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

A. INPUT OF STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL

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;

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

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;

Goal 1 – Objective 1.1

SRC Comment: Add a strategy regarding staff retention. This seems to be a contributor to early exits. Maybe something related to ongoing mentorship? Development of supervisor cohort?

Goal 1 – Objective 1.2

SRC Comment: Update regarding the changed timeframe – (Peer Mentoring) starting in Feb 2022 as a result of COVID associated delays.

Goal 1 – Objective 1.3

SRC Comment: No changes needed

Goal 2

SRC Comment: This should be modified to reflect the addition of Order of Selection Priority Category 4.

Goal 2 – Objective 2.1

SRC Comment: Since W.O.R.K. services are no longer available; this should be amended.

Goal 2 – Objective 2.3

SRC Comment: It would be worthwhile to identify details of the partnership (with the Office of Aging and Disability Services); is there a written plan for how to do this?

SRC Comment: Is the Bridge Career Exploration Workshop different than the standard Career Exploration Workshop protocol?

SRC Comment: Should a strategy be added to reflect the proposed co-location of OADS staff in VR offices?

Goal 2 – Objective 2.4

SRC Comment: Can a strategy be added to support the development of more employment specialists/job coaches/providers doing this work? Maybe include a strategy regarding developing internal positions in Washington County to address this gap?

Goal 2 – Objective 2.5

SRC Comment: Keep all strategies

Goal 3 – Objective 3.2

SRC Comment: Maintain objective

Goal 3 – Objective 3.3

SRC Comment: Add a strategy re: youth exiting corrections, role of VR in that process

Goal 3 – Objective 3.6

SRC Comment: What are the barriers that remain are to making progress on this strategy (collaborating to better serve individuals with a mental health condition)?

SRC Comment: Same as above, what is the barrier to this (delivery of joint staff training on employment for people with a mental health condition)?

Goal 3 – Objective 3.8

SRC Comment: What are the barriers here (collaboration to better serve individuals with a history of substance use)?

Goal 3 – Objective 3.9

SRC Comment: Is this where more can be added about DEI (Diversity, Equity and Inclusion)?

SRC Comment: Add language related to the internally developed training by Kim Desso

Goal 3 – Objective 3.10

SRC Comment: What actions are being done (related to serving those with TANF benefits)? This is an important objective, but there are so many objectives within this goal

Goal 4

SRC Comment: This goal does not read well – what is DVR being provided?

Goal 4 – Objective 4.1

SRC Comment: How often is this (common referral form) used? How can someone access this form?

Goal 4 – Objective 4.2

SRC Comment: What is happening in regards to categories 3 and 4 in this respect (referral to CareerCenter partners)?

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

Goal 1 – Objective 1.1

SRC Comment: Add a strategy regarding staff retention. This seems to be a contributor to early exits. Maybe something related to ongoing mentorship? Development of supervisor cohort?

DVR Response: DVR appreciates this feedback and will add a strategy concerning staff retention. Please also see the CSPD section for more information on strategies to promote staff retention

Goal 1 – Objective 1.2

SRC Comment: Update regarding the changed timeframe – (Peer Mentoring) starting in Feb 2022 as a result of COVID associated delays.

DVR Response: DVR will update the timeframes concerning Peer Mentoring implementation.

Goal 1 – Objective 1.3

SRC Comment: No changes needed

DVR Response: DVR appreciates the feedback

Goal 2

SRC Comment: This should be modified to reflect the addition of Order of Selection Priority Category 4.

DVR Response: DVR will add Order of Selection Priority Category 4 to this Goal

Goal 2 – Objective 2.1

SRC Comment: Since W.O.R.K. services are no longer available; this should be amended.

DVR Response: DVR will update the reference to W.O.R.K. services to reflect current strategies

Goal 2 – Objective 2.3

SRC Comment: It would be worthwhile to identify details of the partnership (with the Office of Aging and Disability Services); is there a written plan for how to do this?

DVR Response: There are additional details that may be found in Section F of the plan.

