



**Office of Vocational Rehabilitation  
Office of Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind**

**WIOA STATE PLAN - TITLE IV  
Program Years 2020-2023**

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

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

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## **a. INPUT OF STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL**

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**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;**

In matters of program administration and planning, the Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services, Office of Vocational Rehabilitation and Office of Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind has a strong commitment to seeking the advice of consumers of vocational rehabilitation services, service providers, family members, advocates, employers and others interested in disability issues.

Comprised of representatives of these stakeholder groups, the State Rehabilitation Council makes a major contribution to the VR/VRB program through advice provided during regular SRC business meetings, Policy Committee meetings, and other activities the members determine to be appropriate.

The SRC meets quarterly. The SRC Minutes, which are maintained for all SRC meetings, summarize the advice and recommendation provided to VR and VRB. VR and VRB continued to work closely with the SRC this year, providing the SRC with ongoing reports in regards to policy and procedure changes, RSA 911 submission updates, RSA Data dashboard information, client services, etc.

The DSU accepts the comments and recommendations from the SRC. Below are the comments and the DSU's responses to those comments.

### **SRC Questionnaires**

**1. Do you have any comments or recommendations for input into the Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services' Office of Vocational Rehabilitation or Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind (OVR/OVRB) service delivery system?**

#### **SRC Comments:**

- *Please make sure you use person first language. Also, please call back or make contact back with client or client applicant in a timely manner.*
- *No*
- *Keep up the great work!*

- *To educate clients on ABLE Act.*
- *None*
- *I think it would be helpful for these reports to be first in the meeting. By the time were listening to them, everyone needed a break. Or build a break into the meeting. The Annual Report was very nicely done. That was clearly a huge job-well done!*
- *Great Report.*
- *Recommendations: Counselors provide information on application process/services provided to individuals. Some potential clients may slip through the cracks due to lack of communication between the clients and provider. Some clients are frustrated when follow-up calls/services takes a long time, or non-existent. Another recommendation is to provide counselors with additional training on new code changes or rule changes. This may include the type of services clients are eligible for that includes job training. Hire additional staff to assist with the number of clients counselors are assigned (host a job fair).*
- *The numbers served are impressive. The open case satisfaction survey from certain districts did not indicate as high of satisfaction while services were being provided.*
- *None.*
- *No. Keep up the great work.*
- *The number of individuals served by VR and VRB that was presented during this quarter's SRC was impressive. Likewise, the performance data regarding timeliness of eligibility determinations and IPE development was equally impressive. Magnificent job. Employment outcome data presented quarterly would be helpful to understand the end impact to individuals' lives after services.*
- *No comments.*
- *None.*

**DSU Response:**

*The VR and VRB Director will continue to provide the SRC with updates regarding the numbers served and overall performance data. We will continue to implement strategies to promote good customer service and promote outreach in the community regarding VR Services. The consumer satisfactions surveys will continue to be provided as a means of providing the DSU with feedback regarding the quality of client services.*

**2. Having heard this quarter's report on the results of consumer satisfaction surveys, do you have any comments or recommendations for input into the service delivery process?**

**SRC Comments:**

- *From what I heard from the report the survey results sounded like MDRS was doing a great job.*
- *No*
- *Keep up the good work.*
- *The ratings are excellent. Keep up the great work.*
- *No comments.*

- *Keep up the great work.*
- *I believe MSU does a very nice job calling for the input information*
- *I wish the consumer satisfaction measures of open and closed cases could be congruent in both questions asked and scale used so that the two could be compared. The reports indicate overall satisfaction. The staff described use of the data to provide feedback to staff that leads to continual improvement.*
- *Develop a process that can be easily followed by internal administrators and staff and 3rd party entities. Provide customer service training for all staff members and administrators.*
- *Individuals whose cases are closed continue to have high satisfaction this quarter. That fact speaks a lot for the outcomes of services for peoples' lives. I struggle making a comparison due to the two different scales used for open and closed cases. I would like to see the same 1 to 5 scale used for both. Should the questionnaire consist of the same questions for both measures with possible some sub questions if more information is needed for open cases? The system described for the open cases and the address of concerns in a timely manner with staff seems to be an effective tool to keep staff informed of areas that both lead to any dissatisfaction with customers; as well as areas in which customers are highly satisfied. Good feedback for staff.*

**DSU Response:**

*The DSU will continue to implement ways and strategies to improve customer service and address those areas of weaknesses that are identified in the consumer satisfaction survey. We will implement training for staff in this area to help address concerns and to help improve the overall quality of services. The DSU will also examine ways to improve the survey and accept the recommendation/suggestions regarding the rating scale, etc.*

**3. Do you have any comments or recommendations for input in terms of potential service providers or discussions on the performance of service providers currently being used by OVR/OVRB?**

**SRC Comments:**

- *Please have MDRS do a yearly review because some of the providers don't work in a timely manner or what until they have enough work in an area before proceeding with work.*
- *No*
- *None.*
- *I am very pleased with what is going on.*
- *The closed case satisfaction questionnaire ask.*
- *The closed case satisfaction questionnaire ask specifically about the services providers and indicates high satisfaction from consumers this quarter.*
- *No comment*
- *The Pre-ETS service provides were reviewed with the SRC members. This listing seemed comprehensive, statewide, and given students with a disabilities a variety for choices of service.*
- *Add a detailed list of acronyms on the agency website.*

- *In person sight visits from state and federal agencies.*

**DSU Response:**

*The DSU will work on ways to improve our knowledge of the performance of service providers. This will help in providing more quality informed choices to our clients regarding providers of services as they make choices.*

*We will continue to determine ways to obtain more statewide providers for Pre-Employment Transition Services to help ensure we are able to serve students statewide that need Pre-Employment Transition Services.*

**Presentation of Information on Policy**

**4. Do you have any comments or recommendations concerning the:**

**A. Transition Potentially Eligible Program?**

**SRC Comments:**

- *Not at this time*
- *No*
- *Not at this time*
- *No comments at this point. Service delivery systems appears to be working fine.*
- *The numbers of outcomes are impressive.*

**B. Pre-ETS Transitions Services update?**

**SRC Comments:**

- *Good.*
- *Good to see that this is growing.*
- *The discussion regarding providers of Pre-ETS and the plan to publicize which providers provide which services and in which geographic area will be beneficial to staff, customers, and the public. The policy itself that was presented looks well written for staff use. The referencing of law and regulation helps one to understand why procedures are developed in the way that they are developed. Well done!*
- *No comments*
- *Excellent.*

**DSU Response (A and B):**

*The DSU will work to continue to improve the quality and quantity of Pre-Employment Transition Services provided to potentially eligible and eligible students with disabilities.*

**C. Alcohol and Drug (A&D) Policy**

**SRC Comments:**

- *Good.*

- *Thank you so much for approval of the denial letter that residential treatment programs need for DMH Fee services.*
- *The reasons for a denial for a referral for secondary treatment were explained via a form letter that is available for a staff member to send to a referral source. I would suggest having a check box for use by staff that a consent to disclose information is valid and on file for the entity to be in receipt of the letter.*
- *No comments*
- *None.*

**DSU Response:**

*The DSU updated this procedure in order to provide programs with a means to provide additional funding for clients needing secondary treatment. We will update our Consent to Disclose Information for the clients to sign.*

**D. Policy Procedures for Order of Selection?**

**SRC Comments:**

- *Great! MDRS serves all.*
- *Nothing at this time.*
- *I hope you do not have to implement the order of Selection. The policy seems to be in line with the law. How will you notify the public if you implement Order of Selections?*
- *No comments or recommendations.*
- *More information and explanation.*
- *Informative.*

**DSU Response:**

*The DSU implemented the changes to the Order of Selection based on federal mandates. The new changes will also allow VR to decide to serve clients who require specific equipment or services should the Order of Selection be implemented. At this time, all Priority Categories remain open.*

**E. Policy Procedures for Financial Needs Analysis?**

**SRC Comments:**

- *It's great to know about computers not needing financial needs analysis because it is AT for the person's disability.*
- *No comments at this point.*
- *I believe that financial needs analyses do not fit within Vocational Rehabilitation. I believe the spirit of VR is to support job seekers with disabilities to achieve the highest employment outcomes possible. However, many employees with disabilities due to the nature of a disability being progressive or very significant may, in fact, need services more than once to maintain or progress in employment. Financial needs analyses can be an incentive for job seekers and later employees with disabilities to limit their income and earnings as not to earn themselves out of support services that they need. I do believe that all other comparable benefits should be utilized prior to VR funds being utilized. I like that some services are excluded from a financial needs analysis.*

- *No comments.*
- *None.*

**DSU Response:**

*Changing the policy for financial participation will benefit the clients we serve, especially when we have funds available to serve all clients. We do not want to create a hardship for clients that are in need of these services. Computers are more often a requirement for accommodations and accessibility. It is our goal to help ensure that the clients we serve are able to increase their skill gain and earn credentials. Often times, clients may have been eligible for services; however, based on the financial need, VR could not participate in the costs. Previous policy guidelines were developed that indicate that the FAFSA is the primary federal determination regarding a client's ability to pay and the amount of financial assistance they will receive.*

**F. Blind Enterprise Program Vendor Spotlight**

**SRC Comments:**

- *This was very good.*
- *Enjoyed hearing about the success.*
- *Great process. Recognition of vendors and the services they provide is always needed.*
- *This a most excellent employment opportunity. I enjoyed hearing from an active and successful BEP Vendor.*
- *More information from client with complete vision lost.*
- *All recognitions regarding vendors and the clients they serve should always b4e front and center during meetings. Good job.*
- *Informative.*

**DSU Response:**

*The DSU values the employment of all Mississippians who are Blind or Visually Impaired. The DSU will endeavor to continue to bring awareness to Blind vendors and commissaries throughout the great state of Mississippi.*

*The DSU will also implement the quarterly Blind vendor spotlight to display the working abilities, skills and strengths of the Blind and Visually Impaired entrepreneurs of Mississippi. The DSU will continue to support the Business Enterprise Program (BEP) to meet 21<sup>st</sup> century sales guidelines and newly renovated facilities throughout the state.*

**Results of 2019 Consumer Satisfaction Survey**

A consumer satisfaction survey is conducted four times per year to determine the consumer satisfaction regarding closed cases during the year.

An outside marketing firm, Wolfgang Frese Survey Research Laboratory of Mississippi State University, conducted the survey for the SRC.

The ratings for the various services consumers received are presented below using the average (means) score given to each item by all respondents interviewed. If an item did not apply to a particular respondent or if the consumer did not know or refused to rate an item he/she is not included in calculating the average score for that item. The seven items rated are in Table 1 (for exact wording, reference the questionnaire.) Chart 1 is included for an easy visual comparison. The respondents were asked to rate the items (Questions 1-9) on a scale from 1 to 5, with 1 being poor and 5 being excellent. Thus, a high score indicates that the service was good and a low score that it was poor.

**Table 1 - Service Ratings by Consumer**

*Rate the following items on a scale of '1 to 5', with '1' being poor and '5' being excellent.*

	<b># of Consumers</b>	<b>Average Rating Mean</b>
Q1 The help the OVR staff provided at the time you applied for VR services	1,007	4.75
Q2 The help from the OVR staff during the planning of your services	1,006	4.73
Q3 The help from the OVR staff when you were receiving your VR Services	1,000	4.76
Q4 The help you received from other agencies or service providers	138	4.58
Q7 Your employment outcome	820	4.56
Q8 Employment benefits provided by your new employer	409	4.02
Q9 Overall, how do you rate the services you received?	1,003	4.75

**2. THE DESIGNATED STATE UNIT'S RESPONSE TO THE COUNCIL'S INPUT AND RECOMMENDATIONS; AND**

**DSU Responses:**

*The VR and VRB Director will continue to provide the SRC with updates regarding the numbers served and overall performance data. We will continue to implement strategies to promote good customer service and promote outreach in the community regarding VR Services. The consumer satisfaction surveys will continue to be provided as a means of providing the DSU with feedback regarding the quality of client services. We will implement training for staff in this area to help address concerns and to help improve the overall quality of services. The DSU will also examine ways to improve the survey and accept the recommendation/suggestions regarding the rating scale, etc.*

*The DSU will work on ways to improve our knowledge of the performance of service providers. This will help in providing more quality informed choices to our clients regarding providers of services as they make choices.*

*We will continue to determine ways to obtain more statewide providers for Pre-Employment Transition Services to help ensure we are able to serve students statewide that need Pre-Employment Transition Services.*

*The DSU will work to continue to improve the quality and quantity of Pre-Employment Transition Services provided to potentially eligible and eligible students with disabilities.*

*We will update our Consent to Disclose Information for the clients to sign.*

*The DSU implemented the changes to the Order of Selection based on federal mandates. The new changes will also allow VR to decide to serve clients who require specific equipment or services should the Order of Selection be implemented. At this time, all Priority Categories remain open.*

*Changing the policy for financial participation will benefit the clients we serve, especially when we have funds available to serve all clients. We do not want to create a hardship for clients that are in need of these services. Computers are more often a requirement for accommodations and accessibility. It is our goal to help ensure that the clients we serve are able to increase their skill gain and earn credentials. Often times, clients may have been eligible for services; however, based on the financial need, VR could not participate in the costs. Previous policy guidelines were developed that indicate that the FAFSA is the primary federal determination regarding a client's ability to pay and the amount of financial assistance they will receive.*

*The DSU values the employment of all Mississippians who are Blind or Visually Impaired. The DSU will endeavor to continue to bring awareness to Blind vendors and commissaries throughout the great state of Mississippi.*

*The DSU will also implement the quarterly Blind vendor spotlight to display the working abilities, skills and strengths of the Blind and Visually Impaired entrepreneurs of Mississippi. The DSU will continue to support the Business Enterprise Program (BEP) to meet 21<sup>st</sup> century sales guidelines and newly renovated facilities throughout the state.*

**In 2018, VR and VRB implemented a Consumer Satisfaction Survey** for open VR Cases. This would allow the agency to identify any areas of client dissatisfaction with agency services and take corrective action on such issues while the client is still an active participant in agency services. The hope was that increasing client satisfaction would lead to more successful employment outcomes. Therefore, a multi-step plan was devised to develop and complete a service satisfaction survey. Upon completion of the survey, results were compiled and analyzed and a written report was produced. These results are now presented at the SRC meetings. In June 2020, VR and VRB Counselors completed RSA-911 Training. This training is a recorded training that was designed so that Counselors could go back and listen to the training as often as they need to. In addition, this recorded training through Microsoft TEAMS, helped provide consistent information throughout the state. Staff was also provided with a RSA 911 Coding Manual. As we work with more Transition aged students, we continue to see caseloads increase. Initially, the Counselors caseloads were restructured so that more counselors would serve students with disabilities. However, as we move further from the first year of implementation of the new law and regulations in WIOA, we continue to see an increase in caseload size. Recommendations for new Counselors' positions have been made and the need for CRPs that will be able to provide to Pre-ETS to potentially eligible.

When the results of the Consumer Satisfaction Survey are received, this report is provided to the District Managers. When caseloads are identified that show significant weaknesses,

managers work with the staff to determine why the issues have occurred and develop strategies to improve the performance of that particular Counselor. Also, follow-up is made to the client to correct the issues.

We will implement training for staff in this area to help address concerns and to help improve the overall quality of services. On-going training in areas identified as a result of the consumer satisfaction survey and overall case reviews assist us in addressing policy and procedure issues and selecting subject areas for on-going staff development. The DSU will also examine ways to improve the survey and accept the recommendation/suggestions regarding the rating scale, etc.

**The Results of 2019 Consumer Satisfaction Survey for (Closed Cases) is as follows:**

A consumer satisfaction survey is conducted four times per year to determine the consumer satisfaction regarding closed cases during the year.

An outside marketing firm, Wolfgang Frese Survey Research Laboratory of Mississippi State University, conducted the survey for the SRC.

The ratings for the various services consumers received are presented below using the average (means) score given to each item by all respondents interviewed. If an item did not apply to a particular respondent or if the consumer did not know or refused to rate an item he/she is not included in calculating the average score for that item. The seven items rated are in Table 1 (for exact wording, reference the questionnaire.) Chart 1 is included for an easy visual comparison. The respondents were asked to rate the items (Questions 1-9) on a scale from 1 to 5, with 1 being poor and 5 being excellent. Thus, a high score indicates that the service was good and a low score that it was poor.

**Table 1 - Service Ratings by Consumer**

Rate the following items on a scale of '1 to 5', with '1' being poor and '5' being excellent.

	<b># of Consumers</b>	<b>Average Rating Mean</b>
Q1 The help the OVR staff provided at the time you applied for VR services	1,007	4.75
Q2 The help from the OVR staff during the planning of your services	1,006	4.73
Q3 The help from the OVR staff when you were receiving your VR Services	1,000	4.76
Q4 The help you received from other agencies or service providers	138	4.58
Q7 Your employment outcome	820	4.56
Q8 Employment benefits provided by your new employer	409	4.02
Q9 Overall, how do you rate the services you received?	1,003	4.75

The DSU will work on ways to improve our knowledge of the performance of service providers. This will help in providing more quality informed choices to our clients regarding providers of services as they make choices. In PY 2019, a Pre-ETS Service provider consumer satisfaction survey was provided to Counselors to rate the satisfaction with the new Pre-ETS Providers. This survey was very helpful in determining the quality of services of the Pre-ETS providers and ways to provide feedback to the provider’s regarding their service delivery. We

will continue to implement this survey and plan to conduct more vendor/service provider survey at least every two years.

The DSU will work to continue to improve the quality and quantity of Pre-Employment Transition Services provided to potentially eligible and eligible students with disabilities. A Pre-ETS Resource Guide Document was developed and provided for staff so that they would know the services each provider provides, the area of the state they serve and the fees and codes associated with the service. DSU will seek new providers of Pre-ETS to potentially eligible.

The DSU updated this procedure in order to provide programs with a means to provide additional funding for clients needing secondary treatment. We will update our Consent to Disclose Information for the clients to sign. At the request of the SRC, a new letter was also developed to assist Treatment facilities know when the applicant did not apply for VR Services.

Changing the policy for financial participation will benefit the clients we serve, especially when we have funds available to serve all clients. We do not want to create a hardship for clients that are in need of these services. Computers are more often a requirement for accommodations and accessibility. It is our goal to help ensure that the clients we serve are able to increase their skill gain and earn credentials. Often times, clients may have been eligible for services; however, based on the financial need, VR could not participate in the costs. Previous policy guidelines were developed that indicate that the FAFSA is the primary federal determination regarding a client's ability to pay and the amount of financial assistance they will receive. In September 2019, changes were made to the Financial Need Analysis as a result of the recommendations by the SRC and issues that had been expressed by clients and staff. Computers and equipment needed for accommodations (Assistive Technology) was removed from a financial need analysis. Because of the availability of funds, the cost of training such as college tuition and fees was not removed from financial participation, however, a baseline amount for all clients despite income was increased. This change will help those clients that were determined eligible, however, based on the calculation of financial participation of the client, VR could not participate in the cost of the service. This change was approved by the SRC.

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

The DSU did not reject any of the Council's input or recommendations.

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## **b. REQUEST FOR WAIVER OF STATEWIDENESS**

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**When requesting a waiver of the statewideness requirement, the designated State unit must identify the types of services to be provided by the program on a non-statewide basis. The waiver request must also include written assurances that:**

**1. A LOCAL PUBLIC AGENCY WILL PROVIDE THE NON-FEDERAL SHARE OF COSTS ASSOCIATED WITH THE SERVICES TO BE PROVIDED IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE WAIVER REQUEST;**

The Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services, Office of Vocational Rehabilitation and Office of Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind is requesting will continue to develop targeted third-party services and program agreements with local agencies in Fiscal Years 2020-2023.

These agreements are written and carried out in compliance with 34 CFR 361.28. MDRS, Office of Vocational Rehabilitation and Office of Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind requires each agreement describe the services to be provided, will contain written assurances signed by the local education agency that local agencies funds are provided with non-federal funds.

MDRS has on record that no federal funds are used by the LEAs to provide their share of the services

**2. THE DESIGNATED STATE UNIT WILL APPROVE EACH PROPOSED SERVICE BEFORE IT IS PUT INTO EFFECT; AND**

DSU approval will be obtained before each service is initiated. All services will be provided in accordance with the agency's approved State Plan.

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

All agreements approved under this waiver will comply with all requirements of the VR Services portion of the Combined State plan, including the state's Order of Selection for Services requirements and this assurance will be written in all agreements.

As new agreements are added, the current state plan will be updated to add the new agreements that have been entered into.

MDRS requests a waiver of state wideness on an annual basis in order to provide and expand services to a substantially larger number of individuals with significant disabilities, to individuals with disabilities with particular type of impairments, individuals with disabilities from particular ethnic populations that have traditionally been underserved, and other target populations identified in WIOA and federal regulations, such as students with disabilities needing Pre-Employment Transition Services. Due to the increase in the number of potentially eligible and eligible students with disabilities served, the anticipated number of students with disabilities as reported by the Department of Education and the Comprehensive Needs Assessment, MDRS is requesting a Waiver of State wideness for the following:

### **1. VR TRANSITION CONTRACT EMPLOYEE**

MDRS, Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) request a waiver of statewideness for its Interagency Cooperative Agreements with local educational agencies.

MDRS sponsors a jointly funded contract employee with the local education agency which implements the position of a VR Transition Contract Employee in the school. These agreements between MDRS - VR and the local educational agency are designed to increase the availability and quality of Pre-Employment Transition Services and Transition services that assist potentially eligible students and eligible students with disabilities to transition from secondary education to postsecondary education or employment.

MDRS does not have sufficient budget authority to contract with every potential local educational agency in the state. Some local educational agencies have not chosen to enter into this agreement. For LEAs who have opted out, VR/VRB Counselors and/or the LEAs are providing the Pre-Employment Transition Services to these students with disabilities.

MDRS may enter into new agreements with additional school districts during Federal Fiscal Year 2020.

#### **Cooperative Agreements include the following required federal assurances:**

- Local educational agency funds used as match are certified as non-federal monies. All expenditures are made by the school district with 100% non-federal monies, and are certified by the district when MDRS is invoiced for reimbursement by the school district.

This position is provided under an Interagency Agreement which provides for a 50% funding and 50% time spent on the work of each agency.

- MDRS reimburses the school district for one-half the cost of salary, fringe benefits, travel, staff development and other possible items that are necessary to achieve the goals of this agreement.
- The services provided are for VR eligible and potentially eligible students with disabilities and are new services that have a VR focus or an existing service that has been modified to have a VR focus.

The following 32 school districts currently have Interagency Agreements with MDRS for the jointly funded VR Transition Contract Employee: Alcorn County School District, Bay St. Louis-Waveland School District, Booneville School District, Carroll County School District, Clinton Public School District, Coahoma County School District, Columbia School District, Hattiesburg Public School District, Jackson County School District, Jackson Public School District, Jones County School District, Kemper County School District, Kosciusko School District, Lamar County School District, Lauderdale County School District, Laurel School District, Long Beach School District, Madison County School District, New Summit School, North Tippah School District, Ocean Springs School District, Oxford School District, Petal School District, Prentiss County School District, Quitman County School District, Rankin County School District, Senatobia Municipal School District, South Tippah School District, Tishomingo County School District, Tupelo Public School District, Wayne County School District, and Winona School District.

### **2. PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION SERVICE: PEER MENTORING**

MDRS, Office of Vocational Rehabilitation and Office of Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind is currently piloting a cooperative Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS): Peer Mentoring Program at Mississippi State University (MSU) and the University of Southern

Mississippi (USM) through their disability support services offices. At this time, the Peer Mentoring Program is only available to VR/VRB eligible students at MSU, USM and Hinds Community College. Other postsecondary students across the state are eligible to receive support services through their VR/VRB Counselor and/or through their college disability support offices.

VR may enter into new agreements with additional colleges and universities during Federal Fiscal Year 2020-2023.

- Using federal allocated Pre-ETS funds, MDRS reimburses MSU, USM, and Hinds Community College for Peer Mentor Certification, Peer Mentoring Plan, Assignment, and Management, and Peer Mentoring Evaluations and Final reports.
- MDRS also reimburses the Mentor for hourly Peer Mentoring services. All services provided by the universities using federal monies, and are certified by the district when MDRS is invoiced for reimbursement by the universities.

### **3. PROJECT SEARCH**

Mississippi Vocational Rehabilitation Agency is requesting a waiver of statewideness for Project SEARCH.

Project SEARCH is only offered in a subset of communities across Mississippi. The Project SEARCH Program is a unique, nine month, school-to-work program for young adults with developmental disabilities that occurs entirely at the workplace. This innovative, business-led model of school-to-work transition features total workplace immersion, which facilitates a seamless combination of classroom instruction; career exploration; and hands-on, worksite-based training and support. The goal for each student is Competitive Integrated Employment. Project SEARCH was developed at Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center, and has been implemented as several sites in Mississippi throughout statewide initiatives involving the collaborative effort of MDRS, area school districts, and several of Mississippi's leading employers. The LEA provides a classroom teacher to provide some academic instruction in the morning and the students go to work stations the remainder of the day. Work stations may include patient escort, food service, instrument sterilization, and other settings in the hospital. MDRS approval will be obtained before services are initiated. All services will be provided in accordance with the agency's approved State Plan. The agency will approve services before they begin.

MDRS is working to add Project SEARCH partners across the state to create more opportunities for youth with significant disabilities in obtaining real-life work experience that leads to Competitive Integrated Employment.

The services provided are for VR eligible students with significant disabilities that are seeking Competitive Integrated Employment.

