

## Attachment 4.10

### Comprehensive System of Personnel Development

The Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services (MDRS) has implemented procedures and activities within the Office of Human Resource Development (OHRD) which assure the full implementation of a Comprehensive System of Personnel Development as described in the 1998 Amendments to the Rehabilitation Act. OHRD is responsible for the agency-wide functions of personnel management, payroll, safety and risk control, performance management, benefits and compensation, employee relations, job analysis, and staff development.

### Data System on Personnel and Personnel Development

In order to assess the need for qualified personnel, OHRD has developed and maintains a data base which includes information on the number of rehabilitation personnel providing vocational rehabilitation services, types of positions, and the ratio of the number of personnel needed by MDRS to provide vocational rehabilitation services to the number of applicants and individuals served. The projected ratio is 145 counselors, 87 counselor assistants, 7 interpreters, 6 psychometrists, 30 evaluators, 56 work adjustment instructors, and 14 instructors at the center for the blind to 21,544 applicants and eligible individuals served. Annual projections of the five year personnel needs of MDRS have been developed based on the projected number of individuals to be served (including the percentage of severely disabled), the number of personnel expected to retire or leave MDRS, anticipated turnover rates for vocational rehabilitation professionals and paraprofessionals, and any anticipated organizational changes such as required reductions in staff numbers. The projected requirements to meet the staffing needs of MDRS customers for the next five years are 180 counselors and a 25% increase in counselor assistants. An added increase of two staff interpreters and one staff psychometrist will be needed to insure quality services are provided in a timely manner.

<b>Job Title</b>	<b>Total Positions</b>	<b>Current Vacancies</b>	<b>Projected Vacancies over the next 5 years</b>
Counselor	145	24	37
Counselor Assistant	87	11	16
Interpreters	7	1	3
Psychometrists	6	0	1
Evaluators	30	4	7
Work Adjustment Instructors	56	10	16
Instructors at the Center for the Blind	14	2	5

An annual survey of the state's two university graduate programs in rehabilitation counseling determine the number of students enrolled, projected graduation dates, and the total number

expected to complete the requirements for national certification in rehabilitation counseling. These two graduate programs accredited by the Council on Rehabilitation Education (CORE), one at Mississippi State University and the other at Jackson State University (a Historically Black College or University), are the only graduate programs in rehabilitation counseling in Mississippi. Jackson State currently has 53 students enrolled in its program and 8 students earned a Master’s Degree in Rehabilitation Counseling during the calendar year 2013. Mississippi State currently has 24 students enrolled in its Master’s Program in Rehabilitation Counseling and 10 students earned a Master’s Degree in this program in 2013.

<b>Institutions</b>	<b>Students Enrolled</b>	<b>Employees sponsored by agency and/or RSA</b>	<b>Graduates sponsored by agency and/or RSA</b>	<b>Graduates from the previous year</b>
Jackson State University	53	6	8	8
Mississippi State University	24	0	16	10

**Plan for Recruitment, Preparation, and Retention of Qualified Staff**

The state plan for MDRS addresses the need to recruit and retain qualified staff, including those staff with minority backgrounds and individuals with disabilities. In 1997 MDRS issued policy requiring managers seeking to hire new counselors hire only those individuals who meet the qualifications for Certified Rehabilitation Counselor (CRC). Recognizing that there may be some locations in the state where qualified personnel would not be available, MDRS has not officially changed its required minimal education standard for counselors. If a manager determines that there is not a *qualified* rehabilitation professional available to fill a vacancy, the vacancy may be filled by an individual with lesser qualifications if the decision is approved by the Office Director of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) or the Office Director of Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind (VRB) and the individual agrees in writing to participate in an approved Master’s Degree Program as soon as available through MDRS.