SRC Comment: Is the Bridge Career Exploration Workshop different than the standard Career Exploration Workshop protocol?

DVR Response: Yes, the Bridge Career Exploration Workshop is a version of the curriculum that is designed for those with lower literacy. Collaboration with the self-advocacy group Speaking Up For Us (SUFU) provided additional feedback on related new virtual modules during this past year that will be used to help reach individuals in community programs who have not had access to VR and employment supports.

SRC Comment: Should a strategy be added to reflect the proposed co-location of OADS staff in VR offices?

DVR Response: Yes, DVR will add a strategy referencing that upcoming collaboration.

Goal 2 – Objective 2.4

SRC Comment: Can a strategy be added to support the development of more employment specialists/job coaches/providers doing this work? Maybe include a strategy regarding developing internal positions in Washington County to address this gap?

DVR Response: Yes, DVR will develop a strategy to reflect these needs and associated efforts underway.

Goal 2 – Objective 2.5

SRC Comment: Keep all strategies

DVR Response: DVR is in agreement and appreciates the feedback.

Goal 3 – Objective 3.2

SRC Comment: Maintain objective

DVR Response: DVR will maintain the objective but will update language to tie the objective to MDOL/DVR’s Disability, Equity and Inclusion efforts.

Goal 3 – Objective 3.3

SRC Comment: Add a strategy re: youth exiting corrections, role of VR in that process

DVR Response: DVR has a strong juvenile justice presence and will better reflect that in strategies in this section

Goal 3 – Objective 3.6

SRC Comment: What are the barriers that remain are to making progress on this strategy (collaborating to better serve individuals with a mental health condition)?

DVR Response: DVR has a close working relationship with the Office of Behavioral Health. Renewed efforts to address Employment First recommendations as well as the awarding of a vendor for the Employment Workforce Development System will continue to strengthen staff capacity as well as increase focus on the specific needs of this population.

SRC Comment: Same as above, what is the barrier to this (delivery of joint staff training on employment for people with a mental health condition)?

DVR Response: As above, DVR has a close working relationship with the Office of Behavioral Health. Renewed efforts to address Employment First recommendations as well as the awarding of a vendor for the Employment Workforce Development System will continue to strengthen staff capacity as well as increase focus on the specific needs of this population.

Goal 3 – Objective 3.8

SRC Comment: What are the barriers here (collaboration to better serve individuals with a history of substance use)?

DVR Response: One barrier to collaboration has been the lack of understanding on the part of community providers about how and when VR services can be added to other supports to assist individuals in recovery to enter or re-enter employment. Grants to the Maine Department of Labor and other workforce system partners have helped to build collaborations across CareerCenter partners.

Goal 3 – Objective 3.9

SRC Comment: Is this where more can be added about DEI (Diversity, Equity and Inclusion)?

DVR Response: Yes, this is one place where DEI can be added.

SRC Comment: Add language related to the internally developed training by Kim Desso

DVR Response: DVR appreciates the feedback and will add information on the in-house developed DEI trainings.

Goal 3 – Objective 3.10

SRC Comment: What actions are being done (related to serving those with TANF benefits)? This is an important objective, but there are so many objectives within this goal

DVR Response: Please see Section P – Evaluation of Progress for more information on this objective

Goal 4

SRC Comment: This goal does not read well – what is DVR being provided?

DVR Response: DVR appreciates this feedback and has tweaked the wording to improve readability.

Goal 4 – Objective 4.1

SRC Comment: How often is this (common referral form) used? How can someone access this form?

DVR Response: A common referral form has been drafted for use but COVID has delayed its roll-out. This will be a priority of WIOA collaborative work across the partners in the coming year.

Goal 4 – Objective 4.2

SRC Comment: What is happening in regards to categories 3 and 4 in this respect (referral to CareerCenter partners)?

DVR Response: DVR provides information on CareerCenter resources and services to all individuals found eligible in closed Order of Selection Priority Categories (currently 3 and 4). Additional information is provided concerning CareerCenter resources during annual outreach to those on the waitlist.

