



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

**WIOA STATE PLAN: TITLE IV (MOD)
Program Years 2022-2023
*(Mod to Title IV State Plan 2020-2023)***

PROGRAM-SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS FOR VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION (COMBINED OR GENERAL)

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

A. INPUT OF STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL

All agencies, except for those that are independent consumer-controlled commissions, must describe the following:

1. INPUT PROVIDED BY THE STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL, INCLUDING INPUT AND RECOMMENDATIONS ON THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN, RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE COUNCIL'S REPORT, THE REVIEW AND ANALYSIS OF CONSUMER SATISFACTION, AND OTHER COUNCIL REPORTS THAT MAY HAVE BEEN DEVELOPED AS PART OF THE COUNCIL'S FUNCTIONS;

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 OVR/OVRB 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 regard 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 SRC's comments, questions, and/or input:

SRC Comment/Question: 2020 has been a difficult year. I appreciate everyone who has done out-of-the-box thinking to get services to clients and helped keep spirits high amongst clients who are feeling down or frustrated at the closeness of service due to Covid-19.

SRC Comment/Question: The VRB Training Needs Survey should be disseminated to all current VRB referrals, applicants, and clients; state partners, including SRC members, School for the Blind, DD Council; IL Providers, among others and all VRB staff for dissemination and for sharing with Mississippians who experience blindness. The results will help VRB to plan the Structured Discovery Service provision that is being proposed to best meet the needs of Mississippians who need this service.

SRC Comment/Question: I am looking forward to learning more about the goal to establish the Structured Discovery Learning program in Mississippi. This sounds like a great opportunity to keep Mississippians who need this service.

SRC Comment/Question: If the order of selection is ever initiated, please make sure consumers are aware of the process. The policy appears to follow all law and regulation. It is outstanding to think that no categories have been closed since 2009. This is impressive. This signifies to me that staff are utilizing resources very efficiently.

SRC Comment/Question: The summer job programs are very exciting. Hopefully every employer will have a successful experience and see the benefit of employing our customers.

SRC Comment/Question: Combining WIPA with the Independent Living for the Blind doesn't seem to fit. It seems to overwhelm staff, which can cause delays in WIPA services and WIPA services being less intense than needed when a benefits recipient is making choices about work and benefits.

SRC Comment/Question: It's always nice to see the positive comments. It is important to constantly check up on the negative comments, trying to see if service delivery could be better, check to help resolve complaints. The satisfaction surveys indicate overall satisfaction. It seems that both surveys should ask the same questions and use the same scale for best use. I believe that staff take the customer satisfaction seriously and review the results frequently with changes made when needed to bring about better satisfaction. Spend time next meeting reviewing satisfaction information. How do you keep the "Bias" out of people doing surveys? Planning survey questions; administering survey, interpreting responses. Should a neutral party be contracted to develop and administer survey?

SRC Comment/Question: Who makes the survey calls? Is it done in-house or by a third party?

SRC Comment/Question: I think that the service delivery to MDRS employees needing accommodations can stand some improvements.

SRC Comment/Question: I am excited about the idea of having Structured Discovery for our OVRB clients. I had no idea that some clients had to leave the state for an extended period of time to receive Structured Discovery. This will be a great benefit for our OVRB community. I think VR/VRB are working hard toward meeting their goals. This makes Mississippi proud.

SRC Comment/Question: I'm impressed with the work the MDRS team is beginning to put in place. People in internships, establish careers opportunities and outreach to the business community. VR & VRB have continual new approaches that bring about good outcomes for people with disabilities. I was impressed to hear about the way that all high quality services are available, even if out of state. Great work. Keep striving to get our numbers back up to pre-Covid levels. It's been a tough year and we are all thankful for the hard work to get us to the other side of the crisis.

SRC Comment/Question: It will be exciting to see the information from the Florida vendors and how it can be implemented in Mississippi. It is great to share resources.

SRC Comment/Question: Very good report. I love that this area is getting the needed attention. The resources for staff prepared by your new coordinator are excellent. Resources for employers could be helpful. Training to the public could assist as well. Great Report Jennifer. I am so glad that MDRS is focusing on the success of individuals with Autism. I love that you are collaborating on every case for individuals with Autism. That is awesome.

SRC Comment/Question: This is a great report. It really helped me understand what OOS means. I am glad that all categories are currently able to receive services and that there is an appeal procedure just in case it is needed.

SRC Comment/Question: I am thankful for your efforts in writing for the funds to reimburse business owners who lost merchandise during COVID.

SRC Comment/Question: The VRB Career Reboot sounds like a great program. Thank you for inviting Deana Criess to present to the SRC about the program. I also appreciated Betsy Simoneaux following up by email with informative materials to the group after Deana's presentation on the VRB Career Reboot Program. I am happy to learn more about this resource and to learn that it is being utilized with people in our state.

SRC Comment/Question: The idea to do the brief SRC Orientation was excellent. It would be super to have an extended session. May be good for someone from NCSRC to come to Mississippi and share SRC roles, responsibilities and other state practices as an orientation for new members, current members and other parties.

SRC Comment/Question: This agenda item was tabled due to insufficient time. The SRC agenda needs to be expanded in length of time as not to rush the presenters and as not to discourage discussion from SRC members. How will Needs Assessment be utilized? May want to have a neutral party analyze and evaluate needs assessment and how to improve and increase services as expressed in the October 13, 2021 meeting. I like how the assessments are done on open ongoing and at the end of closed cases.

Letter from SRC Chairperson, Mary Meruvia

On behalf of the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC), I am happy to share the annual report of the Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services' Office of Vocational Rehabilitation and Office of Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind (OVR/OVRB).

The State Rehabilitation Council is a body mandated by The Rehabilitation Act and its resulting regulations at CFR 361. Members, described in these regulations, represent a broad range of individuals with disabilities across the state. We are pleased in 2021 to have received timely appointments which have enabled the SRC to be a fully functioning body.

Our mandated functions include:

- Reviewing, analyzing, and advising OVR/OVRB on the performance of their responsibilities related to eligibility and order of selection; the extent, scope, and effectiveness of vocational rehabilitation services; and functions that affect the ability of individuals with disabilities in achieving employment outcomes
- Partnering with OVR/OVRB in developing goals and priorities; and evaluating the effectiveness in obtaining these goals
- Advising OVR/OVRB in the vocational rehabilitation portion of the Unified State Plan
- Conducting a review and analysis of consumer satisfaction
- Submitting this report and making it available to the public
- Coordinating activities with other named Councils within the state, to include the Statewide Independent Living Council
- Performing other relevant functions the SRC determines appropriate consistent with the purpose of OVR/OVRB

The Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services' OVR/ OVRB have continued effective Vocational Rehabilitation Services to Mississippi's citizens who experience disability. Employment outcomes secured after the receipt of Vocational Rehabilitation Services have assisted in Mississippi's recovery after suffering from the Covid 19 pandemic. "Recovery, Powered By Inclusion", a phrase used during the VR and VRB Disability Employment Awareness Month, has been exercised year-long in programs and services that not only benefitted the

citizens who experience disability and received services, but our entire state of Mississippi as well, in recovery.

We hope you will consider strong funding of this agency for the 20% required state match to federal funds so that it will have the funding levels to remain an essential Mississippi resource to help restore both the State's economy as well as the strong spirit of Mississippi Citizens through their own self-supporting employment. The State Rehabilitation Council is happy to continue to advise the agency in regards to the individual stakeholder groups who we represent.

Sincerely,

Mary Lundy Meruvia, Chairperson

State Rehabilitation Council

FFY 2021 Mississippi State Rehabilitation Council Activity Report:

The Mississippi State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) held four (4) quarterly meetings for the Federal Fiscal Year **October 1, 2020 – September 30, 2021**. Utilizing TEAMS and teleconferencing, the members were able to attend our quarterly meetings during the continued pandemic era. During each meeting, everyone is welcomed, introductions are made and guests are recognized. Agenda topics are centered around the SRC Functions and provided by the Offices of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR), Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind (OVRB) and Business Development Services (BDS). The State Rehabilitation Council reviewed and provided input at each meeting on selected topics related to:

- Reviewing, analyzing, and advising OVR/OVRB/BDS on the performance of their responsibilities related to eligibility and order of selection; the extent, scope, and effectiveness of vocational rehabilitation services; and functions that affect the ability of individuals with disabilities in achieving employment outcomes.
- Partnering with OVR/OVRB in developing goals and priorities and evaluating the effectiveness in obtaining these goals.
- Advising OVR/OVRB/BDS in the vocational rehabilitation portion of the Unified State Plan.
- Conducting a review and analysis of consumer satisfaction, including a quarterly report from the Client Assistance Program (CAP) as well as a report of Due Process Hearings.
- Submitting the SRC Annual Report and making it available to the public.
- Coordinating activities with other named Councils within the state, with a specific agenda item quarterly for a report from the Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC).
- Performing other relevant functions, the SRC determines appropriate consistency with the purpose of OVR/OVRB/BDS.

DECEMBER 2020 MEETING

The **2020 State Rehabilitation Council Annual Report** was reviewed and discussed at the December 2020 meeting. LaVonda Hart, Director of Vocational Rehabilitation, explained the information contained in the SRC Annual Report. Draft copies were provided as some information was still being compiled. The SRC Annual Report is required by the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) and must be submitted before the end of the calendar year. This

report includes data in relation to the Offices of Vocational Rehabilitation (including Pre-ETS) and Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind.

Ms. Hart also reviewed the **State Plan** that is submitted to the MDRS Workforce Core Partners for WIOA. This report is then submitted to the MS. Department of Employment Services which is the lead partner in organizing the combined report.

The **RSA 911 Report**, a quarterly report, is submitted to RSA four times during the Program Year. The Program Year '21 begins July 1, 2020 and ends June 30, 2021. It was noted that the SRC still operates on the federal fiscal year.

More information was provided on the **Structured Discovery Center** and the requirements that will need to be met for approval. Dr. Edward Bell, referred by the RSA, will be assisting the agency to ensure the requirements are met.

Further discussions included the **Comprehensive Services Needs Assessment**, which is compiled to reflect future needs of VR/VRB. The **Public Consulting Group** has been contracted to compile detailed reporting.

Additional State Rehabilitation Council Member Activities during FFY 2021 (December 2020 Quarterly Meeting):

Chairperson Election – *Selection of the SRC Chairman* for the 2021 Year was discussed. Pursuant to the SRC Federal Regulations, a Council Chairperson must be selected. The bylaws state the role and duties of the SRC Chairperson. A survey will be sent via Survey Monkey asking for nominations for the Council Chairman for the upcoming year. Once nominations are received, they will be voted on.

Nomination Committee – The *nomination form* was updated and available for all Council members to review. Changes were made that followed specific wording from the Federal Regulations regarding positions on the council and information needed about the applicant.

The six members rolling off the Council as of June 30, 2021 due to having served the maximum of two term limits will be: Pam Dollar; Jean Walley; Shannon Hillman; Lee Cole; Presley Posey and Cassandra Singleton.

Budget Committee – According to Article 4 of the SRC Bylaws, the Council is charged with developing a *Resource Plan*. There is a data element in the Innovation and Expansion Report that asks for a dollar figure for the SRC. Even though expenses are consistent, the SRC has not had any input into the Resource Plan. A review of expenses based on the last five years was used to determine future costs. A *proposed budget* has been established.

MARCH 2021 MEETING

Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) were discussed. **Virtual Transition Camps** will be held on a daily basis offering three- and five-day camps to our VR students with disabilities. This will be provided by **Employ U** which is a fee for services Pre-ETS Provider. These camps will be held during Christmas and Spring Break.

MPIC/HOPE Alliance, a contracted Pre-ETS third-party provider, will be serving incarcerated youth with disabilities. Participants housed at various facilities around the state will be participating with this program.

A report was provided on the startup process of the **Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment**. Three surveys were sent: 1) Community Partners, 2) OVR/OVRB Consumers, and 3) OVR/OVRB/BDS Staff.

The new policies of the **Alcohol and Drug Program** from the **Department of Mental Health** were reported. Mr. Don Brown explained that the new process will be geared toward the person, not the program. Funding is now called *Fee for Services* (FFS).

The **American Society of Addiction Medicine (ASAM)** has developed an assessment tool which will be used to determine the level of care needed for an individual addicted to types of drug substances and/or abuse. Ranging from outpatient to inpatient hospitalization, the levels are based on the type and severity of the substance use/abuse.

JUNE 2021 MEETING

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the June 2021 meeting officially marked the first year of virtual meetings. While the pandemic slowed many activities, the SRC was able to continue business as normal. Due to technology, the SRC conducted the four quarterly meetings.

The **Order of Selection** (OOS) was explained to the SRC. It is common practice of MDRS to provide comprehensive VR services to all eligible clients. However, when resources are not sufficient to serve all clients, an Order of Selection may be implemented. MDRS has been fortunate that all categories have been opened since 2009. When an OOS is executed, it establishes a system of categorization for prioritizing individuals with the most significant disabilities providing individuals priority to receive services. Applications can still be taken during an OOS, but services will not be provided.

The **Autism Program** was highlighted by VR Program Coordinator, Jennifer Jackson. Ms. Jackson discussed various trainings that have been provided to counselors and staff that work with clients that have Autism. Continual monthly virtual trainings are being provided to assist counselors with learning from examples of past cases.

The **VRB Career Reboot** was presented to the Council. It is managed by Perkins School for the Blind. It is a young adult transition program available for anyone between 18-35 years of age, has a high school diploma and wants to achieve Competitive Integrated Employment. Two paths are offered for clients that participate in the program.

Additional State Rehabilitation Council Member Activities during FFY 2021 (June 2021 Quarterly Meeting):

NCSRC – Additional *NCSRC information* was provided to the Council. A zoom training session will be held for all SRC members regarding the purpose, regulations, and functions of the SRC.

Nomination Committee – *Nominations* for upcoming vacancies were received by the Council. The Business, Industry and Labor position is still vacant with no nominations; therefore, the search will continue for this position and all other positions will move forward for approval. All Council Members were sent copies of the nominations. The motion was made and passed to submit the current nominations for the upcoming term of the SRC to the MDRS Executive Director. Once the Executive Director has approved, the nomination letters will be sent to the Governor for confirmation.

Budget Committee - The current *financial information* was provided to the committee and the *Resource Plan* will be updated. The *SRC 3rd Quarterly Meeting* will be held in conjunction with the *Rehabilitation Association of Mississippi (RAM) Annual Conference* in Bay St. Louis, Mississippi. This meeting will be offered virtually as well.

OCTOBER 2021 MEETING

The October 2021 meeting was the first *in-person* meeting since the beginning of Covid-19 and was held in conjunction with the Rehabilitation Association of Mississippi (RAM) Annual Conference. This meeting was also offered virtually. The newly appointed State Rehabilitation

Council members were welcomed and the current members were appointed to serve their second term. MDRS staff introductions were shared with the Council members with explanations of their agency positions.

