self-attestation
Youth who has experienced recent traumatic events, are victims of abuse, or reside in an abusive environment	Youth who has experience recent traumatic events, are victims of abuse, or reside in an abusive environment within the past 5 years	Letter or other form of documentation from: a social service agency, the legal system, a school official; self-attestation
Youth who has been referred to or is being treated by an agency for substance abuse or addiction issues.	Youth with a substance abuse problem or addiction issue, has been treated for a such a problem with the past 5 years or previously in treatment facility	Letter or other form of documentation from: a treatment facility, a school official, a court official, a doctor, or a social service agency. Signed statement from a parent or guardian; medical records or self-attestation
History of mental illness	Youth that has been diagnosed with cognitive, emotional, or behavioral illnesses	School documentation, medical records, letter or other documentation from mental health professional
Harassment, Victimization and Bullying	Youth who is/was a victim of verbal/physical harassment and/or bullying	School documentation, medical records, court documents, or self-attestation
Youth who is emancipated or in the process of being emancipated	Youth who is emancipated or in the process of being emancipated by the courts	Court Documents
A high school graduate or GED recipient who has not held a full-time regular job for more than 3 consecutive months and lacks work readiness skills necessary to obtain and retain substantial employment	Individual who has not been able to retain employment for more than three months	Documentation from past employers; self-attestation
Involved in gang activity	A gain is a group of three or more individuals who engage in criminal activity and identify themselves with a common name or sign	Court documentation; juvenile justice system documentation; self-attestation
Youth that are residing with family members with substance abuse or addiction issues	Youth that are currently residing with a family member that is enrolled in a treatment program or released within the past 12 months prior to enrollment	Letter or other documentation from the treatment facility verifying participation and/or release information

VERMONT DEPARTMENT OF LABOR
WIOA TRAINING PROVIDERS ELIGIBILITY
PROCEDURES

Updated July 2015

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Section 1: Purpose:

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) section 122 requires States to approve a training provider's eligibility before WIOA funds can be used to pay for the provision of training services. The State, in consultation with the State Workforce Development Board (SWDB), is charged with developing the process for determining how training providers may qualify for inclusion on Vermont's Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL). The procedures outlined in this document will provide information on the eligible training provider application process. The ETPL will be made available to the SWDB, WIOA participants, and members of the public.

Section 2: Qualifications:

To be eligible to receive funds for the provision of training services, a provider shall be one of the following:

- (1) An institution of higher education that provides a program that leads to a recognized post-secondary credential;
- (2) An entity that carries out programs registered with the Vermont Department of Labor, Apprenticeship Division; or
- (3) Another public or private provider of a program of training services, which may include joint labor-management organizations, and eligible providers of adult education and literacy activities under title II of WIOA if such activities are provided in combination with occupational skills training.

A "program of training services" is one or more courses or classes, or a structured regimen that leads to:

- (1) A recognized post-secondary credential¹, secondary school diploma or its equivalent;
- (2) Employment; or
- (3) Measurable skill gains toward such a credential or employment.

Section 3: Identification of Respective Roles:

The State of Vermont is designated as a single State local area and, therefore, the State Workforce Development Board operates as both the State and local workforce

¹ WIOA § 3(52) defines 'recognized postsecondary credential' to include an associate or baccalaureate degree, an industry-recognized certificate or certification, a registered apprenticeship certificate, or a recognized State or Federal license.

development board. The State has designated the Vermont Department of Labor (VDOL) to assist in carrying out the process and procedures for determining the eligibility of training providers. All applications for addition to the ETPL shall be submitted to the Vermont Department of Labor for approval. Training providers approved under these procedures shall be included on the ETPL. The VDOL shall notify the SWDB of any updates to the ETPL at each SWDB meeting.

Section 4: Transitional Period:

Pursuant to authority granted in section 122(i) of the WIOA, the State will allow any training provider eligible to provide training services on July 21, 2014 to continue to be eligible to provide such services until December 31, 2015. On or before October 1, 2015, training providers shall submit completed applications for continued eligibility as provided in these procedures. If an eligible training provider under this section is not approved under the continued eligibility procedures by December 31, 2015, that eligible training provider shall be removed from the ETPL. Training providers authorized under this section are not subject to the initial eligibility procedures.