3. THE DESIGNATED STATE UNIT’S EXPLANATIONS FOR REJECTING ANY OF THE COUNCIL’S INPUT OR RECOMMENDATIONS.

Maine DVR does not reject any of the Council’s input or recommendations.

B. REQUEST FOR WAIVER OF STATEWIDENESS

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;

This agency has not requested a waiver of Statewideness. The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation can provide Vocational Rehabilitation services statewide under an Order of Selection. Therefore, the waiver request is not necessary.

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

See above (a)

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

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

see above (a)

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

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

The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) works with other state agencies and many Councils and Committees whose focus is on individuals with disabilities. Once approved, all agreements and Memoranda of Understanding are considered to be in effect until replaced or discontinued according to the terms of each agreement. At a minimum, DVR reviews MOUs at least annually to determine those that are in need of updating or replacement. DVR convenes teams with broad stakeholder participation to work on MOUs according to the needs of the particular agreement.

DVR has a long-standing relationship and works very closely with the Maine Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). Presently, DVR and DHHS have two memorandums of understanding (MOU); one MOU is with the Office of Aging and Disability Services (OADS), which serves individuals with developmental disabilities; the other MOU is with the Office of Behavioral Health -formerly the Office of Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services - (DHHS-OBH) which serves individuals who experience mental health disorders . Additionally, DVR, OADS and DHHS-OBH have developed and are implementing joint approaches to the workforce development of community rehabilitation providers and business engagement throughout the state. DVR, the Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired (DBVI), OADS and DHHS-OBH continue to develop a joint MOU that will develop a cost sharing plan to address current WIOA regulations.

The current MOU’s address the combined efforts that DVR and DHHS have initiated and clarify roles to improve the successful outcomes for these jointly served populations. • DHHS Office of Aging and Disability Services and DVR/DBVI MOU (updated June 2014) “This Memorandum is intended to guide the Maine Department of Labor’s Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS), through its Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired and Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, and the Office of Aging and Disability Services (OADS) in the Maine Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), through a system change planning process for the purpose of implementing an aligned service delivery system that promotes evidence–based practices. It contains information about policies and processes that pertain to maintaining and enhancing the relationship between these two entities”.

DHHS Office of Behavioral Health and DVR MOU (updated August 2013) “This Memorandum is intended to guide the Maine Department of Labor’s Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS), through its Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired and the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, and the Maine Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), through its Office of Behavioral Health (DHHS-OBH), in the course of planning and implementing an aligned service delivery system that promotes evidence–based practices. It contains information about policies and processes that pertain to maintaining and enhancing the relationship between these two entities.”

Through these strong partnerships with OADS and DHHS-OBH, DVR has been able to maximize federal and state funding to Maine by drawing down its full federal allotment for public rehabilitation services and accessing employment support services through Medicaid waivers.

• Interagency Support of Benefits Counseling

DVR continues to work closely with many other state partners to ensure that Maine’s benefits counseling services remain available to beneficiaries of SSI/SSDI, and specifically, DVR applicants and eligible clients. DVR currently administers a single contract with Maine’s approved WIPA provider, Maine Medical Center’s Department of Vocational Services, which includes funding from four sources of state and federal funds, including from the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired, Office of Behavioral Health, and Office of Aging and Disability Services.

The contract’s scope of work includes direct service provision of benefits counseling, training of VR counselors and case managers, and service capacity building through quarterly system development network meetings, which include representatives from the Disability Rights Center’s Protection and Advocacy for Beneficiaries of Social Security (PABSS) and the Bureau of Employment Services.

•Memorandum of Understanding with PJCC (Penobscot Job Corps Center)

In 2021, Maine DVR updated a Memorandum of Understanding with PJCC. The purpose of the agreement is to set forth the commitments of PJCC and the Maine DVR to meet the needs of students and young adults with disabilities and to better coordinate the process of student transition to employment. Cross-training opportunities are held annually.