Chairman Mary Meruvia reviewed the Mississippi SRC Bylaws, the Rehab Act of 1973, and the Federal Register Sections 361.16 and 361.17 with the Council members. These document reviews detailed the guidelines for the State Rehabilitation Councils.

Executive Director Chris Howard welcomed the newly appointed members of the Council and thanked them for accepting their position on the SRC. Mr. Howard is looking forward to working with them in the future. Mr. Howard explained MDRS' programs, explained the many successes of MDRS, and highlighted MDRS' missions and goals.

Mr. Don Brown, Nomination Committee Chairman, thanked the new members for accepting the nominations, introduced each member and thanked the members who rolled off in June 2021.

LaVonda Hart, Dorothy Young, and Josh Woodward, Directors of the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind, and Business Development, respectively, introduced themselves and discussed their individual programs.

Ms. Hart provided a PowerPoint presentation titled "*WIOA Mandates a VR/SRC Partnership*" which provides the framework for the SRC role and a basic overview of the SRC partnership with VR. The presentation explained the duties and functions of the SRC Council, the requirements and rules of the RSA for the Council and reviewed the representatives required to serve on the council.

Additional State Rehabilitation Council Member Activities during FFY 2021 (October 2021 Quarterly Meeting):

The SRC Chairman *welcomed all members* of the Council to the October Meeting and the members introduced themselves. All *SRC nominations have been confirmed by Governor Tate Reeves* and certificates will be distributed at the December Meeting.

Nomination Committee – The chairman welcomed new members to the Council. The chairman recognized newly appointed members, current members and thanked members whose terms expired June 30, 2021 for their services to the Council and Mississippians with disabilities.

Budget Committee- There has been no update yet as no expenses have been incurred to date.

Additional State Rehabilitation Council Member Activities in Partnership with the Offices of Vocational Rehabilitation and Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind:

Offices of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) and Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind (OVRB):

OVR and OVRB are advocates of the State Rehabilitation Council's mission and assist the SRC with its responsibilities. The offices of OVR and OVRB provide liaison support as well as administrative, technical assistance, and coordination in support of the SRC's responsibilities. OVR and OVRB provide a VR Program Specialist as a liaison to coordinate activities between MDRS and the SRC. The VR Program Specialist and Program Officers provide administrative support, when necessary, to facilitate the work of the SRC. A Program Specialist is assigned, as requested, to assist the SRC members with specific mandated duties.

Administrative, technical, and liaison support offer the following:

- In-person meetings – coordinate dates, times, location, distribute communications and handouts to SRC Council members and attendees.
- Virtual Meetings – provide virtual meeting communications and reference handouts to SRC Council Members and attendees.
- Meals/Refreshments – coordination of meal selection, deliveries, and location.
- Communications/Bulletins – communications are distributed to members regarding quarterly meetings, special meetings, agendas, and follow up agenda items.
- Minutes – meeting recordings, preparation of the official legal record of the council meetings, and coordinate amendments to previous minutes.
- Technical Support – technical assistance is provided during meetings for presentations, etc. and coordination of technical equipment availability.
- Website – preparation and coordination through MDRS personnel for SRC communication uploads to the MDRS website.
- SRC Annual Report – prepare the SRC Annual Report and coordinate upload to the MDRS website.

Results of the Annual 2020 - 2021 SRC Consumer Satisfaction Survey

A consumer satisfaction survey is conducted four times per year to determine 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, the consumer 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 very bad and 5 being very good. Thus, a high score indicates that the service was good and a low score indicates that it was poor.

Table 1 - Service Ratings by Consumer: *The following items are rated on a scale of '1 to 5', with '1' being poor and '5' being excellent.*

Questions (1-9)	# of Consumers	Average Rating Mean
Q1 The help the OVR staff provided at the time you applied for VR services?	998	4.79
Q2 The help from the OVR staff during the planning of your services?	993	4.80
Q3 The help from the OVR staff when you were receiving your VR Services?	991	4.81
Q4 The help you received from other agencies or service providers?	176	5.54
Q7 Your employment outcome?	776	4.61
Q8 Employment benefits provided by your new employer?	394	4.13
Q9 Overall, how do you rate the services you received?	992	4.80

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

The VR and VRB Director will continue to provide the State Rehabilitation Council (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.

SRC Comment/Question: 2020 has been a difficult year. I appreciate everyone who has done out-of-the-box thinking to get services to clients and helped keep spirits high amongst clients who are feeling down or frustrated at the closeness of service due to Covid-19.

DSU Response: Yes, 2020 and 2021 have been a difficult year. However, COVID-19 did push OVR/OVRB into thinking of ways to serve clients. Some of the techniques such as providing services virtually, counselors being supplied with a cell phone to be able to work from any location to communicate with their clients, etc. More than likely, these new processes will continue and were determined to be very beneficial and needed in order to continue providing services.

SRC Comment/Question: The VRB Training Needs Survey should be disseminated to all current VRB referrals, applicants, and clients; state partners, including SRC members, School for the Blind, DD Council; IL Providers, among others and all VRB staff for dissemination and for sharing with Mississippians who experience blindness. The results will help VRB to plan the

Structured Discovery Service provision that is being proposed to best meet the needs of Mississippians who need this service.

SRC Comment/Question: I am looking forward to learning more about the goal to establish the Structured Discovery Learning program in Mississippi. This sounds like a great opportunity to keep Mississippians who need this service.

SRC Comment/Question: If the order of selection is ever initiated, please make sure consumers are aware of the process. The policy appears to follow all law and regulation. It is outstanding to think that no categories have been closed since 2009. This is impressive. This signifies to me that staff are utilizing resources very efficiently.

DSU Response: We are currently under an Order of Selection. However, all categories are open at this time. At any time that resources do not permit all eligible consumers to be served and a Priority Category has to be closed, all clients and individuals in the state will be notified.

SRC Comment/Question: The summer job programs are very exciting. Hopefully every employer will have a successful experience and see the benefit of employing our customers.

SRC Comment/Question: Combining WIPA with the Independent Living for the Blind doesn't seem to fit. It seems to overwhelm staff, which can cause delays in WIPA services and WIPA services being less intense than needed when a benefits recipient is making choices about work and benefits.

DSU Response: On August 2021, SSA suspended the 80% directive that requires 80% of WIPA referrals to originate from the Ticket to Work Help. What this means is that MPIC can accept direct referrals from any service entity until this directive is reinstated. As of August 31, 2021, MPIC has received a total of 78 referrals (46 from the Helpline and 32 from other entities). MPIC is on track to reaching the referral goal of 500. However, as you know, there are six Community Work Incentive Coordinators (CWICs) that provide direct services throughout the state. Two full-time and four part-time CWICs. The four part-time CWICs only work two days per week providing WIPA services. To ensure that all staff have an equitable caseload based on their time worked, all referrals will need to be sent to the Program Manager and referrals will be assigned based on the CWIC workload. Also, to ensure that all consumers are receiving timely and quality services, the referral process will include:

- The WIPA Program Manager will receive all referrals from service entities.
- WIPA Program Manager will assign all referrals to the CWICs.
- WIPA Program Manager will email all referral sources with the CWIC contact information and date of assignment.
- CWIC has 5 days to contact the referral (3 attempts will be made within a 10-day period)
- CWICs will follow-up with an email to the Program Manager and Referral source once contact has been made.

The WIPA Program Manager will follow up with referral source to discuss initial contact, quality of services, etc. 30 days after referral is received. These steps are being implemented so that the Program Manager can track referrals when needed, ensure that consumers are receiving timely services, and staff have an equitable caseload. MPIC's goal is timely and quality services for all consumers. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to call the Program Manager.

SRC Comment/Question: It's always nice to see positive comments. It is important to constantly check up on the negative comments, trying to see if service delivery could be better, check to help resolve complaints. The satisfaction surveys indicate overall satisfaction. It seems that both surveys should ask the same questions and use the same scale for best use. I believe that staff take customer satisfaction seriously and review the results frequently with changes made when needed to bring about better satisfaction. Spend time at the next meeting reviewing satisfaction information. How do you keep the "Bias" out of people doing surveys? Planning survey questions; administering survey, interpreting responses. Should a neutral party be contracted to develop and administer surveys?

DSU Response: The negative, or not so positive, complaints and comments are submitted to the District Manager to review and address. Normally, contact is made with the individual to help resolve the issue.

SRC Comment/Question: Who makes the survey calls? Is it done in-house or by a third party?

DSU Response: MDRS Program Integrity completed the consumer satisfaction survey for open cases and Mississippi State completes the quarterly consumer satisfaction for closed cases.

SRC Comment/Question: I think that the service delivery to MDRS employees needing accommodations can stand some improvements.

DSU Response: OVR/OVRB will continuously respond to and improve our efforts to ensure that our staff that need reasonable accommodations receive these accommodations.

SRC Comment/Question: I am excited about the idea of having Structured Discovery for our OVRB clients. I had no idea that some clients had to leave the state for an extended period of time to receive Structured Discovery. This will be a great benefit for our OVRB community. I think VR/VRB are working hard toward meeting their goals. This makes Mississippi proud.

DSU Response: The need to establish a Structured Discovery CRP and enhance the capability to services individuals with Autism and other social skills impairments can only benefit the individuals we serve and increase their ability to be successful in obtaining competitive integrated employment.

SRC Comment/Question: I'm impressed with the work the MDRS team is beginning to put in place. People in internships, establish careers opportunities and outreach to the business community. VR & VRB have continual new approaches that bring about good outcomes for people with disabilities. I was impressed to hear about the way that all high-quality services are available, even if out of state. Great work. Keep striving to get our numbers back up to pre-Covid levels. It's been a tough year and we are all thankful for the hard work to get us to the other side of the crisis.

DSU Response: OVR/OVRB continue to look for ways to expand services. We continue to increase the number of individuals who receive work-based learning experiences, internships, etc.

SRC Comment/Question: It will be exciting to see the information from the Florida vendors and how it can be implemented in Mississippi. It is great to share resources.

DSU Response: The DSU is continuously looking for ways to serve clients and provide services.

SRC Comment/Question: Very good report. I love that this area is getting the needed attention. The resources for staff prepared by your new coordinator are excellent. Resources for employers could be helpful. Training to the public could assist as well. Great Report Jennifer. I

am so glad that MDRS is focusing on the success of individuals with Autism. I love that you are collaborating on every case for individuals with Autism. That is awesome.

DSU Response: Being able to serve more individuals with Autism and help these individuals obtain competitive integrated employment is one of our goals. A new process for staffing cases for individuals with Autism was developed to ensure that cases are not closed or fall through the cracks because of the lack of receiving appropriate services. The need for more CRPs that provide services for individuals with Autism is addressed in the updated State Plan for 2022–2023.

SRC Comment/Question: This is a great report. It really helped me understand what OOS means. I am glad that all categories are currently able to receive services and that there is an appeal procedure just in case it is needed.

DSU Response: As stated, all of OVR/OVRB priority categories are open. Due to the impact of COVID-19 and access to adults and students, funds were available to provide services to all individuals who applied for and were determined eligible for services.

SRC Comment/Question: I am thankful for your efforts in writing for the funds to reimburse business owners who lost merchandise during COVID.

DSU Response: OVRB would like to thank the Committee of Blind Vendors and the MDRS Business Enterprise Program for their work and commitment to serve our clients even during COVID.

SRC Comment/Question: The VRB Career Reboot sounds like a great program. Thank you for inviting Deana Criess to present to the SRC about the program. I also appreciated Betsy Simoneaux following up by email with informative materials to the group after Deana's presentation on the VRB Career Reboot Program. I am happy to learn more about this resource and to learn that it is being utilized by people in our state.

DSU Response: OVRB will continue to monitor this program for assisting clients with finding competitive integrated employment.

SRC Comment/Question: The idea to do the brief SRC Orientation was excellent. It would be super to have an extended session. May be good for someone from NCSRC to come to Mississippi and share SRC roles, responsibilities and other state practices as an orientation for new members, current members and other parties.

DSU Response: At the December 2021 meeting, Sherry Taylor, Vice President and Treasurer of the NCSRC attended and made a presentation virtually to the SRC. Ms. Taylor discussed SRC roles and responsibilities and gave a brief overview of what a few states have done to orientate new members and current members to the SRC. She encouraged SRC participation and invited them to the national SRC meeting/training. At the October meeting, the VR Director conducted a brief orientation for new members. We will continue to provide an SRC Orientation for new members and current members. We accept the recommendation to have an extended session and will work toward this for a future meeting.

SRC Comment/Question: This agenda item was tabled due to insufficient time. The SRC agenda needs to be expanded in length of time as not to rush the presenters and as not to discourage discussion from SRC members. How will Needs Assessment be utilized? May want to have a neutral party analyze and evaluate needs assessment and how to improve and increase services as expressed in the October 13, 2021 meeting. I like how the assessments are done on open ongoing and at the end of closed cases.

DSU Response to 4H: At the December meeting, the DSU agreed that a work group, including SRC members, would be developed to carefully analyze the results of the most recent Comprehensive Needs Assessment. The DSU and the SRC will move forward with implementing this team of individuals. This will help in developing new goals and objectives as well as assist in determining ways to improve the delivery of services to individuals with disabilities.

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. 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 Pre-Employment Transition Services (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.

Training, as well as updated policy and procedures, have been implemented for staff that 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.

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

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.

B. REQUEST FOR WAIVER OF STATEWIDENESS

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

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

In 2020–2021, 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 requested a Waiver of State wideness for the following:

For Program Year 2022–2023, MDRS, Office of Vocational Rehabilitation and Office of Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind is not requesting a waiver of statewideness.

1. VR Transition Contract Employee
2. Pre-Employment Transition Service: Peer Mentoring
3. Project SEARCH

These agreements will end June 30, 2022.

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

Not applicable.

3. REQUIREMENTS OF THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN WILL APPLY TO THE SERVICES APPROVED UNDER THE WAIVER.

MDRS is not requesting a waiver of statewideness for any VR Service in 2022 - 2023.

C. COOPERATIVE AGREEMENTS WITH AGENCIES NOT CARRYING OUT ACTIVITIES UNDER THE STATEWIDE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM

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

1. FEDERAL, STATE, AND LOCAL AGENCIES AND PROGRAMS;

The Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services (MDRS), Offices of Vocational Rehabilitation and Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind, have 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 and the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind have always strived to maximize and improve the level of services afforded to individuals with the most significant disabilities. The OVR/OVRB 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 OVR/OVRB 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.

A Memoranda of Understanding clarifies and drives the WIOA required partnership between OVR/OVRB and Mississippi's One-Stop system and each of the four local workforce development areas. Moving forward, MDRS' OVR/OVRB activities include a common intake process and coordinating data sharing between agencies. Data was not available on the implementation or progress on these activities. Additional exploration may be needed to provide further clarification on activities and opportunities for improvement.