- Local educational agency funds used as match are certified as non-federal monies. All expenditures are made by the school district with 100% non-federal monies and are certified by the district when MDRS is invoiced for reimbursement by the school district.
- This position is provided under an Interagency Agreement which provides for 50% funding from each agency for the Project SEARCH Transition Contract Specialist position.
- MDRS reimburses the school for one-half the cost of salary, fringe benefits, travel, staff development and other possible items that are necessary to achieve the goals of this agreement.

- MDRS covers the cost of the licensing agreement for the current Project SEARCH sites.
- The services provided are for VR eligible students with significant disabilities that are seeking Competitive Integrated Employment.

The following school districts currently have Interagency Agreements with MDRS for Project SEARCH. New Summit School, Rankin County School District, Petal School District, Jones County School District, Tupelo School District. The following sites will be added in 2020: Brookhaven School District, Neshoba Central School District, Philadelphia School District and Ocean Springs School District.

## **c. COOPERATIVE AGREEMENTS WITH AGENCIES NOT CARRYING OUT ACTIVITIES UNDER THE STATEWIDE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM**

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**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;**

The Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services (MDRS), Office of Vocational Rehabilitation and Office of Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind, has cooperative relationships with an extensive number of public and private agencies and programs, including local school districts, community mental health centers, community colleges, universities, human services agencies, and other agencies.

The Office of Vocational Rehabilitation has always strived to maximize and improve the level of services afforded to individuals with the most significant disabilities. The OVR staff, integral members of many interagency teams, regularly collaborate with agencies and programs to facilitate the provision of services to its primary clients.

In all of the coordination activities throughout the State, the goal is to reduce the duplication of services and to maximize the VR client's opportunity to obtain an employment outcome.

The methods utilized by VR to expand and improve services to individuals with significant disabilities in our State will be enhanced and ongoing. These 'methods' entail several administrative and programmatic activities intended to facilitate and/or maintain expansion of services for individuals with significant disabilities.

### **COOPERATIVE AGREEMENTS:**

MDRS and OVR make a concerted effort to utilize all available resources to provide the highest quality and most cost-effective services to individuals with significant disabilities. Since several organizations provide various services to individuals with disabilities, those resources are tapped whenever and wherever possible.

In order to accomplish this, OVR relies on many Cooperative Agreements, memorandums of agreements and contracts with various agencies, organizations and groups.

### **The entities that OVR is actively involved with include, but is not limited to:**

- **Department of Mental Health, Bureau of Mental Health** - OVR is currently implementing a statewide provision of services for individuals with severe mental illness. In 2018, a formalized agreement between the Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services, Office of Vocational Rehabilitation and the Mississippi Department of Mental Health, Bureau of Mental Health.

The purpose of this program is to enhance employment opportunities for individuals with severe and persistent mental illness or persons in recovery. This program will result in increased integrated employment opportunities for these individuals.

A comprehensive program evaluation will be completed with mental health sites participating this year, including site visits to the mental health centers as well as

discussions with VR Counselors about how the program is working, what is working well and improvements that might help the program.

Throughout the districts, VR offices work with the community mental health centers serving the area. VR Counselors and District Managers will provide orientation and training sessions for mental health center staff and their clients.

Where the community mental health centers have established vocational and Supported Employment programs, OVR often collaborates with these centers to meet the needs of our mutual clients;

- **Mississippi Department of Education** - for the coordination of transition services and local school districts to carry out transition and youth career services plus implement a Transition Contract Employee in participating local school districts;
- **Hinds Community College Disability Support Services and VR Memorandum of Understanding** - provides for both interpreting services in the classroom and the provision of Pre-Employment Transition Services to eligible students. This enables students to participate in their chosen academic coursework as well as preparing them for the world of work upon graduation. Through this partnership, students are equipped with the necessary skills to achieve identified employment goals within their chosen career path;
- **Division of Medicaid** - to provide seamless, non-duplicated services to individuals who are eligible for both Medicaid and VR services and for maximum utilization of resources between the two agencies;
- **Department of Mental Health (DMH) Planning and Advisory Council** - as federally mandated for advice and support. DMH to cover the costs for therapeutic medical services offered at secondary alcohol and drug treatment centers that have been approved by DMH;
- **Department of Mental Health - Bureau of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities** - to continue enhancing, expanding, and developing methods to support eligible persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities who express a desire for Competitive Integrated Employment; establish a state-level work group to address system, policy and funding issues that impede the continuous provision of employment services by MDRS and DMH; engage MDRS staff and DMH providers and stakeholders at the local level in collaboration and cooperation in the accomplishment of the vision and desired outcomes; identify and disseminate best practices including training and funding strategies; and, provide individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities with quality employment services that lead to Competitive Integrated Employment in a non-duplicated and seamless manner;
- **Department of Human Services (DHS)-Division of Family and Children Services** - to assess foster care participants who are diagnosed as having physical and/or mental disabilities; **DHS-Division of Field Operations** to assist TANF recipients who are diagnosed with physical and/or mental disabilities;
- **Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians** - for interagency referrals for vocational rehabilitation services, including transition planning to Choctaw Indians;
- **U. S. Department of Veterans Affairs** - to improve work opportunities for veterans with disabilities and coordinate a referral and service delivery process;

- **Warren-Yazoo Mental Health Service Program of Assertive Community Treatment (PACT)** - to facilitate the most effective and efficient process to assist PACT recipients gain access to vocational rehabilitation services;
- **Department of Transportation** - to coordinate transportation and related program resources and services at the state level wherever possible and promote maximum feasible coordination at the local level;
- **Mississippi State University, T.K. Martin Center** - to provide for evaluations pertaining to assistive technology, primarily related to seating, positioning and mobility; adaptive driving, including bioptic driving; vehicle modifications; and augmentative and alternative communication;
- **Mississippi State University, Student Support Services, and the University of Southern Mississippi / Institute for Disability Studies** operate the **Peer Mentoring Program** - to provide self-advocacy training as part of Pre-Employment Transition Services for post-secondary students with disabilities, and to assist with the transition of these students into post-secondary education in order to achieve degrees in higher education that allow for successful careers;
- **Department of Education, Office of Special Education** - continues the memorandum of agreement to support the seamless transition of students from school to adult life, facilitating the development and completion of their Individualized Education Program. The agreement addresses the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and the Rehabilitation Act. It includes information about the purpose, authority and scope, foundations of the partnership, roles and responsibilities, confidentiality, student documentation, student eligibility, VR/VRB staff attendance at IEP meetings, coordination of resources, resolution of differences, data reporting, 504 students and termination and changes.

## **2. STATE PROGRAMS CARRIED OUT UNDER SECTION 4 OF THE ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY ACT OF 1998;**

MDRS administers Mississippi's Project START (Success through Assistive Rehabilitative Technology), the state program carried out under Section 4 of the Assistive Technology Act of 1998, for education awareness and access to Assistive Technology.

MDRS operates an Assistive Technology Program to assure the adequate and appropriate utilization of rehabilitation engineering assistance is provided to individuals with disabilities. OVR makes referrals to this program. The rehabilitation engineering assistance includes a range of services to assist individuals with physical and/or cognitive disabilities that can be addressed through modification, alteration or renovation via development or use of technological devices, or by way of other technology-related assistance.

To provide timely and quality rehabilitation engineering services, MDRS has Assistive Technology Specialists located throughout the state in MDRS offices.

## **3. PROGRAMS CARRIED OUT BY THE UNDER SECRETARY FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE;**

MDRS has developed a relationship with the local office of the U.S. Department of Agriculture to gather information, build relationships, and develop cooperative efforts to provide services to Mississippians with a disability.

Although no written cooperative agreements have been developed, VR will continue to foster a relationship with the Mississippi Chapter of the USDA and initiate steps to invite USDA representative to present to VR Counselors at their District meetings.

#### **4. NON-EDUCATIONAL AGENCIES SERVING OUT-OF-SCHOOL YOUTH; AND**

MDRS, VR/VRB, has developed a cooperative agreement with the University of Mississippi Online High School. This cooperative agreement will enable out of school youth to participate in the online program with the goal of obtaining their high school diploma. The University of Mississippi is an accredited program that is listed among the top 50 Best Online High School Diplomas in the country. MDRS will provide accommodations necessary to obtain this credential such as interpreters and tutors that will instruct in the student's natural language. These students, who have struggled with standardized tests due to English being a second language, will have an avenue that will facilitate their educational credential attainment opening further educational opportunities.

Some additional non-educational agencies serving out of school youth in which VR has memorandums of understanding as follows:

- **Department of Mental Health, Bureau of Mental Health** - In 2018, a formalized agreement between the Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services, Office of Vocational Rehabilitation and the Mississippi Department of Mental Health, Bureau of Mental Health which serves out of school youth. In PY 2020, an MOU was amended to also service individuals with severe mental illness, including out of school youth. The purpose of this program is to enhance employment opportunities for individuals with severe and persistent mental illness or persons in recovery. This program will result in increased integrated employment opportunities for these individuals.
- **Division of Medicaid** - to provide seamless, non-duplicated services to individuals who are eligible for both Medicaid and VR services and for maximum utilization of resources between the two agencies; that serves out of school youth.
- **Department of Mental Health - Bureau of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities** - to continue enhancing, expanding, and developing methods to support eligible persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities who express a desire for Competitive Integrated Employment. There are specific services under this waiver program that serves out of school youth.
- **Department of Human Services (DHS)-Division of Family and Children Services** - to assess foster care participants who are diagnosed as having physical and/or mental disabilities;
- **Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians** - for interagency referrals for vocational rehabilitation services, including transition planning to Choctaw Indians;
- **Warren-Yazoo Mental Health Service Program of Assertive Community Treatment (PACT)** - to facilitate the most effective and efficient process to assist PACT recipients gain access to vocational rehabilitation services.

#### **5. STATE USE CONTRACTING PROGRAMS.**

Mississippi has no state use contracting programs

## d. COORDINATION WITH EDUCATION OFFICIALS

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### 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**

To comply with the partnership of WIOA (Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act), MDRS, VR/VRB staff collaborates with the Mississippi Department of Education and has updated the Memorandum of Agreement. This agreement explains how VR/VRB staff and MDE partner to provide a coordinated set of activities to facilitate a seamless transition of students with disabilities from school to Competitive Integrated Employment or education/training.

The Memorandum of Understanding, effective January 1, 2020 through June 30, 2022, focuses on mandates for transition services described in the Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2004). This includes how MDRS and MDE will collaborate to fulfill mandates on behalf of students with disabilities. Key elements of the partnership are stated in the agreement and include: Authority; Purpose; Pre-Employment Transition Services Required Activities; Consultation and Technical Assistance; Transition Planning; Outreach and Identification of Students with Disabilities; Section 511 Subminimum Wage; and Assurances.

#### **Policies and procedure to facilitate the transition of students from school to receipt of VR services**

One of the Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services major goals is to emphasize the employment potential of students with disabilities and to improve the outreach and outcomes for students with disabilities. The MDRS-VR/VRB Program has updated the Transition policy to align with the Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act (WIOA) definition and provides guidance for the provision of Pre-Employment Transition Services.

The MDRS-VR/VRB Program will continue to work with local school officials to implement Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS). This approach provides a continuum of services directed toward additional post-secondary education or direct entry into the workforce.

Office of Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind works closely with the education system through the VR Transition and Youth Career Services Program. There are approximately 17 VRB Counselors throughout the state who work in preparing students with blindness/vision loss for entry into the world of work. They serve as informational resources for teachers and other educational staff as well as provide resources and information about blindness for parents and transitioning students throughout development of the student's Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE).

VRB Counselors work closely with parents, education staff, and community service providers to promote development of skills needed for students to become as independent as possible and competitive in terms of employment. In addition to training parents and students about the special education rights and responsibilities, VRB provides educational support by working with the VR Transition Team, school officials, and families to develop and implement the IPE.

Goals developed in the Individualized Education Program (IEP) are included in the IPE to facilitate successful completion of those goals.

The IPE is completed during the transition process so it is in place before students exit secondary education. Services prepare students to be confident and competent to maximize their potential to achieve success.

Office of Vocational Rehabilitation works closely with the education system throughout the state. There are approximately between 45 and 50 VR Counselors throughout the state who work in preparing students with disabilities for entry into the world of work.

The goal is to help the students with disabilities achieve a seamless transition from high school into the world of work, community, vocational or post-secondary education, and/or other planned outcomes. OVR administers the VR Transition and Youth Career Services Program as specified in Title I of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended.

District level VR offices and local education districts work together in maintaining local agreements between each VR district office and the local school districts as to *how to* execute the transition services.

There are nearly 143 of these agreements with various school districts resulting in services to about 440 schools. These agreements are shared with other state agencies, family members, and consumer groups to ensure the seamless transition of services for students. The agreements do not include any specified financial agreement other than the implied cost for serving students with disabilities.

Restructuring of the VR Transition and Youth Career Services Program has resulted in additional VR Counselors being assigned to designated high schools, who we refer to as Transition Counselors. These Counselors provide leadership, work with the students, parents, and school personnel.

We also have designated VR Program staff that consist of a Statewide Coordinator for Transition Services. Because of the continued growth in the Transition and Youth Career Services Program, we are anticipating adding additional Transition Coordinators.

VR Counselors are assigned to all public secondary schools, including Mississippi School for the Deaf and Blind.

The counselor and the District Manager establish linkages within each school with the following individuals:

1. Special Education Coordinator;
2. Principal;
3. Guidance Counselor for junior and seniors;
4. School health personnel; and
5. Other school-based staff determined appropriate by the counselor and the District Manager.

OVR/OVRB staff will provide the following information sharing activities, but not limited to other activities agreed upon:

1. Provide information to students, parents and school staff about Vocational Rehabilitation policy and procedures as they relate to transition planning and VR outcomes;

2. Work with the school district to appropriately identify students who may benefit from VR services;
3. Participation in school-based transition activities, including conferences and meetings;
4. Participating in information and formal presentations to parent groups;
5. Providing consultation to local education staff regarding challenging or complex situations before or after referral;
6. Contribute to the transition planning by communicating with school staff so that students, parents and school district staff can avail themselves of the counselor's expertise;
7. Attending local educational transition fairs and community job fairs to promote employment;
8. Participating on Transition teams;
9. Participating in local meetings that provide services to students;
10. Determine eligibility for VR services;
11. Counsel transitioning students and their parents about vocational and career planning and employment outcomes related to the Individualized Education Program (IEP) by reviewing existing school records related to student;
12. Advise students, parents and school staff during the transition planning and service delivery process regarding current labor market information and community resources, including community-based services and the need for involvement by other state agencies.

Along with the VR Transition Counselors, these staff take a leading role in ensuring that Transition Services are provided to potentially eligible and eligible students with disabilities.

To help facilitate the transition of students with disabilities from school to VR services to assist the student in transitioning into training and/or employment, VR/VRB will:

1. Maintain the Memorandum of Understanding with the Department of Education and local school districts. This will be used as the tool to help facilitate and guide how VR will work with students during their transition;
2. VR/VRB Counselors and Rehabilitation Counselors for the Deaf will continue to be assigned to designated school districts as identified by the Transition Survey that is coordinated by the Transition Coordinator and local school districts;
3. The VR Transition Counselor will work with the school district each year prior to the beginning of school to provide outreach and information training to the school he/she is assigned;
4. Continue to update Resource Guide and technical information for staff and contract providers to help deliver and coordinate VR services during the transition process
5. VR policy indicates that the IPE will be completed before the student exits high school. This will help ensure that the student on an education/employment track upon exiting high school.
6. Each year, information is obtained from the Department of Education to provide update Special Education staff contact information.

Prior to making services available, the VR Counselor utilizes school documentation, health records, and other pertinent information as deemed appropriate for determining a student with a disability potentially eligible for Pre-Employment Transition Services and/or for determination of eligibility for the VR Transition Program.

The VR Counselor may then collaborate with the student, family members, school district personnel and others to provide Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS). MDRS has set aside 15% of its Reserve in order to make the Pre-ETS available to all eligible and potentially eligible students with a disability. Pre-Employment Transition Services encompass five required activities that must be made available for students between the ages of 14 to 21 years old. Pre-ETS include the following: job exploration counseling; work-based learning experiences; counseling on enrollment in comprehensive transition or postsecondary educational programs; workplace readiness training; and instruction in self-advocacy. Pre-ETS should be planned on an eligible student's Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) through informed choice if they were not previously provided by VR prior to the student applying for VR transition services, or if it is determined that additional Pre-ETS are needed.

Transition planning between MDRS and MDE ultimately helps with the successful development and implementation of both the IEP and the IPE.

MDRS, through the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation and Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind, has recently sent Request for Proposals for third party providers to provide Pre-ETS activities in accordance with the Workforce Innovation & Opportunity Act (WIOA). At this time, two proposals have been awarded contracts and additional Request for Proposals are being sought.

Transition and Youth Career Services include, but are not limited to, job search skills, work evaluation, development of an IPE, basic money management, social skills, and job readiness training along with continuous counseling and guidance. These services may be performed solely by the VR Counselor, in collaboration with other service providers, or in coordination with an education teaching professional.

The VR/VRB Counselor also works with the classroom teacher implementing Pre-ETS services. The VR Counselor is prepared to teach the Pre-ETS curriculum in conjunction with providing the classroom teacher with information, technical assistance, and/or curriculum materials as needed. The VR Counselor supervises the student in this program, documents the student's progress, and shares information with the classroom teacher on a regular basis.

VR continues to emphasize *best practices* in providing services to students with disabilities in order to provide a seamless transition to subsequent work or other environments. This emphasis on *best practices*, in part, is achieved by continuous training of staff working with students with disabilities.

VR assures that, with respect to students with disabilities, the state has developed and implemented strategies to address the needs identified in the FFY 2018 Comprehensive Statewide Assessment of Rehabilitation Needs; strategies to achieve the goals and priorities identified by the state to improve and expand VR services for students with disabilities on a statewide basis; and, has developed and will implement strategies to provide Pre-Employment Transition Services.

MDRS also assures that, with respect to students, the needs identified in the state has developed and will implement new strategies to address the needs identified in the FFY 2018 Comprehensive Statewide Assessment.

## **2. INFORMATION ON THE FORMAL INTERAGENCY AGREEMENT WITH THE STATE EDUCATIONAL AGENCY WITH RESPECT TO:**

### **A. CONSULTATION AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE TO ASSIST EDUCATIONAL AGENCIES IN PLANNING FOR THE TRANSITION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES FROM SCHOOL TO POST-SCHOOL ACTIVITIES, INCLUDING VR SERVICES;**

Mississippi has both a state level agreement, Memorandum of Agreement for Transition Planning for Secondary Students with Disabilities between the Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services (MDRS) and the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) and a local level Agreement of Cooperation with each of our education agencies.

The scope of services between MDRS and MDE are described in (d) 2, between MDRS and the local education agencies are intended to serve as a mechanism for OVR/OVRB and the local school districts to clearly specify the plans, policies and procedures for coordinating services to facilitate the transition of students with disabilities, including:

- Responsibilities of MDRS/OVR and OVRB;
- Responsibilities of Local Education Agency;
- Referral Process;
- Joint Development of IEPs and IPEs; and
- Coordination necessary and documentation requirements set forth in section 511 of the Rehabilitation Act, as added by WIOA, with regard to students with disabilities who are seeking subminimum wage employment.

This Memorandum of Agreement for Transition Planning for Secondary Students with Disabilities is made and entered into by and between the Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services, hereafter referred to as 'MDRS', for and on behalf of its Offices of Vocational Rehabilitation and Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind, hereafter referred to as 'OVR/OVRB', and the Mississippi Department of Education, for and on behalf of its Office of Special Education, hereafter referred to as 'MDE OSE'.

Both the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (the Rehabilitation Act), as amended by The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), require State Educational Agencies (SEA) and Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) agencies to plan and coordinate transition services, as well as Pre-Employment Transition Services for students with disabilities through a formal Interagency Agreement (Section 612(a)(12) of the IDEA and Section 101(a)(11)(D) of the Rehabilitation Act)

A formal Interagency Agreement is mandated under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) 34 CFR 300.154, and section 101(a) (11) (D) of the Rehabilitation Act and its implementing regulations at 34 CFR 361.22 (b). Additional references used in this document include Sections 113 and 511 of the Rehabilitation Act, and the Final Regulations: State Vocational Rehabilitation Services Program; State Supported Employment Services Program; Limitations on Use of Subminimum Wage. This Agreement is designed to improve the cooperative and collaborative efforts between OVR/OVRB and MDE/OSE to coordinate the receipt of Pre-Employment Transition Services, Transition Services and other Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Services to students with disabilities who are eligible for special education services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), students who have a 504 plan, and other students with disabilities who are eligible or potentially eligible for services through OVR/OVRB in order to facilitate their smooth transition from school to post-school employment-related activities and Competitive Integrated Employment.

It is also the intent of this agreement to serve as a mechanism for OVR/OVRB and MDE OSE to clearly specify the plans, policies and procedures for coordinating services to facilitate the transition of students with disabilities, including:

- Consultation and technical assistance in the planning for the transition of students with disabilities;
- Transition planning by OVR/OVRB and educational personnel that facilitates the development and implementation of a student’s Individualized Education Plan (IEP);
- Roles and responsibilities, including financial and programmatic responsibilities of each agency;
- Procedures for outreach to and identification of students with disabilities;
- Assessment of students’ potential need for transition services and Pre-Employment Transition Services;
- Coordination necessary and documentation requirements set forth in section 511 of the Rehabilitation Act, as added by WIOA, with regard to students with disabilities who are seeking subminimum wage employment;
- Assurance that the MDE OSE will not enter into an arrangement with an entity holding a special wage certificate under section 14(c) of the Fair Labor Standards Act for the purpose of operating a program under which a youth with a disability is engaged in work at a subminimum wage; and
- Additional considerations include grievance procedure to resolve disputes between OVR/OVRB and the MDE OSE, as appropriate, as well as procedures to resolve disputes between an individual with a disability and the entities specified above, and information about the Client Assistance Program.

The Cooperative Agreement between the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation and the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation for Blind and the Mississippi School for the Deaf and Blind was implemented to ensure that students who are Blind and Deaf receive effective seamless services as they make the transition from high school to post-high school education and/or training. This agreement includes Pre-Employment Transition services and other VR services. This agreement follows the same guidelines for all cooperative agreements with Mississippi Department of Education and the local education agency in terms coordination, consultation and technical assistance.

**B. TRANSITION PLANNING BY PERSONNEL OF THE DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY AND EDUCATIONAL AGENCY THAT FACILITATES THE DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THEIR INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PROGRAMS;**

It is understood by all VR staff working with the school and transition age youth that it is their responsibility to work with students and the school in the school’s efforts to develop and implement an IEP so that the student and VR will be able to develop and implement an IPE before the student exists high school. The school system is responsible for inviting the student, his or her parent or guardians, and if appropriate, representatives of participating agencies to meetings when transition is being discussed and decisions made about transition services. The VR Transition Counselor attend IEP meetings and provide school districts with assistance, strategies and ideas to help identify students’ post-school employment goals, needs for VR Services, and concerns to be addressed in achieving the goals when invited.

**C. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES, INCLUDING FINANCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES, OF EACH AGENCY, INCLUDING PROVISIONS FOR DETERMINING STATE LEAD AGENCIES AND QUALIFIED PERSONNEL RESPONSIBLE FOR TRANSITION SERVICES;**

Often times when working with students while in school, there may be an overlap between their educational goal (IEP) and employment goals and services (IPE). When this happens, VR works with the school to either share the cost or determine how the service will be paid. Staff are provided guidelines to help determine how and who will be responsible for the services. Some questions are asked to help guide the decision, such as:

1. Is the service required to help achieve the education goal? If yes, the school has the primary responsibility for payment.
2. Will the service help to achieve the IPE employment goal? If yes, VR has the primary responsibility for payment.
3. If the service is planned on the IEP and IPE, the school and VR are responsible for negotiating a cost sharing agreement. Conflicts between the school and VR are resolved utilizing the process outlined in the Memorandum of Understanding
4. If the student is over 18 and eligible for services through the Department of Mental Health, Bureau for Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities, the school, VR and Mental Health will be responsible for negotiating a cost sharing agreement.

**VR staff are trained to work with the school and other agencies that have a Memorandum of Understanding or Cooperative Agreement to use this decision making strategy to resolve and ensure the student receives the services needed.**

**D. PROCEDURES FOR OUTREACH TO AND IDENTIFICATION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES WHO NEED TRANSITION SERVICES.**

Outreach to students with disabilities should occur as early as possible during the transition planning process and must include, at a minimum, a description of the purpose of the VR program, eligibility requirements, application procedures, and scope of services that may be provided to eligible individuals.

As the student moves from school to post school life, there should be no gap in services between the education and the vocational rehabilitation systems. While local school districts are responsible for providing education and transition services to students with disabilities who are still in the secondary school system, VR can provide transition services that involve planning and preparing for the student's future employment.

District Managers and counselors are responsible for developing cooperative working relationships with the local education agency staff in the districts, and other agencies working with students.

The counselor will actively work in collaboration with their local school district to identify students with disabilities who can benefit from vocational rehabilitation services. Schools usually provide a list of names to the counselor during the first semester of the current school year. Schools may also provide the information to the counselor prior to the end of a school year or during the summer break, which helps with preparation for the upcoming school year. When referring a student to VR, it is recommended that the school district:

1. Understands VR's eligibility requirements and the purpose of VR services;
2. Makes referrals based on student needs;

3. Obtains consent for release of information from the parent, legal guardian or from the student (a student age 18 or older can independently sign the release form unless he/she has a designated legal guardian);
4. Provides documentation that describes the student's disability, needs, preferences, interests, and skills (e.g., interpersonal, work, academic, independent living) which are relevant to vocational rehabilitation and achieving employment. Preferred information includes descriptions of the student's current abilities, work-related capacities and limitations, functional limitations and service needs, if available.