In 1994 MDRS began working with the Board of Trustees for the Institutions of Higher Learning (IHL) to establish a graduate program in Rehabilitation Counseling that would be accessible to VR staff throughout the state. Through these efforts, a program of distance education was developed cooperatively by Mississippi State University and Jackson State University. This program began at the start of the 1995 Fall Semester and ended with the conclusion of the 2004 Spring Semester. Courses were offered via a compressed video network and broadcast to sites located near the homes or work sites of participating students. Courses that required clinical experience or direct contact with the instructor were offered through intensive one to two week courses on each respective university campus. A total of 70 employees completed their degrees and/or course requirements through this program and now meet national certification standards for CRC. Currently, Mississippi

State University is working to develop a hybrid online and on campus program in Rehabilitation Counseling. The estimated beginning date for this program has not been determined at this time.

OHRD works closely with the graduate program in rehabilitation counseling at both Mississippi State University and Jackson State University by establishing placement opportunities for intern and practicum students and actively participating in university career development activities, including participation in Career Days and Job Fairs. Representatives from OHRD meet with the graduate students from each program annually to explain career opportunities and the state employment application process. The MDRS Training Director also serves on each program's Advisory Council. Working with Jackson State University provides significant opportunities for recruitment of minorities, and MDRS works closely with university support services on both campuses to recruit graduates with disabilities.

### **Personnel Standards**

MDRS has adopted the national certification standard of requiring, at a minimum, (1) a Master's Degree Program in Rehabilitation Counseling or (2) a Master's Degree in Counseling with a graduate course in the Theories and Techniques of Counseling and supervised work experience in the field of rehabilitation, which would enable an individual to be eligible to sit for the CRC exam. Currently, Mississippi has no registration or licensure requirements for Rehabilitation Counselors or Vocational Evaluators.

Of the 155 counselor caseloads, 24 positions are currently vacant, 81 (or 62%) are in compliance with the national certification standard, and 50 are not in compliance with the national certification standard. Of the 50 counselors not in compliance, 28 are enrolled in a Master's Degree Program.

Of the 34 evaluators, four positions are vacant, 17 evaluators are in compliance with the national certification standard, and 13 evaluators are not in compliance with the national certification standard. Of the 13 evaluators not in compliance, seven are enrolled in a Master's Degree Program and two have Master's Degrees and are taking additional coursework required to become qualified. Due to limited funding and the lack of stipend funded programs for vocational evaluators, priority is given to the placement of VR counselors in a Master's Program in Rehabilitation Counseling.

Applicants for counselor and vocational evaluator positions at MDRS who do not meet the requirements of a Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD) must meet the Mississippi State Personnel Board's minimum qualification for a DRS Counselor II or DRS Evaluator II. This minimum qualification is a Master's Degree from an accredited four-year college or university in Rehabilitation Counseling or a related field; or, a Bachelor's Degree from an accredited four-year college or university in Rehabilitation Counseling or a related field and one year of related experience. Before applicants who do not meet the CSPD requirements are hired, they are required to sign a contract stating that they will enroll in a Master's Degree Program within one year, unless approved otherwise. MDRS counselors who need a Master's Degree to meet the requirements of the law and regulations are required to sign a contract specifying that they will complete this program in a three-year period from the inception of coursework. Exceptions in terms

of the three-year time frame are only granted due to disability-related issues and are only provided with the approval of the Office Director, either for VR or VRB. MDRS has established a deadline of September 30, 2015 by which all staff will meet the MDRS personnel standard.

Long-term strategies for the retraining of any vocational rehabilitation counselor or vocational evaluator who is not a qualified rehabilitation professional and not currently in a program are to utilize accessible Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) CSPD funded stipend programs to the extent possible. Those not funded under a stipend program as funded by RSA CSPD will be sponsored by MDRS at available distance education or web-based Masters Programs in Rehabilitation Counseling such as those available through Auburn University, the University of Kentucky, the University of Wisconsin, Southern University, and the Georgia State University Consortium. Employees who live within commuting distance of Jackson State University and Mississippi State University can access these universities' campus-based programs.

Employees sponsored by the agency in graduate training are eligible for reimbursement of tuition, book costs, and approved educational leave. State statute requires that the employee enter a contractual agreement with MDRS for service repayment. MDRS requires three years of continued employment in return for expense reimbursement and educational leave. Additionally, MDRS has created a job classification for rehabilitation counselors which require certification as a professional rehabilitation counselor plus two years of rehabilitation counseling experience. Promotion to this highest of four counselor salary levels provides an additional incentive for personnel to obtain a Master's Degree and to attain certification. Upon attainment of the Master's Degree in Rehabilitation Counseling or certification in rehabilitation counseling, the employee may also be eligible for an educational salary benchmark of five percent.