COOPERATIVE AGREEMENTS:

OVR and OVRB 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 and OVRB rely on many Cooperative Agreements, Memorandums of Agreements and contracts with various agencies, organizations and groups. These agreements govern cooperation with and use of agency and program services. These agreements include specific logistical agreements for processing interagency referrals, coordinating services and expenditures, cross training, and resolving disputes.

District and local VR/VRB district offices typically do not have formal cooperative agreements. Agreements made at the state level are intended to govern day-to-day operations in the local and district offices. **The entities that OVR is actively involved with include, but is not limited to:**

- **Department of Mental Health-Bureau of Mental Health** - OVR has implemented a statewide provision of services for individuals with severe mental illness. Beginning in 2018 to present, 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. This agreement was updated in 2021.

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.
- **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 covers 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** assists 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; Psychometric Services and Interpreting Services.
- **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, OVR/OVRB 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 also operates an Assistive Technology Program to assure the adequate and appropriate utilization of rehabilitation engineering assistance is provided to individuals with disabilities. OVR and OVRB make 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;

The Offices of Vocational Rehabilitation and Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind have 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 a USDA representative to present to VR Counselors at their District meetings.

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

Some additional non-educational agencies serving out of school youth in which VR has Memorandums of Understandings are 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 serve 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

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-OVR/OVRB staff collaborates with the Mississippi Department of Education and has updated the Memorandum of Agreement. This agreement explains how OVR/OVRB 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 updated 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.

At the state and local level, OVR/OVRB works with education officials to coordinate complementary transition services for students with disabilities. At the state level, OVR continues to evaluate the options for the most effective coordination and delivery of services to students under IDEA. Additionally, OVR continues to work with local school officials to implement Pre-ETS. Prior to making services available, OVR Counselors use school documents, health records, and other pertinent information as deemed appropriate for determining a student with a disability potentially eligible for Pre-ETS and/or the OVR Transition Program. OVR Counselors then work with classroom teachers implementing Pre-ETS. VR/VRB, in collaboration with the local education agency, will provide Pre-ETS to assist the student in developing and successfully achieving their IPE goal.

OVR and MDE are working on other ways to increase opportunities for youth, such as with the Project SEARCH program. MDRS and MDE are well positioned to continue evaluating and improving opportunities and services for youth with disabilities across the State.

Policies and procedures to facilitate the transition of students from school to receipt of VR services.

One of OVR/OVRB's 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-OVR/OVRB 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 (Pre-ETS).

The OVR/OVRB Programs will continue to work with local school officials to implement Pre-ETS. This approach provides a continuum of services directed toward additional post-secondary education or direct entry into the workforce.

OVRB 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 the 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 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.

OVR works closely with the education system throughout the state. There are approximately between 55 and 60 VR Counselors throughout the state who work in preparing students with disabilities for entry into the world of work.

The goal is to help 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.

Out of the 160 local education agencies in the state of Mississippi, OVR/OVRB has 158 agreements in place. Within these school districts, there are approximately 440 schools serving students between the ages of 14 – 21. . 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 and work with students, parents, and school personnel.

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

- Special Education Coordinator

- Principal
- Guidance Counselor for junior and seniors
- School health personnel
- 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. Participate in school-based transition activities, including conferences and meetings.
4. Participate in information and formal presentations to parent groups.
5. Provide 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. Attend local educational transition fairs and community job fairs to promote employment.
8. Participate on Transition teams.
9. Participate 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, this staff takes 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, OVR/OVRB 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. OVR/OVRB 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 is on an education/employment track upon exiting high school.
6. Each year, information is obtained from the Department of Education to provide updated Special Education staff contact information.
7. Statewide, VR will designate VR staff who are assigned high school transition to provide leadership, information and referral, advocacy and technical assistance, and to promote collaboration among consumers, parents, adult service providers and other service agencies. Designated VR Transition staff includes the Statewide Transition Coordinator and the staff designated to be a part of the Transition Team.
8. Develop a Transition Team that will include a VR representative from each District. Transition Team members will be responsible for sharing transition-related policy and practices with staff in their District. This responsibility also includes coordinating activities and training with other VR staff.

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 Office of Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind, has recently sent Qualifications Requests for third party providers to provide Pre-ETS activities in accordance with the Workforce Innovation & Opportunity Act (WIOA). At this time, three proposals have been awarded contracts and ten Requests for Proposals have been renewed.

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 OVR/OVRB 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 students 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 2021 Comprehensive Statewide Assessment, 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 developed and will implement strategies to provide Pre-ETS.

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 OVR/OVRB and MDE are described in (d) 2, between OVR/OVRB 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 OVR and OVRB
- Responsibilities of Local Education Agency
- Referral Process
- Joint Development of IEPs and IPEs
- 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,

and 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-ETS, 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-ETS and other VR services. This agreement follows the same guidelines for all cooperative agreements with the 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 OVR/OVRB 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 and IPE

before the student exits high school. The school system is responsible for inviting the student, his or her parent(s) or guardian(s), and if appropriate, representatives of participating agencies to meetings when transition is being discussed and decisions made about transition services. The VR Transition Counselor attends IEP meetings and provides 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. A VR Counselor is assigned to each public high school in Mississippi. The VR Transition Counselor(s) assigned to each school is responsible for connecting with the special education staff at each school to outreach to students with disabilities interested in competitive integrated employment. This is achieved by setting up regular office hours in the school setting. VR Counselors participate in job fairs, parent teacher conferences, teacher conferences/meetings and attend IEP meetings when invited. VR recommends that students are referred for VR services two (2) years before exiting high school. When a high school student is enrolled in VR, their IPE and IEP are complimentary to each other. VR provides services both during school, after school and during the summer. The goal is for both the IPE and IEP to include Pre-ETS provided by the school and VR in a way that best promotes the success of the student through their transition from high school to post-secondary education or employment.

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/VRB works with the school to either share the cost or determine how the service will be paid. Guidelines are provided to staff 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/VRB 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. The Interagency Agreement between VR and the Department of Education provides information about VR and the local education agency's responsibilities to provide Pre-ETS to students with disabilities from age 14-21. The VR/VRB Resource Guide

includes information and other details on how VR provides Pre-ETS, includes the VR staff requirement to document and code these services for federal reporting and the student's IPE.

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. In 2022, our Transition Navigators will assist districts with developing relationships, providing services, and increasing student referrals.

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 aged 18 or older can independently sign the release form unless he/she has a designated a legal guardian); and
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 an 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 VR/VRB Module in the AACE 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.

E. COOPERATIVE AGREEMENTS WITH PRIVATE NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

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

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-OVR/OVRB 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 are identified through resources such as:

- the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment,
- information from the State Rehabilitation Council,
- other sources of State and local data to inform decision-making, and/or
- 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-OVR/OVRB 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 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-ETS in the state was very limited. To expand the delivery of Pre-ETS and obtain providers for Pre-ETS, 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 Qualifications (RFQ), 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 RFQ 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. In 2022-2023, MDRS-OVR/OVRB will also begin

utilizing a Vendor Registration Process for Pre-ETS Providers. Providers will complete the Community Rehabilitation Program Certification and Vendor Application or Individual Service Provider Application.

F. ARRANGEMENTS AND COOPERATIVE AGREEMENTS FOR THE PROVISION OF SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

Describe the designated State agency's efforts to identify and make arrangements, including entering into cooperative agreements, with other State agencies and other appropriate entities in order to provide supported employment services and extended employment services, as applicable, to individuals with the most significant disabilities, including youth with the most significant disabilities.

OVR 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.

OVR 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 40 new Extended Service Support Plan Agreements from January 1, 2020 through June 30, 2021. These 40 new agreements are in addition to the agreements previously established and are 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 SE 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 would 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 the 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 SE 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 (SRVS)**
A Cooperative Agreement was entered into by MDRS, Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, with Shelby Residential and Vocational Services (SRVS) 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.

OVR continues to utilize Shelby Residential and Vocational Services (SRVS) as a provider for services. However, the number of consumers referred to SRVS was greatly impacted in 2019-2020 by the COVID-19 pandemic.

G. COORDINATION WITH EMPLOYERS

Describe how the designated State unit will work with employers to identify competitive integrated employment and career exploration opportunities in order to facilitate the provision of:

1. VR SERVICES; AND

WIOA specifically directs the VR program to work with employers to identify Competitive Integrated Employment opportunities and career exploration opportunities 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 82 Mississippi counties. There are twelve Business Development Representatives (BDRs) located in and across a ten-district area. Presence in the community provides the BDRs with learning the communities' workforce needs, meeting employers located in their districts, learning employers' human capital needs, and helping the VR arm of MDRS connect the needs of the businesses with the clients being served. The BDRs are located in Oxford, Tupelo, Greenwood, Starkville, Jackson, Pearl, Meridian, McComb, Laurel, and Gulfport.

Twelve OBD representatives are supported by three managers and one office assistant (two regional managers and one office director). This team trains, supports, and provides direction to the twelve BDRs and are responsible for assistance in the creation of large-scale programs with employers who want to hire on a mass scale.

In 2020, MDRS job fair efforts were hindered due to COVID-19. In fiscal year 2021, the goal was to implement three job fairs independent from the Governor's Job Fair Network. The first independent job fair was held in October 2021 in Oxford, Mississippi. It was held in conjunction with the University of Mississippi and was targeted towards college students with disabilities. Twenty-eight businesses attended the job fair. Students' attendance was less than expected; however, feedback from business partners was positive. The most common feedback was that the students were job seeking and qualified for the positions that were being offered. Two additional fairs are planned before the end of FY22. OBD will continue to target the college age individuals with disabilities exiting post-secondary and seeking employment. Plans are to geographically target the central and southern parts of the state, potentially with the University of Southern Mississippi and Jackson State University.

Sales-Minded / Business First Approach

The OBD representatives' goal is to provide multiple services and an on-going rapport with business relationships. This mindset is directly correlated with the sales approach that the office bases its strategy upon. The OBD units' goal is to understand the workforce area in which each representative is located, understand the employers within these areas, recognize the employers' needs, and how to utilize the resources of VR and MDRS (AbilityWorks, Training, etc.) to meet the employers' needs.

OBD uses a face-first approach to delivering the product. The goal is to keep the OBD representatives in the community interacting with businesses as much as possible, to be in-person with the businesses, building relationships, taking facility tours, 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 relational culture. Ultimately, by building this relationship and understanding the business, OBD can specifically pinpoint the needs of the business. Once the business needs are understood, the next step is to utilize the trainings the

OBD program provides, the services offered, and individuals the OBD represents to meet the needs of that business.

Services to Business

OBD's goal is to provide a package of services that meets a business' needs for education, support, and human capital. These needs are met through a bundle of services that BDRs are trained to provide. The OBD unit is equipped to provide training such as Disability Awareness, Customer Service, Assistive Technology, ABLE Act, etc.. The goal of the 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 have existed beforehand.

Placement has been prioritized for a long period of time. The OBD representatives carry a caseload of 'job ready' clients who are willing and ready to return to work. When approaching businesses, the first step for the BDR is exploration and fact-finding. The goal is to understand the business model and to understand the business' human capital needs. Once the representative has grasped those topics, then the BDR moves to try meeting those business needs with the job-ready client served through VR. The BDR's primary function is relationship building, understanding the client's needs, finding opportunities, and connecting the clients to those opportunities. The BDR's performance is graded on the ability to connect the clients to employment, internships, community-based opportunities, and other services the OBD provides.

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 the clients bring to the workforce and incorporate this value within the business corporate model. OBD staff meets with businesses and determines how this corporate model can be best achieved. The assessment usually determines how many individuals the business is seeking, the specific jobs and areas in which the businesses need individuals to work, training existing staff to prepare for individuals with disabilities to work there, and developing training to prepare the individuals for success when entering the workplace.

In 2019 a total of 11,245 contacts were made to businesses, 6,279 in 2020 and 9,857 in 2021. In 2020, the number of businesses contacted was impacted by COVID-19.

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

Career Exploration Services

The Office of Business Development (OBD) helps facilitate Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) by assisting students and youth and exploring different career opportunities. OBD makes business connections when providing their services, especially direct services such as recruitment assistance for internships, Community-Based Work Experiences, job shadowing, on-the-job training and business sponsored training programs. The OBD plays an integral role in assisting students and youth with disabilities in obtaining high quality employment.

The Summer Internship Program has recently expanded from a summer program geared toward students to a service designed to be provided anytime an individual needs or requires this service during the year.

In 2020, 54 students received summer internships and 73 received summer internships in 2021. The number of students that could participate was impacted by COVID-19.

The internship program is used to provide the individual with a disability 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 OVR/OVRB 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. OVR/OVRB can cover up to 320 hours to allow the person to train at no cost to the client or business.

The community-based training program is used to provide 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 see if this is an opportunity they would like to pursue or to allow the business to become sure that this client is a good fit. OVR/OVRB usually covers between 40 and 80 hours of the cost to the business.

Job shadowing is a service designed so that the individual can go into a business to see how the business operates. Clients may have a mental perspective of how a job would be that is not realistic to the actual operation of that job. This program allows the individual to observe without actually working for that partner business. This provides clarity to the job exploration process and saves valuable time on the backside of the employment process when the client is not pleased with a career goal for which they are not suited. The job shadowing experience usually last up to 40 hours for the client and partnered business.

On-the-job training is a very similar program to the internship program except 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 assuring the fit is correct in the employment process.

Project SEARCH is a program that is focused on youth. This program partners a school, a business, and a VR agency to create a ten-month internship program. The school provides a teacher and up to twelve 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 ten-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 the 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. In 2020-2021, 42 Interns participated in Project SEARCH sites at University MS Medical Center, Baptist Jackson, Baptist Attala, Merit Health-Vicksburg, South Central Regional Medical Center, North MS Medical Center and Forrest General Hospital.

MDRS Community Rehabilitation Program Services to Business

Office of Vocational Rehabilitation

AbilityWorks, Inc.

AbilityWorks, Inc. (AW), a network of Community Rehabilitation Programs (CRP), provides vocational assessment, actual work experience and work adjustment training for individuals with disabilities. This is possible through a wide array of contracts and subcontract services provided to local businesses and industry. It is a division of MDRS with 15 AbilityWorks' locations throughout the state:

Harrison County Service Areas: Hancock, Harrison, Jackson, Pearl River, Stone, George

Olive Branch Service Areas: Desoto, Marshall, Tate, Tunica

Tupelo Service Areas: Lee, Pontotoc, Itawamba, Union

Laurel Service Areas: Covington, Jasper, Jones, Smith, Wayne

Meridian Service Areas: Clark, Kemper, Lauderdale, Neshoba, Newton, Winston

Jackson Service Areas: Hinds, Madison, Rankin, Scott, Simpson, Warren

Corinth Service Areas: Alcorn, Benton, Prentiss, Tippah, Tishomingo

Starkville Service Areas: Clay, Oktibbeha, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Webster, Montgomery

Kosciusko Service Areas: Attala, Leake, Neshoba, Rankin

Columbus Service Areas: Lowndes, Clay, Monroe

Brookhaven Service Areas: Adams, Amite, Copiah, Claiborne, Franklin, Jefferson, Jefferson Davis, Lawrence, Lincoln, Marion, Pike, Walthall, Wilkerson

Greenwood Service Areas: Leflore, Carroll, Holmes, Grenada, Bolivar, Sunflower, Humphreys, Tallahatchie, Yazoo

Washington County Service Areas: Washington, Sunflower, Bolivar, Issaquena, Sharkey

Hattiesburg Service Areas: Forrest, Greene, Lamar, Perry

Oxford Service Areas: Calhoun, Coahoma, Panola, Lafayette, Quitman, Yalobusha

AbilityWorks' 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 which match their interests, 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 and has continued throughout 2021.