A referral packet which includes a referral letter, the Referral Information Form (MDRS-VR-05), Transition and Youth Referral Form Addendum (MDRS-TY-01) and transition brochure will be sent to individuals the school identifies as someone who may benefit from VR services. Contact will then be made with these referrals and their parents to introduce the vocational rehabilitation program and determine their potential interest in services. When the counselor sends letters to the client, a copy will be sent to the parent/guardian.

Students who express interest in services by returning the appropriate referral paperwork will be scheduled for a meeting with the counselor at school during school hours. The parents of the students must be notified of the meeting and invited to attend. When requested by the parent, other arrangements can be made to begin the application process. During the meeting, the counselor will explain the vocational rehabilitation program and answer questions posed by the student and/or his/her parents/guardians.

The counselor is required to enter the referral information in AACE (the MDRS caseload management system) to allow each referral to be successfully tracked. The counselor will also use the referral module to document the services provided to students.

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## **e. COOPERATIVE AGREEMENTS WITH PRIVATE NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS**

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

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**Cooperative Agreements with private non-profit organizations are established based on identified needs and expectations. Agreements may vary from the establishments of information and referral needs to the structuring of a new service or program.**

As an ongoing process, MDRS, VR/VRB district staff develop and reinforce relationships with community partners structured to meet customer needs and informed choice.

Vocational and service needs of customers within the geographic area as identified through resources such as:

- the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment;
- information from the State Rehabilitation Council; and
- other sources of State and local data to inform decision-making.
- other sources of State and local data to inform decision-making
- networking with other community partners that service individuals with disabilities

MDRS develops a formal fee for service contracts with private non-profit vocational rehabilitation service providers. The contract contains all necessary clauses and each contract is approved by the state's Assistant Attorney General assigned to MDRS. The contracts are executed by the MDRS Executive Director and the principal of the private non-profit vocational rehabilitation service provider.

MDRS has the authority to enter into contracts with for-profit organizations for the purpose of providing vocational rehabilitation services for individuals with disabilities when it is determined that the for-profit organization is better qualified to provide the VR services than non-profit agencies and organizations.

In order to enter into a cooperative agreement as a VR Service provider, community rehabilitation program providers request to become a vendor for Vocational Rehabilitation Services, a provider/information request form and checklist is completed. This checklist contains the some of the same information that providers submit that answer request for proposals. The provider is asked to provide valid W-9 information, evidence of incorporation with the MS Secretary of State, Scope of Services and the professional licensures, certification, credential, qualifications, resumes and job descriptions of key leadership positions. The vendor is also asked to provide information concerning their status as a supplier, grantee, and business structure.

The number of providers for Pre-Employment Transition Services in the state was very limited. To expand the delivery of Pre-Employment Transition Services, and obtain providers for Pre-Employment Transition Services, the Competitive Sealed Proposal process was used to request and obtain proposals from competing sources in response to advertised competitive

specifications, through the issuance of a Request for Proposals (RFP), by which an award is made to the provider or who receives the highest score based on weighted evaluation criteria outlined in the RFP and

includes discussions and negotiations with providers. The RFP was posted on MDRS external website and in the legal notice section of the newspaper and the Mississippi Contract/Procurement Opportunity Search Portal to allow service providers access to the document, guidance and policy. Emails were also sent to community partners and agencies notifying them that MDRS was accepting Request for Proposals and the proposals could be found on the MDRS' external website.

For PY 2019, In order to determine consumer satisfaction with Pre-Employment Transition providers, VR developed a survey to quantify VR staff satisfaction and feedback. The consumer satisfaction survey was collected from VR staff first because this was the first time this type of satisfaction survey had been initiated for the providers of Pre-Employment Transition Services. This mechanism was used in 2020 to assist in determining staff feedback for providers of Pre-Employment Transition Services. Steps will be made in the next two years to develop a consumer satisfaction survey that consumers will be surveyed.

## **f. ARRANGEMENTS AND COOPERATIVE AGREEMENTS FOR THE PROVISION OF SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES**

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**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.**

MDRS administers the Supported Employment (SE) Program as specified in Title VI of the Rehabilitation Act and amended in WIOA. VR works extensively with other state agencies, private non-profit entities, employers, family members, and consumer groups to ensure quality SE services are provided to all eligible individuals throughout all phases of the SE service delivery system.

When individuals apply for VR Services, the VR Counselor determines eligibility for VR and for Supported Employment. If it is determined that the individual will also require SE services to obtain employment and long-term supports to maintain employment, the individual’s case is staffed with the SE Counselor. The SE Program is not separate from the general VR program. It simply offers additional services to individuals that meet the criteria for eligibility for SE services. SE clients are eligible for any of the traditional VR services available to any other VR client. Any traditional VR services the SE client needs is paid for with regular VR (Title I) funds.

MDRS - VR has entered into formal Cooperative Agreements with the Mississippi Division of Medicaid (Medicaid) and Department of Mental Health, Bureau for Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, with respect to delivery of VR services, including extended services, for individuals with the most significant disabilities eligible for home and community-based services.

The collaboration with DMH has resulted in a formalized referral process between the two agencies to ensure VR services are provided to individuals with the *most significant disabilities*, including those with serious mental illness.

A formal referral process has been developed for individuals referred from the Department Mental Health to VR Supported Employment. The MDRS Supported Employment Program Coordinator receives the referral from the DMH Mental Health Support Coordinator/Target Case Manager. After review, the SE Program Coordinator then forwards the referral to the SE Counselor in the appropriate MDRS District Office for application for VR services.

Upon completion of the time-limited Supported Employment services, the ongoing job skills training assistance and other necessary long-term support is transitioned to a third party, group, or individual through a Cooperative Agreement or Extended Services Support Plan Agreement. The primary provider of extended services is the DMH-Bureau of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities through its network of local community service programs.

However, an increasing number of individuals and other community organizations are accepting this role. Employers are often willing to take on this responsibility and are encouraged to do so since it is the most natural arrangement for the client.

VR has entered into 64 new Extended Service Support Plan Agreements from January 1, 2019 through December 31, 2019. These 64 new agreements are in addition to the agreements previously established and still ongoing.

Providers of long term supports are required to document twice monthly contact with each consumer successfully working in the community, and to maintain this documentation in case files for the duration of that consumer's job. This information is reported monthly to the VR Supported Employment Coordinator for tracking purposes.

WIOA increased the maximum amount of time for SE staff to provide time-limited Supported Employment services to 24 months. However, the rate of transitioning a client to extended services is dependent upon the needs of the individual, his/her family, the employer, the third party agency, and other involved individuals. Since SE staff members and the Extended Service provider will have been collaborating in the provision of SE services throughout an individual's Vocational Rehabilitation Program, such transitions are normally seamless and do not cause job disruptions.

Individuals with chronic mental illness who need special support services, but not job skills training services provided either at the work site or away from the work site in order to obtain employment, perform work skills and maintain employment are provided VR employment services. These services are coordinated with the DMH Case Manager to ensure the individual receives the support and is able to maintain employment.

In VR practice, when stabilization occurs, the client is ready to transition from VR-funded SE services to the appropriate source of ongoing support from the *Extended Service* provider.

Transition to *Extended Services* must take place no later than 24 months after the initial job placement. If there are exceptional circumstances that require ongoing support services to be provided longer than 24 months, the Counselor should justify this in a case note.

VR may provide extended service supports to youth who have a most significant disability and are eligible for SE services. Extended support services provided to youth with the most significant disabilities can continue for a period of time not to exceed four (4) years or until the youth reaches the age of 25 and no longer meets the definition of a youth with a disability (or whichever comes first). VR can begin providing extended support services once initial job stabilization is achieved.

The use of Job Trainers at the worksite is an integral part of SE services. This individual is responsible for learning the job prior to the client coming to work, then teach the job to the client. The trainer not only teaches the work skills needed at the job site but will help the client become adjusted to the new work environment. The job trainer will help the client develop relationships with coworkers and supervisory staff. If the client cannot meet the job standards, the trainer is there to ensure the employer that he work will be done to the business' quality and quantity levels. As the client becomes more independent at the worksite and is able to perform most of the job tasks with minimum intervention by the trainer, the trainer will fade assistance until the case can be closed and the extended service provider assumes the extended long-term support.

The following are possible resources for *Extended Services* the counselor coordinates with to provide *Extended Services*:

- Natural Supports: Support from supervisors and co-workers occurring in the workplace to assist employees with disabilities to perform their jobs, including supports already provided by an employer for all employees. These natural supports may be both formal and/or informal, and include mentoring, supervision (ongoing feedback on job

performance), training (learning a new job skill with a co-worker), and co-workers socializing with employees with disabilities at breaks or after work. Support provided by family, friends, or significant others are also included within this definition.

- Medicaid Funded Employment Supports: ID/DD Waiver-Intellectual and Developmental Disability Waiver Program for individuals who are approved for the ID/DD Waiver program.

**Some New Programs and Services designed to support the provision of Supported Employment Services are as follows:**

- **Job Coach Training Manual**

The Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services, Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, and the Mississippi Department of Mental Health Division of Home and Community Based Services serve as the two primary providers of job coaching services. In 2018, both agencies along with other community partners worked together to ultimately create a Job Coach Training Manual.

This manual was designed to review best practices in job coach training to develop a specific Mississippi job skills trainer curriculum. The new curriculum is competency-based and the intent is for it to become a required training regime for all persons in any job coach or related position in Mississippi. Prior to this project, training for job coaches ranged from none to out of State correspondence programs to agency training so specific it did not translate to general use. The goal of the job trainer manual project is to increase the level of competency for job coaches in the state and have a mutually agreed on curriculum in the state .

This curriculum targeted audience of all job coaches in the state is a collaborative effort between The Arc of Mississippi, Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services, Mississippi Department of Mental Health, Institute for Disability Studies, and self-advocates.

- **Project SEARCH**

The Project SEARCH Program is a unique, business-led, nine-month employment preparation program that takes place entirely at the workplace. Up to 12 students with disabilities experience total workplace immersion, classroom instruction, career exploration, and hands-on training through three different worksite rotations. The goal for each participant is competitive employment. To reach that goal, the program provides real-life work experience combined with training in employability and independent-living skills to help young people with significant disabilities make successful transitions to productive adult.

- **Shelby Residential and Vocational Services**

A Cooperative Agreement was entered into by MDRS, Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, with Shelby Residential and Vocational Services to provide services to individuals eligible for traditional VR employment services and Supported Employment. These outcome based VR and SE services include:

1. **Exploration-** This is a time-limited and targeted service designed to help a person make an informed choice about whether s/he wishes to pursue individualized integrated employment.
2. **Discovery** activities include observation of person in familiar places and activities, interviews with family, friends and other who know the person well, observation of the

person in an unfamiliar place and activity, identification of the person's strong interests and existing strengths and skills that are transferable to individualized integrated employment. Discovery also involves identification of conditions for success based on experience shared by the person and others who know the person well, and observation during the Discovery process.

3. **Job Development Plan**-This is a time-limited and targeted service designed to create a clear and detailed plan for Job Development. This service includes a planning meeting involving the individual and other key people who will be instrumental in supporting the individual to become employed in individualized integrated employment.
4. **Job Development**-This is support to obtain an individualized competitive or customized job in an integrated employment setting in the general workforce, for which an individual is compensated at or above the minimum wage, but ideally not less than the customary wage and level of benefits paid by the employer for the same or similar work performed by individuals without disabilities.
5. **Job Skills Training**-Job skills training for individualized, integrated employment includes identifying, through job analysis, and providing services and supports that assist the individual in maintaining individualized integrated employment that pays at least minimum wage but ideally not less than the customary wage and level of benefits paid by the employer for the same or similar work performed by individuals without disabilities. Job skills training includes supports provided to the individual and his/her supervisor and/or co-workers, either remotely (via technology) or face-to-face.
6. **Customized Employment**-Service is described herein that will place individuals in settings that meet the definition of Competitive Integrated Employment. Services should be provided in a continuous process leading to obtaining a Competitive Integrated Employment outcome.

## **g. COORDINATION WITH EMPLOYERS**

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**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**

WIOA specifically directs the VR program to work with employers to identify Competitive Integrated Employment opportunities and career exploration opportunities in order to facilitate the provision of VR services, and transition services for youth with disabilities such as Pre-Employment Transition Services. MDRS will handle this coordination with employers through its Office of Business Development.

The Office of Business Development (OBD) is comprised of 16 individuals spread across the 82 county area that makes up the state of Mississippi. We have 12 “Business Development Representatives” who are located in and across our 10 district area. Their duties are to be in the community learning their communities’ workforce needs, meeting employers located in their districts, learning those employer’s human capital needs, and helping the VR arm of MDRS connect the need of those businesses with the clients that we serve. Our 12 representatives are located in Oxford, Tupelo, Greenwood, Starkville, Jackson, Pearl, Meridian, McComb, Laurel, and Gulfport.

Supporting those 12 individuals are three managers and one office assistant. (2 Regional Managers and 1 Office Director). Their purpose is to support, train, and provide direction to the 12 development representatives. They also are charged with assisting in the creation of large scale programs with employers who want to hire on a mass scale.

### **Sales-Minded / Business First Approach**

The goal of the OBD representatives is to provide multiple services and an on-going relationship to the businesses they enter into relationship with. This mindset is directly correlated with the sales approach that the office bases its strategy on. The OBD units’ goal is to understand the workforce area that each representative is located in, understand who the employers are in those areas, the needs of the employers, and finally how to use the resources of VR and MDRS (AbilityWorks, Training, etc.) to meet the needs of those employers.

We use a face-first approach to delivering our product. Our goal is to keep the OBD reps in the community interacting with businesses as much as possible. We want them to be in person with the businesses and building relationships. We want them taking tours of facilities, have meetings about how a business operates, etc. The purpose of this is to put a face to MDRS. This means a lot to businesses in Mississippi who come from a very relational culture. Ultimately, by building this relationship and understanding the business we can specifically pinpoint the needs of the business. Once we understand the needs of the business, the next step is to use the trainings we provide, the services we offer, and individuals we represent to meet the needs of that business.

### **Services to Business**

OBDs goal is to provide a package of services that meets a businesses’ needs for education, support, and human capital. These needs are met through a bundle of services that our Business Development Reps are trained to provide. Our BD unit is equipped to provide training such as Disability Awareness, Customer Service, Assistive Technology, ABLE Act, etc. The goal of our

business training is to educate the business about the disability community and to establish a level of comfort about working with the disability community that may not exist beforehand.

Placement has been prioritized for a long period of time. The OBD reps carries a caseload of “job-ready” clients who are willing and ready to return to work. When approaching businesses, the first step for the BD rep is exploration and fact-finding. The goal is to understand the business model and to understand the business’ human capital needs. Once we have a grasp on those topics, then the BD rep moves to try meet those needs of the business with the job-ready client that we are serving through VR. The BD reps primary function is relationship building, understanding their client’s needs, finding opportunities, and connecting our clients to those opportunities. Their performance is graded on their ability to connect their client’s to employment, internships, community-based opportunities, and other services that we provide.

Lastly, OBD has entered into relationships with businesses who want to hire individuals with disabilities on a mass scale. These companies understand the value of diversity and the value that our clients bring to their workforce and want to incorporate this deep within their corporate model. Our office will meet with the businesses and determine how to best achieve this for them. The assessment usually determines how many individuals they are looking for, the specific jobs and areas they need our individuals to work, training existing staff to prepare for individuals with disabilities to work there, and developing training to prepare our individuals for success when entering the workplace.

## **2. TRANSITION SERVICES, INCLUDING PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION SERVICES, FOR STUDENTS AND YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES.**

### **Career Exploration Services**

OBD offers a number of services to help our individuals, student and adult, explore different career opportunities before committing to them. These services are geared to serve the client and business alike. These services include: internships, community-based experiences, job shadowing, on-the-job training, and business sponsored training programs.

Our internship program has recently been expanded from a summer program geared toward students to a year-round programs geared to serving both students and adults whenever the need should arise.

In 2018, VR had 45 adults and 17 students participate in the Summer Internship Program with approximately 58 different employers. In 2019, VR had 56 students participate.

The program is used by BD staff to allow the person to be trained by the business, gain vital skill sets, and allow the business to see the person for who they are and how they fit within their organization while MDRS covers the cost and allows the business to experience the person without having to make the commitment to hiring them in the case that the opportunity is not a good fit for the business, the client, or both. MDRS can cover up to 320 hours to allow the person to train at no cost to the client or business.

Our community-based training program is used by BD staff to allow students and adults, who already have skill sets needed by a partner business, to go into the business, work, and prove themselves and their abilities to the business. The program is used on a shorter term basis to help the client to see if this is an opportunity they’d like to pursue or to allow the business to become sure that this client is a good fit for them. MDRS usually covers between 40 and 80 hours of the cost to the business.

Job Shadowing is a new service to the BD portfolio of services. We saw the need for individuals to go into a business to see how they operate. We have clients who have a mental perspective of how a job would be that isn’t realistic to the actual operation of that job. This program aims to

allow the person to watch without actually working for that partner business. We believe this provides clarity to the job exploration process and saves valuable time on the back side of the employment process when the client isn't pleased with their career goal they aren't suited for. The job shadowing experience usually last up to 40 hours for the client and partner business.

On-the-job training is a very similar program to our internship program except in the fact that the business hires the person first and is then reimbursed for a certain number of salaried hours. This program is mainly utilized by companies who are completely sold on the disabled population and are willing and equipped to work through any issues that may arise making sure the fit is correct in the employment process.

Project SEARCH is a program that is geared towards youth. This program partners a school, a business, and a VR agency to create a 10 month internship program. The school provides a teacher and up to 12 students, while the business provides a classroom location and the internship sites. The VR agency provides the overarching management, the cost, job placement, and the counseling to the program. The students rotate through three 10 week internship rotations during their regular school year. The goal of the program is to gain valuable specific career skillsets, learn what it means to work, and work through employment hurdles all while still in school. Many of our sites have aimed to hire the students that they work with. While this is nice it is not required and much of the training and career development is geared toward being able to be used elsewhere in the community upon exit.

### **MDRS Community Rehabilitation Program Services to Business**

#### **Office of Vocational Rehabilitation**

##### **AbilityWorks, Inc.**

AbilityWorks, Inc., a network of Community Rehabilitation Programs (CRP), provides vocational assessment, job training, and actual work experience for individuals with disabilities. This is possible through a wide array of contract and subcontract services provided to local business and industry. It is a division of MDRS with 15 AbilityWorks locations throughout the state. AbilityWork's mission to clients is *"to improve the quality of life, employment opportunities, and integration of people with disabilities into the community"*. The mission to business and industry through the subcontracting program is to provide fast turnaround times, high-quality workmanship, competitive rates, credit rates, credit terms and speedy delivery. Some of the services and products AbilityWorks offers include collating and sorting, packaging and handling, assembly work, product reworking, product reclamation, grounds maintenance, housekeeping and quality reviews.

AbilityWorks enables the VR program staff and employers to work together to identify career exploration opportunities and Competitive Integrated Employment opportunities for clients. Both activities are conducted mainly through Community Based Services connecting the client's abilities with employer opportunities.

AW considers career exploration as a comprehensive process that systematically utilizes work, either real or simulated, as the focal point for evaluation and vocational exploration, the purpose of which is to assist an individual with vocational development.

When a client has an interest in a career but AW cannot provide the client with similar tasks or experiences related to that career, then the AW staff establishes a work-based learning opportunity in the community for the client.

The client gains exposure and experience in the type of career in which he/she is interested, thereby either helping the client realize the career is not the correct choice or reaffirming the client's interest in the career.

The work-based learning experience may additionally help the client and the VR Counselor understand what additional training is required as well as the skills and/or abilities that must be acquired to be successful in the selected career.

Through its AbilityWorks program, MDRS-VR partnered with Sephora to provide training for individuals with disabilities in a warehouse distribution setting. This program began at Sephora's Olive Branch location August 2017.

In regards to the customer service they received, respondents reported the AbilityWorks and Addie McBryde staff treated them with respect, kindness, patience and professionalism over 65% of the time, with proficient knowledge being exhibited at only 55%. It was further noted that punctuality and explaining the situation or process was displayed 50% of the time.

According to survey results, 90.63% of the respondents that attended a CRP received services from AbilityWorks, Inc. The most common and frequent reported services received from AbilityWorks were Work-Adjustment training, Vocational Assessment services, and Community-Based services.

### **Office of Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind**

#### **The Addie McBryde Center for the Blind**

The Addie McBryde Center is the state comprehensive center for the Blind and Visually Impaired. This center is a place where people who are Blind can reside temporarily while they learn to lead productive, self-sufficient lives. The program incorporates instruction in a variety of independence skills as well as case management including home management, cooking, orientation and mobility, Braille, access to computer technology, college preparation, job-readiness, adaptation to blindness and many other skills that contribute to independence and the confidence to seek the highest level of employment possible. The center provides Pre-ETS in conjunction with the independent skills classes on a daily basis. The Summer Internship Program (for the Blind and Visually Impaired) is hosted by the Addie McBryde Center connecting clients with their first real-world work experience.

The Addie McBryde Rehabilitation Center is a comprehensive personal adjustment center for adults who are Blind, Visually Impaired or Deaf-Blind. Through a program of training offered to both residential and day clients, individuals participate in class learning skills that enable the client to successfully live and work independently. Established in 1972, the center is located on the campus of the University of Mississippi Medical Center in Jackson, Mississippi. The facility has a dormitory capacity for 28 clients, a gymnasium, a client library and classrooms equipped with specialized technology for the Blind and Visually-Impaired. Certified instructors individualize training to meet a client's needs during the class day from 8:00AM-3:00PM. Clients participate in additional activities in the 'Achieving Milestones' class focusing on adjustment to vision loss, confidence building, resume writing, interviewing and utilizing resources in the community.

According to survey results, 9.38% received services from the Addie McBryde Center. The most common services received from the Addie McBryde Center were Rehabilitation Technology, followed by Orientation and Mobility, Independent Living and Braille Services.

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## h. INTERAGENCY COOPERATION

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**Describe how the designated State unit will collaborate with the State agency responsible for administering each of the following programs to develop opportunities for Competitive Integrated Employment, to the greatest extent practicable:**

### **1. THE STATE MEDICAID PLAN UNDER TITLE XIX OF THE SOCIAL SECURITY ACT;**

MDRS has entered into formal Cooperative Agreements with the Mississippi Division of Medicaid (Medicaid) and Department of Mental Health (DMH) -Bureau of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, with respect to delivery of VR services, including extended services, for individuals with the most significant disabilities eligible for home and community-based services. The collaboration with DMH has resulted in a formalized referral process between the two agencies to ensure an array of services is provided to individuals with the *most significant disabilities* opening many new options for them.

In addition to the formal agreements with Medicaid and DMH, MDRS collaborates on a more informal basis with public and private entities to ensure a comprehensive program of services is provided to individuals eligible for Supported Employment services. Collaborative partners include local mental health facilities to help people move from qualified institutions to homes in the community, local school districts, businesses and industries, workforce development One-Stop Career Centers, advocacy groups, and other relevant third parties as well as parents of individuals with the most significant disabilities.

Whenever there is an overlap of goals and services, VR work with the agencies to arrange a cost sharing agreement in order to provide the services the individuals is in need of. The following guidelines are used to come to a final agreement regarding which agency is responsible for providing the service.

1. Will the service help the individual achieve the IEP educational goal?
2. Will the service help the individual achieve IPE employment goal?
3. If the service will help achieve the IEP goal and the IPE goal, the agency and VR negotiated how each party will participate in the cost of the service.
4. If the student is eligible for the IDD Waiver or State plan Medicaid SE Services, all agencies work together to negotiate which services will be provided in order to share in the cost of the services.

The partnership's intent is to build capacity across existing state systems to improve outcomes for youth and young adults with developmental disabilities, including intellectual disabilities, seeking competitive employment in integrated settings.

### **2. THE STATE AGENCY RESPONSIBLE FOR PROVIDING SERVICES FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES; AND**

**Mississippi's ID/DD Waiver** provides individualized supports and services to assist individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities live successfully at home and in the community and are an alternative to care in institutional settings. The ID/DD Waiver includes an array of services aimed at assisting people to live as independently as possible in their home and community. Services include: Supported Employment, Home and Community Supports,

Supervised Residential Habilitation, Day Services-Adult, In-Home Nursing Respite, Community Respite, ICF/MR Respite, Prevocational Services, Specialized Medical Supplies, Behavior Support/Intervention Services, and Speech, Occupational and Physical Therapy.

When the IDD Waiver case manager and the individual has determined that Competitive Integrated Employment is an option for the individual with appropriate services, referrals are made to Vocational Rehabilitation.

A formal referral process has been developed and coordinated with the IDD Waiver. The individual's information is submitted to the VR SE Program Coordinator with existing information to assist in expediting the eligibility process.

Upon receipt of referral and agreed upon referral information, the referral is assigned to an SE Counselor who initiates the application for VR Services.

The formal Memorandum of Understanding outlines the services each agency is responsible for, as well, as how service cost sharing will be resolved.

### **3. THE STATE AGENCY RESPONSIBLE FOR PROVIDING MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES.**

In 2018, a formalized agreement between the Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services, Office of Vocational Rehabilitation and the Mississippi Department of Mental Health, Bureau of Mental Health.

The purpose of this program is to enhance employment opportunities for individuals with severe and persistent mental illness or persons in recovery.

This program will result in increased integrated employment opportunities for these individuals. A comprehensive program evaluation will be completed with mental health sites participating this year, including site visits to the mental health centers as well as discussions with VR Counselors about how the program is working, what is working well and improvements that might help the program.

Throughout the districts, VR offices work with the community mental health centers serving the area. VR Counselors and District Managers will provide orientation and training sessions for mental health center staff and their clients.