The current salary for vocational rehabilitation counselors in Mississippi remains below that of other southeastern states, but is now more competitive with other public and private agencies recruiting individuals with the required Master's Degree. In State Fiscal Year 1999 MDRS was successful in its efforts to gain approval by the Mississippi State Legislature and the Mississippi State Personnel Board to raise the entry-level salary for counselors and evaluators in order to successfully attract *qualified* personnel. In January 2003, July 2006, and again in July 2007 the salaries of vocational rehabilitation counselors and vocational evaluators were also realigned. Following a survey of the southeastern average, the salaries remain lower than that of neighboring states.

The annual evaluations completed by OHRD regarding the need for additional personnel will be used as a monitoring tool to ensure planned recruitment and retraining efforts for all personnel, particularly vocational rehabilitation counselors, meet the adopted national certification standards for rehabilitation counselors and vocational evaluators.

### **Staff Development**

In order to comply with the staff development provisions of the 1998 Amendments to the Rehabilitation Act, MDRS has developed an ongoing training plan which provides training opportunities for all VR staff and appropriate VR support staff. The training is designed to meet the

personal and career development needs of VR personnel, thus increasing retention among qualified personnel. The ongoing training plan for the VR Program includes four categories as provided below.

**Annual Core Curriculum Training Series.** New employee training begins with a program of orientation and basic training (Core Curriculum) for professional staff that includes the following:

1. History of Vocational Rehabilitation and the Foundations of Rehabilitation and the Law
2. Assistive Technology
3. Medical and Psychological Aspects of Disabilities
4. Job-Specific Automated Accessible Case Environment (AACE) Computer Training

**Regional Training Teams.** New VR counselors also complete a structured and timely training at the local level by the Regional Training Team. This training provides new staff task-specific training to promote quality service delivery to all VR consumers and promotes the timely performance of the counselor job duties. The training is completed in modules and includes instruction and hands-on training in overall case management. This training, with an accompanying training manual, is designed for counselors to use as a guide in making decisions and delivering quality VR services to consumers.

**Annual Ongoing Staff Development Training Sessions.** Ongoing staff development training can include a variety of topics but, generally, include the following:

1. Disability-Specific Topics
2. Case Management
3. Eligibility
4. Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) Development
5. Various Types of Caseloads including Supported Employment and Transition
6. Issues Regarding Work with Minority Populations, including Cultural Diversity
7. Other Areas Identified during Case Reviews Conducted by MDRS Program Evaluation Staff

**Additional Training Based on Need.** Training sessions are held at the district level and in formal statewide training as needed.

In 2000 MDRS Senior Management began addressing Leadership Development and Succession Planning through annual Executive Leadership Development Training sessions. As a result of this training, MDRS developed a 12-month curriculum for leadership training which was instituted in 2003 as a formal leadership development program to address the increasing percentage of retirement age employees and the need for knowledgeable managers and supervisors. This program, known as Leadership, Education, and Development for Rehabilitation Services (*LEADRS*), is to address the future loss of institutional memory and the transfer of accumulated wisdom through its development of employee management skills and technical competencies. *LEADRS'* mission is, "To educate, develop, and empower current and future leaders of MDRS to sustain and enhance the Department's holistic approach in meeting the needs of Mississippians with disabilities." Since the inception of *LEADRS*, six classes have been held and a total of 139 employees have completed the program. Of the 139 employees who completed the program, 76 have been promoted and only 27 have left the

agency. In 2008 MDRS Executive Senior Management participated in an advanced leadership series of trainings. Due to the success of the program, it has become a vital part of the agency's succession planning and has set the standard for future succession planning/networking efforts.