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.

H. INTERAGENCY COOPERATION

Describe how the designated State unit will collaborate with the State agency responsible for administering each of the following programs to develop opportunities for competitive integrated employment, to the greatest extent practicable:

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

In January 2014, by the Governor's Executive Order (1335), Mississippi state agencies were directed to ensure employment in integrated settings as the first priority option to the extent feasible.

In July 2015, MS Legislation passed HB 836 and implemented an Employment First policy for working age citizens of Mississippi with disabilities. This Act required state agencies that provide services and support persons with disabilities to consider their option of competitive integrated employment and to collaborate and coordinate services.

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 (SE) 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 works with agencies to arrange a cost-sharing agreement to provide the services the individual needs. The following guidelines are used to reach a final agreement regarding which agency is responsible for providing the service(s):

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 (SE), 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 have 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. This agreement was renewed May 1, 2020 thru April 30, 2024.

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 SE 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.

I. COMPREHENSIVE SYSTEM OF PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT; DATA SYSTEM ON PERSONNEL AND PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT

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

1. SYSTEM ON PERSONNEL AND PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT

A. QUALIFIED PERSONNEL NEEDS

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

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

The Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services (MDRS) has implemented procedures and activities within the Office of Human Resource Development (OHRD) 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 OVR/OVRB.

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 OVR/OVRB 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	

Job Title	OVR Filled Positions	OVRB Filled Positions
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 16,345 clients are 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. To properly assist counselors with caseloads, a ratio of two counselors to one 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.

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

Institutions	Students Enrolled	Degree
Jackson State University	20	Master of Science - Rehabilitation Counseling
Mississippi State University	6	Master of Science - Rehabilitation Counseling

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.

Institutions	Students Enrolled	Employees sponsored by agency and/or RSA	Graduates sponsored by agency and/or RSA	Graduates from the previous year
Jackson State University	20	3	6	7
Mississippi State University	6 (2=1 st year, 4=2 nd year)	0	0	7

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 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-OVR/OVRB 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 Department (HRD) by the OVR Program Coordinator.

In Fall 2021-Spring 2021, VR and VRB had three (3) interns from Jackson State University and six (6) interns from Mississippi State University who were receiving Master of Science 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 HR 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 (OHRD) 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.

OVR/OVRB 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. VRB has four (4) Orientation and Mobility Specialists throughout the state that work with VRB clients. Three (3) 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 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 requires 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 online 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 HRD 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. 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, for those who are Deaf or Deaf-Blind, are met using a combination of employee positions and arrangements with qualified local interpreter service providers. MDRS employs eight qualified sign language interpreters for the ten 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-VR 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 programs have 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 have 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;

MDRS-OVR/OVRB and the Mississippi State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) completed the *2018 Comprehensive Needs Assessment*. 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. MDRS-OVR/OVRB contracted with Public Consulting Group (PCG) and conducted a comprehensive statewide assessment in 2020. Results of the 2020 assessment were completed in June of 2021. The results of both assessments were used to provide an overall assessment of the rehabilitation needs of individuals residing in the state for State Plan Year 2020 - 2023.

The CSNA seeks to effectively assess OVR and OVRB consumer needs in order to inform OVR and OVRB future policy and decision-making so they can best serve their consumers and meet their rehabilitation needs. During the COVID-19 crisis, many individuals and their families continued to rely on these important services being provided by OVR/OVRB through phone calls, emails and letters in order to limit person-to-person contact to best protect both employees and individuals receiving services.

During 2020, as a result of the numerous confirmed cases of the COVID-19 in Mississippi, OVR/OVRB made the decision to restrict and/or provide limited public access to all OVR/OVRB offices across the state. OVR/OVRB continued to provide the same individualized services, just in a different way. OVR/OVRB maintains a web page at <https://www.mdrs.ms.gov/Pages/COVID-19-MDRS-Update.aspx> to provide relevant updates, resources and web links.

While OVR/OVRB took measures to support the safety of both staff and supported individuals, the work continued. During this time, OVR/OVRB:

- Received 7,604 applications
- Determined eligibility for 6,127 individuals
- Developed 5,533 IPEs

Throughout the CSNA, OVR and OVRB have the opportunity to continue momentum forward to leverage forward thinking and continue improving services and outcomes for individuals with disabilities.

The publicly available data sources were utilized to make population level estimates and statements about the population of Mississippi and the population of individuals with disabilities. Multiple data sources were utilized to develop the analysis and recommendations. Information was collected from various data sources many of which were existing data sources.

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

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 (SE) services will increase in FY 2020–2023.

Population Demographics – Disability by Age Compared to Mississippi Disabled Population (ACS, 2019)

OVR/OVRB Potential Service Population represents individuals with disabilities who could be, but are not currently, served by OVR. Individuals are considered part of the service population if they are:

1. Currently unemployed (in the labor force, but do not have a job)
2. Not receiving OVR services

To calculate the potential service population, individuals currently using OVR are removed from the population of unemployed individuals with a disability:

Unemployed individuals with a disability – Current OVR Cases Not Employed = potentially unserved individuals

OVR Potential Service Population: Number of unemployed individuals with a disability 13,028 (from the 2019 ACS one-year estimates) and subtracts the OVR currently opened OVR caseload of 6,793 to arrive at a total of 6,235 number of an additional potentially unserved individuals. (REF CSNA).

To calculate the potential service population, individuals currently using OVRB are removed from the population of unemployed individuals with a disability:

Unemployed individuals with a disability – Current OVRB Cases Not Employed = potentially unserved individuals

OVRB Potential Service Population: Number of unemployed individuals with a visual disability 4,526 (from the 2019 ACS one-year estimates) and subtracts the OVRB currently opened caseload not employed of 1,070 to arrive at a total of 3,456 number of potentially unserved individuals (REF CSNA).

The 2018 Comprehensive Needs Assessment and the 2021 Comprehensive Needs Assessment both identified the following service needs that continue to recur across both assessments related to the needs of individuals with the most significant disabilities, including the need for supported employment.

Based on 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
- College/vocational training, work experience training, on-the-job training and social skills training
- Job Search/Placement Services
- Vocational Assessment/Evaluation
- Transportation

- 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 populations
- VR and VRB collaborate with minority businesses and service providers that are located in the community to develop relationships that lead to employment
- MDRS and the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians work together to help ensure that eligible Choctaw Indians' services are coordinated to provide comprehensive VR services that will lead to employment outcomes
- Additional staff training and service provider training needed to serve the increasing number of individuals with significant mental health impairments
- Work adjustment training for individuals who have Autism and other impairments who need social skills training
- Since the number of individuals in the state working in subminimum wage employment continues to decrease, OVR/OVRB and its network of providers need to ensure ongoing capacity to meet the demand by further developing capacity to provide supported and customized employment services
- Structured Discovery Training for individuals with blindness and other visual impairments
- OVR consumers, staff, and community partners all cited additional benefits, resources for individuals with disabilities, education and training funding, more money/higher income and potential loss of benefits as some of the highest financial needs.

B. WHO ARE MINORITIES;

In comparison to population estimates, OVR reaches a proportionate number of individuals with disabilities who are minorities. According to OVR staff, the greatest needs of unserved/underserved minority individuals were outreach on the availability of services followed by more services focused on their communities.

POPULATION DEMOGRAPHICS – ETHNICITY STATISTICS

OVR statistical data displays the OVR population by ethnicity and reflects that the two largest ethnic groups represented in this sample are White (representing 60.3%) and Black or African American representing 37.1%. Multiple races accounted for 1.6% of the population, followed by American Indian or Alaska Native and Asian ethnic groups representing less than one percent each of the sample.

OVR PARTICIPANT POPULATION BY RACE*

<u>Race/Ethnicity</u>	<u>ACS % of Total - 2019</u>
American Indian or Alaska Native	0.5%
Asian	0.4%
Black or African American	37.1%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	-

White	60.3%
Multiple Races/Other	1.6%

Statistical data shows a breakdown of the **OVR** population compared to ACS totals for 2019. Non-Hispanic ethnic groups have a slightly higher representation (2.9%) than the ACS totals, and Hispanic or Latino groups have a slightly lower representation (at 0.1%) than the ACS average of 3.5%.

OVR PARTICIPANT POPULATION COMPARED TO MS POPULATION BY ETHNICITY*

Ethnicity	ACS % of Total - 2019
Hispanic or Latino	3.5%
Non-Hispanic	96.5%
Unsure	-

OVRB statistical data displays the OVRB population by ethnicity and data displays that the two largest ethnic groups represented in this sample are Black or African American (representing 51.7%) followed by White (representing 46.9%). The ethnic group Asian represents 0.6% of the population. When compared to ACS 2019 totals, the ethnic groups African American and Asian are overrepresented, and White, Multiple races/other, and American Indian or Alaska Native are underrepresented.

OVRB PARTICIPANT POPULATION BY RACE*

Race/Ethnicity	ACS % of Total - 2019
American Indian or Alaska Native	0.5%
Asian	0.4%
Black or African American	37.1%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	---
White	60.3%
Multiple Races/Other	1.6%

The statistical data displays a breakdown of the **OVRB** population by ethnicity compared to ACS totals for 2019. The Non-Hispanic ethnic group has a slightly higher representation (3%) compared to ACS totals. The Hispanic or Latino group is not represented in VRB totals vs. the ACS average of 3.5% percent.

OVRB PARTICIPANT POPULATION BY ETHNICITY

Ethnicity	ACS % of Total - 2019
Hispanic or Latino	3.5%
Non-Hispanic	96.5%
Unsure	-

- OVRB could consider expanding outreach to American Indian or Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, multiple races, and Hispanic and Latino groups to educate different cultures about available OVRB services, focusing more services on these communities, and increasing community access to OVRB offices.

**Source (Population by Race/Ethnicity): PCG relied on publicly available data sources to make population level estimates and statements about the population of Mississippi and the population of individuals with disabilities. The source of this secondary data is the American Community Survey (ACS). The ACS is the largest on-going data collection performed by the US Census Bureau and constitutes the most up-to-date and complete data on US residents. It is widely used by private and public entities to understand the population. The Rehabilitation Services Administration suggests the ACS as a resource for agencies to rely on for the CSNA process. PCG used ACS 1-year estimates in this document. The 1-year estimates report on the results of a single year of ACS surveys, with data weighted to reflect the population at that point in time. The identical percentages for OVR and OVRB are correct because used ACS Mississippi data as a baseline for both OVR and OVRB, and the ACS data does not distinguish between blind/not blind disabilities.*

Based on AACE Case Management and RSA Data dashboard information for 2019–2020 and 2020–2021, VR/VRB Participant Population by Race and Ethnicity is as follows:

Participant Population by Race and Ethnicity (2020 - 2021)	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
American Indian/Alaska Native	64	67	60	55
Asian	41	45	49	51
Black/African American	3,374	3,089	3,169	3,129
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	10	12	13	12
White	4,216	4,095	4,180	4,009
Hispanic/Latino	102	93	99	103
Multiple Races	176	76	75	70

Participant Population by Race and Ethnicity (2019 - 2020)	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
American Indian/Alaska Native	1.1%	83	80	70
Asian	0.5%	37	39	42
Black/African American	43.4%	3,299	3,477	3,327
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	0.2%	13	9	8
White	55.8%	4,312	4,523	4,235
Hispanic/Latino	1.2%	97	105	100
Multiple Races	2.5%	190	195	179

According to AACE Case Management System, the follow age groups with disabilities were served by VR/VRB for 2019–2020 and 2020–2021.

Age (2020-2021)	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
0 - 15	11	12	14	13
16 - 18	1,480	1,139	1,274	1,323
19 - 24	1,249	1,255	1,259	1,263
25 - 44	1,857	1,783	1,789	1,708
45 - 54	1,158	1,151	1,134	1,104
55 - 59	684	700	702	682
60+	1,192	1,197	1,230	1,103

Age (2019-2020)	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
0 - 15	0.1%	6	8	10
16 - 18	17.5%	1,344	1,420	1,485
19 - 24	14.9%	1,138	1,202	1,188
25 - 44	27.6%	2,080	2,127	1,871
45 - 54	15.3%	1,173	1,223	1,134
55 - 59	8.8%	695	751	692
60+	15.5%	1,214	1,303	1,218

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.
- 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.
- OVR/OVRB 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.
- OVR/OVRB 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. OVR/OVRB will also continue to provide outreach to other minority populations to ensure they have information regarding the VR program.
- Benefits Planning and Counseling.
- 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.
- Vocational Rehabilitation Counseling and Guidance.
- Transportation.
- 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.
- OVR/OVRB and the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians 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.

- Additional staff training and service provider training needed to serve the increasing number of individuals with significant mental health impairments.
- Alternative training for individuals with blindness and other visual impairments such as Structured Discovery Training.
- Explore opportunities to reduce overall successful closures and employment wage income racial groups that have been identified in the CSNA as underserved.

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

The CSNA results indicate that there may be several underserved groups. We identified disparities in outcomes for individuals with most significant disabilities and individuals who are racial and ethnic minorities. These populations (African American or Black, American Indian and Alaskan Native) experience lower rates of success in services and earn lower hourly wages compared to their peers in other groups.

OVR/OVRB will explore opportunities to reduce overall successful closure and employment wage income by:

- Learning more about the causes of disparities for individuals who are minorities and those who are most significantly disabled
- Realigning resources and supports to address the needs of these priority populations
- Exploring additional resources that may be needed to address barriers, increase work skills, and provide support
- Developing performance measures to monitor outcomes of priority populations

Specific disabilities that were identified as being underserved:

- Individuals with autism
- Individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities
- Individuals with mental health disabilities
- Individuals with vision loss

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 workforce partners can access information for common clients and all VR clients have the Workforce ID which is consistent throughout all programs.

All partner agencies completed their separate intake forms with new customers. In each of these separate forms, however, there are six diagnostic questions that are the same on all forms and multiple demographic fields that are shared between partners (Intake). These data elements are automatically uploaded into the Hub - or auto filled - if the unique identifier matches a profile that already exists in the Hub.

The WIOA Hub software development was released and launched into the production environment on May 23, 2017. The other partners came on board between January 2018 and June 2018. Once other partners went live in the Hub, MDRS began receiving ad-hoc referrals from them through the Hub directly into MDRS' case management system. Ad-hoc referrals are referrals from workforce partner agency consumers who answered yes to question two of the six diagnostic questions, which is "Do you have difficulty with seeing, hearing, talking, using your hands, getting around (mobility), interacting with others, learning, or thinking that make it difficult for you to get or keep a job?"