Section 5: Initial Eligibility Procedures:

To be included on the Vermont ETPL, all training providers and programs, not previously eligible to provide training services, shall provide the required information to the VDOL. The VDOL shall review the application, make a determination of approval, and notify the applicant of the determination within 30 days of receiving the completed application. The VDOL shall notify the applicant of the final determination in writing, including, in the case of a denial, reasons for the final determination and a statement that the provider may appeal the decision as provided in these procedures. The applicant may appeal the determination of the VDOL using the appeals procedures outlined in section 11 of this document.

Applicants approved under this section will receive initial eligibility for one (1) fiscal year. If the applicant wishes to continue providing training services, the applicant shall apply for continued eligibility as provided in this document.

The following information is required for an initial eligibility determination:

- 1) A completed application²;
- 2) A copy of the provider's refund, equal employment opportunity and accessibility policies;
- 3) A current class schedule; and

² In regards to the application, an initial training provider should provide any accurate information related to the requested performance measures and certify to the VDOL the ability to meet the minimum performance levels and accurately submit the required information.

- 4) Any additional information requested by the VDOL.

An initial eligibility determination will be decided for each training provider on a **program by program** basis and be based on the following criteria:

- A training provider's prior eligibility status or status of existing programs.
- The ability of the training provider to meet minimum performance levels based on the State Plan's performance measures required by the U.S. Department of Labor.
- Compliance with Vermont labor laws, such as workers' compensation, unemployment insurance, wage and hour, and nondiscrimination.
- The degree to which the program relates to in-demand industry sectors and occupations in the State.

Section 6: Continued Eligibility Procedures:

All training providers shall annually apply to remain on the ETPL by submitting a completed application along with the required information. The VDOL shall review the application, make a determination of approval, and notify the applicant of the determination within 30 days of receiving the completed application. The VDOL shall notify the applicant of the final determination in writing, including, in the case of a denial, reasons for the final determination and a statement that the provider may appeal the decision as provided in these procedures. The applicant may appeal the determination of the VDOL using the appeals procedures outlined in section 11 of this document. Any training provider that does not apply to remain shall be removed from the ETPL.

The following information is required for a continued eligibility determination:

- 1) A completed application;
- 2) Performance Reports for the past two years, as applicable; and
- 3) Certification that the following have not changed from previous years: the provider's refund, equal employment opportunity and accessibility policies, and the class schedule. If changes have occurred new copies shall be provided.
- 4) Any additional information requested by the VDOL.

A continued eligibility determination will be decided for each training provider on a **program by program** basis and be based on the following criteria:

- A training provider's prior eligibility status or status of existing programs.
- The performance of training providers on the performance accountability measures relating to the State Plan and the training provider's individual performance measures established by the VDOL.
- The availability of training services throughout the State.

- Information reported to State Agencies with respect to Federal and State programs involving training services, including the adult education and vocational rehabilitation programs.
- The degree to which the program relates to in-demand industry sectors and occupations in the State.
- Compliance with State licensing requirements, where applicable.
- The ability of the training provider to offer quality programs that lead to post-secondary credentials.
- The ability of the training provider to provide training services to individuals who are unemployed, underemployed, incumbent workers and individuals with barriers to employment.
- Demonstrated ability of the training provider to submit timely and accurate performance reports.
- Continued compliance with Vermont labor laws, such as workers' compensation, unemployment insurance, wage and hour, and nondiscrimination.
- A training provider's ability to meet the State Plan's performance measures required by the U.S. Department of Labor.

Section 7: Registered Apprenticeship Programs:

Pursuant to section 122(a)(3) of the WIOA, apprenticeship programs registered with the Vermont Department of Labor, Apprenticeship Division are automatically eligible to be included on the ETPL. Although registered apprenticeship programs are automatically eligible, the program will not be included on the ETPL unless the program provider notifies the Apprenticeship Division of its intention to be included on the ETPL.

The Apprenticeship Division will notify every apprenticeship program, registered as of the date of enactment of these procedures, to determine whether the program provider wants to be included on the ETPL. New apprenticeship programs that want to be included on the ETPL shall indicate this intention on the apprenticeship program application. Once an apprenticeship program is registered on the ETPL, the program will remain on the ETPL until the program is no longer registered with the Apprenticeship Division or until the provider notifies the Apprenticeship Division, in writing, of the intention to be removed from the list.