Where the community mental health centers have established vocational and Supported Employment programs, OVR often collaborates with these centers to meet the needs of our mutual clients as referrals are made to VR for services for those who have been determined to need and want to obtain Competitive Integrated Employment.

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## **i. COMPREHENSIVE SYSTEM OF PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT; DATA SYSTEM ON PERSONNEL AND PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT**

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

### **1. SYSTEM ON PERSONNEL AND PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT**

#### **A. QUALIFIED PERSONNEL NEEDS**

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

##### **i. THE NUMBER OF PERSONNEL WHO ARE EMPLOYED BY THE STATE AGENCY IN THE PROVISION OF VR SERVICES IN RELATION TO THE NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS SERVED, BROKEN DOWN BY PERSONNEL CATEGORY;**

The Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services (MDRS) has implemented procedures and activities within the Office of Human Resource Development which assures the full implementation of a Comprehensive System of Personnel Development.

##### ***Data System on Personnel and Personnel Development***

Assurance of an adequate supply of qualified Rehabilitation professionals and paraprofessionals and personnel to provide vocational rehabilitation services is the major driving force of the Office of Human Resource Development. Data from numerous sources is used to determine current and projected needs, as well as, Vocational Rehabilitation and Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind progress toward meeting them.

OHRD maintains a database which includes information on the number of vocational rehabilitation personnel providing vocational rehabilitation services, types of positions, and the ratio of the number of personnel needed to provide vocational rehabilitation services to individuals served by the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation and Office of Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind.

The current staffing ratio is 138 counselors; 67 counselors assistants, 8 interpreters, 3 psychometrists, 20 evaluators, 36 work adjustment instructors, and 9 instructors at the Center for the Blind to 13,671 applicants and eligible individuals served. MDRS, along with all State agencies, received a budget cut the previous fiscal year and absorbed most of the cut through attrition. This year, MDRS is working to rebuild the VR/VRB workforce by filling vacancies and adding positions where needed throughout the state. Currently, MDRS is experiencing vacancies in all of the personnel categories mentioned above, but is actively advertising vacancies to maintain the needed ratios.

The table below displays current VR and VRB personnel.

Job Title	OVR Filled Positions	OVRB Filled Positions
Counselor	117	21
Counselor Assistant	57	10
Interpreter	8	
Psychometrist	3	
Evaluator	20	
Work Adjustment Instructor	36	
Instructors at the Center for the Blind		9

**ii. THE NUMBER OF PERSONNEL CURRENTLY NEEDED BY THE STATE AGENCY TO PROVIDE VR SERVICES, BROKEN DOWN BY PERSONNEL CATEGORY; AND**

The table below displays current VR and VRB needed positions, broken down by category.

Job Title	OVR Vacancies	OVRB Vacancies	Current Total Staff Needs
Counselor	13	3	154
Counselor Assistant	17	0	84
Interpreter	3		11
Psychometrist	3		6
Evaluator	7		27
Work Adjustment Instructor	4		40
Instructors at the Center for the Blind		2	11

The current staffing ratio, if all positions are filled, equates to a counselor to client ratio of 89 clients per counselor. Although caseload sizes vary depending on the type of services provided, the ideal client to counselor ratio is 75 clients per counselor.

**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.**

MDRS predicts the number of clients who will receive services to grow by 66% in five years. MDRS projects that 13,855 clients will be served in FY 2020; 16,345 clients to be served in FY2021; 19,282 clients to be served in FY 2022; and 22,747 clients to be served in FY 2023. Based on these projections, MDRS is anticipating a need for a 66% increase in counselors to maintain current staffing ratios (102 additional counselors), and then an additional 47 counselors to meet the desired client to counselor ratio of 75 clients per counselor. In order to

properly assist counselors with caseloads, a ratio of 2 counselors to 1 counselor assistant is ideal. An additional 68 counselor assistants are needed in five years to meet the desired ratio. An added increase of one staff interpreter will also be needed to ensure quality services are provided in a timely manner.

The table below displays the projections of the number of personnel, broken down by personnel category, needed to provide VR services in five years based on projects of the number of individuals served.

Job Title	Projected Additional Staffing Needs over the Next 5 Years	Total Staff Needed in 5 Years
Counselor	149	303
Counselor Assistant	68	152
Interpreter	0	11
Psychometrist	3	9
Evaluator	12	39
Work Adjustment Instructor	0	40
Instructors at the Center for the Blind	6	17

The number of Counselors that provide Transition and Youth Career Services remains consistent with overall Counselor staffing projections. The projected five year staffing needs noted above for counselors and counselor assistants would require that VR be provided with additional FTEs, allocated by the State legislature.

With the turnover within OVRB over the last few years, the rate of change in the next few years is expected to be lower. It can be anticipated that OVRB staffing needs could include approximately six new staff positions within the next five years. The table above highlights the current vacancies within OVRB. These vacancies are within the same regional office and are currently being covered by existing staff. The chart also depicts anticipated staffing needs for the next five years due to expected vacancies from retirements.

On average, OVRB and OVRB loses approximately 66 employees each year due to separation, transfer to another state agency for career advancement, or retirement. Of the predicted 66 separations per year, 11 are due to retirement and 51 due to resignation/transfer. MDRS predicts an average of 28 counselors to separate per year and 12 counselor assistants to separate per year, determined by reviewing a two year average rate of separation in these two classifications. Due to this predicted turnover, vacancies are a contributing factor in our ability to maintain desired client to counselor ratios; however, all positions are advertised for recruitment quickly upon departure of the separated employee.

**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;**

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 39 students enrolled in its program and seven students earned a Master’s Degree in Rehabilitation Counseling during the calendar year 2018. Mississippi State currently has nine students enrolled in its Master’s Program in Rehabilitation Counseling and four students earned a Master’s Degree in this program in 2018.

Described in the table below is information from institutions of higher education in Mississippi that prepare vocational rehabilitation professionals, categorized by institution and type of program.

**Program Data for Institutions of Higher Education**

<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	39	29	5	7
Mississippi State University	9	2	7	4

**ii. THE NUMBER OF STUDENTS ENROLLED AT EACH OF THOSE INSTITUTIONS, BROKEN DOWN BY TYPE OF PROGRAM; AND**

Described in the table below is information from institutions of higher education in Mississippi that prepare vocational rehabilitation professionals, categorized by institution and type of program.

**Program Data for Institutions of Higher Education**

<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	39	29	5	7
Mississippi State University	9	2	7	4

**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.**

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 39 students enrolled in its program and seven students earned a Master’s Degree in Rehabilitation Counseling during the calendar year 2018. Mississippi State currently has nine students enrolled in its Master’s Program in Rehabilitation Counseling and four students earned a Master’s Degree in this program in 2018.

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Jackson State University	39	29	5	7
Mississippi State University	9	2	7	4

**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.

The VR Services Portion of the Combined State Plan continues to address the need to recruit and retain qualified staff, including those staff with minority backgrounds and individuals with disabilities.

OHRD encourages managers seeking to hire new counselors to hire only those individuals who meet the requirements of Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD). 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 as long as the individual meets the national standards for a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor.

VR maintains close relationships with universities including minority institutions such as historically black colleges and universities, and disability specific organizations. VR employees collaborate with universities in securing grant funding; invite university employees to help with training and education activities; and provide practicum and internship slots for students. VR acknowledges that it is not able to easily recruit an adequate number of qualified rehabilitation counselors to replace those retiring and departing for other reasons. VR is currently engaged in the activities indicated below to address recruitment preparation and retention of counselors.

MDRS staff works closely with the graduate programs 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 MDRS meet with the graduate students from each program annually to explain career opportunities and the state employment application process.

VR staff is requested by the university to serve on each program's Advisory Council. VR also designates a Program Coordinator to serve 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.

#### **OVR/OVRB Student Practicum/Internship Programs**

MDRS has an ongoing working relationship with the Institutions of Higher Learning to provide practicum and internship training to college students. Practicum and Internship trainings are coordinated through the OVR/OVRB district or regional manager and the designated OVR program coordinator. A list of all practicum and internship students will be provided to the MDRS Office of Human Resources (HRD) by the OVR Program Coordinator.

In 2019, VR and VRB had 26 interns who were receiving their Masters degree in Rehabilitation Counseling.

The following procedures are used when arranging student practicum or internship training:

1. Students requesting to participate in a practicum or internship placement with OVR/OVRB must be referred by their college or university's department advisor.
2. The department advisor must contact the designated program coordinator to request for student placement at an OVR/OVRB site.
3. The program coordinator will provide the department advisor with a Practicum/Intern Application form for the student to complete. The application will be emailed to department advisor within 1-3 business days of initial contact.
4. Once the application is reviewed by the program coordinator, the district or regional manager at the appropriate site will be notified by the program coordinator.
5. Students who are seeking a practicum/internship in rehabilitation counseling or a related field must be assigned to work with a vocational rehabilitation counselor senior or a certified rehabilitation counselor.
6. The district or regional manager will determine the appropriate MDRS student supervisor for their office.
7. The program coordinator and designated MDRS student supervisor will schedule a date and time for an initial interview with student.

8. Upon a contingent internship offer, a background report will be conducted for all potential interns. Intern Students must comply with the agency's policies pertaining to these issues outlined in Section 8.7 Background Reports on New Employees, of the MDRS Policy and Procedures Manual.
9. Once approval has been given, the department advisor and student will be informed of the start date by the program coordinator.
10. The student will be required to complete the MDRS Confidentiality Certification Statement form and the Computer Rules and Policy Agreement on the first day they report for training. This form will be returned to the program coordinator and a copy of the MDRS Confidentiality document will be given to the student.
11. Upon completion of the practicum/internship training, the MDRS student supervisor will complete the Exit Evaluation for Practicum and Intern Student form. The form shall be submitted to the designated program coordinator. The program coordinator will forward the Exit Evaluation form to the HRD training department.

### **3. PERSONNEL STANDARDS**

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

**A. STANDARDS THAT ARE CONSISTENT WITH ANY NATIONAL OR STATE-APPROVED OR -RECOGNIZED CERTIFICATION, LICENSING, REGISTRATION, OR OTHER COMPARABLE REQUIREMENTS THAT APPLY TO THE PROFESSION OR DISCIPLINE IN WHICH SUCH PERSONNEL ARE PROVIDING VR SERVICES; AND**

There is not a state approved or recognized certification, licensure or registration of Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors. VR in conjunction with the State Rehabilitation Council establish the Certified Rehabilitation Counselor (CRC) educational eligibility requirement as its highest standard. Efforts are made to recruit those who meet the CRC educational eligibility status.

However, if MDRS is unsuccessful in finding enough applicants who meet the highest standards, MDRS will accept and consider qualified those who meet the minimum initial standard for providing Counseling and Guidance services, with an understanding of the needs of individuals with disabilities and a 21st century understanding of the evolving labor market and the attainment of:

- A Bachelor's degree from an accredited university and one year of experience counseling individuals with disabilities, with an understanding of the needs of individuals with disabilities and a 21st century understanding of the evolving labor market. Alternative majors may be considered such as vocational rehabilitation counseling, social work, psychology, disability studies, business administration, human resources, special education, supported employment, customized employment, economics, or another field that reasonably prepares individuals to work with consumers and employers, or attainment of:
- A Master's degree or doctoral degree in a field of student such as vocational rehabilitation counseling, law, social work, psychology, disability studies, business administration, human resources, special education, management, public administration, or another field that reasonably provides competence in the employment sector, in a disability field, or in both business-related and rehabilitation-

related fields and from an accredited university in a Social, Behavioral or Rehabilitative Science may substitute for the year of required experience.

Policies and activities to ensure that all professional and paraprofessional personnel receive appropriate and adequate training in terms of a system of staff development as follows:

MDRS is committed to assuring that its personnel are qualified to provide the highest quality of service to its constituents. This commitment is demonstrated through a comprehensive training program which begins with orientation and continues throughout the career of the individual employee. A systematic program of skills-based training provides all programmatic and support personnel with the abilities and tools necessary to deliver quality services. Training activities range from providing staff with information about correct and/or better methods of carrying out assigned jobs to providing staff with new and challenging ideas pertinent to the programs in MDRS.

The Division of Training within the Office of Human Resource Development serves as a centralized unit to plan, implement, and coordinate training activities for all VR and VRB staff.

Educational Assistance - MDRS, within the limits of available funds, is authorized, pursuant to Section 37-101-293 of the Mississippi Code of 1972 Annotated, to grant educational assistance to its employees. Educational assistance may consist of any combination of paid educational leave (full-time or part-time) at a maximum salary to be established by the Mississippi State Personnel Board and/or reimbursement for tuition, books, and related fees for undergraduate or graduate level courses. The purpose of the educational assistance program is to encourage employees to develop job-related skills and to develop employees for higher level professional and management positions. Priorities for awarding educational assistance will be based on the established need within MDRS for staff with the educational credentials being sought and the availability of individuals with those credentials in the relevant applicant pool.

**B. THE ESTABLISHMENT AND MAINTENANCE OF EDUCATION AND EXPERIENCE REQUIREMENTS, IN ACCORDANCE WITH SECTION 101(A)(7)(B)(II) OF THE REHABILITATION ACT, TO ENSURE THAT THE PERSONNEL HAVE A 21ST CENTURY UNDERSTANDING OF THE EVOLVING LABOR FORCE AND THE NEEDS OF INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES.**

VR/VRB performance development is an on-going, day-to-day process of communication and feedback between the supervisor and employee. The employee assists the supervisor in determining job duties and associated competencies and behavioral anchors during the annual Planning Phase. The supervisor shall provide information to the employee on his/her progress throughout the performance development period (Review and Feedback Phase). The employee is assigned a formal PDS Rating at the end of the appraisal period.

Ensuring that personnel have a 21st-century understanding of the evolving labor force and the needs of individuals with disabilities means that personnel have specialized training and experience that enables them to work effectively with individuals with disabilities to assist them to achieve Competitive Integrated Employment and with employers who hire such individuals. Relevant personnel skills include, but are not limited to:

- Understanding the functional limitations of various disabilities and the vocational implications of functional limitations on employment, especially with regard to individuals whose disabilities may require specialized services or groups of individuals with disabilities who comprise an increasing proportion of the State VR caseloads, such as individuals with traumatic brain injury, post-traumatic stress syndrome, mental illnesses, autism, blindness or deaf-blindness;

- Vocational assessment tools and strategies and the interpretation of vocational assessment results, including, when appropriate, situational and work-based assessments and analysis of transferrable work skills;
- Counseling and guidance skills, including individual and group counseling and career guidance;
- Effective use of practices leading to Competitive Integrated Employment, such as supported employment, customized employment, internships, apprenticeships, paid work experiences, etc.;
- Case management and employment services planning, including familiarity and use of the broad range of disability, employment, and social services programs in the state and local area, such as independent living programs, Social Security work incentives, and the Social Security Administration's Ticket-to-Work program;
- Caseload management, including familiarity with effective caseload management practices and the use of any available automated or information technology resources;
- In-depth knowledge of labor market trends, occupational requirements, and other labor market information that provides information about employers, business practices, and employer personnel needs, such as data provided by the Bureau of Labor Statistics and the Department of Labor's O\*NET occupational system;
- The use of labor market information for vocational rehabilitation counseling, vocational planning, and the provision of information to consumers for the purposes of making informed choices, business engagement and business relationships, and job development and job placement;
- The use of labor market information to support building and maintaining relationships with employers and to inform delivery of job development and job placement activities that respond to today's labor market;
- Understanding the effective utilization of rehabilitation technology and job accommodations;
- Training in understanding the provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act and other employment discrimination and employment-related laws;
- Advocacy skills to modify attitudinal and environmental barriers to employment for individuals with disabilities, including those with the most significant disabilities;
- Skills to address cultural diversity among consumers, particularly affecting workplace settings, including racial and ethnic diversity and generational differences; and
- Understanding confidentiality and ethical standards and practices, especially related to new challenges in use of social media, new partnerships, and data sharing.

#### **Office of Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind**

Current service delivery also includes 17 master level counselors that focus on transition and adults to assist with facilitating clients through the vocational process and four Orientation and Mobility Specialists throughout the state that work with VRB clients. Three are currently ACVREP certified and one is receiving training in Orientation and Mobility. All VRB Counselors are eligible to take the CRC exam and retain their CRC.

#### 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**

In recent years, long-term strategies for retraining a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor or Vocational Evaluator who are not a qualified rehabilitation professional and not currently in a program are to utilize accessible Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) - Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD) funded stipend programs to the extent possible, since it represents a significant savings to VR. VR has implemented this more aggressive approach in meeting the CSPD standards.

The previous in-service grant was allocated solely to VR CSPD activities. These training grant funds were used to pay tuition and fees to individuals who could not get the coursework through the RSA stipend program, such as those who did not live near the public university or who otherwise could not use the RSA Stipend program. The elimination of the in-service training grant to states has severely reduced VR's ability to continue support for these activities. It is not currently clear how much of the Basic VR grant will be available for this support. The HRD department has implemented a system to track academic classes taken and progress toward certification eligibility.

Those not funded under a stipend program as funded by RSA CSPD will be sponsored by MDRS at available distance education or web-based Master's 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. 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 to successfully attract *qualified* personnel.

In January 2003, July 2006, July 2007, and July 2019, the salaries of Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors and Vocational Evaluators were realigned. Following a survey of the southeastern average, the salaries remain lower than that of neighboring states. In December 2015, MDRS was successful in its efforts to gain approval by the Mississippi State Personnel Board to include a new classification for Counselors and Evaluators possessing a CRC or CVE. This new classification increased the salary for qualified employees.

MDRS has established educational requirements of a Master's Degree in Rehabilitation Counseling with a continuing education component to address these issues.

### **Core Curriculum**

In order to ensure that staff maintains a 21st century knowledge for working with individuals with disabilities, the Core Curriculum series will be provided annually for all Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors and Vocational Evaluators. This training program provides a structured introduction to the Mississippi Vocational Rehabilitation Program presented at the State Office and/or via webinar in two to three day training sessions conducted over the course of a year.

Core Curriculum includes modules on the history and law affecting rehabilitation; program policies; medical and psychological aspects of disability; Accessible Automated Case Environment (the Agency's computerized case management system); counseling theories; job development and job placement; assistive technology; vocational assessment and various commercial evaluation systems utilized by the Agency's CRPs (for Vocational Evaluators); and training on disability-specific issues such as autism, blindness, deafness, etc.

### **Annual Ongoing Staff Development Training Sessions**

Although there has been an emphasis on assisting counselors meet the CSPD standards and developing the technical, managerial and leadership skills of supervisors and managers, VR provides ongoing staff development training to employees at every level.

Ongoing staff development training can include a variety of topics but, generally, include the following:

- Disability-Specific Topics
- Case Management
- Eligibility
- Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) Development
- Various Types of Caseloads including Supported Employment and Transition
- Issues Regarding Work with Minority Populations, including Cultural Diversity
- WIOA Pre-Employment Transition Services - Customized Integrated Employment
- Other Areas Identified during Case Reviews conducted by MDRS Program Evaluation Staff

### **Additional Training Based on Need**

VR offers individual training allocations for staff members. This allocation can be used for job related professional development activities such as attending conferences, purchasing books, CDs, DVDs or other materials, taking on-line short courses or any other approved professional development activity. Supervisory approval is required for these professional development activities to ensure that employees participate in activities consistent with their individual

needs and job responsibilities and requirements. Our HR Department provides consultation and technical assistance to VR employees as needed. Training sessions are held at the district level and in formal statewide training as needed.

In order to address the increasing percentage of retirement eligible employees and the need for knowledgeable managers and supervisors, the MDRS Executive Team established a formal leadership development program. This program, known as Leadership, Education, and Development for Rehabilitation Services (LEADRS), addresses 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"*.

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) 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 to evaluate employee performance.

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's performance.

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 VR training plan. Information from annual client surveys is also used in determining training objectives and is incorporated into the VR training plan.

## **B. PROCEDURES FOR THE ACQUISITION AND DISSEMINATION OF SIGNIFICANT KNOWLEDGE FROM RESEARCH AND OTHER SOURCES TO DESIGNATED STATE UNIT PROFESSIONALS AND PARAPROFESSIONALS.**

MDRS continues to identify current information from research, rehabilitation trends and professional resources. This information is provided to agency staff through a variety of methods, including training at the state, regional, and district levels. Most recently this training has been focused on Autism and Customized Employment. Additionally, this information is posted and available to staff on MDRS Connect, the agency intranet.

Information is provided to staff via email and posted on the MDRS agency intranet (Connect). Information regarding current trends, disabilities and tools to use to assist the Counselors and staff in performing their duties and providing quality services to individuals with disabilities is disseminated via Connect.

VR program staff is required to provide staff with and post current information regarding their program areas for staff usage.

## **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.**

VR staff works with Mississippi's diverse populations. One way VR does this is to actively recruit and support employees who have diverse backgrounds. When a counselor is unable to communicate directly with a customer in his/her preferred language, the agency has qualified interpreters or translators on staff.

Due to the increasing Hispanic population, qualified interpreters are contracted on an as needed basis for individuals who are Spanish speakers. VR 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.

American Sign Language interpretation needs who are Deaf or Deaf-Blind are met using a combination of employee positions and arrangement with qualified local interpreter service providers. 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.

VR has assisted listening devices in most offices for MDRS employees to communicate with individuals who are hard of hearing or late-deafened and do not know sign language. VR complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act by providing materials in braille or large print, through having qualified sign language interpreters, and offering text-based communication access. VR arranges for Foreign Language Translators when needed.

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. Materials are available in Braille and other accessible formats, as requested by consumers.

MDRS requires that all VR Counselors for the Deaf achieve and maintain basic proficiency in American Sign Language. VR 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 VR Counselors for the Deaf and Sign Language Interpreters.

## **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.**

Mississippi VR and VRB program has an established partnership with the Mississippi Department of Education/Office of Special Education including an executed Interagency Agreement (IA). A new IA has been developed to comply with required content elements of WIOA.

VR and VRB have operationalized the transition and youth services program and has continued to work on improving the quality of those services. To support this, additional staff will be hired to help coordinate, plan and provide services to students with disabilities, coordinate and plan with local education agencies, and to work with district staff.

## j. STATEWIDE ASSESSMENT

**1. PROVIDE AN ASSESSMENT OF THE REHABILITATION NEEDS OF INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES RESIDING WITHIN THE STATE, PARTICULARLY THE VR SERVICES NEEDS OF THOSE:**

**A. WITH THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES, INCLUDING THEIR NEED FOR SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES;**

*Based on information from the 2018 US Census Bureau/ACS, the following types of disabilities in the state:*

<b>Disability Types</b>	<b>Number of Individuals with Disability</b>	<b>% Type of Disability</b>
Ambulatory	266,996	39.2%
Cognitive	183,211	26.98%
Hearing	116,298	17.13%
Vision	112,508	16.57%
<b>TOTAL OF INDIVIDUAS with Disability</b>	<b>679,013</b>	

*Based on AACE - VR Case Management System (October 1, 2018 through September 30, 2019), the following types of disabilities served:*

<b>DISABILITY IMPAIRMENT</b>	<b>VR CLIENTS</b>	<b>VRB CLIENTS</b>	<b>TOTAL (VR/VRB)</b>
OTHER PHYSICAL IMPAIRMENTS NOT LISTED ELSEWHERE	2742	10	2752
COMMUNICATIVE IMPAIRMENTS (EXPRESSIVE/RECEPTIVE)	2405		2405
OTHER MENTAL IMPAIRMENTS	2238	1	2239
COGNITIVE IMPAIRMENTS	1982		1982
PSYCHOSOCIAL IMPAIRMENTS	726	2	728
OTHER ORTHOPEDIC IMPAIRMENTS	659	2	661
MOBILITY ORTHOPEDIC / NEUROLOGICAL IMPAIRMENTS	655		655
DISABILITY NOT REPORTED (CLOSED FROM APP)	313		313
DEAFNESS, COMMUNICATION VISUAL	220		220
GENERAL PHYSICAL DEBILITATION	181	1	182
MANIPULATION ORTHOPEDIC/NEUROLOGICAL IMPAIRMENTS	154		154

<b>DISABILITY IMPAIRMENT</b>	<b>VR CLIENTS</b>	<b>VRB CLIENTS</b>	<b>TOTAL (VR/VRB)</b>
COMBINATION OF ORTHOPEDIC/NEUROLOGICAL IMPAIRMENTS	152		152
OTHER HEARING IMPAIRMENTS	129	1	130
HEARING LOSS, COMMUNICATION AUDITORY	95	1	96
RESPIRATORY IMPAIRMENTS	67		67
OTHER VISUAL IMPAIRMENTS	45	1480	1525
DEAFNESS COMM. AUDITORY	35		35
DEXTERITY ORTHOPEDIC / NEUROLOGICAL IMPAIRMENTS	28		28
HEARING LOSS, COMMUNICATION VISUAL	23		23
LEGALLY BLIND (EXCLUDING TOTALLY BLIND)	5	131	136
BLINDNESS	3	71	74
DEAF-BLINDNESS	1	2	3
APPLICATIONS		41	41
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>12,858</b>	<b>1,743</b>	<b>14,601</b>

The Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation, Offices of Vocational Rehabilitation, Office of Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind and the Mississippi State Rehabilitation Council completed the *2018 Comprehensive Needs Assessment*. The assessment is mandated to be performed every three years. The 2018 assessment was completed in February 2019. The information obtained from the assessment, is used to assist in determining the needs of individuals with disabilities who reside in the state of Mississippi.

In addition, data was captured and utilized from the 2018 U.S. Census Bureau/ACS reporting and the AACE Case Management System.

Furthermore, realizing it is crucial for counselors to understand what clients believe to be most helpful and what they perceive to be the greatest obstacles in regards to gaining and retaining employment, the agency developed survey questions and implemented a statewide survey to capture this data.