In the future, the PIRL for the State of Mississippi will be created through 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 and was the first partner to go live.

MDRS and other state partners are now all live in the Hub. Referrals can be made by any one of the partner agencies and based on how the individual answers the questions, ad-hoc referrals will be sent to other partner agencies through the Hub. MDRS's case management system pulls ad-hoc referrals in from the Hub each night and they are marked as Workforce Referrals. July 1, 2020–December 31, 2021, MDRS received 14,734 ad-hoc referrals from Workforce Partners. They are then worked by OVR/OVRB staff where the individual is contacted to determine if they are potential candidates for services provided by OVR/OVRB.

In 2019, OVR/OVRB received Technical Assistance and worked with WINTAC on strategies to help improve service integration with Core Partners. Work teams were held in Greenville and Belden Workforce offices. Efforts were made and are still being made to improve co-enrollment and service integration. The challenge – although connection was made with the two work teams in both Belden and Greenville and information was gained on what they are currently doing in the areas of career pathways, front-end services and business engagement the process was stymied by an inability to connect with local leadership with reduced travel due to COVID-19.

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.

OVR/OVRB has committed considerable time and resources into developing services for youth and students with disabilities. Significant progress has been made in the last two (2) years. The COVID-19 pandemic played a significant role in OVR/OVRB's ability to access and provide services to students at the same rate prior to COVID-19. Steps are being made and are continuing to be made in increasing the methods used to deliver services virtually. Also, due to the effects that COVID-19 had on accessing students with disabilities, OVR/OVRB will continue to incorporate the results of the *2018 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).

During PY 2019-2021, OVR/OVRB was impacted significantly in our ability to access and provide services to students with disabilities due the impact of COVID-19.

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%.

The Mississippi Department of Education reports over 21,000 students with disabilities.

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

	Disabled		Non-Disabled	
Characteristic	N	%	N	%
Average Age	19.1	---	18.9	---
Gender				
Male	22,865	62.8	225,926	51.0
Female	13,557	37.2	216,774	49.0
Race				
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
Other	67	0.2	8,007	1.8
Hispanic Status				

	Disabled		Non-Disabled	
Hispanic	1,907	5.2	19,392	4.4
Not Hispanic	34,515	94.8	423,308	95.6
Educational-Workforce Status (Age 16-24)				
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 11th -12th 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:

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

Pre-ETS services are made available by the counselor and Pre-ETS providers 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 below).

Based on the AACE Case Management information and RSA information, the following students received Pre-Employment Transition Services.

Provision of Pre-Employment Transition Services:

2020 - 2021	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	2019	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Job Exploration Counseling	263	0	560	1,198		1,049	1,600	2,141	860
Work Based Learning Experiences	106	173	277	774		382	668	739	198
Counseling and Enrollment Opportunities	56	62	379	717		574	842	1,136	537
Work Readiness Training	192	282	589	1,505		789	1,273	1,695	713
Instruction in Self Advocacy	222	362	641	1,651		814	1,548	1,918	903

The following data shows the number of students who received Pre-ETS per quarter.

Students with Disabilities Receiving Pre-ETS:

2020 – 2021	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Number of Students with Disabilities Reported	1,234	1,300	1,684	2,160
Number receiving Pre-ETS	389	491	1,075	1,445

2020 – 2021	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Number receiving Pre-ETS who are Potentially Eligible	257	358	634	782
Number receiving Pre-ETS who applied	132	133	441	663

Students with Disabilities Receiving Pre-ETS:

2019 – 2020	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Number of Students with Disabilities Reported	2,271	2,784	3,180	2,114
Number receiving Pre-ETS	1,488	2,130	2,559	1,218
Number receiving Pre-ETS who are Potentially Eligible	634	1,239	1,517	640
Number receiving Pre-ETS who applied	854	891	1,042	578

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, and the provision of 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.

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 accounted for 59.3% of all respondents, was a high school diploma but no additional education. Relatively sizable shares of respondents also completed the 12th grade without earning a diploma (17.6%) and gained some college experience but no college degree (8.8%).

For the remainder of this State Plan in year 2022-2023, OVR/OVRB will continue to address the rehabilitation needs of students and youth with disabilities to ensure that students received Pre-ETS.

Transportation is a major barrier for students and their ability to access work opportunities. The following have been identified as major needs for students with disabilities:

- Work-based learning experiences
- Training in self-advocacy
- Additional classes for people interested in work
- Career exploration

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

Community Rehabilitation Programs (CRP) in Mississippi provide an array of services to adults, students and youth that will assist them in achieving Competitive Integrated Employment.

Community Rehabilitation Programs to Provide Pre-ETS

According to the CSNA 2021, when considering the number and capacity of Pre-ETS providers, it is important to recognize that providers are one component of OVR Pre-ETS delivery. Given the successes reported by some Pre-ETS providers, they can be part of the solution to addressing unmet needs of youth with disabilities. OVR acknowledges that third party vendors continue to be part of the solution as they evaluate opportunities to enhance and advance opportunities for students with disabilities.

CSNA results indicate that there is a need for continued expansion of Pre-ETS, with an emphasis in work-based learning and self-advocacy. Research indicates that participation in work-based learning experiences prior to exiting high school are 4.5 times more likely to be employed after high school.

In 2017, VR recognized the need to establish and develop more relationships with providers/CRPs to assist in providing Pre-ETS. In 2017 and early 2018, Request for Proposals were advertised. In 2018, the agency is hoping to have developed more CRPs to provide such services.

In 2021–2023, thirteen (13) new Pre-ETS providers have cooperative agreements to provide these services to potentially eligible and eligible students with disabilities: Wesson-Monroe, LLC, Public Consultant Group, Inc., Mississippi Prison Industries Corporation, University of Southern Mississippi-ToTAL, National Federation for the Blind-Peer Mentoring, LIFE of Mississippi, Vocational & Rehabilitation Consultants, LLC, T.K. Martin at Mississippi State University, The ARC of Mississippi, Jobs for Mississippi Graduates, Inc., Career Development & Training Institute, Transition Workforce, Inc., and Mississippi State University-Disability Support Services .

AbilityWorks, Inc.

The Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services, through the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, operates 15 transitional rehabilitation community facilities referred to as AbilityWorks.

AbilityWorks, Inc., a network of Community Rehabilitation Programs (CRPs), provides vocational assessment, work evaluation, work adjustment training, and Community-Based Work Experience for VR consumers. 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. AbilityWorks' 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, of Olive Branch, provides job specific training for work at the Distribution Center Sephora in Olive Branch, Mississippi.

AbilityWorks locations throughout the state:

Harrison County Service Areas: Hancock, Harrison, Jackson, Pearl River, Stone, George

Olive Branch Service Areas: Desoto, Marshall, Tate, Tunica

Tupelo Service Areas: Lee, Pontotoc, Itawamba, Union,

Laurel Service Areas: Covington, Jasper, Jones, Smith, Wayne

Meridian Service Areas: Clark, Kemper, Lauderdale, Neshoba, Newton, Winston

Jackson Service Areas: Hinds, Madison, Rankin, Scott, Simpson, Warren

Corinth Service Areas: Alcorn, Benton, Prentiss, Tippah, Tishomingo

Starkville Service Areas: Clay, Oktibbeha, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Webster, Montgomery

Kosciusko Service Areas: Attala, Leake, Neshoba, Rankin

Columbus Service Areas: Lowndes, Clay, Monroe

Brookhaven Service Areas: Adams, Amite, Copiah, Claiborne, Franklin, Jefferson, Jefferson Davis, Lawrence, Lincoln, Marion, Pike, Walthall, Wilkerson

Greenwood Service Areas: Leflore, Carroll, Holmes, Grenada, Bolivar, Sunflower, Humphreys, Tallahatchie, Yazoo

Washington County Service Areas: Washington, Sunflower, Bolivar, Issaquena, Sharkey

Hattiesburg Service Areas: Forrest, Greene, Lamar, Perry

Oxford Service Areas: Calhoun, Coahoma, Panola, Lafayette, Quitman, Yalobusha

The Addie McBryde Center

Addie McBryde also provides services for consumers who are Blind or Visually Impaired 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.

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.

These facilities provide a variety of services including Vocational Evaluation, Work Adjustment Training, 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 to provide structured Discovery Training

NEED: Currently, there is only one personal adjustment training program that provides “services to groups” who are blind, deafblind, and visually impaired who are seeking Competitive Integrated Employment and independence in communities of their choice.

The Mississippi’s Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA) indicated that due to the physical location of the Addie McBryde Center, it may not be accessible for all eligible Mississippians who experience blindness or visual impairment.

These responses could be attributed to limitations in locality or district, in comparison to the location of the Addie McBryde Program. Results from the Gemini Research and Training, LLC’s survey indicated that a minority of individuals have received training in a comprehensive independent training center, but almost half (46%) indicated that they would attend in state if available.

Study results also indicated that those who completed residential training at a center were more likely to be currently employed (23%) than those who did not receive training (14%) to vision loss.

CSNA feedback on service challenges suggested that OVR/OVRB should explore expanding Community Resource Providers (CRPs) and other resources to best meet consumers’ employment related service needs. Some services currently delivered by CRPs do not conform to what is considered to be Evidence Based Practice (EBP) employment.

Over the last several years, OVRB has invested in, and worked to evaluate, whether the services offered through the Addie McBryde Center meet the needs of individual with blindness and visual impairments, or if Mississippi should consider expanding the capacity of CRPs to meet the needs of this population. OVRB works closely with the Addie McBryde Center to connect consumers with services that help them gain and maintain employment. While this resource is available, assessment results indicated that access to and knowledge of these services are limited. The Center has limited capacity and is not centrally located, hampering its ability to serve all Mississippians. In addition, OVRB’s prior survey research indicated that individuals who receive services through the Addie McBryde Center were more likely to be employed than other survey respondents.

When considering available service expansion, OVRB should explore how to increase its capacity to provide successful and effective services. The following recommendations may help OVRB increase efficacy of services:

- Expanding services for traditional and non-traditional training.

- Expanding locations of the Addie McBryde Center would allow access for consumers across the state and expand Center capacity for traditional training for consumers to obtain Competitive Integrated Employment.
- Additionally, services should be expanded in capacity and access for non-traditional training including structured discovery methodology.

COMMUNITY REHABILITATION PROGRAMS (CRP):

Community Rehabilitation Programs to better serve individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder and other individuals with Social Skills Disorders

Unemployment among individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is approximately 85%. This means that roughly two-thirds (2/3) of people with autism are not working. Currently, there is no Community Rehabilitation Program that specifically addresses the extended support needs of individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder despite research suggesting the need for more comprehensive services to improve employment outcomes. Services needed would include:

- Enhance the possibility of successful employment opportunities through individualized services to meet workforce demands and improve the lives of individuals with ASD.
- Create a more comprehensive service program through the provision of multiple services such as soft skills training, functional living skills, interviewing skills, etc. across multiple settings.
- Provide direct instruction in social interaction in multiple settings in order to increase the ability of individuals with ASD to obtain and maintain employment.
- Increase employment outcomes for individuals with ASD.
- Ultimately increase the number of tax paying citizens in the state.
- OVR AbilityWorks' providers offer a limited number of services that may not meet the diverse needs of individuals with different disabilities.
- In addition, facility- based training does not align with evidence-based practices for successful case closures.

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 Counselors servicing local school districts as well as the VR Supported Employment Counselors working together with school districts 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 (Pre-ETS) 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 beginning 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 follows-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 8th through 12th,
- 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 provides 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 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

OVR

The results of the CSNA found that according to Mississippi employment statuses of individuals with a disability (2019 ACS), only 2.7% (13,028) of individuals are classified as unemployed. In comparison to the current OVR open caseload, there are a total of 6,793 open OVR cases, leaving 6,235 potentially unserved individuals. Furthermore, an additional 369,387 individuals with disabilities were classified as 'Not in labor force'. This suggests potential for educational and outreach opportunities.

When reviewing overall demographic information it is important to highlight:

- Of the 2.7% unemployed Mississippians with a disability, OVR is already serving approximately 1.9% of that 2.7%.
- There are 6,235 potentially unserved individuals with disability that could require additional capacity to outreach and serve.
- There are 369,387 individuals with disabilities who are not in the labor force that could benefit from education and outreach.

When comparing OVR age groups to the Mississippi ACS 2019 population:

- Age group 14 to 44 is represented in higher percentages compared to the ACS.
- Age group 65 or older is represented at a much lower percentage.
- Age group 14 to 25 is represented more than five times the state average.
- Age group 25 to 34 is almost two times the state average.
- Age group 35 to 44 is approximately one and a half times the state average.
- Age group 65 and older is 29.3% less than the state average.

When reviewing age group representation across priority levels, ages 14-24 are represented highest in the 'unknown' priority at 43% which potentially eligible consumers participating in Pre-ETS activities most likely account for the majority of this group. Ages 14-24, 25-34 and 35-44 are represented highest in MSD, and ages 45-54, 55-64 and 65 and older are all represented highest in NSD. This suggests the younger age group participants have more functional limitations, which lack of work skills and experience may be contributed to this.

When reviewing overall age information, it is important to highlight:

- The age group 14 to 24 is represented more than five times the ACS state average of individuals with disabilities. This may be contributed to OVR/OVRB's focus on extending services to potentially eligible participants. For example, OVR/OVRB's emphasis on coordination with the education system to serve this population.
- Age group 25 to 34 are almost two times what would be expected.
- MSD priority levels are represented highest in ages 25-34, followed by 14-24 and 35-44. This may be due to more functional limitations and resulting from lack of work experience and skills.

- NSD is represented highest in age group 65 or older.

Analyzing population by disability status, OVR data shows participants with physical disabilities are represented highest (30.6%) followed by mental health (22.2%), deaf and hard of hearing (21.4%) and intellectual disabilities (20.6%). Regarding overall significance of disability, individuals most significantly disabled represent the highest population (28.1%). However, between priority levels, this difference is very small, approximately 1-4%.

OVRB

Looking at ACS 2019 population totals of participants in Mississippi with a vision disability by district, the Northern District population with a vision disability is 52,606 compared to 1,272 currently being served by OVRB. The Southern District population with a vision disability is 59,824 compared to 1,431 being served by VRB. According to ACS 2019, almost 60% of the Mississippi population with a vision disability are aged 55 or older, while 5.6% are aged 13 or younger.

Overall, district distribution is almost evenly spread between the Northern and Southern Districts compared to the Mississippi percentage population distribution. The overall population count of Mississippi individuals with a vision disability in the ACS 2019 are substantially higher, suggesting opportunities for outreach to expand services to more individuals with vision disabilities.