Registered apprenticeship programs are not required to submit initial or continued eligibility applications under these procedures. Registered apprenticeship programs are required to comply with all laws and rules regarding apprenticeship programs and labor laws in the State of Vermont. A registered apprenticeship program included on the ETPL

may be subject to reporting of performance information as determined by the VDOL, Workforce Development Division, in consultation with the SWDB.

Section 8: On-the-Job Training, Customized Training, Incumbent Worker Training, and Other Training Exceptions:

Pursuant to section 122(h) of the WIOA, providers of on-the-job training, customized training, incumbent worker training, internships, paid or unpaid work experience opportunities, or transitional employment, as those terms are defined in WIOA, are not subject to the procedural requirements outlined in this document. Providers of these programs should consult with the VDOL, Workforce Development Division about the process to be identified as eligible providers of training services. If eligible, these programs shall submit such performance information and meet performance criteria as determined by the VDOL.

Section 9: Additional Requirements:

Eligible Training Providers are subject to applicable requirements in the WIOA as well as any applicable Federal and State laws and regulations, including the requirement to submit performance reports as required by WIOA section 116(d)(4).

Section 10: Enforcement:

Upon a determination by the VDOL that a training provider, or individual providing information on behalf of the provider, intentionally supplied inaccurate information or substantially violated any requirements of WIOA, any VDOL rule or regulation, or any State or Federal labor law, eligibility shall be terminated for a period of not less than 2 years. A training provider whose eligibility is terminated under this section shall be liable for the repayment of funds received during the period of violation. This section is construed to provide remedies and penalties that supplement, but shall not supplant, any additional civil and criminal remedies and penalties.

The VDOL shall notify a training provider in writing when the Department opens an investigation under this section. The notification shall include a brief description of the nature of the investigation and a reference to the applicable laws and rules, including these procedures.

The VDOL shall notify a training provider in writing upon a final determination of an investigation under this section. The notification shall include a detailed description of the

investigation, reasons for the final determination, a reference to the applicable laws and rules, including these procedures, any penalties, including eligibility status and repayment amounts, and a statement that the provider may appeal the determination as provided in this document.

Any training provider determined to violate this section may appeal the determination of the VDOL as provided in section 11 of this document.

Section 11: Appeals:

Within 15 calendar days after receipt of a denial or termination of eligibility, a training provider may file a written request to receive an appeal by a formal hearing. The VDOL Commissioner will appoint a Hearing Officer (HO), or similar entity, to oversee any complaint hearing, and will ensure that the HO has the qualifications, skills, and abilities to fairly, accurately, and without bias, assess the information and determine the facts. A hearing shall be scheduled on a date and time mutually acceptable to the parties, but no later than 30 days after receiving the written request for a hearing. The hearing shall include an opportunity for the applicant to submit written and verbal information to the presiding HO. The hearing shall be conducted in a fair and impartial manner. The Hearing Officer shall issue a decision within 60 calendar days from the date of the hearing informing both parties (the complainant and respondent) of the decision. The decision of the HO or presiding entity shall be final.

Section 12: Waiver From Additional Information Request:

If the VDOL requests additional information as part of the application, other than what is required by the WIOA or applicable regulations, a training provider may request, in writing to the VDOL Commissioner, a waiver from the additional information request. To be granted a waiver, a training provider must be able to demonstrate that providing the information would be unduly burdensome or costly. If the Commissioner determines that the provider has demonstrated such extraordinary costs or undue burden, the VDOL shall provide access to cost-effective methods for the collection of information. Nothing in this section permits a training provider to request a waiver from any required information.

Section 13: Out-of-State Providers:

An out-of-state training provider wishing to provide training services within the State of Vermont shall comply with the procedures outlined in this document. Any out-of-state training provider wishing to offer Vermont WIOA participants training services outside of

Vermont should contact the VDOL, Workforce Development Division for further information.

Section 14: Public Comments:

These procedures will be open for public comment on July 15, 2015. All comments and recommendations are to be submitted to the VDOL at Cameron.Wood@state.vt.us or mailed to Cameron Wood, c/o Vermont Department of Labor, P.O. Box 488, Montpelier, VT 05601 by July 21, 2015.