The results of the *2018 Comprehensive Needs Assessment* provided the following results: Of those who responded to the survey, 25% indicated they received SE services, 94.87% of those identified as SE participants stated they were receiving all the services they required, 97.44% of the respondents professed the SE staff showed respect, kindness, patience, professionalism and proficient knowledge of the SE program during service delivery.

For adults with most significant disabilities age 25 and older, according to the 2018 Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment of the Rehabilitation Needs of Individuals with Disabilities Survey results indicated that 83.33% of the respondents identified themselves as an individual with a disability with the remaining percentage identifying as a family member of a person with a disability or as “other”.

Based on the results of this assessment and information generated from our AACE Case Management system, it is projected that number of individuals with significant disabilities and

the number of individuals that need supported employment services will increase in FY 2020 – 2023.

**B. WHO ARE MINORITIES;**

*Based on the AACE VR Case Management System 10/1/18 through 9/30/19 results are as follows:*

ETHNICITY/RACE *	VR Clients Served	VR %	VRB Clients Served	VRB %
White	6,966	54.2%	788	45.2%
Black or African American	5,517	42.9%	892	51.2%
Multi-Racial	290	2.3%	43	2.5%
Asian	36	0.3%	8	0.5%
American Indian or Alaskan Native	18	0.1%	2	0.1%
Not Completed	15	0.1%	6	0.3%
Does not wish to self-identify	10	0.1%	1	0.1%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	6	0.0%	3	0.2%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>12,858</b>		<b>1,743</b>	

*\*Data Based on AACE VR Case Management System-10/1/18 through 9/30/19. Note: may have more than one ethnicity.*

**2018 Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment**

Based on the FFY 2018 Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment Survey, for Adult Services (age 25 and older) in regards to race and ethnicity, the results are as follows: 50.4% African-American, 5.38% American Indian and 3.23% Hispanic.

Based on the AACE VR Case Management System 10/1/18 through 9/30/19, the results reflect that: 5,517 individuals were Black or African American, 36 Asian, 290 Multi-Racial, and 6,966 individuals were White.

Individuals Served by the VR Program: White 6,966 (54.2%), 5,517 Black of African American; (42.9%); 290 Multi-Racial (2.3%); 36 Asian (0.3%); American Indian or Alaskan Native 18 (0.1%); Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander 6 (0.0%).

Individuals Served by the VRB Program: 892 (51.2%) Black; 788 (45%) White; 43 Multi-Racial (2.5%); Asian 8 (0.5%); American Indian or Alaskan Native 2 (0.1%); Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander 3 (0.2%).

Because of the results of this assessment, it is projected that in FY 2020 – 2023, the specific service needs identified are:

Provide VR staff training in multicultural awareness and develop awareness of staff of socio-economic issues that may interfere with a person’s ability to stay engaged in the VR process.

- Vocational Rehabilitation Counseling and Guidance;
- Assist individuals in accessing training and training opportunities to compete in today’s labor market;
- On-the-Job Training;

- Job Search/Placement Services;
- Vocational Assessment/Evaluation;
- Transportation;
- Training: College/Vocational;
- Provide VR staff training in multicultural awareness and develop awareness of staff of socio-economic issues that may interfere with a person's ability to stay engaged in the VR process.
- Develop resources and tools to be able to communicate with individuals who are Spanish speaking. Increase outreach and availability of VR Services in areas of the state with the largest populations of African American, Hispanic populations and Asian population; and
- VR and VRB collaborate with minority businesses and service providers that are located in the community in order to develop relationships that lead to employment.
- The Interagency Agreement between MDRS and the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians is maintained. Both agencies work together to help ensure that eligible Choctaw Indians' services are coordinated in order to provide comprehensive VR services that will lead to employment outcomes.

**C. WHO HAVE BEEN UNSERVED OR UNDERSERVED BY THE VR PROGRAM;**

Access to and services provided by VR/VRB for individuals who are unserved or underserved.

**Specific service needs identified for FFY 2020 – 2023 include:**

- Increased the outreach activities to assist in creating awareness of available services to meet the needs of individuals in the African American, Asian, Hispanic and Latino communities;
- Transition aged - Youth need to have work experience to put on job applications and to assist in learning soft skills;
- Students as they enter post high school need peer mentors to encourage them (a mentor they can relate to and feel comfortable with);
- Outreach to 504 students and those with physical disabilities;
- Although data indicates that individuals with Mental Illness, Deaf, Intellectual Disabilities and Visual Impairments apply for VR/VRB Services, data supports that individuals with these impairments are less likely to obtain Competitive Integrated Employment and earn living wages;
- A better understanding of available VR services;
- Increase collaboration with the Choctaw Indian Vocational Rehabilitation entity to target services that are not provided by Choctaw VR to assist in increasing employment in the community; and
- VR Counseling and Guidance to assist Career Exploration to obtain access to services that will provide support in employment with competitive wages.
- Continue outreach activities, Career Counseling, and Information Services to combine the needs of students with intellectual and developmental disabilities and those that

might have been previously referred from schools to subminimum wage facilities /segregated facilities, rather than VR for career and employment services.

- Transition Students – Increase awareness of VR services to transition students with disabilities. Often times, transition students and their families do not recognize the importance of early VR involvement. This need is based on the difficulties VR staff has had in obtaining parental response to services. Because of this, some students continue to exit high school without VR services and have little success in enrolling in training and education opportunities.
- Assist in providing training to staff on the service delivery for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders. VR Program has a dedicated to work with staff to enhance the delivery of VR Services that will ultimately improve the employment outcome for individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder.
- Individual with Mental Illness - Because of the lack of long-term success VR has had with individuals with Serious Mental Illness, VR has entered into a Cooperative Agreement with the Department of Mental Health to provide VR Services to individuals that have been determined to need VR employment services, including Supported Employment.
- MDRS will conduct a separate needs assessment for the Hispanic/Latino population in Mississippi with disabilities to help gather more information regarding their vocational rehabilitation service needs.
- MDRS will continue to monitor the ACS survey for the most recent data regarding the race and ethnicity per county to remain informed of target areas in which information should be disseminated. MDRS will also continue to provide outreach to other minority populations to ensure they have information regarding the VR program.
- Benefits Planning and Counseling
- In 2018, (October 1, 2018 through September 30, 2019), the agency served 12,858 VR clients and 1,743 VRB clients. The federal requirement for service rate of all individuals with disabilities is 0.80. Based Standard and Indicator 2.1, Ratio of Minority Service Rate to Non-Minority Service Rate is 0.800. VR and VRB will continue to monitor the ratio of minority service rate to non-minority service rate to ensure that we are meeting the needs of individuals with disabilities in the state that are underserved and unserved.

#### **D. WHO HAVE BEEN SERVED THROUGH OTHER COMPONENTS OF THE STATEWIDE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM; AND**

As part of the 2018 *Comprehensive Needs Assessment*, a survey question asked participants if they have utilized the state’s Workforce Investment Network (WIN) for assistance with finding a job or for receiving job training services. The Workforce Investment Network (WIN) Job Centers are service centers that offer programs and resources geared toward job seeking and are partners in the American Job Center Network. WIN is an innovative strategy designed to provide convenient, One-Stop employment and training services to employers and individuals searching for a job. Combining federal, state, and community workforce programs and services, it is WIN’s goal to create a system that is both convenient and user-friendly.

Survey results indicated 45% of respondents used the WIN Job Center for job search assistance, job training information and interview tips. However, only 73% of clients who used the service felt comfortable with the assistance they received and indicated they believed services could be better.

VR will increase partnerships with the statewide Workforce Investment Network system to develop innovative programs to serve common customers. With our collaboration and integration efforts thus far we have been successful in implementing a common intake process, anticipating having a Hub where our workforce partners can access information for common clients and all VR clients have the Workforce ID which is consistent throughout all programs.

VR will continue to participate and assist in providing ongoing training of job center staff on disability sensitivity issues. Efforts to coordinate various government agencies with very different rules and expectations for participation continue. An individual facing parenting responsibilities, poverty, and disability issues needs to work with agencies that can coordinate their efforts.

**E. WHO ARE YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES AND STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES, INCLUDING, AS APPROPRIATE, THEIR NEED FOR PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION SERVICES OR OTHER TRANSITION SERVICES.**

**Youth and Students with Disabilities**

According to the 2017 American Community Survey, 36,422 or 7.6% youth in the state have a disability and 442,700 or 92.4%, youth in the state do not have a disability.

**According to the 2017 American Community Survey, the Distribution of Disabled Youth in Mississippi by Disability Type** are: any disability 36,422/100.0; cognitive difficulty only 12,595 or 34.6; ambulatory difficulty only 856 or 2.4%; independent living difficulty only 2,114 or 5.8%; self-care difficulty only 759 or 2.1%; vision difficulty only 5,284 or 14.5%; hearing difficulty only 1,575 or 4.3%; and two or more disabilities 13,239 or 36.3%.

Information on the disabilities experienced by survey respondents: Over one quarter of respondents, (26.5%) reported having a disability of a type not otherwise specified by the survey. After that, the most commonly referenced forms of disability were mental health impairments (23.0%); intellectual impairments (21.4%); neurological impairments (19.4%); communication impairments (9.7%); and visual impairments (9.2%).

**According to the 2017 American Community Survey, the characteristics of Mississippi Youth and Students by Disability Status:**

Characteristic	Disabled		Non-Disabled	
	N	%	N	%
Average Age	19.1	---	18.9	---
<b>Gender</b>				
Male	22,865	62.8	225,926	51.0
Female	13,557	37.2	216,774	49.0
<b>Race</b>				
White	16,665	45.8	230,365	52.0
Black	17,868	49.1	192,331	43.4
American Indian/Alaskan Native	278	0.8	1,475	0.3
Asian/Pacific Islander	594	1.6	4,299	1.0
From Multiple Races	950	2.6	6,223	1.4

	Disabled		Non-Disabled	
Other	67	0.2	8,007	1.8
<b>Hispanic Status</b>				
Hispanic	1,907	5.2	19,392	4.4
Not Hispanic	34,515	94.8	423,308	95.6
<b>Educational-Workforce Status (Age 16-24)</b>				
Enrolled in school	11,953	39.5	227,113	62.3
Not enrolled in school, employed	4,979	16.5	86,125	23.6
Not enrolled in school, unemployed	1,821	6.0	14,932	4.1
Not enrolled in school, not in labor force	11,506	38.0	36,467	10.0

**2019 Comprehensive Needs Assessment for Students and Youth with Disabilities**

In 2019, OVR/OVRB conducted a *Comprehensive Needs Assessment* of students and youth with disabilities, ages 14-24, to determine the rehabilitation needs, including the need for Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS).

**Results are as follows:**

**Age Range**

- 13.64% - age 22-24
- 42.42% - age 19-21
- 43.94% - age 16-18
- There were no responses from individuals 14-15 years old.

**Gender**

- 56% - male
- 44% - female

**Race/Ethnicity**

- 2.27% - American Indian or Native Alaskan
- .76% - Asian
- 76.52% - Black or African American
- 18.94% - White
- 3.03% - Multiple races
- 1.52% - Other

**Education Level**

- 60.61% of respondents were in the 11<sup>th</sup> -12<sup>th</sup> grade. The table below provides a breakdown of the educational level of all respondents.

***Based on the 2018 Comprehensive Statewide Assessment Survey, the current level of education responses are:***

<b>Current Level of education:</b>	<b>%</b>
7-8 <sup>th</sup> Grade	1.52%
9 <sup>th</sup> -10 <sup>th</sup> Grade	5.30%
11 <sup>th</sup> -12 <sup>th</sup> Grade	60.61%
College or Training Prog.	22.73%
Not in School	12.88%

**Respondents were asked to select a category that best described their disability. Results were as follows (*based on the 2018 Comprehensive Survey Results*):**

**Transition Responses - Disability Selected - 132 Respondents**

- Intellectual Impairments 39%
- Mental Health Impairments 15%
- Deafness 12%
- Neurological Impairments 11%
- Other Physical Impairments 9%
- Hearing Loss 8%
- Communication Impairments 6%
- Mobility Impairments 6%
- Visual Impairments 5%
- Deaf/Blind 4%
- Respiratory Impairments 2%
- Blindness 2%
- Legal Blindness 2%
- Orthopedic Impairments 2%

**Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS)**

In July 2014, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) was signed into law. WIOA requires a vocational rehabilitation (VR) agency to reserve at least fifteen percent (15%) of their federal funds to make available, in coordination with local education agencies, the provision of Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) to students with disabilities statewide who are eligible or potentially eligible in accordance with Section 361.48 of the federal regulations and 113 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended.

Pre-ETS are specific services that are only available to students with disabilities to ensure they have meaningful opportunities to receive training and other services necessary to achieve employment outcomes in Competitive Integrated Employment. These services are designed to help students with disabilities begin to identify career interests that can be explored further through additional OVR/OVRB transition services.

Pre-ETS services are made available by the counselor to all eligible and potentially eligible students with disabilities. This survey assessed the need for the provision of Pre-ETS for students with disabilities in the state of Mississippi. Results are as follows:

***\*Based on 2018 Comprehensive Assessment Survey:***

<b>PRE-ETS Services</b>	<b>Received Pre-ETS</b>	<b>Never Received Pre-ETS</b>	<b>Interested in Receiving Pre-ETS</b>	<b>Not Interested in Receiving Pre-ETS</b>
<b>Job Exploration Counseling</b>	53.79%	46.21%	70.45%	29.55%
<b>Work-Based Learning Experiences</b>	54.55%	46.97%	70.45%	29.55%
<b>Workplace Readiness Training</b>	48.48%	51.52%	62.88%	37.12%
<b>Instruction in Self-Advocacy</b>	60.61%	39.39%	65.15%	34.85%
<b>Counseling on Post-Secondary Educational Opportunities</b>	53.79%	46.97%	68.64%	31.36%

Based on the *Comprehensive Needs Assessment* for Disabled Youth in Mississippi, 54.5% of respondents were enrolled in a school or college at the time of the survey. At the time of the survey, 10% were in Grades 7-11, 25.5% were in Grade 12, 7.3% were enrolled in a vocational or certification program, 33.6% were enrolled in a community college, and 23.6% were enrolled in a four-year university. By far the most common level of education, accounting for 59.3% of all respondents, was to have a high school diploma but no additional education. Relatively sizable shares of respondents also completed the 12<sup>th</sup> grade without earning a diploma (17.6%) and gained some college experience but no college degree (8.8%).

**Employment Plans for Students (based on the 2018 Comprehensive Assessment):**

In order to determine the services that students in the state of Mississippi will need upon graduation from secondary and/or post-secondary education programs, their post-graduation plans were assessed. 33.33% of students indicated they would be employed full time upon graduation. 34.09% did not know their future employment plans and less than 8% reported that this question was not applicable to them.

**2. IDENTIFY THE NEED TO ESTABLISH, DEVELOP, OR IMPROVE COMMUNITY REHABILITATION PROGRAMS WITHIN THE STATE; AND**

In 2017, VR recognized the need to establish and develop more relationships with providers/Community Rehabilitation Programs to assist in providing Pre-Employment Transition Services. In 2017 and early 2018, Request for Proposals were advertised. In 2018,

the agency is hoping to have developed more Community Rehabilitation Programs to provide such services.

The Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services, through the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, operates 15 transitional rehabilitation community facilities referred to as AbilityWorks. In 2017, AbilityWorks restructured its services to be able to provide Pre-Employment Transition Services such as work-based learning opportunities and career/vocational exploration services.

These facilities provide a variety of services including Vocational Evaluation, Work Adjustment Training, and Community-Based Work Experiences, counseling and transportation. All services are individualized to meet the needs of the individual served in preparation for Competitive Integrated Employment.

### **Community Rehabilitation Programs**

Community Rehabilitation Programs (CRP) in Mississippi provide an array of services to students and youth that will assist them in achieving Competitive Integrated Employment. Clients who attend AbilityWorks can receive vocational assessment, job training, work experience or other services based upon their individualized needs. Addie McBryde also provides services through either a residential or day program where individuals participate in classes such as orientation and mobility, techniques of daily living and personal management. The *2018 Comprehensive Needs Assessment* asked respondents if they were aware of these CRPs. 68.94% were aware of our CRPs. Yet only 45.45% stated they actually participated at AbilityWorks or Addie McBryde. Of those that participated, 30.30% reported that the services provided by the CRP were helpful in preparing them for employment.

AbilityWorks, Inc., a network of Community Rehabilitation Programs (CRP), provides vocational assessment, job training, and actual work experience for individuals with disabilities. This is possible through a wide array of contract and subcontract services provided to local businesses and industry. It is a division of MDRS and with 15 locations statewide. AbilityWork's mission to clients is *"to improve the quality of life, employment opportunities, and integration of people with disabilities into the community"*. The mission to business and industry through the subcontracting program is to provide fast turnaround times, high-quality workmanship, competitive rates, credit rates, credit terms and speedy delivery. Some of the services and products AbilityWorks offers include collating and sorting, packaging and handling, assembly work, product reworking, product reclamation, grounds maintenance, housekeeping and quality reviews.

The Addie McBryde Rehabilitation Center is a comprehensive personal adjustment center for adults who are Blind, Visually Impaired or Deaf-Blind. Through a program of training offered to both residential and day clients, individuals participate in class learning skills which enable the client to successfully live and work independently. Established in 1972, the center is located on the campus of the University of Mississippi Medical Center in Jackson, Mississippi. The facility has a dormitory capacity for 28 clients, a gymnasium, a client library and classrooms equipped with specialized technology for the Blind and Visually Impaired. Certified Instructors individualize training to meet a client's needs during the class day from 8:00 AM to 3:00 PM. Clients participate in additional activities in the 'Achieving Milestones' class focusing on adjustment to vision loss, confidence building, resume writing, interviewing and utilizing resources in the community.

According to survey results, 90.63% of the respondents that attended a CRP received services from AbilityWorks, Inc. while 9.38% received services from the Addie McBryde Center. The most common and frequent reported services received from AbilityWorks were Work Adjustment training, Vocational Assessment services, and Community-Based services. The most

common services received from the Addie McBryde Center were Rehabilitation Technology, followed by Orientation and Mobility, Independent Living and braille services.

In regards to the customer service they received, respondents reported the AbilityWorks and Addie McBryde staff treated them with respect, kindness, patience and professionalism over 65% of the time, with proficient knowledge being exhibited at only 55%. It was further noted that punctuality and explaining the situation or process was displayed 50% of the time.

**3. INCLUDE AN ASSESSMENT OF THE NEEDS OF INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES FOR TRANSITION CAREER SERVICES AND PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION SERVICES, AND THE EXTENT TO WHICH SUCH SERVICES ARE COORDINATED WITH TRANSITION SERVICES PROVIDED UNDER THE INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES EDUCATION ACT**

The respondents consisted of potentially eligible students with a disability, VR eligible transition secondary and post-secondary students, transition out of school youth, and parents of transition students from four regions of the state.

It is important that individuals receive services to meet their individualized needs to ensure they have the greatest opportunity to achieve Competitive Integrated Employment. Respondents indicated the following are the most needed services in helping achieve employment:

- 45.45% - Job Search/Placement Services
- 40.91% - Vocational Rehabilitation Counseling and Guidance
- 33.33% - Transportation
- 26.52% - Job Coaching
- 22.73% - No Other Services Required

To effectively meet the needs of students, MDRS collaborates with education and workforce programs to assist students with disabilities in making the transition from school to post-secondary education and/or to Competitive Integrated Employment. MDRS, through its Offices of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) and Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind (OVRB), maintains a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE).

In addition to the MOU with MDE, the Agency maintains individualized agreements between the local school districts and vocational rehabilitation offices. These agreements define referral procedures and the roles of the school and OVR/OVRB staff in the provision of transition services that are specific and tailored to the unique situation of each school and the OVR/OVRB district. Each counselor is responsible for developing and maintaining an agreement between the Agency and local school district. A copy of the form to be used for this agreement may be obtained from the State Coordinator for Transition Services. The form includes instructions and has been designed to assist in the development of the agreements locally.

A counselor is assigned to work with a specific school district to provide transition services in accordance with the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Applied Technology Act, as amended and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), as amended.

VR assures that the Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) is also coordinated with the employment goal in the school's individualized educational plan (IEP) and, where appropriate, the Individualized Service Plans (ISP) of the long term care providers.

The VR Counselor servicing local school districts as well as the VR Supported Employment Counselors work together with school districts to ensure that students with disabilities that previously entered subminimum wage employment are provided information and services to assist in diverting these individuals into Competitive Integrated Employment.

Pre-Employment Transition Services are provided to students with disabilities as early as age 14. If these individuals require VR Transition services as early as age 14, VR facilitates this need by opening a VR case. This service provision will help strengthen VR's efforts to reach more students and strengthen the opportunity for successful employment outcomes.

In accordance with the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, the inclusion of transition services is not intended to shift the responsibility from school districts to Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) but enforces the need for coordinated efforts between education and workforce programs such as VR.

MDRS, through OVR/OVRB, is the state agency that delivers transition services to secondary school students with disabilities. These counselors work with students, families, and educators during the transition process to inform them of available VR services, including Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS), and identify students who might benefit from or need VR services and career services designed to assist in obtaining a post school employment outcome.

While local school districts are responsible for providing education and transition services to students with disabilities who are still in the secondary school system, under WIOA, VR is the state unit that is mandated to make available Pre-ETS begin at age fourteen (14) for all eligible and potentially eligible students with disabilities with parental consent.

District Managers and Counselors are responsible for developing cooperative working relationships with the local education agency staff in the districts and other agencies working with youth. Letters were sent by the State Transition Program Coordinator to the Special Education Directors and 504 Coordinators for each school district to discuss VR services for students with IEPs and 504 plans. The counselor is to follow-up with their Special Education Directors and 504 Coordinators at least annually to discuss the provision of outreach services for students with disabilities and to determine the need for potential referrals.

Counselors are assigned to all public secondary schools. The counselor and the District Manager establish linkages within each school with the following individuals:

- Special Education Coordinator;
- 504 Coordinator;
- Transition Coordinator
- Principal
- Guidance Counselors for grades 8<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup>;
- School health personnel; and
- Other school-based staff determined appropriate by the counselor and the District Manager.

The Counselor works with the school district's Transition Coordinator, Transition Assistants when applicable, and Special Education Teachers to implement Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) for eligible and potentially eligible students with disabilities. The required

activities of Pre-ETS will mostly take place at the local school during a prearranged time that the counselor and school personnel have agreed to.

The Counselor will be prepared to teach the Pre-ETS curriculum and will do so as agreed upon with school personnel. In addition to being prepared to teach the curriculum, the counselor will provide the classroom teacher with technical assistance and/or curriculum materials as needed. The counselor should be working in his/her assigned schools two to three days per week while rotating schools to ensure services are made available to both eligible and potentially eligible students within each school serviced.

The Counselor documents the student's progress in Pre-ETS activity for eligible students in the participant's AACE Case note page and for potentially eligible (PE) students in the AACE PE Case Type page, and provide an update to the classroom teacher with a report of the student's participation and progress in Pre-ETS on a regular basis.

MDRS and the local school district may enter into a Cooperative Agreement to jointly fund a Transition Assistant position to ensure a smoother transition of services between the school and OVR/OVRB. The Transition Assistant will provide services to selected secondary students with disabilities who are:

- between the ages of fourteen (14) and twenty-one (21);
- in transition from school to work and community; and
- eligible for vocational rehabilitation services.

The addition of school-based transition services are intended to add a component to the overall school and rehabilitation service continuum, not supplant existing employment-related or other services which are potentially appropriate for a particular student (any service the school is already responsible for providing). The Transition Assistant will not serve students who, with or without modifications, can benefit from existing school programs (career/technical and educational training programs etc.).

Once the student leaves the school system, it becomes the full responsibility of the agency Counselor to continue to provide services necessary to further prepare the individual for a successful post-school outcome by enrolling in a post-secondary education program or obtaining Competitive Integrated Employment.

## k. ANNUAL ESTIMATES

**Describe:**

**1. THE NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS IN THE STATE WHO ARE ELIGIBLE FOR SERVICES**

In review of the data obtained from the Mississippi Disability Data Table from the 2018 U.S. Census Bureau/American Community Survey (ACS), there are approximately 480,783 Mississippians age 18-64 that have a disability, which is 16.5% of the overall population.

**2. THE NUMBER OF ELIGIBLE INDIVIDUALS WHO WILL RECEIVE SERVICES UNDER:**

**A. THE VR PROGRAM;**

**Vocational Rehabilitation and Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind**

Based on the current trend analysis for individuals determined eligible for VR services, MDRS observed an 11.9% increase in the number of individuals eligible for VR services between FY 2018 and 2019.

In 2019 (10/01/2018 – 09/30/19), Vocational Rehabilitation and Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind served a total of 11,745 eligible individuals with disabilities. In comparing FFY 2019 to FFY 2020, VR/VRB had a 17.97 percent increase in the total number served and an 11.5 percent increase in total costs. These percentages of increase were used to estimate the number of eligible individuals who will receive services in FFY 2020 – FFY 2023.

**Estimated Number of Eligible Clients who will receive services:**

<b>FFY</b>	<b>Number of Clients who will receive services</b>
2020	13855
2021	16345
2022	19282
2023	22,747

**B. THE SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM; AND**

In 2018, Mississippi VR provided Supported Employment services to 424 individuals at an average cost of \$2,762.09. In 2019, 510 individuals received SE services with an average cost of \$3,343.83. Based on the 6% increase in the number of individuals that received SE services, MDRS estimates that in 2020, approximately 644 individuals will receive SE services.