Analysis of OVRB population by age indicates the highest age group represented is aged 55-64 at 37%. When comparing age group percentages to the ACS 2019, ages 25-64 are represented in higher percentages. This means the majority of services provided to those with a vision impairment are focused on working age individuals. The age group 14-24 is slightly more represented than the state average percentage of individuals with a vision disability, a difference of less than +1.83%. However, the age group 65 and older is represented 28.6% less than the state average.

Analysis of age groups by disability priority levels reveals that participants aged 14-24 represent the highest percentage of Most Significantly Disabled (MSD) and Significantly Disabled (SD). Ages 25-34 represent the second highest percentage of MSD and SD. Ages 65 and older and 55-64 had the highest percentage of individuals with No Significant Disability (NSD). Overall, age groups 14-34 represent the highest percentage for MSD and SD; it is possible that fewer work skill experiences result in more functional limitations. Continued pre-employment services with this population, including work skill development, may help address some of these limitations.

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. This increase in numbers began to shift because of the impact of Covid-19. In fact, in 2020, OVR/OVRB served 14,003.

In 2019 (10/01/2018– 9/30/19), Vocational Rehabilitation and Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind served a total of 11,745 eligible individuals with disabilities. These percentages of increase were used to estimate the number of eligible individuals who will receive services in FFY 2020 – FFY 2023.

In 2021, OVR/OVRB observed a 4% drop in the numbers served due to the impact of Covid-19. However, with the steps being made to prevent the spread of Covid-19, we have to see at least a 2% increase in numbers served in 2022-2023.

Estimated Total Number who applied for services and/or were determined eligible for services.

FFY	Number of Clients who will receive services
2020	13,289
2021	13,074
2022	13,336
2023	13,603

B. THE SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM; AND

In FFY 2019, Mississippi VR provided Supported Employment services to 422 individuals at a total cost of \$1,213,666.64. In FFY 2020, 423 individuals at a total cost of \$1,513,768.50. In 2021, 384 individuals received SE services at a cost of \$1,741,430.47. The decrease in individuals receiving services in 2020 and 2021 is due to the effects of the national pandemic COVID-19. Many businesses/employers were closed or hiring was slow due to the fear of the spread of COVID-19. In 2022–2023, with the steps being made to prevent the spread of COVID-19, we are in hopes that we have more individuals in need of SE services.

In 2022, VR estimates that we will serve approximately 475 individuals in Supported Employment. In 2023, VR estimates that we will serve approximately 535 individuals in Supported Employment

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

Mississippi OVR/OVRB 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.

MDRS – VR TITLE IV STATE PLAN PYs 2022-2023 (MOD TO STATE PLAN 2020-2023)

FFY	PC 1 Served	PC1 Cost
2020	4,567	22,161,087.01
2021	4,439	27,944,912.29
2022	4,528	28,503,810.54
2023	4,619	29,073,886.75
FFY	PC 2 Served	PC 2 Cost
2020	4,489	23,080,277.62
2021	4,609	27,944,912.29
2022	4,701	28,503,810.54
2023	4,795	29,073,886.75
FFY	PC 3 Served	PC 3 Cost
2020	4,233	15,288,433.75
2021	4,026	15,132,695.93
2022	4,107	15,435,349.85
2023	4,189	15,744,056.85
FFY	Total Served	Total Cost
2020	13,289	60,529,798.38
2021	13,074	71,022,520.51
2022	13,336	72,442,970.93
2023	13,603	73,891,830.35

Title I Funds

For FFY 2020 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 2021.

Social Security Reimbursements

During Program Year 2020, VR collected \$1,645,442.20 in Social Security Reimbursements. In Program Year 2021, MDRS collected \$2,346,233.84 in reimbursement and anticipate this will remain around the same amounts for FY 2022 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 2021 and 2022, VR did not request additional federal funds and does not anticipate requesting additional federal funds through the reallotment process for FY 2022-2023.

Pre-Employment Transition Services

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

L. STATE GOALS AND PRIORITIES

The designated State unit must:

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

The 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, and 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.
- Increase the number of individuals closed rehabilitated with a Supported Employment Outcome.

Through outreach, education and marketing efforts targeted to individuals with disabilities, OVR/OVRB 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.

OVR/OVRB will continue to target individuals with disabilities who are already working to retain or progress in employment, previous OVR/OVRB 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 are 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 of 504 Services 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 State Rehabilitation Council (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 the 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, we anticipate, 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.

Goal 1:

Expand locations of the Addie McBryde Center to allow access for consumers across the state and expand Center capacity for traditional VR blindness training for consumers to obtain competitive integrated employment

Establish an additional VR training for blindness with nontraditional training including structured discovery methodology

Goal 2:

Increase application and number of service providers of evidence base practices to increase successful competitive integrated employment outcomes of individuals who are blind and visually impaired

Establish an additional VR training for blindness with nontraditional training for structured discovery methodology

Goal 3:

Explore evidenced based practices to create successful services models and processes, and leverage community resources to address OVRB capacity and service needs.

Goal 4:

Explore opportunities to streamline vendor management and create efficiency in process.

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

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 (OOS) 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 - OVR/OVRB 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 is an *Individual with a 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.

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

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, *Individual with a Disability*.

C. THE SERVICE AND OUTCOME GOALS

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

During FFY 2021, all Priority Categories have remained open. MDRS has sufficient funds to service all individuals who apply for services. For FFY 2022-2023, 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 (OOS) 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. Individual with a Disability: Individual with a *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-OVR/OVRB 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 includes 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, OVR/OVRB will make the adjustment. No consumer will be moved to a lower Priority Category.

N. GOALS AND PLANS FOR DISTRIBUTION OF TITLE VI FUNDS

1. SPECIFY THE STATE'S GOALS AND PRIORITIES FOR FUNDS RECEIVED UNDER SECTION 603 OF THE REHABILITATION ACT FOR THE PROVISION OF SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

For PY 2020–2023, MDRS will continue to invest all Title VI allocations to fund the purchase of Supported Employment Services services after the individual has been placed in employment. 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 Supported Employment (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.
- Services can be provided statewide virtually or in-person.

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 Supported Employment (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 referred to 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

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 natural language or preferred 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 Statewide 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 continues to utilize 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 this population has the 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 are 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.
- Continue to partner with the MDE Transition Team

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-OVR/OVRB will continue to request proposals (RFP) 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 the contract with Shelby Residential and Vocational Services, the following services can now be provided by an 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.

Office of Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind is proposing to increase the number of Community Rehabilitation Programs (CRPs) to establishment a program that provides one or more Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) services to individuals are blind, deafblind, and or visually impaired to enable those individuals to maximize their opportunities for employment, including career advancement (34 C.F.R. 361.5 (c) (7)). The program would be a state operated center, operated by VR staff. The program will be housed in a rented renovated building located in the Southern region of Mississippi.

The proposed state operated CRP for the blind will seek RSA prior approval to allow Mississippi VR to establish a second program in the form of a Model Demonstration Project that will be based on the methods and principles that undergird “Structured Discovery Instruction, belief, and philosophy for persons who are blind and visually impaired to demonstrate that having an additional alternative training method formerly known as “Structured Discovery” will help maximize opportunities for employment, including career advancement (34 C.F.R. & 361.5(c)(7)). Currently, there are no residential training centers exclusively using non-visual techniques through use of sleep shades or the practice of structure discovery cane travel in Mississippi.

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. This is referred to as the ‘Hub’ and we 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 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 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 2016 until June 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 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 OVR/OVRB 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 takes 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-OVR/OVRB will continue to work with workforce partners to provide 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 accessibility for individuals with disabilities. Assistive Technology staff provides 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 is assigned to each of the workforce area boards and attend quarterly meetings. This information is shared and communicated with VR staff and assists 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 attended: 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/VRB staff in District 3 and VR/VRB Staff in District II. In collaboration with the Workforce areas and the OVR/OVRB 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 programs. Aligning systems assists 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. In December 2021, a WIOA State Plan Working meeting was held.

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 OVR/OVRB 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.
- OVR/OVRB 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 to 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, colleges and universities.
- Continue 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 (SRC). The SRC's 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.
- The agency and the SRC currently have a SRC budget that provides support for all SRC activities, training, and innovation and expansion activities. Through these funds, the SRC has advised and provided input in expansion of services directed at consumers who are blind for the additional CRPs and individuals with Autism and other development disabilities.
- The listed activities below are a continuation of expansion of current practices. However, in 2021-2022, the CSNA provided innovation and expansion recommendations that include, but not limited to:
 1. Develop and expand work based learning opportunities for individuals who have significant disabilities, including blindness.
 2. Innovation of customized employment opportunities for the blind.

3. Develop and expand CRPs that provide services, Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS), and employment services with a vocational rehabilitation outcome of Competitive Integrated Employment.
4. Expand the Community Rehabilitation Program for the blind, deafblind, and or visually impaired to address the employment outcomes and independence for VR consumers with significant disabilities.
5. Expand the Community Rehabilitation Program for individuals with Autism and other social skills disorders.

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 to just obtain employment but maintain employment. The goals and strategies will assist in ensuring that the individuals are provided services in which they not only 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 OVR/OVRB 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 needed in order to be willing to accept employment opportunities and be able to receive the services individuals need while preparing for employment.

P. EVALUATION AND REPORTS OF PROGRESS: VR AND SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT GOALS

Describe:

1. AN EVALUATION OF THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE VR PROGRAM GOALS DESCRIBED IN THE APPROVED VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN FOR THE MOST RECENTLY COMPLETED PROGRAM YEAR WERE ACHIEVED. THE EVALUATION MUST:

A. IDENTIFY THE STRATEGIES THAT CONTRIBUTED TO THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THE GOALS

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 and employment outcome from 2018 to 2019. Due to the impact of COVID-19 OVR saw a 12% decrease in the number of individuals that obtained employment, however 2710 individuals achieved competitive integrated employment in 2020 and 2375 achieved competitive integrated employment in 2021. There was a 50% increase in VRB consumers that obtained an employment outcome from 2018 to 2019. Due to the impact of COVID-19 OVRB saw a 32% decrease in the number of individuals that obtained employment in 2020, however 352 individuals obtained competitive integrated employment and in 2021 239 obtained competitive integrated employment.
- In 2019, the Measurable Skill Gain (MSG) rate was 59.8% and in 2020 MSG for consumers served was 72.4%
- The median hourly wage for individuals exiting the VR/VRB program with an employment outcome has increased. In 2018 median wage was \$11.54 and the median hours worked per week was 40 hours. In 2019 the median wage increased to \$12.00 per hour and in 2020 the median wage increased to \$13.00.
- In 2018-2019, 5,182 new IPE were signed, in 2019 -2020, 4,960 IPEs were signed, 2020-2021, 4,564 IPEs were signed.
- 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. Due to COVID-19, Transition Conferences were postponed in 2019 -2021.
- VR Career Counselors in 2019, assisted 267 clients received Job Prep and Job Ready Services. VR Career Counselors continue to assist clients become 'Job Ready'. In 2020, 729 consumers received job prep services, 442 received job search and 225 clients received job placement. In 2021, 363 received job prep and 284 received job search services and 130 received job placement.
- The 7th Annual Summer Internship for Students with Blindness was completed in 2019. Fourteen (14) students participated.
- In 2021, 8th Annual Summer Internship for Students with Blindness was completed and eight (8) students participated. The 2020, Annual Summer Internship was postponed due to COVID-19. Four (4) consumers were hired into competitive integrated employment after completing their internship.

- 626 clients received Benefits Counseling from our Community Work Incentive Partners in 2019. 490 VR consumers received Benefits Counseling and 487 VR consumers in 2021. The number that received Benefits Counseling were impacted by COVID-19
- 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.
- 6276 individual contacts to business in the state of Mississippi were made in 2020. COVID 19 had an impact on the number of businesses contacted.
- 9857 individual contacts to business in the state of Mississippi were made in 2021
- 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. Due to COVID-19, Job Fairs in 2020 were cancelled.
- In October 2021, Job Fair held in conjunction with the University of Mississippi that targeted college students with disabilities. Twenty-eight businesses attended
- Seventy students (72) with disabilities participated in the Student Summer Internship Program (SIP) in 2019. Fifty-four (54) students participated in 2020 and seventy-three (73) participated in 2021.
- 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).
- In 2020 -2021, Forty-two (42) individuals with disabilities participated in Project SEARCH and existing and new partnerships were created with the University MS Medical Center, Baptist Jackson, Baptist Attala, Merit Health-Vicksburg, South Central Regional Medical Center, North MS Medical Center and Forrest General Hospital.
- 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.
- In 2020, 31 individuals with disabilities received Sephora Distribution Center Training and 15 were hired. In 2021, 25 received training and ten were hired.
- In 2018, the Business Enterprise Program (Randolph Sheppard) had five new vendors open businesses. In 2019-2020, five new vendors opened and in 2020-2021, two new vendors opened.

- In Summer 2021, the first Summer Pre-ETS Work-Based Learning Program was implemented. One Hundred-three (103) participated in the program. These students were placed with employers throughout the state in their local communities.

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.
- In 2021, RL Brown Group began translating brochures in Spanish beginning with our Transition and Youth Services Brochure
- VR has sixty seven (67) individuals whose primary language is Spanish as a result of the outreach and translation of forms and brochures.
- 189 individuals signed and developed a Career Pathway IPE in 2019, 152 in 2020 and 2021 in 136. 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. In 2020, 548 individuals received SE services.
- VR staff work in partnership with other agencies such as the Department of Mental Health, Bureau of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities. The Memorandum of Understanding with the Department of Mental Health was renewed for May 1, 2021 through April 30, 2024.
- Autism Spectrum Disorders - Two new providers entered into contracts to provide evaluation and assessment services to individuals with Autism and other significant disabilities. These provider contracts have been renewed.
- In 2018, 311 individuals with autism were provided VR Services. In 2019, the number of individuals with autism increased to 449, 2020 the number served increased to 604 and in 2020 the number served increased to 628.
- In 2021 and new Interagency Agreement was established with TEAAM that provides services to individuals with autism spectrum disorders, attention deficit disorder, specific learning disability and other intellectual and development disorders.
- The 3rd Annual VR Deaf Pre-ETS Summer Program was held by the Deaf Services Program at Eagle Ridge in July 2019. The DEAF Pre-ETS Summer Program was postponed in 2020 and 2021 due to COVID-19.
- 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. VR will continue to move toward implementing the Outreach and Orientation

Program. Progress on implementing has been delayed in 2020 and 2021 due to COVID-19 and staff shortages.

- Supported Employment Job Skills Manual and training was 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 renewed for January 1, 2020 through June 30, 2022. In 2020 -2021, all Memorandum of Agreements with local education agencies were updated.
- In 2019, 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.
- In 2020 through 2021, Interagency Agreements for Peer Mentoring have been executed with East Mississippi Community College/Student Support Services, August 1, 2020 – July 31, 2023; Northwest Mississippi Community College/Success Center – September 1, 2020 – July 31, 2023; Mississippi State University/Disability Resource Center – June 1, 2021 – June 30, 2023, and the University of Southern Mississippi – June 1, 2021 – June 30, 2023.
- 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 stakeholders 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. Due to COVID -19 further work on the Integration Continuum was halted.