MDRS also promotes capacity building and leadership development through supervisory staff's participation in a Basic Supervisory Course and the Certified Public Manager Program available through the Mississippi State Personnel Board, and In-service Supervisor Training available through MDRS. In addition, staff members have participated in the National Executive Leadership Program at the University of Oklahoma; the National Rehabilitation Leadership Institute at San Diego State University; the Community Rehabilitation Program Leadership Development Program and the Institute for New Supervisors through Georgia State University; the John C. Stennis State Executive Development Institute at Mississippi State University; and, the South Central Public Health Leadership Institute at the Tulane School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine.

The staff development plan is based upon the assessed needs of the staff. The Performance Development System (PDS) falls under the purview of OHRD. This system was developed by the Mississippi State Personnel Board in November 2010 to replace the previous Performance Appraisal System and is applicable to all state service employees. One objective of the management plan for OHRD is to correlate individual performance development, skill level, and training data in order to identify training needs and evaluate individual and group performance in relation to pre-service and in-service training. Also incorporated into the employee evaluation process is the employee's Individual Development Plan (IDP), which serves as an employee training needs assessment. IDPs are developed by the employee and evaluated by the supervisor to assure that the employee receives work-related training and training in other areas that the employee and supervisor agree will benefit the employee in the performance of his or her job. The system of employee performance evaluation does not impede the accomplishment of specific mandates contained in Title I of the Rehabilitation Act. The system facilitates accomplishment by means of including in performance standards the responsibilities of MDRS and its employees under the Rehabilitation Act.

Information from case reviews conducted by the MDRS Program Evaluation Unit is analyzed to evaluate the knowledge and skill of employees as they relate to the policy of serving individuals with the most severe disabilities. Results of such evaluations are included in the development of objectives for the annual training plan. Information from annual client surveys is also used in determining training objectives and is incorporated into the training plan.

### **Personnel to Address Individual Communication Needs**

The need for counselors who are fluent in native languages other than English has not been established based on the current service population. This area is constantly monitored by MDRS and counselors who are fluent in other languages are recruited when a need arises. Due to the increasing Hispanic population, employees who are fluent in Spanish have been identified and are available to serve as interpreters. Also, MDRS has established fees for foreign language interpreters which may be authorized and paid by counselors when the need for their services occurs to provide rehabilitation services to non-English speaking individuals. All materials are provided to individuals

who are visually impaired in Braille or on audiotape upon request. Also, VRB counselors participate in specialized in-service quarterly training and in-service training provided through the MDRS Assistive Technology Division which includes training on communication skills for individuals who are blind or deaf-blind. MDRS employs eight qualified sign language interpreters for the 10 districts that comprise the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation. The Office on Deaf and Hard of Hearing also employs one qualified sign language interpreter who is available to provide interpreter services. The community rehabilitation programs operated by MDRS employ individuals who are proficient in sign language skills and in-service training classes for employees are provided on a continuous basis in American Sign Language at the MDRS central office location in Madison, Mississippi. MDRS requires that all Counselors for the Deaf achieve and maintain basic proficiency in American Sign Language. MDRS coordinates with post-secondary educational consortiums to provide proficiency testing of manual communication skills. Specialized training in deafness-related areas is provided for new counselors in the Deaf Program as well as quarterly training for all Counselors for the Deaf and Sign Language Interpreters.

### **Coordination of Personnel Development under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act**

MDRS pursues efforts to coordinate with the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) cross training that will address education and rehabilitation under the provision of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Training conferences on transition services have been held and co-sponsored by MDRS and MDE. Specifically, regional training conferences bring together all VR counselors with transition caseloads, other agency personnel involved with transition services, and transition specialists, teachers, and special education coordinators from MDE. Funds from the MDRS In-service Training Grant are linked to various components of the CSPD for the provision of continuing education/graduate school for those employees who currently do not meet the national standards. Funds are utilized for tuition and related expenses for graduate training in Rehabilitation Counseling through Mississippi State University and Jackson State University, as well as the other masters-level distance learning and web-based programs in Rehabilitation Counseling that are utilized.

### **State Rehabilitation Council**

This attachment was developed after a review of the results of the Statewide Assessment of Rehabilitation Needs. Any pertinent findings from the Statewide Assessment were incorporated into this attachment. Additionally, members of the State Rehabilitation Council were involved in the development of this attachment.