**C. EACH PRIORITY CATEGORY, IF UNDER AN ORDER OF SELECTION.**

Mississippi VR/VRB anticipate sufficient resources to provide the full range of VR services to all eligible individuals without implementing the 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**

Mississippi has not closed any Priority Categories. All individuals eligible to receive services will receive services.

**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.**

The estimated cost to serve the estimated number of eligible individuals in each Priority Category are as follows: Projections are based on the number of individuals served in each Priority Category and the average cost of the clients served in each Priority Category.

Based on the current trend analysis if the VR Program continues to see the growth in the numbers served and costs of services, we will have to close a priority category. At this time all priority categories are open.

<b>FFY</b>	<b>PC 1 Served</b>	<b>PC1 Cost</b>
2020	4,038	\$22,082,838
2021	4,159	\$22,745,324
2022	4,283	\$23,427,683
<b>FFY</b>	<b>PC 2 Served</b>	<b>PC 2 Cost</b>
2020	3,957	\$23,036,050
2021	4,076	\$23,727,131
2022	4,198	\$24,438,945
<b>FFY</b>	<b>PC 3 Served</b>	<b>PC 3 Cost</b>
2020	4,102	\$16,339,360
2021	4,226	\$16,829,540
2022	4,352	\$17,334,427
<b>FFY</b>	<b>Total Served</b>	<b>Total Cost</b>
2020	12,097	\$61,458,248
2021	12,460	\$63,301,996
2022	12,834	\$65,201,055

**Title I Funds**

For FFY 2019 budget beginning October 1, 2018 through September 30, 2019, VR received \$44,680,926 funding from RSA. MDRS expects to receive the same funding for FFY 2020.

**Social Security Reimbursements**

During FFY 2019, VR collected \$1,917,794.73 in Social Security Reimbursements. MDRS expects that this reimbursement will remain around the same amounts for FY 2020 through 2023.

**Supported Employment**

MDRS received \$300,000 in 2019 for the SE Program. SE funds are supplemented with Title I funds to pay for the cost of clients receiving services and fund SE VR staff positions. 50% of the SE funds were earmarked and set aside for youth with significant disabilities.

**Reallotment**

In 2019 and 2020, VR did not request additional federal funds and does not anticipate requesting additional federal funds through the reallotment process for FY 2020-2023.

**Pre-Employment Transition Services**

MDRS set aside \$6,702,139 which is the 15% earmarked for Pre-Employment Transition Services.

## I. STATE GOALS AND PRIORITIES

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**The designated State unit must:**

**1. IDENTIFY IF THE GOALS AND PRIORITIES WERE JOINTLY DEVELOPED AND AGREED TO BY THE STATE VR AGENCY AND THE STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL, IF THE STATE HAS A COUNCIL, AND JOINTLY AGREED TO ANY REVISIONS**

The Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services, Office of Vocational Rehabilitation and Office of Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind, value enabling individuals with disabilities to increase their level of self-sufficiency through employment and education.

MDRS values competent employees who are knowledgeable in vocational rehabilitation and committed to serving individuals with disabilities to increase their level of self-sufficiency through employment and education;

MDRS values VR and VRB leaders and managers who demonstrate the commitment, knowledge and experience to lead the program, value sound fiscal and administrative practices that support all VR and VRB personnel, individuals with disabilities and community partners.

To align with the requirements and performance standards of the Rehabilitation Act and its implementing regulations, MDRS, Office of Vocational Rehabilitation and Office of Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind, and the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) have developed these goals and priorities.

**2. IDENTIFY THE GOALS AND PRIORITIES IN CARRYING OUT THE VR AND SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMS**

**VR goals and priorities regarding the distribution of Title VI-Part B funds are to:**

- continue the referral process between MDRS and DMH to identify ‘youth with the *most significant disabilities*’ who will require SE services;
- continue the referral process between the VR Transition/Youth Counselor and the VR Supported Employment (SE) Counselor for students with disabilities, ages 14-21, who have been determined to need long-term ongoing support services;
- ensure equitable distribution of the funds;
- provide technical assistance to district staff about the appropriate use of the funds;
- monitor to ensure that the funds are being correctly utilized;
- obtain service providers for Customized Employment;
- train all VR Counselors, including those who work with General VR consumers, in Supported Employment; and
- increase the number of individuals closed rehabilitated with a Supported Employment Outcome.

Through outreach, education and marketing efforts targeted to individuals with disabilities, VR/VRB will continue to broaden the population of individuals with disabilities being served

which includes minorities with disabilities and unserved and underserved and identified by the Comprehensive Needs Assessment.

VR/VRB will continue to target individuals with disabilities who are already working to retain or progress in employment; previous VR/VRB consumers who may have lost employment to become reemployed; college students nearing completion of their academic programs; and,

- high school transition age youth with disabilities
- individual with blindness and visual impairments
- individuals with deafness and hearing impairments
- youth and adults with most significant disabilities

**GOAL I: Improve the employment, economic stability, and self-sufficiency of eligible individuals with disabilities.**

**Strategies (Plan of Action):**

- Develop a job placement culture by providing ongoing training in the job development and placement process.
- Develop and implement on-campus work experience training for students who reside in rural communities when community-based work experience is not available.
- Refer those consumers receiving SSI/SSDI cash benefits who are interested in earnings that will eliminate their reliance on SSA cash benefits for work incentives Benefits Analysis and Counseling.
- Coordinate and conduct the Annual Governor’s Job Fair for individuals with disabilities.
- Summer Internship Program for high school students with disabilities including those who have blindness and visual impairments, deafness and hard of hearing.

**GOAL II: Improve the VR Service Delivery System to Individuals with disabilities.**

**Strategies (Plan of Action):**

- Designate staff in MDRS districts to be responsible for conducting outreach and orientation sessions on a regular basis.
- Provide input to assure appropriate inclusion of vocational rehabilitation activities in, public service announcements, and agency website and publications.
- Update and distribute vocational rehabilitation brochures to appropriate referral sources.
- Designate and train specific staff members in each district to handle referrals and provide information to the public.
- Assure that all geographic areas of the state are covered with appropriate service delivery staff.
- Develop and implement a consumer satisfaction survey to be completed while the consumer’s case is open with VR.
- Develop a consumer satisfaction survey to be completed by the consumer regarding services received from vendors/providers of VR services.

**GOAL III: Implement a statewide model for more effectively serving high school youth and students with disabilities including individuals with visual and/or hearing impairments.**

**Strategies (Plan of Action):**

- Engage with key partners such as the Department of Education, State Rehabilitation Council, high school, community colleges and other training and education program in designing an improved service delivery model that will develop stronger partnerships to place increased emphasis on serving transition high school students who **are** in special education.
- Engage with key partners such as the Department of Education, State Rehabilitation Council, high school, community colleges and other training and education program in designing an improved service delivery model that will develop stronger partnerships to place increased emphasis on serving transition high school students who **are not** in special education.
- Co-develop a formal Interagency Cooperative Agreement with officials from the Department of Education, local school districts and local high schools.
- Plan and coordinate with the Mississippi Department of Education-Special Education Director and Director 504 Services of to plan and conduct at least annual training and semi-annual work groups for the purpose of cross-training in understanding the services offered by Vocational Rehabilitation.
- Develop and implement the use of an OVR Transition Manual designed to assist staff in the delivery of transition services. This manual will be used as a technical assistance tool for transition planning purposes.
- Annually identify 504 Coordinators and special education staff for each school.
- Co-develop and implement self-identification tool identifying youth with disabilities who could possibly benefit from transition services.
- Establish relationships with parent training and information groups, advocacy groups and other service providers to encourage referral and parental participation in the development and provision of transition services.
- Establish comprehensive guidelines and indicators for assessing the individual transition needs of students.
- Work with other core partners in the workforce system to provide employment related services to prevent duplicative services.
- Contract with additional Community Rehabilitation Programs to provide Pre-Employment Transition Services.

**GOAL IV: Implement identified improvements to increase statewide consistency and quality of consumer services.**

**Strategies (Plan of Action):**

- Use results of the annual case review to determine where additional guidance and training are required.
- Utilize the new counselor training process for mentoring, training, and leadership development for all VR Counselors.

- Utilize and continue to develop consistent training process for key VR staff that deliver direct client services.
- Conduct annual statewide case record reviews of case service practices to determine consistency and adherence with federal/state requirements. Use case review results to identify and implement improvements in quality and consistency of services.
- Survey OVR staff on practices and provide refresher training to assure consistent and quality service delivery.
- Deliver high quality training and support to provide staff with the knowledge and skills needed to perform effectively.
- Recognize and appreciate staff throughout the division for their contributions to VR's success.
- Continue to update and deliver advanced best practices training to field staff statewide to provide ongoing skill development in key service delivery operations and practices, including a strong focus on customer service, cultural sensitivity, and better addressing each consumer's impediments to employment.
- Increase collaboration within the workforce system to improve services to unemployed workers with disabilities who are eligible for VR services by better leveraging services with other workforce development programs.
- Play stronger roles on state and local Workforce Boards to assure that VR consumers and other individuals with disabilities are better served by the One-Stop system.
- Increase collaboration with community colleges to improve coordination of VR services with community college programs and Adult Basic Education programs.
- Implement written agreements with providers for individuals with intellectual and development disabilities to affirm their roles and responsibilities for serving VR consumers, including their capacity for providing long-term employment supports to individuals after the VR case is rehabilitated.

**Goals Specific to the Service Delivery for Individuals who require Supported Employment Services:**

**GOAL 1: Strategies:**

- Continue the referral process between MDRS and DMH to identify 'youth with the *most significant disabilities*' who will require SE services;
- Continue the referral process between the VR Transition/Youth Counselor and the VR Supported Employment (SE) Counselor for students with disabilities, ages 14-21, who have been determined to need long-term ongoing support services;
- Ensure equitable distribution of the funds;
- Provide technical assistance to district staff about the appropriate use of the funds;
- Monitor to ensure that the funds are being correctly utilized;
- Obtain service providers for Customized Employment;
- Train all VR Counselors, including those who work with General VR consumers, in Supported Employment

- Increase the number of individuals closed rehabilitated with a Supported Employment Outcome

**3. ENSURE THAT THE GOALS AND PRIORITIES ARE BASED ON AN ANALYSIS OF THE FOLLOWING AREAS:**

**A. THE MOST RECENT COMPREHENSIVE STATEWIDE ASSESSMENT, INCLUDING ANY UPDATES;**

The FFY 2020 – 2023 goals and priorities are based on the 2019 Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment, and the 2019 Transition Needs Assessment.

The listed goals and strategies were discussed with some goals being recommended by and developed in collaboration with the SRC.

The goals and strategies were discussed with, some goals recommended by and developed in collaboration with the SRC.

**B. THE STATE’S PERFORMANCE UNDER THE PERFORMANCE ACCOUNTABILITY MEASURES OF SECTION 116 OF WIOA; AND**

Over the last year, VR and VRB had met and in some areas exceeded its performance goals based on the performance data provided by RSA, Data Dashboard.

Our Counselor’s performance development system has changed as a result of the new Common Performance Measures and the RSA 911. We continue to monitor to ensure that we are continuing to serve individuals with significant disabilities.

With the added focus on documenting skill gain and credentials, with feel that we continue to move forward and be successful in assisting eligible individuals with disabilities obtain employment, retain employment, and participate in education and training opportunities. We feel that in FY 2020 – 2023, we will continue to increase our number of individuals with disabilities that obtain measurable skill gains and ultimately Competitive Integrated Employment.

**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.**

No additional recommendations or reports were received from the SRC.

## m. ORDER OF SELECTION

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### Describe:

#### 1. WHETHER THE DESIGNATED STATE UNIT WILL IMPLEMENT AND ORDER OF SELECTION. IF SO, DESCRIBE:

##### A. THE ORDER TO BE FOLLOWED IN SELECTING ELIGIBLE INDIVIDUALS TO BE PROVIDED VR SERVICES

The Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services, Office of Vocational Rehabilitation and Office of Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind, implemented an Order of Selection in May 2001. Since July 13, 2009, all Priority Categories have been open.

Based on an assessment for determining eligibility and an assessment in each of the seven functional capacity areas, an individual with a *significant disability* means an individual with a disability (i) who has a severe physical or mental impairment which seriously limits one (1) or more functional capacity (such as mobility, communication, self-care, self-direction, interpersonal skills, work tolerance, or work skills) in terms of an employment outcome; (ii) whose vocational rehabilitation can be expected to require multiple services over an extended period of time; and (iii) who has one (1) or more physical or mental disability or combination of disabilities resulting from amputation, arthritis, autism, blindness, burn injury, cancer, cerebral palsy, cystic fibrosis, deafness, head injury, heart disease, hemiplegia, hemophilia, respiratory or pulmonary dysfunction, intellectual disability, mental illness, multiple sclerosis, muscular dystrophy, musculo-skeletal disorders, neurological disorders (including paraplegia and quadriplegia), sickle cell anemia, specific learning disability, end-stage renal disease or other disability or combination of disabilities determined on the basis of an assessment for determining eligibility and vocational rehabilitation needs to cause comparable substantial functional limitation.

#### **MDRS - VR/VRB Policy on Order of Selection**

At any time that MDRS resources do not permit all eligible consumers to be served, an Order of Selection for services shall be implemented.

In 2015, the Order of Selection process was updated and approved by the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) and approved as part of the updated 2018 State Plan.

First Priority will be given to consumers with the *most significant disabilities*. The OOS allows for individuals with *most significant disabilities* to receive services before all other individuals with disabilities. Second Priority shall be given to consumers with significant disabilities. Third Priority will be given to other eligible consumers. The Order of Selection was implemented in May 2001. Since July 13, 2009, all Priority Categories have been open.

In 2015, VR updated its Order of Selection which was approved by the State Rehabilitation Council.

**Priority Category 1:** An individual has a *Most Significant Disability* if a mental or physical impairment exists that seriously limits three (3) or more functional capacity areas in terms of an employment outcome and whose vocational rehabilitation will require multiple VR services over an extended period of time.

**Priority Category 2:** An individual has a *Significant Disability* if a mental or physical impairment exists that seriously limits one (1) or two (2) functional capacity areas in terms of an employment outcome and whose vocational rehabilitation will require multiple VR services over an extended period of time.

**Priority Category 3:** An individual has a *Non-Significant Disability* if a mental or physical impairment exists that seriously limits one (1) functional capacity area in terms of an employment outcome and whose vocational rehabilitation will not require multiple VR services over an extended period of time.

MDRS, in consultation with the SRC, will close the Priority Categories designated to be *closed*. Any individual currently under an approved IPE at the time his/her Priority Category is closed will continue to receive with his/her IPE, including the provision of Pre-Employment Transition Services and Post-Employment Services.

Individuals placed in delayed status will be notified of their Priority Category, process for reclassification, their right to appeal, and the availability of the Client Assistance Program (CAP).

If an OOS is implemented, MDRS will provide the following information:

- Show the order to be followed in selecting eligible individuals to be provided VR services
- Provide justification for the order
- Identify the services and outcome goals
- Identify the time within which these goals may be achieved for individuals in each Priority Category within the order

When an OOS is in effect, individuals meeting eligibility requirements but are in a *closed* Priority Category have access to information and referral services. VR will provide all eligible individuals with disabilities who do not meet the OOS criteria with information about, and referral to, other Federal or State programs (including to Workforce Investment Network Job Centers for training and placement) that can assist them with obtaining or retaining employment.

MDRS will elect to provide services, regardless of any established Order of Selection, to eligible individuals who require specific services or equipment to maintain employment.

## **B. THE JUSTIFICATION FOR THE ORDER**

MDRS has determined that sufficient resources are currently available to provide VR services to all individuals with disabilities that apply, those determined eligible in all Priority Categories and those under an IPE. Due to the increase in service needs and the staff resources in 2017 and 2018 to provide the services, if the projected resources for funds and personnel changes before the next state plan modification, MDRS will make a determination whether it may need to close one or more of its Priority Categories.

MDRS will conduct reviews periodically during the year to help validate the order and assess the impact of unforeseen circumstances.

When it is determined that MDRS does not have the staff or fiscal resources to serve all eligible individuals in all Priority Categories, MDRS administration will make the decision to begin closing Priority Categories, first beginning with Priority Category 3, *Non-Significant Disability*.

### **C. THE SERVICE AND OUTCOME GOALS**

Since 2009, MDRS – VR/VRB has been able to keep all Priority Categories open and not maintain a waiting list.

During FFY 2019, VR/VRB all Priority Categories have remained open. MDRS has also had sufficient funds to service all individuals with apply for services. For FFY 2020-2023, MDRS anticipates that all priority categories will remain open and there will be no wait list.

### **D. TIME WITHIN WHICH THESE GOALS MAY BE ACHIEVED FOR INDIVIDUALS IN EACH PRIORITY CATEGORY WITHIN THE ORDER; AND**

All Priority Categories are currently open for consumers who are eligible and under an IPE. In addition, the average time it takes to serve individuals in each priority category is as follows:

1. Priority Category 1 - 18 months to serve;
2. Priority Category 2 - 14 months to serve;
3. Priority Category 3 - 6 months to serve.

### **E. HOW INDIVIDUALS WITH THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES ARE SELECTED FOR SERVICES BEFORE ALL OTHER INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES**

At any time that MDRS resources do not permit all eligible consumers to be served, an Order of Selection for services shall be implemented. When an OOS is in effect, MDRS continues to accept applications and make determinations of eligibility while notifying all eligible individuals of the Priority Category they are assigned.

When an individual is assigned to a category that is *closed*, the individual will be moved to *delayed* status and placed on a waiting list to be served in the chronological order in which he/she applied. Individuals having an active Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) prior to the implementation of the OOS will continue to receive services uninterrupted.

**In 2015, the following Order of Selection was updated and approved:**

**Priority 1. Most Significant Disability:** Individual With a *Most Significant Disability*: An individual —

- who has a severe physical or mental impairment that seriously limits three (3) or more functional capacities in the areas of mobility, communication, self-care, self-direction, interpersonal skills, work tolerance, or work skills in terms of an employment outcome;
- whose vocational rehabilitation can be expected to require multiple vocational rehabilitation services over an extended period of time; and
- who has one (1) or more physical or mental disability(ies) resulting from amputation, arthritis, autism, blindness, burn injury, cancer, cerebral palsy, cystic fibrosis, deafness, head injury, heart disease, hemiplegia, hemophilia, respiratory or pulmonary dysfunction, intellectual disability, mental illness, multiple sclerosis, muscular dystrophy, musculo-skeletal disorders, neurological disorders (including stroke and epilepsy), spinal cord conditions (including paraplegia and quadriplegia), sickle cell anemia, specific learning disability, end-stage renal disease or other disability or combination of disabilities determined on the basis of an assessment for determining eligibility and vocational rehabilitation needs to cause comparable substantial functional limitations.

**Priority 2. Significant Disability:** Individual With a *Significant Disability*: An individual -

- who has a severe physical or mental impairment that seriously limits one (1) or two (2) functional capacities in the areas of mobility, communication, self-care, self-direction, interpersonal skills, work tolerance, or work skills in terms of an employment outcome;
- whose vocational rehabilitation can be expected to require multiple vocational rehabilitation services over an extended period of time; and
- who has one (1) or more physical or mental disability(ies) resulting (See List under *Most Significant Disability*)

**Priority 3. Non-Significant Disability:** Individual with a *Non-Significant Disability*: An individual -

- who has a physical or mental impairment that seriously limits one (1) or more functional capacity(ies) in the area of mobility, communication, self-care, self-direction, interpersonal skills, work tolerance, or work skills in terms of an employment outcome;
- whose vocational rehabilitation is *not* expected to require multiple vocational rehabilitation services over an extended period of time; and
- who has one (1) or more physical disability(ies) or combination of disabilities (See list under *Most Significant Disability*)

Individuals having an active plan prior to the implementation of the Order of Selection will continue to receive services uninterrupted.

**2. IF THE DESIGNATED STATE UNIT HAS ELECTED TO SERVE ELIGIBLE INDIVIDUALS, REGARDLESS OF ANY ESTABLISHED ORDER OF SELECTION, WHO REQUIRE SPECIFIC SERVICES OR EQUIPMENT TO MAINTAIN EMPLOYMENT**

MDRS will elect to provide services, regardless of any established Order of Selection, to eligible individuals who require specific services or equipment to maintain employment. Specific services or equipment include, Assistive Technology Services.

If an Order of Selection is implemented, consumers placed on a waitlist will have the ability to have their current Priority Category reviewed and if functional limitations in the functional capacity areas cause them to be categorized into a higher category, VR/VRB will make the adjustment. No consumer will be moved to a lower Priority Category.

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## **n. GOALS AND PLANS FOR DISTRIBUTION OF TITLE VI FUNDS**

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### **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**

For PY 2020 – 2023, MDRS will continue to invest all Title VI allocations to fund the purchase of job training services, especially job trainers. MDRS expects to continue supplementing Title VI funds as supplemental funds are available and, if possible, continue the level of Title I monies committed to the SE Program. MDRS occasionally supplements Title VI funds with Social Security Reimbursement funds as there is a need for additional funds for program expenditures. MDRS plans to continue this process if Title I funds are not available.

When the Title VI-B funds are awarded, they are distributed to the SE Counselors to fund job coach services for SE clients.

Additionally, MDRS will continue its efforts to increase the funds available for use by the SE program by development and submission of proposals for grants that may become available.

MDRS will also explore ways to utilize available funds more efficiently by entering into Cooperative Agreements with other entities who may participate in the cost of providing services to SE clients.

VR goals and priorities regarding the distribution of Title VI-Part B funds are to:

- Allocate 50 percent of the federal Supported Employment allotment for eligible youth with the most significant disabilities.
- Because based on current case data and referral information, it is anticipated that more individuals will require SE services to obtain and maintain Competitive Integrated Employment, SE Funds will also be used by VR Counselors to purchase SE services from community rehabilitation programs with Cooperative Agreements with the agency as providers become available in the state
- In PY 2020 – 2023, VR staff will continue to collaborate with community partners to add additional providers for SE Services. VR (Title I) Funds will be used to purchase traditional VR employment services and SE Services from Shelby Residential and Vocational Services (SVRS), which is the only third party provider in the state.

### **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**

VR has updated its policy manual to include guidance for the provision of Extended Services for youth populations with the *most significant disabilities*, under the age of 25. These youth populations may receive extended services (i.e., ongoing supports to maintain an individual in Supported Employment) for up to four (4) years. In addition, Customized Employment is clarified in the policy. VR also works with extended service providers, when feasible, as a means to provide additional resources and services to individuals needing and choosing these specialized services as an interim step to the rehabilitation process of achieving a successful

employment outcome. SE Counselors will continue to primarily focus on successful employment outcomes in Competitive Integrated work settings.

**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.**

Cooperative arrangements will continue to be developed with other provider agencies and organizations, both public and private, to expand the SE Program to unserved and underserved populations. The focus of these arrangements is on promoting and enabling SE Counselors and service provider personnel from other agencies to work as teams to share expertise, provide technical support in specific disability areas, and conduct joint training.

With the Interagency Agreement and referral process that has been developed with the Department of Mental Health and the Division of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, we will continue to work with this agency in serving individuals who are eligible for the waiver as extended service providers.

SE staff also participates in *best practices* in coordinating services for SE clients in the education system throughout the state. These practices have proven to be successful for clients because of the enhanced teamwork with other agencies. Under WIOA Customized Employment is included in the definition of Supported Employment and VR is including it as a VR service that the SE client can choose to include in his/her IPE. Therefore, VR is expanding Customized Employment training to the majority of its direct service staff. These service approaches will continue to be made available to clients during the intake process and will be utilized when deemed appropriate and when chosen by the client.

In obtaining extended service providers, Supported Employment Counselors will continue to work with individuals that may be eligible for the IDD Waiver Program to be the extended service provider. This will assist in providing the services necessary to assist in maintaining an individual with a significant disability in employment. MDRS currently has a referral process in place with the Department of Mental Health for individuals who are eligible for the IDD Waiver but seek Competitive Integrated Employment.

## **o. STATE'S STRATEGIES**

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**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**

The following methods will be used to expand and improve the services to individuals with disabilities.

- Designate staff in each MDRS district to be responsible for conducting Vocational Rehabilitation outreach and orientation sessions on a regular basis.
- Continue to work with local education agencies to identify and provide Pre-Employment Transition Services and Transition Services to students with disabilities.
- Expand Project SEARCH sites to be used as a tool to provide Pre-Employment Transition Services to students with disabilities.
- Utilize relationships with workforce partners at the state and local levels to have more options and resources available for job placement and training.
- Share specific agency expertise to facilitate interagency knowledge to improve services to all participants with disabilities served by any agency within the workforce system.
- Annually evaluate physical location of VR staff to assure that all geographic areas of the state are covered with appropriate service delivery staff.
- Continue to administer a consumer satisfactory survey while the consumer's case is open with VR.
- Develop a consumer satisfaction survey with the consumer regarding services received from vendors/providers of VR services.
- Use case review results to identify and implement improvements and quality consistency of service.
- Increase collaboration within the state's workforce system to improve services to unemployed workers with disabilities who are eligible for VR services by better leveraging services with other workforce development programs.

### **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**

VR Counselors evaluate the need for Assistive Technology (AT) services throughout the rehabilitation process. At initial interview, consumers are routinely provided information on accommodations and information in their mode of communication. At *eligibility determination*, the need for AT is assessed and when determined needed, provided as part of the individuals' Individualized Plan for Employment. At employment, the need for additional AT is assessed.

Through the MDRS Assistive Technology (AT) Program, nine Rehabilitation Technologists and two Rehabilitation Engineers are strategically located throughout the state to provide consultation on AT referrals as well as perform initial evaluations and assessments; procure and set up AT equipment; provide follow-up evaluations; design and fabricate original items; and provide specifications and final inspections for AT services.