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 3rd Annual VR Deaf Pre-ETS Summer Program was held by the Deaf Services Program at Eagle Ridge in July 2019. In July 2019, the 4th Annual Pre-Employment Transition Camp for Students with Deafness was held.
- 14 Students with Blindness participated in the OVRB 6th Summer Internship Program.
- VR served 3,609 students with disabilities and VRB served 676 students with disabilities for a total of 4,285. This is an increase of 486 students from 2018.
- In 2020, OVR served 3595 eligible and potentially eligible students with disabilities. This is a decrease from 2019 due to COVID-19 and the limited access to students.
- In 2020, OVRB served 301 eligible students with disabilities. This is a decrease from 2019 due to COVID-19 and the limited access to students.

- In 2021, OVR/OVRB served 2605 eligible students with disabilities and 1,292 potentially eligible students with disabilities.
- 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. In 2020 through 2021, Peer Mentoring will be provided at East Mississippi Community College and Northwest Mississippi Community College/Success Center – Pre-Employment Transition Services were provided through OVR’s partnership with the Mississippi State University - T.K. Martin Center through on-campus internships. COVID-19 impacted this partnership in 2019–2020. Contracts were renewed and as steps are being made to prevent the spread of COVID-19 as we look forward to this partnership.
- 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. This contract will continue in 2021–2022.
- Pre-Employment Transition Services were provided through VRB’s partnership with the National Federation of the Blind through two Transition conferences. This contract will continue in 2020–2022.
- Pre-Employment Transition Services were provided through OVR’s partnership with Life of MS through two different one-day transition conferences across the state. This contract will continue in 2020-2022
- Pre-Employment Transition Services were provided through OVR’s partnership with Vocational & Rehabilitation Consultants, LLC through one three-day conference. This contract was impacted by COVID-19.
- 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. This contract will continue in 2020–2022 and many activities provided are virtual.

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 OVR/OVRB 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 are 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 goals, significant progress was made to increase the goals.

Some of the factors that impeded the achievement of the goals and priorities were:

- High staff turnover experiences over the last few years affected VR’s ability to provide consistent, high-quality services to consumers as referenced in the CSNA;

- The effects of COVID-19 affected our ability to provide access to needed services due to the nation and statewide shutdown of schools and businesses;
- Increasing number of referrals for Pre-Employment Transition Services and Transition Services; and
- 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 Supported Employment (SE) program for 2020:

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

Report of Progress:

- 29 referrals were received from the IDD Waiver Program
- 92 referrals for individuals with serious mental illness were received from the Department of Mental Health.
- 583 individuals received CCIR referrals that were in 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:

- 59 Job Coaches hired to provide job training services.
- 55 Individuals placed in employment
- 51 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.
- In 2020–2021, Seven (7) 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. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this joint training was placed on hold.

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. Counselors 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 certifies providers for SE services.
- In 2021 – 2022, three new contracted Navigator positions will be filled to generate referrals and manage potentially eligible caseloads;
- Monthly Transition Meetings that include Training topics will continue through 2022. These are held virtually.
- Transition and Youth Services Resource Guide was updated.
- OVR was approved to add ten new VR Counselor positions. The positions were not available for recruitment until after July 2021.

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

OVR/OVRB 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 Counselor and/or VTI vacancies which causes a delay in service and sometimes the quality of service provided is impacted;
- The number of referrals received from cooperative partners and Transition Counselors decreased since the start of the pandemic, therefore decreasing the caseload size, workload and/or services provided;

- SE Counselors understanding cooperative agreements with other programs and the services other programs provided such as the IDD Waiver and Severe Mental Illness;
- The lack of trained and reliable job skills trainers throughout the state;
- Vocational Training Instructors are limited in training and skills;
- The current tracking system for SE referrals is insufficient;
- The lack of training for SE Counselors;
- High staff turnover experiences over the last few years affected the VR's ability to provide consistent, high-quality services to consumers as referenced in the CSNA; and
- The effect COVID-19 which caused a national pandemic which affected our ability to provide services due to school and business closures.

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

The Workforce Partners in Mississippi worked 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 worked 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 completed their separate intake forms with new customers. In each of these separate forms, however, there are **six diagnostic questions** that are the same on all **forms and multiple demographic fields that are shared between partners (Intake)**. These data elements are automatically uploaded into the Hub - or auto filled - 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 and was the first partner to go live.

The WIOA Hub software development was released and launched into the production environment on May 23, 2017. The other partners came on board 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.

MDRS and other state partners are now all live in the Hub. Referrals can be taken by any one of the partner agencies and based on how the individual answers the questions, referrals will be sent to other partner agencies through the Hub. MDRS' Case Management System retrieves referrals from the Hub nightly and they are marked as Workforce Referrals. They are then worked by MDRS staff where the individual is contacted to determine if they are potential candidates for services provided by MDRS.

MDRS submits requests and receives multiple quarters of wage data from MS Department of Employment Services (MDES) quarterly. MDRS then imports that data into MDRS' Case Management System which is then used in the RSA-911 performance measures submitted each quarter.

Alliance is the vendor that provides the Case Management System (Aware) for the Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services (MDRS) and for the OVR/OVRB `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.

- The Workforce Partners meet periodically to discuss how to enhance the Hub to better serve individuals.
- WIOA/RSA-911 User Group meets periodically throughout the year.
- Aware VR User Group monthly.
- There is an Aware Community of Practice User Group made up of Rehabilitation Services agencies all over the United States that meet periodically throughout the year.
- 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 (ETA-9169).
- MDRS continues to request and receive multiple quarters of wage data from MDES for the RSA-911 performance measures.

The Primary Indicators of Performance are:

1. Unsubsidized Employment During the 2nd Quarter After Exit
2. Unsubsidized Employment During the 4th Quarter After Exit
3. Median Earnings
4. Credential Attainment Rate
5. Measurable Skill Gain
6. Indicator(s) of Effectiveness in Serving Employers

A. Percentage of program participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the second quarter after exit from the program.

The Office of Vocational Rehabilitation and Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind has in place a data sharing agreement with the Mississippi Department of Employment Security UI wage, to allow us to capture data for quarterly reporting of earnings and employment. VR/VRB will need to establish additional data sharing agreements to allow us to capture out of state data to ensure the full measuring of earnings for VR/VRB participants who exit the program. VR/VRB has also added a process to allow staff to collect self-employment earnings and employment success.

- Achieved PY 2020 – 2455 Individuals Employment (Q2) Rate 52.9%
- Projection 52.9%

B. The percentage of program participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the fourth quarter after exit from the program.

The Office of Vocational Rehabilitation and Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind has in place a data sharing agreement with the Mississippi Department of Employment Security UI wage, to allow us to capture data for quarterly reporting of earnings and employment. VR/VRB will need to establish additional data sharing agreements to allow us to capture out of state data to ensure the full measuring of earnings for VR/VRB participants who exit the program. VR/VRB has also added a process to allow staff to collect self-employment earnings and employment success.

- Achieved PY 2020 – 2282 Individuals Employment (Q4) Rate 51.3%
- Projection 53%

C. The median earnings of program participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the second quarter after exit from the program.

The Office of Vocational Rehabilitation and Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind has in place a data sharing agreement with the Mississippi Department of Employment Security UI wage, to allow us to capture data for quarterly reporting of earnings and employment. VR/VRB will need to establish additional data sharing agreements to allow us to capture out of state data to ensure the full measuring of earnings for VR/VRB participants who exit the program. VR/VRB has also added a process to allow staff to collect self-employment earnings and employment success.

- Achieved PY 2020 - \$6003.76
- Projection \$6073.00

D. The percentage of program participants who obtain a recognized postsecondary credential or a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent one year after exit from the program.

VR/VRB AWARE case management system records and captures Educational/Training goal information that records program participants who have received a recognized postsecondary credential or a secondary school diploma. Staff has been training in and provided procedures on how to document the Educational Goal page and the documentation that is required. VR/VRB is also registered with and obtains information from the National Student Clearinghouse that provides data and helps confirm academic credentials.

- Achieved PY 2020 – 52 Individuals Credential rate 21.1%
- Projection 24.7%

E. The percentage of program participants who, during a program year, are in an education or training program that leads to a recognized postsecondary credential or employment and who are achieving measurable skill gains toward such a credential or employment.

VR/VRB AWARE case management system allows staff to record Measurable Skill Gain for each participant that is identified in a secondary or postsecondary education or training program. Staff has been training and provided procedures on how to document the individuals Educational Goal record and update this page when Measurable Skill Gains are achieved.

- Achieved for PY 2020 – 1159 Individuals MSG Rate 69.7%
- Projection 69.8%

F. Indicator(s) of Effectiveness in Serving Employers

- Not Applicable

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 (I&E) funds to assist in carrying out the duties of the State Rehabilitation Council. 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

Pre-Employment Transition Services Providers and Services

Funds will be used to expand pre-employment and transition providers and services to students with disabilities by creating contract Transition Navigators. Additional contract transition staff will help expand services and assist OVR/OVRB provide access to these needed services. Based on information from the Mississippi Department of Education, there are over 22,000 students in the state with disabilities.

In 2020–2021, over thirteen (13) new Pre-ETS providers were contracted with to provide Pre-Employment Transition Services. The Transition Contract Employees will end effective June 30, 2022. VR/VRB will continue to add new Pre-ET providers. Progress has been made to advertise and hire three Transition Navigators. To date, only two (2) Transition Navigators have started.

Social Skills Classes for Individuals with Autism and other related disabilities with social challenges

Consumers with Autism Spectrum Disorder are having difficulty getting and keeping employment due the deficits in social skills and communication skills. Some can perform job tasks, but do not have appropriate social and soft skills necessary to be successfully employed. Once they have completed high school, many feel isolated due their lack of structured social interactions like they had in school. Plans are to create a group-based social skills class for students/youth who have Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) or related disabilities with social challenges. These classes will assist these individuals in making a smoother

transition from adolescents to adulthood, increase peer relations and increase the likelihood of gaining and maintaining employment.

Social Skills Classes are currently being developed and providers being identified. We are planning to have providers and these classes start in 2022.

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.

In 2020 – 2021, twelve (12) Project SEARCH sites were added.

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 started initial conversation and collaboration.

Staff received training in Customized Employment and a new provider identified in 2020 that will not be able to provide Customized Employment Services.

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 Supported Employment 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 14 counselors, 11 VTIs, and a pool of available Job Skills Trainers 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. 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 the 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 Skills Trainers or through natural supports.

2. THE TIMING OF TRANSITION TO EXTENDED SERVICES

Job Stabilization is determined for each client in SE based on his/her unique circumstances. The Counselor determines the client's work performance is stabilized with input from the client, Job Skills Trainer, VTI, employer and extended service provider. Stabilization occurs when the client has demonstrated that he/she can perform the job to the employer's expectations. In addition, there should be a concurrent agreement between client, parent/legal representative, SE Counselor, Vocational Trainer Instructor, Job Skills Trainer and Extended Service provider that the client can perform the essential functions of his job with the provisions of Extended Services. The agreement should be the outcome of a meeting between the above parties. The Extended Service Support Plan Agreement (MDRS-SE-02) should also be signed during this meeting.

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. This transition must not occur until all aspects of the client's placement indicate that the employment situation is secure and consistent with the client's functional capabilities and employment factors. It is at this point, the SE Counselor enters the job stabilization date on the AACE Employment page, moving the client's case into *Employed* status.

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 would 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

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

Signatory information	Chris Howard
Name of Signatory	Chris Howard
Title of Signatory	Executive Director, MS Department of Rehabilitation Services
Date Signed	3/3/2022

(Comment: Original scan of the MDRS Certification Signature is below)

CERTIFICATION SIGNATURE

Signatory information	Chris Howard	
Name of Signatory	Chris Howard	
Title of Signatory	Executive Director, MS Department of Rehabilitation Services	
Date Signed		3/3/2022

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
<p>1. Public Comment on Policies and Procedures: The designated State agency assures it will comply with all statutory and regulatory requirements for public participation in the VR Services Portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan, as required by section 101(a)(16)(A) of the Rehabilitation Act.</p>	
<p>2. Submission of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and Its Supplement: The designated State unit assures it will comply with all requirements pertaining to the submission and revisions of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement for the State Supported Employment Services program, as required by sections 101(a)(1), (22), (23), and 606(a) of the Rehabilitation Act; section 102 of WIOA in the case of the submission of a unified plan; section 103 of WIOA in the case of a submission of a Combined State Plan; 34 CFR 76.140.</p>	
<p>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:</p>	
<p>3.a. The establishment of the designated State agency and designated State unit, as required by section 101(a)(2) of the Rehabilitation Act</p>	
<p>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):</p>	

MDRS – VR TITLE IV STATE PLAN PYs 2022-2023 (MOD TO STATE PLAN 2020-2023)

The State Plan must include	Include
3.b.(A) “is an independent State commission” (Yes/No)	No
3.b.(B) “has established a State Rehabilitation Council” (Yes/No)	Yes
3.c. Consultations regarding the administration of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan, in accordance with section 101(a)(16)(B) of the Rehabilitation Act	
3.d. The financial participation by the State, or if the State so elects, by the State and local agencies, to provide the amount of the non-Federal share of the cost of carrying out the VR program in accordance with section 101(a)(3)	
3.e. The local administration of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan, in accordance with section 101(a)(2)(A) of the Rehabilitation Act. Select yes or no, as appropriate, to identify if the designated State agency allows for the local administration of VR funds (Yes/No)	No
3.f. The shared funding and administration of joint programs, in accordance with section 101(a)(2)(A)(ii) of the Rehabilitation Act. Select yes or no, as appropriate, to identify if the designated State agency allows for the shared funding and administration of joint programs (Yes/No)	No
3.g. Statewideness and waivers of statewideness requirements, as set forth in section 101(a)(4) of the Rehabilitation Act. Is the designated State agency requesting or maintaining a waiver of statewideness for one or more services provided under the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan? (Yes/No) See Section 2 of this VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan	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	

The State Plan must include	Include
3.j. The requirements for the comprehensive system of personnel development, as set forth in section 101(a)(7) of the Rehabilitation Act	
3.k. The compilation and submission to the Commissioner of statewide assessments, estimates, State goals and priorities, strategies, and progress reports, as appropriate, and as required by sections 101(a)(15), 105(c)(2), and 606(b)(8) of the Rehabilitation Act	
3.l. The reservation and use of a portion of the funds allotted to the State under section 110 of the Rehabilitation Act for the development and implementation of innovative approaches to expand and improve the provision of VR services to individuals with disabilities, particularly individuals with the most significant disabilities	
3.m. The submission of reports as required by section 101(a)(10) of the Rehabilitation Act	
4. Administration of the Provision of VR Services: The designated State agency, or designated State unit, as appropriate, assures that it will:	
4.a. Comply with all requirements regarding information and referral services in accordance with sections 101(a)(5)(D) and (20) of the Rehabilitation Act	
4.b. Impose no duration of residence requirement as part of determining an individual's eligibility for VR services or that excludes from services under the plan any individual who is present in the State in accordance with section 101(a)(12) of the Rehabilitation Act	
4.c. Provide the full range of services listed in section 103(a) of the Rehabilitation Act as appropriate, to all eligible individuals with disabilities in the State who apply for services in accordance with section 101(a)(5) of the Rehabilitation Act? (Yes/No)	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	