**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**

Mississippi’s most underserved populations continue to be American Indian and Alaska Native, Asian, and Hispanic or Latino.

Based on the *Comprehensive Needs Assessment* and other data received from the VR Case Management System, individuals with mental illness, cognitive disabilities and Autism Spectrum Disorders are the primary emerging population that are reported as underserved and who staff has requested the most assistance in understanding the disability in terms of employment. VR will seek to provide more training and resources to assist staff in serving this population.

MDRS contracted with RL Brown Group Inc. to translate documents used in routine casework from English into Spanish. MDRS is currently in the process of having all necessary documents and brochures that are made available to the public translated into Spanish. These documents are being uploaded into the case management system and brochures are being made available for those constituents and stakeholders whose natural language is Spanish. District Outreach teams will provide outreach activities in their local communities in efforts to obtain referrals for individuals from diverse populations.

MDRS will continue to monitor the ACS survey data for the most recent race and ethnicity statistics per county to be aware of areas where the information should be disseminated.

MDRS will also continue to provide outreach to other minority populations to ensure they have information regarding 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)**

- Engage with key partners such as MDE, the SRC, local school districts, community colleges, and other training and education programs in designing an improved service delivery model that will develop stronger partnerships to place increased emphasis on serving transition high school students with disabilities.
- Continue to accept proposals from Community Rehabilitation Programs to provide Pre-Employment Transition Services to students with disabilities.
- Community outreach and orientation will establish relationships with parent training and information groups, advocacy groups, and other service providers to encourage referral and parental participation in the development and provision of transition services.

- Increase collaboration with community colleges to improve coordination of VR services with community college programs and Adult Basic Education programs to facilitate transition from secondary to post-secondary activities.
- Summer Internship Program for high school students with blindness and visual impairments, and deafness and hard of hearing.
- Engage with key partners such as MDE, SRC, high schools, community colleges, and other training and education programs in designing an improved service delivery model that will develop stronger partnerships to place increased emphasis on serving transition high school students who are in special education.
- Engage with key partners such as MDE, SRC, high schools, community colleges, and other training and education programs in designing an improved service delivery model that will develop stronger partnerships to place increased emphasis on serving transition high school students who are not in special education.
- Plan and coordinate with the MDE Special Education Director to conduct at least annual training and semi-annual work groups for the purpose of cross training in understanding the services offered by VR.
- When developing the Youth Transition Handbook the design should be complementary to the MDE Special Education Transition Handbook.

In 2019, VR and VRB served 4,285 students with disabilities. In 2019, 1,900 were potentially eligible students with disabilities. MDRS signed contracts with over 20 more Community Rehabilitation Programs to be able to provide Pre-Employment Transition Services to students with disabilities across the state.

#### **5. IF APPLICABLE, PLANS FOR ESTABLISHING, DEVELOPING, OR IMPROVING COMMUNITY REHABILITATION PROGRAMS WITHIN THE STATE**

MDRS, VR/VRB will continue to request proposals from Community Rehabilitation Programs (private and agency-supported) in order to provide Pre-ETS, Customized Employment Services, services to individuals who have autism, services for individuals who have severe mental illness and Supported Employment Services, which will facilitate the agency's ability to achieve the changes in WIOA.

In PY 2019, MDRS was able to secure its first third party contract to provide Supported Employment Services. Prior to this contract, MDRS did not have any community rehabilitation programs that provided Supported Employment Services. SE services were strictly provided in – house by VR staff. As a result of this contact with Shelby Residential and Vocational Services, the following services can now be provided by and outside provider: Exploration, Discovery, Job Development, Job Skills Training and Customized Employment. Through collaboration with other core partners and collaborating with community providers MDRS will continue to seek other providers of services. Through the Request for Proposal process, MDRS was able to secure thirteen (13) new providers for Pre-Employment Transition Services.

Mississippi has been limited in the number of community rehabilitation programs that provide SE Services, Pre-Employment Transition Services, and employment services with a Vocational Rehabilitation outcome of Competitive Integrated Employment.

In PY 2020 – 2023, MDRS will continue to advertise for Request for Proposals for community rehabilitation programs.

## 6. STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE THE PERFORMANCE OF THE STATE WITH RESPECT TO THE PERFORMANCE ACCOUNTABILITY MEASURES UNDER SECTION 116 OF WIOA

The Workforce Partners in Mississippi are working together to create a Shared Data Warehouse that will link our separate case management and data systems. We refer to this as ‘the Hub’, and are working with a vendor, *NSPARC*, to create this data warehouse and bridge. National Strategic Planning & Analysis Research Center (nSPARC) designed and wrote *the Hub*. Founded in 1998, NSPARC is a university research center with more than 100 diverse employees, ranging from data scientists to software architects and security experts. NSPARC supports Mississippi State University’s overarching goals of research, learning, and service by collaborating within the university, through local, state, and federal agencies, and across the private sector to help society grow by discovering solutions to societal problems by using data science. They pursue entrepreneurial and collaborative initiatives to develop and maintain a pipeline of intellectual property and innovative technologies that positively impact real-world problems. NSPARC is headquartered in Starkville, Mississippi, adjacent to Mississippi State University’s campus.

MDRS entered into an agreement with NSPARC to develop a proof of concept in regards to how MDRS would capture the required data into the Hub. The proof of concept was tested and completed in March of 2016. NSPARC was able to use MDRS’ proof of concept in order to move forward with developing the Hub for all partners.

MDRS entered into another Agreement with NSPARC and Alliance (MDRS’ software vendor) in July of 2016. This agreement was for MDRS to provide the necessary data needed for the Hub from our current case management system and to update our Referral Module with the new process of our getting and receiving referrals from our partners. From July of 2016 until June of 2017, Alliance, MDRS, and NSPARC met to work through the process of how the data would be exchanged between the Hub and the Case management system.

All partner agencies will complete their separate intake forms with new customers. In each of these separate forms, however, there are **six diagnostic questions** that will be the same on all **forms and multiple demographic fields that are shared between partners (Intake)**. These data elements will automatically be uploaded into the Hub - or autofill - if the unique identifier matches a profile that already exists in the Hub. If data in these areas is different than the information that was previously in the profile, this information will be updated with that from the most recent entry. The initial version of the Hub was completed in June 2017. MDRS has been sending data to the Hub since that time.

The WIOA Hub software development was released and launched into the production environment on May 23, 2017. The other partners have been phasing in sending their data between January 2018 and June 2018. Once other partners went live in the Hub, MDRS began receiving referrals from them through the Hub directly into MDRS’ case management system. In the future, the PIRL for the State of Mississippi will be created through the Hub.

Alliance is the vendor that provides the Case Management system (Aware) for the Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services (MDRS) and for the VR/VRB programs in at least 35 other states. MDRS has been working with Alliance to ensure that the performance measures are included in Aware. Alliance has multiple user groups across 35+ states that meet to discuss Aware with Aware users. The WIOA/RSA-911 and the Aware VR User Groups are two that are involved in ensuring that all federal reports and WIOA requirements are met.

- WIOA/RSA-911 User Group meets periodically throughout the year.
- Aware VR User Group meets monthly.

- There are two major releases of Aware each year. There are other minor releases that address items related to WIOA/RSA-911.
- MDRS continues to submit multiple quarters of RSA 911 data and the Annual Performance Report (RSA 9169).
- MDRS has a data sharing agreement in place to procure the data to report state wage data for adults and youth.

## **7. STRATEGIES FOR ASSISTING OTHER COMPONENTS OF THE STATEWIDE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM IN ASSISTING INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES**

The Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services, Office of Vocational Rehabilitation and Office of Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind, partnership within Mississippi’s One-Stop system is clarified through Memoranda of Understanding with the State and each of the four local workforce development areas. MDRS is a part of the Workforce Development Board and take an active role in assisting Workforce partners in serving individuals with disabilities. The MDRS Executive Director is a member of the Workforce Development Board.

MDRS-VR/VRB will continue to work with workforce partners to provide for staff training and technical assistance on the eligibility for VR Services, provision of reasonable accommodations, auxiliary aids and services and assistive technology.

MDRS has been an active partner and has provided expertise on the use of computers and website for individuals with disabilities including website accessibility. Assistive Technology staff provide expertise to Workforce Partners on building accessibility issues, etc.

MDRS will continue to participate in staff training with the four local workforce development areas that include Mississippi Partnership, Delta, Twin Districts, and South Central Mississippi Works.

Designated staff are assigned to each of the workforce area boards and attend quarterly meetings. This information is shared and communicated with VR staff and assist the local areas and the District offices to work together in providing employment services for common clients.

As part of the Intensive Technical Assistance with the Workforce Innovation Network Technical Assistance Center (WINTAC), we have received assistance and training on service integration, which is referred to as Integration Continuum. The initial meeting was held in August 24, 2017 at the Madison State office, Madison, Mississippi. Representatives from each of WIOA Core Partner agencies were in attendance: Department of Human Services – Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, State Workforce Investment Board, Adult Basic Education, Mississippi Department of Employment Security,

To further assist in moving VR services more toward integration as we have defined it, on-site state meetings were held in March 2019 with the Delta Workforce Area(Greenville), Three Rivers Workforce (Belden) and VR and VRB staff in District 3 and VR and VRB Staff in District 2. In collaboration with the Workforce areas and VR/VRB programs, we recognize the importance of service integration as part of the Combined State Plan and ultimately, to provide the highest level of service to individuals with disabilities that are served by all workforce program. Aligning systems assist in providing quality customer service and quality competitive employment outcomes. WINTAC continued to work with both areas to update and provide guidance for the integration plans that were developed as a result of the March 2019 meetings. A second on-site meeting was being scheduled for April 2020; however, this was postponed due to COVID-19.

**8. HOW THE AGENCY'S STRATEGIES WILL BE USED TO:**

**A. ACHIEVE GOALS AND PRIORITIES BY THE STATE, CONSISTENT WITH THE COMPREHENSIVE NEEDS ASSESSMENT;**

*The following strategies will be required to achieve the goals and priorities as listed in (l) State Goals and Priorities and (n) Goals and Plans for Distribution of title I Funds:*

**GOAL I: Improve the employment, economic stability, and self-sufficiency of eligible individuals with disabilities.**

**Strategies (Plan of Action):**

- Develop a job placement culture by providing ongoing training in the job development and placement process.
- Develop and implement on-campus work experience training for students who reside in rural communities when community-based work experience is not available.
- Refer those consumers receiving SSI/SSDI cash benefits who are interested in earnings that will eliminate their reliance on SSA cash benefits for work incentives Benefits Analysis and Counseling.
- Coordinate and conduct the Annual Governor's Job Fair for individuals with disabilities.
- Summer Internship Program for high school students with disabilities including those who have blindness and visual impairments, deafness and hard of hearing.

**GOAL II: Improve the VR Service Delivery System to Individuals with disabilities.**

**Strategies (Plan of Action):**

- Designate staff in MDRS districts to be responsible for conducting outreach and orientation sessions on a regular basis.
- Provide input to assure appropriate inclusion of vocational rehabilitation activities in, public service announcements, and agency website and publications.
- Update and distribute vocational rehabilitation brochures to appropriate referral sources.
- Designate and train specific staff members in each district to handle referrals and provide information to the public.
- Assure that all geographic areas of the state are covered with appropriate service delivery staff.
- Develop and implement a consumer satisfaction survey to be completed while the consumer's case is open with VR.
- Develop a consumer satisfaction survey to be completed by the consumer regarding services received from vendors/providers of VR services.

**GOAL III: Implement a statewide model for more effectively serving high school youth and students with disabilities including individuals with visual and/or hearing impairments.**

**Strategies (Plan of Action):**

- Engage with key partners such as the Department of Education, State Rehabilitation Council, high school, community colleges and other training and education program in designing an improved service delivery model that will develop stronger partnerships to place increased emphasis on serving transition high school students who **are** in special education.
- Engage with key partners such as the Department of Education, State Rehabilitation Council, high school, community colleges and other training and education program in designing an improved service delivery model that will develop stronger partnerships to place increased emphasis on serving transition high school students who **are not** in special education.
- Co-develop a formal Interagency Cooperative Agreement with officials from the Department of Education, local school districts and local high schools.
- Plan and coordinate with the Mississippi Department of Education-Special Education Director and Director 504 Services of to plan and conduct at least annual training and semi-annual work groups for the purpose of cross-training in understanding the services offered by Vocational Rehabilitation.
- Develop and implement the use of an OVR Transition Manual designed to assist staff in the delivery of transition services. This manual will be used as a technical assistance tool for transition planning purposes.
- Annually identify 504 Coordinators and special education staff for each school.
- Co-develop and implement self-identification tool identifying youth with disabilities who could possibly benefit from transition services.
- Establish relationships with parent training and information groups, advocacy groups and other service providers to encourage referral and parental participation in the development and provision of transition services.
- Establish comprehensive guidelines and indicators for assessing the individual transition needs of students.
- Work with other core partners in the workforce system to provide employment related services to prevent duplicative services.
- Contract with additional Community Rehabilitation Programs to provide Pre-Employment Transition Services.

**GOAL IV: Implement identified improvements to increase statewide consistency and quality of consumer services.**

**Strategies (Plan of Action):**

- Use results of the annual case review to determine where additional guidance and training are required.
- Utilize the new counselor training process for mentoring, training, and leadership development for all VR Counselors.
- Utilize and continue to develop consistent training process for key VR staff that deliver direct client services.

- Conduct annual statewide case record reviews of case service practices to determine consistency and adherence with federal/state requirements. Use case review results to identify and implement improvements in quality and consistency of services.
- Survey OVR staff on practices and provide refresher training to assure consistent and quality service delivery.
- Deliver high quality training and support to provide staff with the knowledge and skills needed to perform effectively.
- Recognize and appreciate staff throughout the division for their contributions to VR's success.
- Continue to update and deliver advanced best practices training to field staff statewide to provide ongoing skill development in key service delivery operations and practices, including a strong focus on customer service, cultural sensitivity, and better addressing each consumer's impediments to employment.
- Increase collaboration within the workforce system to improve services to unemployed workers with disabilities who are eligible for VR services by better leveraging services with other workforce development programs.
- Play stronger roles on state and local Workforce Boards to assure that VR consumers and other individuals with disabilities are better served by the One-Stop system.
- Increase collaboration with community colleges to improve coordination of VR services with community college programs and Adult Basic Education programs.
- Implement written agreements with providers for individuals with intellectual and development disabilities to affirm their roles and responsibilities for serving VR consumers, including their capacity for providing long-term employment supports to individuals after the VR case is rehabilitated.

## **B. SUPPORT INNOVATION AND EXPANSION ACTIVITIES; AND**

In an effort to expand and improve services to all individuals with disabilities, MDRS, Office of Vocational Rehabilitation and Office of Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind will:

Continue to develop a job placement culture with VR/VRB Counselors by continuing to develop services and provide tools and resources for job preparation services for clients that have reached this point in their IPEs. The VR Career Counselors will continue to assist clients in getting prepared for job interviews, completing application and being job ready.

VR/VRB Counselors will ensure that at the application process Counselors are providing VR Counseling and Guidance regarding the overall purpose of VR Services which is Competitive Integrated Employment. The Office of Business Development Representatives will continue working to bring to the table labor market information so that Counselors will be aware of career opportunities and sector strategies in the state.

Paid Internship opportunities and paid work based learning opportunities will continue to be developed with employers in the community so that consumers can receive training in the competitive labor market. This training will also assist with career exploration, the selection of employment goals and ultimately clients obtaining skills so that they will qualify for Competitive Integrated Employment opportunities.

MDRS engages in numerous programs and activities designed to inform and make available VR and Supported Employment services to individuals with disabilities including individuals with

Significant Disabilities. MDRS will continue outreach activities and provide information to community partners, community program, high schools and colleges and universities.

Continuing to implement the strategies and goals to serve more students with disabilities, such as engaging key partners, participating in training opportunities and outreach meetings to ensure that school staff understand the importance of VR Services for students prior to them exiting high school will increase the success of those students that exit school and transition to post high-school training programs and employment.

MDRS will continue to support the work of the Statewide Rehabilitation Council. The SRCs input has been very important in impacting change in the delivery of VR Services as well as the implementation of the Consumer Satisfaction Survey and other policy changes.

**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.**

The strategies and goals to innovate and expand Vocational Rehabilitation Services, including Supported Employment Services will help increase individuals with disabilities access to VR Services in the state, bring awareness of VR Services in the state and increase the number of individuals with disabilities not just obtain employment but maintain employment. The goals and strategies will assist in ensuring that the individuals are provided services to in which they can overcome lack of skills to compete, but have middle and higher skills to compete and qualify for employment opportunities.

The strategies and goals will also help ensure that VR/VRB Counselors are qualified and have the skills needed to work with individuals with various type of disabilities, including Autism and Mental Illness. Having skilled and qualified staff will help provide quality VR Services to the individuals we serve.

The strategies and goals will help to ensure that individuals with disabilities have a selection of community rehabilitation programs to assist in providing VR services that will enable them to obtain Competitive Integrated Employment. This has been a huge barrier to overcome in the state of Mississippi.

Continuing to work with other Workforce partners will help individuals receive the wrap around services they need in order to be willing to accept employment opportunities and be able to receive the services they need while they are preparing for employment.

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**p. EVALUATION AND REPORTS OF PROGRESS:  
VR AND SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT GOALS**

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**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**

**GOAL I: Improve the employment, economic stability, and self-sufficiency of eligible individuals with disabilities.**

**Report of Progress:**

- 28.2% increase in VR consumers that obtained an employment outcome from 2018 to 2019.
- 50% increase in VRB consumers that obtained an employment outcome from 2018 to 2019.
- Three Youth Pre-Employment Transition Conferences were held in Vicksburg on April 26, 2018, Greenwood on May 22, 2018, and Biloxi on April 28, 2018.
- 267 clients received Job Prep and Job Ready Services. VR Career Counselors continue to assist clients become 'Job Ready'.
- The 7<sup>th</sup> Annual Summer Internship for Students with Blindness was completed in 2019.
- 626 clients received Benefits Counseling from our Community Work Incentive Partners in 2019.
- 10,346 individual contacts to business in the state of Mississippi were made by Business Development staff in 2018.
- 11,245 individual contacts to business in the state of Mississippi was made in 2019.
- Five job fairs (three major, two minor in size) were held in Tupelo, Jackson, Gulfport, Greenwood, and Cleveland in 2018.
- Three job fairs were held in Southaven, Jackson, and Gulfport in 2019. 130 businesses attended.
- Seventy students with disabilities participated in the Student Summer Internship Program (SIP) in 2019.
- Eleven students with disabilities participated Project SEARCH in 2018 - 2019. This partnership was created with the University Medical Center, the Rankin County School District, the Mississippi Council for Developmental Disability and MDRS/VR. Nine graduated the program with a 100% placement percentage.

- Project SEARCH was expanded by 4 more locations: North Mississippi Medical Center (Tupelo), Forest General Hospital (Hattiesburg), Baptist Medical Center (Jackson), and Southcentral Regional Medical Center (Laurel in 2019).
- 104 individuals with disabilities have been placed into employment at Sephora Distribution facility in Olive Branch, MS as of October 2019, Sephora has committed to hiring another 50-75 more individuals through 2020. In July of 2019, Sephora had an attrition rate of 2-3% compared to 20-30% of the able-bodied population. Employees with disabilities had less than 1% absenteeism in the program. This partnership started in October 2017.

## **GOAL II: Improve the VR Service Delivery System to Individuals with Disabilities**

### **Report of Progress:**

- MDRS contracted with RL Brown Group Inc. to translate client service forms and documents from English into Spanish.
- 415 individuals signed and developed a Career Pathway IPE in 2019. This process was designed to provide expedited VR services to clients with *Significant Disabilities* by allowing the counselor to establish an employment goal with a consumer within a specific Career Pathway and provide Vocational/Career Counseling and other designated VR services more quickly after a determination of eligibility has been made. For students with disabilities, a Career Pathway (Fast Track) IPE supports the provision of Pre-Employment Transition Services needed to ensure that the student's specific employment goal is consistent with their strengths, abilities, capabilities, concerns, priorities, interest and informed choice.
- VR updated its Supported Employment Policy and Procedures to increase the focus on clients that need SE services. This process helped increase the number of individuals served in the SE program.
- VR staff work in partnership with other agencies such as the Department of Mental Health, Bureau of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities.
- Autism Spectrum Disorders - Two new providers entered into contracts to provide evaluation and assessment services to individuals with Autism and other significant disabilities.
- In 2018, 311 individuals with autism were provided VR Services. In 2019, the number of individuals with autism increased to 449.
- The 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual VR Deaf Pre-ETS Summer Program was held by the Deaf Services Program at Eagle Ridge in July 2019.
- In July 2019, the 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Pre-Employment Transition Camp for Students with Deafness was held.
- VR developed the Outreach and Orientation Program to be utilized by district staff to conduct outreach with other organizations and service providers. Continuing in 2018 and 2019, progress on this has been slow due to other major responsibilities.
- Supported Employment Job Skills Manual and training provided in three locations throughout the state to VR and VRB staff, IDD Waiver providers and other agencies and organizations that provide Employment Services.

- The Interagency Cooperative Agreement with the Department of Education was updated in 2017.
- In 2019, all Memorandum of Agreements with local education agencies were updated.
- OVR/OVRB launched the first Peer Mentoring Pilot Program at the University of Southern Mississippi and Mississippi State University. The guidance and support of the WINTAC Pre-ETS team played a vital role with the implementation of these projects in Mississippi. Given the support of WINTAC and the Pre-ETS team, Mississippi is proud to be one of the first states in the nation to implement a Peer Mentoring project.
- VR and VRB staff participated in the process with the assistance of WINTAC to work with pilot areas in the Belden/Tupelo and Greenville areas to improve service alignment among VR Core Partners, required partners and other stake holders in these areas. WINTAC facilitated the Integration Continuum Self-Assessment. In both locations the partners selected priority areas to make strategic improvements. Each area established Action Teams to oversee the implementation with WINTAC of the strategic plans that includes a cross-section of partners with VR staff in leadership roles.

**GOAL III: Implement a statewide model for more effectively serving high school youth and students with disabilities including individuals with visual and/or hearing impairments.**

**Report of Progress:**

- The 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual VR Deaf Pre-ETS Summer Program was held by the Deaf Services Program at Eagle Ridge in July 2019. In July 2019, the 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Pre-Employment Transition Camp for Students with Deafness was held.
- 14 Students with Blindness participated in the OVRB 6<sup>th</sup> Summer Internship Program.
- VR served 3,609 students with disabilities and VRB served 676 students with disabilities for a total of 4,285. This in an increase of 486 students from 2018.
- OVR/OVRB successfully completed the first pilot year of Peer Mentoring with two of universities in the state: Mississippi State University and the University of Southern Mississippi.
- Pre-Employment Transition Services were provided through OVR's partnership with the Mississippi State University - T.K. Martin Center through on-campus internships.
- Pre-Employment Transition Services were provided through OVR's partnership with the ARC of Mississippi through after school Pre-ETS classes in a rural part of the state.
- Pre-Employment Transition Services were provided through VRB's partnership with the National Federation of the Blind through two Transition conferences.
- Pre-Employment Transition Services were provided through OVR's partnership with Life of MS through two different one-day transition conferences across the state.
- Pre-Employment Transition Services were provided through OVR's partnership with Vocational & Rehabilitation Consultants, LLC through one three-day conference.
- Pre-Employment Transition Services were provided through OVR's partnership with the University of Southern Mississippi through on-campus weeklong Transition Boot Camps

and in-school Pre-ETS activities.

**GOAL IV: Implement identified improvements to increase statewide consistency and quality of consumer services.**

**Report of Progress:**

- Consumer Satisfaction Survey was implemented in 2018 for open VR/VRB cases by the Program Evaluation Unit.

**B. DESCRIBE THE FACTORS THAT IMPEDED THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THE GOALS AND PRIORITIES**

Due to the ongoing changes with federal reporting, MDRS continues to work with staff to understand and incorporate new rules and processes. VR and VRB is still working to achieve the goals and implement the strategies outlined in this state plan.

VR and VRB is still working to achieve the goals and implement the strategies outlined in this state plan. Although all of the strategies were not achieved to meet the goal, significant progress was made to increase the goals. Some of the factors that impeded the achievement of the goals and priorities were:

- Staff turnover
- Increasing number of referrals for Pre-Employment Transition Services and Transition Services
- Extensive training on new policy and procedures due to the changes in WIOA and the RSA 911.

**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**

In review of the Comprehensive Needs assessment, the Transition Needs assessment, unserved and underserved populations and minority populations, the following goals are reported as a result of the strategies identified:

**Report of Progress for the SE program for 2018**

**GOAL I: Improve the employment, economic stability, and self-sufficiency of eligible individuals with disabilities.**

**Report of Progress:**

- 106 referrals were received from the IDD Waiver Program
- 84 referrals for individuals with serious mental illness were received from the Department of Mental Health.
- 29 Number of referrals received from Subminimum Wage Employment facilities

**GOAL II: Improve the VR Service Delivery System to Individuals with Disabilities**

Continue the referral process between the VR Transition Counselor and the VR Supported Employment (SE) Counselor for students with disabilities, ages 14-21, who have been determined to need long-term ongoing support services.