The State Plan must include	Include
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	

The State Plan must include	Include
<p>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</p>	
<p>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</p>	
<p>6. Financial Administration of the Supported Employment Program:</p>	
<p>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</p>	
<p>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</p>	
<p>7. Provision of Supported Employment Services:</p>	<p>Yes</p>

The State Plan must include	Include
7.a. The Designated State Agency Assures That it Will Provide Supported Employment Services as Defined in Section 7(39) of the Rehabilitation Act	
7.b. The designated State agency assures that:	
7.b.i. The comprehensive assessment of individuals with significant disabilities conducted under section 102(b)(1) of the Rehabilitation Act and funded under title I of the Rehabilitation Act includes consideration of supported employment as an appropriate employment outcome, in accordance with the requirements of section 606(b)(7)(B) of the Rehabilitation Act	
7.b.ii. An individualized plan for employment that meets the requirements of section 102(b) of the Rehabilitation Act, which is developed and updated with title I funds, in accordance with sections 102(b)(3)(F) and 606(b)(6)(C) and (E) of the Rehabilitation Act	

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAM PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Performance Goals for the Core Programs

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Performance Indicators	PY 2022 Expected Level	PY 2022 Negotiated Level	PY 2023 Expected Level	PY 2023 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	52.0	54.0	52.0	55.0
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	52.0	52.0	52.0	53.0
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	5788.0	6073.0	6077.0	6194.0
Credential Attainment Rate	21.0	24.7	21.0	26.7
Measurable Skill Gains	20.0	69.8	21.0	69.9
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹

¹ The Departments have not issued the final rule defining Effectiveness in Serving Employers. As a result, states will not submit expected levels of performance for this indicator and the Departments will not establish negotiated levels of performance for PYs 2022 and 2023.

CERTIFICATION REGARDING LOBBYING

Certification for Contracts, Grants, Loans, and Cooperative Agreements

The undersigned certifies, to the best of his or her knowledge and belief, that:

(1) No Federal appropriated funds have been paid or will be paid, by or on behalf of the undersigned, to any person for influencing or attempting to influence an officer or employee of an agency, a Member of Congress, an officer or employee of Congress, or an employee of a Member of Congress in connection with the awarding of any Federal contract, the making of any Federal grant, the making of any Federal loan, the entering into of any cooperative agreement, and the extension, continuation, renewal, amendment, or modification of any Federal contract, grant, loan, or cooperative agreement.

(2) If any funds other than Federal appropriated funds have been paid or will be paid to any person for influencing or attempting to influence an officer or employee of any agency, a Member of Congress, an officer or employee of Congress, or an employee of a Member of Congress in connection with this Federal contract, grant, loan, or cooperative agreement, the undersigned shall complete and submit Standard Form-LLL, "Disclosure of Lobbying Activities," in accordance with its instructions.

(3) The undersigned shall require that the language of this certification be included in the award documents for all subawards at all tiers (including subcontracts, subgrants, and contracts under grants, loans, and cooperative agreements) and that all subrecipients shall certify and disclose accordingly. This certification is a material representation of fact upon which reliance was placed when this transaction was made or entered into. Submission of this certification is a prerequisite for making or entering into this transaction imposed by section 1352, title 31, U.S. Code. Any person who fails to file the required certification shall be subject to a civil penalty of not less than \$10,000 and not more than \$100,000 for each such failure.

Statement for Loan Guarantees and Loan Insurance

The undersigned states, to the best of his or her knowledge and belief, that:

If any funds have been paid or will be paid to any person for influencing or attempting to influence an officer or employee of any agency, a Member of Congress, an officer or employee of Congress, or an employee of a Member of Congress in connection with this commitment providing for the United States to insure or guarantee a loan, the undersigned shall complete and submit Standard Form-LLL, "Disclosure of Lobbying Activities," in accordance with its instructions. Submission of this statement is a prerequisite for making or entering into this transaction imposed by section 1352, title 31, U.S. Code. Any person who fails to file the required statement shall be subject to a civil penalty of not less than \$10,000 and not more than \$100,000 for each such failure.

Please download and sign the forms below. Please scan and return the forms to wioa@ed.gov at the same time you submit your State Plan via the portal.

- 1. SF424B - Assurances – Non-Construction Programs**
(<http://www2.ed.gov/fund/grant/apply/appforms/appforms.html>)
Note: Reference MDRS-VR Signature Page Attached
- 2. Grants.gov - Certification Regarding Lobbying**
(<http://www2.ed.gov/fund/grant/apply/appforms/appforms.html>)
Note: Reference MDRS-VR Signature Page Attached
- 3. *SF LLL Form – Disclosure of Lobbying Activities (required, only if applicable)**
(<http://www2.ed.gov/fund/grant/apply/appforms/appforms.html>)
**Note: Not Applicable (MDRS-VR)*

Continued, Certification Regarding Lobbying

SF424B - Assurances - Non-Construction Programs

[<http://www2.ed.gov/fund/grant/apply/appforms/appforms.html>]

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OMB Approval No. 0348-0040

ASSURANCES - NON-CONSTRUCTION PROGRAMS

Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 15 minutes per response, including time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding the burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reduction Project (0348-0040), Washington, DC 20503.

PLEASE DO NOT RETURN YOUR COMPLETED FORM TO THE OFFICE OF MANAGEMENT AND BUDGET. SEND IT TO THE ADDRESS PROVIDED BY THE SPONSORING AGENCY.

NOTE: Certain of these assurances may not be applicable to your project or program. If you have questions, please contact the awarding agency. Further, certain Federal awarding agencies may require applicants to certify to additional assurances. If such is the case, you will be notified.

As the duly authorized representative of the applicant, I certify that the applicant:

1. Has the legal authority to apply for Federal assistance and the institutional, managerial and financial capability (including funds sufficient to pay the non-Federal share of project cost) to ensure proper planning, management and completion of the project described in this application.
2. Will give the awarding agency, the Comptroller General of the United States and, if appropriate, the State, through any authorized representative, access to and the right to examine all records, books, papers, or documents related to the award; and will establish a proper accounting system in accordance with generally accepted accounting standards or agency directives.
3. Will establish safeguards to prohibit employees from using their positions for a purpose that constitutes or presents the appearance of personal or organizational conflict of interest, or personal gain.
4. Will initiate and complete the work within the applicable time frame after receipt of approval of the awarding agency.
5. Will comply with the Intergovernmental Personnel Act of 1970 (42 U.S.C. §§4728-4763) relating to prescribed standards for merit systems for programs funded under one of the 19 statutes or regulations specified in Appendix A of OPM's Standards for a Merit System of Personnel Administration (5 C.F.R. 900, Subpart F).
6. Will comply with all Federal statutes relating to nondiscrimination. These include but are not limited to: (a) Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (P.L. 88-352) which prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color or national origin; (b) Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, as amended (20 U.S.C. §§1681-1683, and 1685-1686), which prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex; (c) Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended (29 U.S.C. §794), which prohibits discrimination on the basis of handicaps; (d) the Age Discrimination Act of 1975, as amended (42 U.S.C. §§6101-6107), which prohibits discrimination on the basis of age; (e) the Drug Abuse Office and Treatment Act of 1972 (P.L. 92-255), as amended, relating to nondiscrimination on the basis of drug abuse; (f) the Comprehensive Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism Prevention, Treatment and Rehabilitation Act of 1970 (P.L. 91-616), as amended, relating to nondiscrimination on the basis of alcohol abuse or alcoholism; (g) §§523 and 527 of the Public Health Service Act of 1912 (42 U.S.C. §§290 dd-3 and 290 ee 3), as amended, relating to confidentiality of alcohol and drug abuse patient records; (h) Title VIII of the Civil Rights Act of 1968 (42 U.S.C. §§3601 et seq.), as amended, relating to nondiscrimination in the sale, rental or financing of housing; (i) any other nondiscrimination provisions in the specific statute(s) under which application for Federal assistance is being made; and, (j) the requirements of any other nondiscrimination statute(s) which may apply to the application.
7. Will comply, or has already complied, with the requirements of Titles II and III of the Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policies Act of 1970 (P.L. 91-646) which provide for fair and equitable treatment of persons displaced or whose property is acquired as a result of Federal or federally-assisted programs. These requirements apply to all interests in real property acquired for project purposes regardless of Federal participation in purchases.
8. Will comply, as applicable, with provisions of the Hatch Act (5 U.S.C. §§1501-1508 and 7324-7328) which limit the political activities of employees whose principal employment activities are funded in whole or in part with Federal funds.

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9. Will comply, as applicable, with the provisions of the Davis-Bacon Act (40 U.S.C. §§276a to 276a-7), the Copeland Act (40 U.S.C. §276c and 18 U.S.C. §874), and the Contract Work Hours and Safety Standards Act (40 U.S.C. §§327-333), regarding labor standards for federally-assisted construction subagreements.
10. Will comply, if applicable, with flood insurance purchase requirements of Section 102(a) of the Flood Disaster Protection Act of 1973 (P.L. 93-234) which requires recipients in a special flood hazard area to participate in the program and to purchase flood insurance if the total cost of insurable construction and acquisition is \$10,000 or more.
11. Will comply with environmental standards which may be prescribed pursuant to the following: (a) institution of environmental quality control measures under the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (P.L. 91-190) and Executive Order (EO) 11514; (b) notification of violating facilities pursuant to EO 11738; (c) protection of wetlands pursuant to EO 11990; (d) evaluation of flood hazards in floodplains in accordance with EO 11988; (e) assurance of project consistency with the approved State management program developed under the Coastal Zone Management Act of 1972 (16 U.S.C. §§1451 et seq.); (f) conformity of Federal actions to State (Clean Air) Implementation Plans under Section 176(c) of the Clean Air Act of 1955, as amended (42 U.S.C. §§7401 et seq.); (g) protection of underground sources of drinking water under the Safe Drinking Water Act of 1974, as amended (P.L. 93-523); and, (h) protection of endangered species under the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended (P.L. 93-205).
12. Will comply with the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act of 1968 (16 U.S.C. §§1271 et seq.) related to protecting components or potential components of the national wild and scenic rivers system.
13. Will assist the awarding agency in assuring compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended (16 U.S.C. §470), EO 11593 (identification and protection of historic properties), and the Archaeological and Historic Preservation Act of 1974 (16 U.S.C. §§469a-1 et seq.).
14. Will comply with P.L. 93-348 regarding the protection of human subjects involved in research, development, and related activities supported by this award of assistance.
15. Will comply with the Laboratory Animal Welfare Act of 1966 (P.L. 89-544, as amended, 7 U.S.C. §§2131 et seq.) pertaining to the care, handling, and treatment of warm blooded animals held for research, teaching, or other activities supported by this award of assistance.
16. Will comply with the Lead-Based Paint Poisoning Prevention Act (42 U.S.C. §§4801 et seq.) which prohibits the use of lead-based paint in construction or rehabilitation of residence structures.
17. Will cause to be performed the required financial and compliance audits in accordance with the Single Audit Act Amendments of 1996 and OMB Circular No. A-133, "Audits of States, Local Governments, and Non-Profit Organizations."
18. Will comply with all applicable requirements of all other Federal laws, executive orders, regulations, and policies governing this program.

SIGNATURE OF AUTHORIZED CERTIFYING OFFICIAL 	TITLE <i>Executive Director</i>
APPLICANT ORGANIZATION <i>MS Dept of Rehabilitation Services</i>	DATE SUBMITTED <i>3/3/22</i>

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Continued, Certification Regarding Lobbying

Grants.gov - Certification Regarding Lobbying

(<http://www2.ed.gov/fund/grant/apply/appforms/appforms.html>)

Note: Reference MDRS-VR Signature Page below

CERTIFICATION REGARDING LOBBYING

Certification for Contracts, Grants, Loans, and Cooperative Agreements

The undersigned certifies, to the best of his or her knowledge and belief, that:

(1) No Federal appropriated funds have been paid or will be paid, by or on behalf of the undersigned, to any person for influencing or attempting to influence an officer or employee of an agency, a Member of Congress, an officer or employee of Congress, or an employee of a Member of Congress in connection with the awarding of any Federal contract, the making of any Federal grant, the making of any Federal loan, the entering into of any cooperative agreement, and the extension, continuation, renewal, amendment, or modification of any Federal contract, grant, loan, or cooperative agreement.

(2) If any funds other than Federal appropriated funds have been paid or will be paid to any person for influencing or attempting to influence an officer or employee of any agency, a Member of Congress, an officer or employee of Congress, or an employee of a Member of Congress in connection with this Federal contract, grant, loan, or cooperative agreement, the undersigned shall complete and submit Standard Form-LLL, "Disclosure of Lobbying Activities," in accordance with its instructions.

(3) The undersigned shall require that the language of this certification be included in the award documents for all subawards at all tiers (including subcontracts, subgrants, and contracts under grants, loans, and cooperative agreements) and that all subrecipients shall certify and disclose accordingly. This certification is a material representation of fact upon which reliance was placed when this transaction was made or entered into. Submission of this certification is a prerequisite for making or entering into this transaction imposed by section 1352, title 31, U.S. Code. Any person who fails to file the required certification shall be subject to a civil penalty of not less than \$10,000 and not more than \$100,000 for each such failure.

Statement for Loan Guarantees and Loan Insurance

The undersigned states, to the best of his or her knowledge and belief, that:

If any funds have been paid or will be paid to any person for influencing or attempting to influence an officer or employee of any agency, a Member of Congress, an officer or employee of Congress, or an employee of a Member of Congress in connection with this commitment providing for the United States to insure or guarantee a loan, the undersigned shall complete and submit Standard Form-LLL, "Disclosure of Lobbying Activities," in accordance with its instructions. Submission of this statement is a prerequisite for making or entering into this transaction imposed by section 1352, title 31, U.S. Code. Any person who fails to file the required statement shall be subject to a civil penalty of not less than \$10,000 and not more than \$100,000 for each such failure.

* APPLICANT'S ORGANIZATION MS Dept of Rehabilitation Services	
* PRINTED NAME AND TITLE OF AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE	
Prefix: <input type="text"/>	* First Name: <input type="text" value="Christine"/> Middle Name: <input type="text"/>
* Last Name: <input type="text" value="Edward"/> Suffix: <input type="text"/>	
* Title: <input type="text" value="Executive Director"/>	
* SIGNATURE: <input type="text" value="Christine Edward"/>	* DATE: <input type="text" value="2/2/22"/>