**Report of Progress:**

- 58 Job Coaches were trained and hired to provide job training services.
- 262 Individuals placed in employment
- # individuals reached a competitive employment outcome (Closed Rehabilitated)
- SE Counselors and Transition Counselors worked together to identify students and provide orientation regarding VR services to school districts throughout the state.
- Four(4) new Project SEARCH sites were added
- Job Skills Training Manual Training was held in the North, South and Central part of Mississippi in which staff from MDRS and the Department of Mental Health attended

When school year begins, the Transition Counselor should contact each school district and schedule a meeting with the Special Education teachers to discuss possible referrals. If the school reports having any students identified with hearing and/or vision loss, the RCD and/or VRB Counselor should be invited to attend the meeting as well. The Counselors will work together to actively elicit referrals on all students with disabilities age 14-21, regardless of their classroom assignment. They will meet with potential referrals and review the school's supporting documentation. It can be assumed, students who have been identified by the school as requiring additional supports to be successful in the educational setting, will require long-term supports to gain and maintain employment. After the Transition Counselor has established that the client is eligible for VR services and will require Supported Employment, the case can then be referred to the SE Counselor to provide any Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS).

SE Counselors have a separate Supported Employment and Supported Employment Transition caseload. This assist with monitoring the SE services provided to Adults and Students/Youth.

**GOAL III: Implement a statewide model for more effectively serving high school youth and students with disabilities including individuals with visual and/or hearing impairments.**

**Report of Progress:**

- Training was provided to all Transition Counselors and SE Counselors on procedures for making referrals and changes due to new federal regulations. Discovery Training was provided by Shelby Residential and Vocational Services (SRVS);
- New provider, Shelby Residential and Vocational Services (SRVS), entered into a contract to provide Customized Employment Services to individuals with the *most significant disabilities*. Discovery is available through the IDD Waiver Program that certify providers for SE services.

**B. DESCRIBE THE FACTORS THAT IMPEDED THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THE GOALS AND PRIORITIES**

VR/VRB will continuously work to implement new policies and procedures regulated by WIOA. In the SE program, some of the factors that impede the achievement of the goals and priorities are:

- SE Caseload size continue to increase which causes a delay in service and sometimes the quality of service provision is impacted;
- The number of referrals received from Transition counselors increased, therefore, increasing the workload for these counselors;
- SE Counselors understanding cooperative agreements with other programs and the services other programs provided such as the IDD Waiver
- The lack of enough trained and reliable job coaches(trainers)
- New Vocational Training Instructors with limited training and skills and;
- The current tracking system for SE placements is not sufficient
- SE Counselors ability to put in practice training resource

### **3. THE VR PROGRAM'S PERFORMANCE ON THE PERFORMANCE ACCOUNTABILITY INDICATORS UNDER SECTION 116 OF WIOA**

The Workforce Partners in Mississippi are working together to create a Shared Data Warehouse that will link our separate case management and data systems. We refer to this as 'The Hub', and are working with a vendor, NSPARC, to create this data warehouse and bridge. National Strategic Planning & Analysis Research Center (NSPARC) designed and wrote *the Hub*. Founded in 1998, NSPARC is a university research center with more than 100 diverse employees ranging from data scientists to software architects and security experts. NSPARC supports Mississippi State University's overarching goals of research, learning, and service by collaborating within the university, through local, state, and federal agencies, and across the private sector to help society grow by discovering solutions to societal problems by using data science. They pursue entrepreneurial and collaborative initiatives to develop and maintain a pipeline of intellectual property and innovative technologies that positively impact real-world problems. NSPARC is headquartered in Starkville, Mississippi, adjacent to Mississippi State University's campus.

MDRS entered into an agreement with NSPARC to develop a proof of concept in regards to how MDRS would capture the required data into the Hub. The proof of concept was tested and completed in March of 2016. NSPARC was able to use MDRS' proof of concept in order to move forward with developing the Hub for all partners.

MDRS entered into another agreement with NSPARC and our software vendor Alliance in July of 2016. This agreement was for MDRS to provide the necessary data needed for the Hub from our current case management system and to update our Referral Module with the new process of our getting and receiving referrals from our partners. From July of 2016 until June of 2017, Alliance, MDRS, and NSPARC met to work through the process of how the data would be exchanged between the Hub and our case management system.

All partner agencies will complete their separate intake forms with new customers. In each of these separate forms, however, there are **six diagnostic questions** that will be the same on all **forms and multiple demographic fields that are shared between partners (Intake)**. These data elements will automatically be uploaded into the Hub - or autofill - if the unique identifier matches a profile that already exists in the Hub. If data in these areas is different from the information that was previously in the profile, this information will be updated with that from the most recent entry. The initial version of the Hub was completed in June 2017. MDRS has been sending data to the Hub since that time.

The WIOA Hub software development was released and launched into the production environment on May 23, 2017. The other partners have been phasing in sending their data

between January 2018 and June 2018. Once other partners went live in the Hub, MDRS began receiving referrals from them through the Hub directly into MDRS' case management system. In the future, the PIRL for the State of Mississippi will be created through the Hub.

Alliance is the vendor that provides the case management system (Aware) for the Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services (MDRS) and for the VR/VRB `programs in at least 35 other states. MDRS has been working with Alliance to ensure that the performance measures are included in Aware. Alliance has multiple user groups across 35+ states that meet to discuss Aware with Aware users. The WIOA/RSA-911 and the Aware VR User Groups are two that are involved in ensuring that all federal reports and WIOA requirements are met.

- WIOA/RSA-911 User Group meets periodically throughout the year.
- Aware VR User Group monthly.
- There are two major releases of Aware each year. There are other minor releases that address items related to WIOA/RSA-911.
- MDRS continues to submit multiple quarters of RSA 911 data and the Annual Performance Report (RSA 9169).

#### **4. HOW THE FUNDS RESERVED FOR INNOVATION AND EXPANSION (I&E) ACTIVITIES WERE UTILIZED**

##### **Mississippi State Rehabilitation Council**

MDRS continues to use Innovation and Expansion funds to assist in carrying out the duties of the State Rehabilitation Council. The I&E funds specifically provide for the following:

- Support staff to assist the SRC in carrying out its duties;
- Operational costs which include travel and office supplies
- Any cost involved in having members attend meetings and trainings
- The cost associated with the quarterly Annual Consumer Satisfaction Survey

##### **Transition Contract Employee**

Funds will be used to expand pre-employment and transition services to students with disabilities. The Transition Contract Employment will help expand services and assist VR/VRB provide access to these needed services. Based on information from the Mississippi Department of Education, there are over 21,000 students in the state with disabilities.

##### **Project SEARCH**

Efforts will continue to be made and funds will be expended to support Project SEARCH sites. Project SEARCH is expanding and has been proven nationally to be a vital program to train and assist individuals with significant disabilities prepare for and obtain employment.

##### **Customized Training Programs**

Funds will be used to expand working with employers on Customized Training Programs. The first Customized Training program with Sephora was very successful and to date over 100 individuals with disabilities obtained full-time employment with benefits. Collaboration will continue with other employers/industries to train and hire individuals with disabilities. Toyota and Fastenal have already started initial conversation and collaboration.

## 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

MDRS, Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, offers statewide Supported Employment services, including Customized Employment, for individuals and youth with the *most significant disabilities* reach Competitive Integrated Employment outcomes. OVR has updated its policy manual to align with WIOA mandates.

Established a Memorandum of Agreement with the Mississippi Department of Mental Health, Bureau of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities to ensure individuals who are duly eligible for both agencies' programs have collaborative supports and services toward Competitive Integrated Employment outcomes. The Memorandum of Agreement outlines the coordination of services, including Extended Services, Supported Employment, and Customized Employment.

The SE Program provides services to individuals with the most significant disabilities who require intensive support to prepare for, secure, retain, or regain employment. The services are designed to meet the current and future needs of these individuals whose disabilities are of such nature that they need continuous, ongoing support and extended services in order to engage in and maintain gainful employment. VR services include evaluation, assessment, job matching, job development, and job placement and brokering for natural supports for extended services. The specific SE services are job coaching and training.

OVR allocates fifty percent of the federal Supported Employment funding on Supported Employment services for eligible youth with the *most significant disabilities*. Youth under the age of 25 may receive extended services (i.e., ongoing supports to maintain an individual in Supported Employment) for up to four (4) years. MDRS will invest all Title VI allocations to fund the purchase of job training services and other allowable vocational rehabilitation services as needed by clients served in the SE Program. Additionally, the Coordinator for the SE Program and the Coordinator for Transition and Youth Career Services will work together to ensure new policies are in place and the appropriate amount of funding is utilized for youth with the most significant disabilities.

Eligible individuals are those who are determined to be *most significantly* disabled, which means they meet the following criteria:

- *individual has a most 'significant disability'- \*individual's physical or mental impairments seriously limit three (3) or more functional capacities in terms of an employment outcome. Individual will require vocational rehabilitation services in order to prepare for, secure, retain, or regain employment*

MDRS employs a unique strategy for delivery of SE services. The SE Program's structure and service delivery mechanism are integrated into that of the general agency service delivery system. The services are authorized, coordinated and, in most instances, delivered by staff of the state unit. Counselors who specialize in SE perform the functions of case management, job development, and supervision of overall SE service delivery in their respective districts. They

are assisted by Vocational Training Instructors (VTIs) who perform a variety of functions including assessment, job development and placement, job training, job coach supervision, and facilitation of natural supports. Job Coaches are employed on an "as needed" basis. Counselors are assigned to serve SE eligible individuals in each of the ten districts to ensure statewide coverage. The SE staff includes 11 Counselors, 12 VTIs, and a pool of available Job Coaches who are assigned to work with a Supported Employment (SE) client *as needed*. Additionally, this staff works with the statewide Community Rehabilitation Program, AbilityWorks, Inc., a division of MDRS.

MDRS, Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, contends that its responsibility regarding SE is the same as its responsibility for the general program. The SE Programs for both VR and VRB have been combined into one program serving all eligible individuals. VR Counselors, assigned to SE caseloads, have the same duties and responsibilities as those in the VR and VRB programs. However, the caseloads of the VR Counselors assigned to SE caseloads consists of only those clients who meet Title VI eligibility criteria. Therefore, in addition to general agency policy and procedures, VR Counselors must be knowledgeable about Title VI regulations and the unique requirements for SE eligibility.

SE personnel are trained in general VR case management techniques and VR federal regulations, and are held to the same procedures and standards of performance as all other VR Counselors.

MDRS, Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, designates a statewide Supported Employment (SE) Program Coordinator whose duties include the following:

- monitor issues developing in the field of SE;
- monitor staff performance and make recommendations and assist in implementing procedures to improve performance;
- serve as a resource person to staff;
- serve as an advisor to administrative staff in implementing programmatic policies in accordance with federal dictates;
- develop effective programmatic procedures;
- recommend training of SE staff;
- provide training for SE staff; and
- other typical functions of a coordinating and liaison nature.

MDRS, Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, maintains formal agreements with the Mississippi Department of Education and the Department of Mental Health as well as other public and private entities, which identify areas of collaboration to ensure a comprehensive program of services to SE eligible individuals. Staff members collaborate intensively with local mental health centers, school districts, businesses and industries, the DD Council, parents, advocacy groups and other relevant third party providers and resources.

The service approach for SE eligible clients emulates the nationally accepted 'best practices' models of SE service delivery which include individual job placement, enclaves, and temporary employment placement (TEP) for individuals with chronic mental illness. Central to each of these approaches is an emphasis on Person-Centered Planning and facilitation of natural supports. Individualized job development is conducted by SE staff based on job matching assessment information and client's informed choice. SE clients are assisted with employment planning and placement by VTIs and job skills training is provided at the job site either by Job Coaches or through natural supports.

## **2. THE TIMING OF TRANSITION TO EXTENDED SERVICES**

Upon completion of time-limited SE services, the ongoing job skills training assistance and other necessary long-term support is transitioned to a third party, group or individual through a Cooperative Agreement or Extended Services Support Plan Agreement. WIOA increased the maximum amount of time for SE staff to provide time-limited Supported Employment services to 24 months. However, the rate of transitioning a client to extended services is dependent upon the needs of the individual, his/her family, the employer, the third party agency, and other involved individuals. Since SE staff members and the extended service provider will have been collaborating in the provision of SE services throughout an individual's VR program, such transitions are normally smooth and do not cause job disruptions.

MDRS, Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, will continue to cooperate in the networking of services with entities that have Supported Employment facets or other applicable and/or similar resources, such as the state's Workforce Development One-Stop System. Such collaborative efforts are essential for effective planning, development, implementation and continuation of SE arrangements. Service networking will involve developing and identifying appropriate job sites, tapping existing or future job training resources, utilizing concurrent staffing opportunities, and other occasions for programmatic and budgetary interfacing.

Expansion of the SE Program is expected as a result of extensive outreach, staff development, interagency training, dissemination of information, identification and dissemination of information about best practices, technical assistance, and an emphasis on interagency collaboration for identification of potentially eligible individuals and service delivery to clients. MDRS continues to emphasize Person-Centered Planning by partnering with the Mississippi Council on Developmental Disabilities, Mississippi Department of Education, and other entities in promotion of this service provision.

## VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION (COMBINED OR GENERAL) CERTIFICATIONS

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States must provide written and signed certifications that:

**1. THE (ENTER THE NAME OF DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY OR DESIGNATED STATE UNIT, AS APPROPRIATE,) IS AUTHORIZED TO SUBMIT THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN UNDER TITLE I OF THE REHABILITATION ACT OF 1973 (REHABILITATION ACT), AS AMENDED BY WIOA[14], AND ITS SUPPLEMENT UNDER TITLE VI OF THE REHABILITATION ACT[15];**

**ENTER THE NAME OF DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY OR DESIGNATED STATE UNIT, AS APPROPRIATE**

Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services-Office of Vocational Rehabilitation

**2. AS A CONDITION FOR THE RECEIPT OF FEDERAL FUNDS UNDER TITLE I OF THE REHABILITATION ACT FOR THE PROVISION OF VR SERVICES, THE (ENTER THE NAME OF DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY)[16] AGREES TO OPERATE AND ADMINISTER THE STATE VR SERVICES PROGRAM IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN[17], THE REHABILITATION ACT, AND ALL APPLICABLE REGULATIONS[18], POLICIES, AND PROCEDURES ESTABLISHED BY THE SECRETARY OF EDUCATION. FUNDS MADE AVAILABLE UNDER SECTION 111 OF THE REHABILITATION ACT ARE USED SOLELY FOR THE PROVISION OF VR SERVICES AND THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN;**

**ENTER THE NAME OF DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY**

Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services, Office of Vocational Rehabilitation

**3. AS A CONDITION FOR THE RECEIPT OF FEDERAL FUNDS UNDER TITLE VI OF THE REHABILITATION ACT FOR SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES, THE DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY AGREES TO OPERATE AND ADMINISTER THE STATE SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES PROGRAM IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE SUPPLEMENT TO THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN[19], THE REHABILITATION ACT, AND ALL APPLICABLE REGULATIONS[20], POLICIES, AND PROCEDURES ESTABLISHED BY THE SECRETARY OF EDUCATION. FUNDS MADE AVAILABLE UNDER TITLE VI ARE USED SOLELY FOR THE PROVISION OF SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES AND THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE SUPPLEMENT TO THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN;**

**4. THE DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY AND/OR THE DESIGNATED STATE UNIT HAS THE AUTHORITY UNDER STATE LAW TO PERFORM THE FUNCTIONS OF THE STATE REGARDING THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN AND ITS SUPPLEMENT;**

**5. THE STATE LEGALLY MAY CARRY OUT EACH PROVISION OF THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN AND ITS SUPPLEMENT.**

**6. ALL PROVISIONS OF THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN AND ITS SUPPLEMENT ARE CONSISTENT WITH STATE LAW.**

**7. THE (ENTER THE NAME OF AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE BELOW) HAS THE AUTHORITY UNDER STATE LAW TO RECEIVE, HOLD, AND DISBURSE FEDERAL FUNDS MADE AVAILABLE UNDER THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN AND ITS SUPPLEMENT;**

**ENTER THE NAME OF AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE BELOW**

Chris Howard

**8. THE (ENTER THE TITLE OF AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE BELOW) HAS THE AUTHORITY TO SUBMIT THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN AND THE SUPPLEMENT FOR SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES;**

**ENTER THE TITLE OF AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE BELOW**

Executive Director

**9. THE AGENCY THAT SUBMITS THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN AND ITS SUPPLEMENT HAS ADOPTED OR OTHERWISE FORMALLY APPROVED THE PLAN AND ITS SUPPLEMENT.**

#### **FOOTNOTES**

[14] Public Law 113-128.

[15] Unless otherwise stated, "Rehabilitation Act" means the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended by WIOA, signed into law on July 22, 2014.

[16] All references in this plan to "designated State agency" or to "the State agency" relate to the agency identified in this paragraph.

[17] No funds under title I of the Rehabilitation Act may be awarded without an approved VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan in accordance with section 101(a) of the Rehabilitation Act.

[18] Applicable regulations, in part, include the Education Department General Administrative Regulations (EDGAR) in 34 CFR parts 76, 77, 79, 81, and 82; 2 CFR part 200 as adopted by 2 CFR part 3474; and the State VR Services program regulations.

[19] No funds under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act may be awarded without an approved supported employment supplement to the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan in accordance with section 606(a) of the Rehabilitation Act.

[20] Applicable regulations, in part, include the citations in footnote 6.

## CERTIFICATION SIGNATURE

<b>Signatory information</b>	Chris Howard
<b>Name of Signatory</b>	Chris Howard
<b>Title of Signatory</b>	Executive Director, MS Department of Rehabilitation Services
<b>Date Signed</b>	2/28/2020

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### Certification Signature

**Enter Narrative (\* required)**

Signatory information	Enter Signatory information in this column
Name of Signatory	[Enter name here] <i>Chris M Howard</i>
Title of Signatory	[Enter title here] <i>Executive Director</i>
Date Signed	[Enter date here]* <i>2/28/2020</i>

<https://wioaplans.ed.gov/node/42586/edit> 2/24/2020

## ASSURANCES

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

The State Plan must include	Include
1. <b>Public Comment on Policies and Procedures:</b> The designated State agency assures it will comply with all statutory and regulatory requirements for public participation in the VR Services Portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan, as required by section 101(a)(16)(A) of the Rehabilitation Act.	
2. <b>Submission of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and Its Supplement:</b> The designated State unit assures it will comply with all requirements pertaining to the submission and revisions of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement for the State Supported Employment Services program, as required by sections 101(a)(1), (22), (23), and 606(a) of the Rehabilitation Act; section 102 of WIOA in the case of the submission of a unified plan; section 103 of WIOA in the case of a submission of a Combined State Plan; 34 CFR 76.140.	
3. The designated State agency or designated State unit, as appropriate, assures it will comply with the requirements related to: Administration of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan:	
3.a. The establishment of the designated State agency and designated State unit, as required by section 101(a)(2) of the Rehabilitation Act	
3.b. The establishment of either a State independent commission or State Rehabilitation Council, as required by section 101(a)(21) of the Rehabilitation Act. The designated State agency or designated State unit, as applicable (A or B must be selected):	
3.b.(A) “is an independent State commission” (Yes/No)	No
3.b.(B) “has established a State Rehabilitation Council” (Yes/No)	Yes
3.c. Consultations regarding the administration of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan, in accordance with section 101(a)(16)(B) of the Rehabilitation Act	

The State Plan must include	Include
3.d. The financial participation by the State, or if the State so elects, by the State and local agencies, to provide the amount of the non-Federal share of the cost of carrying out the VR program in accordance with section 101(a)(3)	
3.e. The local administration of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan, in accordance with section 101(a)(2)(A) of the Rehabilitation Act. Select yes or no, as appropriate, to identify if the designated State agency allows for the local administration of VR funds (Yes/No)	No
3.f. The shared funding and administration of joint programs, in accordance with section 101(a)(2)(A)(ii) of the Rehabilitation Act. Select yes or no, as appropriate, to identify if the designated State agency allows for the shared funding and administration of joint programs (Yes/No)	No
3.g. Statewideness and waivers of statewideness requirements, as set forth in section 101(a)(4) of the Rehabilitation Act. Is the designated State agency requesting or maintaining a waiver of statewideness for one or more services provided under the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan? (Yes/No) See Section 2 of this VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan	Yes
3.h. The descriptions for cooperation, collaboration, and coordination, as required by sections 101(a)(11) and (24)(B); and 606(b) of the Rehabilitation Act	
3.i. All required methods of administration, as required by section 101(a)(6) of the Rehabilitation Act	
3.j. The requirements for the comprehensive system of personnel development, as set forth in section 101(a)(7) of the Rehabilitation Act	
3.k. The compilation and submission to the Commissioner of statewide assessments, estimates, State goals and priorities, strategies, and progress reports, as appropriate, and as required by sections 101(a)(15), 105(c)(2), and 606(b)(8) of the Rehabilitation Act	
3.l. The reservation and use of a portion of the funds allotted to the State under section 110 of the Rehabilitation Act for the development and implementation of innovative approaches to expand and improve the provision of VR services to individuals with disabilities, particularly individuals with the most significant disabilities	
3.m. The submission of reports as required by section 101(a)(10) of the Rehabilitation Act	
4. Administration of the Provision of VR Services: The designated State agency, or designated State unit, as appropriate, assures that it will:	
4.a. Comply with all requirements regarding information and referral services in accordance with sections 101(a)(5)(D) and (20) of the Rehabilitation Act	
4.b. Impose no duration of residence requirement as part of determining an individual's eligibility for VR services or that excludes from services under the plan any individual who is present in the State in accordance with section 101(a)(12) of the Rehabilitation Act	

The State Plan must include	Include
4.c. Provide the full range of services listed in section 103(a) of the Rehabilitation Act as appropriate, to all eligible individuals with disabilities in the State who apply for services in accordance with section 101(a)(5) of the Rehabilitation Act? (Yes/No)	No
4.d. Determine whether comparable services and benefits are available to the individual in accordance with section 101(a)(8) of the Rehabilitation Act	
4.e. Comply with requirements regarding the provisions of informed choice for all applicants and eligible individuals in accordance with section 102(d) of the Rehabilitation Act	
4.f. Comply with requirements regarding the provisions of informed choice for all applicants and eligible individuals in accordance with section 102(d) of the Rehabilitation Act	
4.g. Provide vocational rehabilitation services to American Indians who are individuals with disabilities residing in the State, in accordance with section 101(a)(13) of the Rehabilitation Act	
4.h. Comply with the requirements for the conduct of semiannual or annual reviews, as appropriate, for individuals employed either in an extended employment setting in a community rehabilitation program or any other employment under section 14(c) of the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, as required by section 101(a)(14) of the Rehabilitation Act	
4.i. Meet the requirements in sections 101(a)(17) and 103(b)(2) of the Rehabilitation Act if the State elects to construct, under special circumstances, facilities for community rehabilitation programs	
4.j. With respect to students with disabilities, the State,	
4.j.i. Has developed and will implement,	
4.j.i.I. Strategies to address the needs identified in the assessments; and	
4.j.i.II. Strategies to achieve the goals and priorities identified by the State, to improve and expand vocational rehabilitation services for students with disabilities on a statewide basis; and	
4.j.ii. Has developed and will implement strategies to provide pre-employment transition services (sections 101(a)(15) and 101(a)(25))	
5. Program Administration for the Supported Employment Title VI Supplement:	
5.a. The designated State unit assures that it will include in the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan all information required by section 606 of the Rehabilitation Act	
5.b. The designated State agency assures that it will submit reports in such form and in accordance with such procedures as the Commissioner may require and collects the information required by section 101(a)(10) of the Rehabilitation Act separately for individuals receiving supported employment services under title I and individuals receiving supported employment services under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act	

The State Plan must include	Include
5.c. The designated state unit will coordinate activities with any other State agency that is functioning as an employment network under the Ticket to Work and Self-Sufficiency program under Section 1148 of the Social Security Act	
6. Financial Administration of the Supported Employment Program:	
6.a. The designated State agency assures that it will expend no more than 2.5 percent of the State's allotment under title VI for administrative costs of carrying out this program; and, the designated State agency or agencies will provide, directly or indirectly through public or private entities, non-Federal contributions in an amount that is not less than 10 percent of the costs of carrying out supported employment services provided to youth with the most significant disabilities with the funds reserved for such purpose under section 603(d) of the Rehabilitation Act, in accordance with section 606(b)(7)(G) and (H) of the Rehabilitation Act	
6.b. The designated State agency assures that it will use funds made available under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act only to provide supported employment services to individuals with the most significant disabilities, including extended services to youth with the most significant disabilities, who are eligible to receive such services; and, that such funds are used only to supplement and not supplant the funds provided under Title I of the Rehabilitation Act, when providing supported employment services specified in the individualized plan for employment, in accordance with section 606(b)(7)(A) and (D), of the Rehabilitation Act	
7. Provision of Supported Employment Services:	Yes
7.a. The Designated State Agency Assures That it Will Provide Supported Employment Services as Defined in Section 7(39) of the Rehabilitation Act	
7.b. The designated State agency assures that:	
7.b.i. The comprehensive assessment of individuals with significant disabilities conducted under section 102(b)(1) of the Rehabilitation Act and funded under title I of the Rehabilitation Act includes consideration of supported employment as an appropriate employment outcome, in accordance with the requirements of section 606(b)(7)(B) of the Rehabilitation Act	
7.b.ii. An individualized plan for employment that meets the requirements of section 102(b) of the Rehabilitation Act, which is developed and updated with title I funds, in accordance with sections 102(b)(3)(F) and 606(b)(6)(C) and (E) of the Rehabilitation Act	

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## VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAM PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

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### Performance Goals for the Core Programs

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

<b>Performance Indicators</b>	<b>PY 2020 Expected Level</b>	<b>PY 2020 Negotiated Level</b>	<b>PY 2021 Expected Level</b>	<b>PY 2021 Negotiated Level</b>
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline
Credential Attainment Rate	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline
Measurable Skill Gains	13.0	20.0	13.0	21.0
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not Applicable <sup>1</sup>	Not Applicable <sup>1</sup>	Not Applicable <sup>1</sup>	Not Applicable <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>

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