• Veterans Administration and VR MOU

A Memorandum of Understanding between the Maine Department of Labor – Bureau of Rehabilitation Services, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and Division for the Blind & Visually Impaired, and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Services was finalized and signed in November 2011.

"The purpose of this MOU is to set forth the commitments of BRS and VA–VR&E to cooperate to meet the needs of veterans with disabilities... Through the efforts outlined in this agreement, BRS and VA–VR & E will strive to minimize duplication of services, improve information sharing and referral, and coordinate activities in accordance with all applicable statutes and regulations."

Maine DVR held its annual meeting with the Veterans’ Administration Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Services on April 14, 2021 . Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, resources were not able to be dedicated to updating the MOU. It is anticipated that this should be able to be accomplished in Spring 2022. Maine DVR has identified staff that operate as veterans’ liaisons in each office

• Department of Corrections and VR MOU – Procedural Guidance

The Maine Department of Labor– Bureau of Rehabilitation Services, DVR/DBVI and the Maine Department of Corrections (DOC) have worked together to establish procedural guidance on collaboration between the agencies. Work thus far has resulted in two procedural directives outlining how the agencies will work together to best meet the needs of individuals who are currently incarcerated or on probation and may be eligible for vocational rehabilitation services. Employment has been identified as one of the most important factors in reducing recidivism among individuals who are exiting the criminal justice system.

In Maine, there are many individuals who may be eligible for VR services who are currently incarcerated and who could potentially benefit from Vocational Rehabilitation services to obtain and maintain employment upon their release. The Department of Corrections through its prisons and probation systems are committed to working collaboratively with DVR to promote appropriate referrals, as well as the exchange of information and needed documentation to support VR eligibility determination.

In each of the larger offices, a DVR staff member has been identified who serves as the liaison to the correctional facilities in their region.

DVR corrections liaisons typically meet as a group on a quarterly basis with DOC staff to share updates and best practices- however this was disrupted due to COVID -19 Corrections liaisons sit on juvenile justice regional care teams. The DVR Assistant Director has represented DVR and Maine Department of Labor on Juvenile Justice Advisory Councils.

• Workers Compensation Board and DVR MOU

During 2012, representatives of the Workers Compensation Board (WCB) and Maine Division of Vocational Rehabilitation worked together to create a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). The MOU was completed and signed, effective November 2012. DVR and the WCB are committed to working together to improve services and employment outcomes for individuals who, as a result of injury need vocational rehabilitation services to return to employment. Through the efforts outlined in the MOU, DVR and the WCB will strive to maximize employment opportunities for injured Maine workers, minimize duplication of services, improve information sharing and referrals, and coordinate activities in accordance with all applicable statutes and regulations.

The Memorandum of Understanding is due to be updated in Spring of 2022.

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The Division for the Deaf, Hard of Hearing and Late Deafened is part of the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and provides programing and services to people who are deaf, hard of hearing, and late deafened. DVR continues its joint effort with DBVI providing services for co-enrolled clients by coordinating with the University of Southern Maine Linguistics Department, Helen Keller National Center (HKNC) for the Deaf-Blind, and the Maine Deaf-Blind Project, (a project which is a member of the New England Consortium of Deaf Blind Projects, and provides technical assistance for students until the age of 21 and focuses on transition age youth) to improve services for clients who are deaf-blind or dual sensory impaired from hearing and vision loss. Although the program, "Independence Without Fear” has discontinued, the collaboration has expanded to include the Department of Health and Human Services, Disability Rights Maine, Division for the Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and Late Deafened, and a Tri-state Collaborative with Vermont and New Hampshire.

Efforts have included discussions to recruit, train and maintain a database of specially trained volunteers who can facilitate communication and other services for people with significant dual sensory needs. , . HKNC and OIB-TAC have provided training to staff on services to this targeted population. DVR/DBVI are currently working on accessing the training needs of Community Rehabilitation Providers and coordinating with HKNC to provide training to dual sensory loss clients.

Dual sensory clients are also being provided Support Service Providers (SSP) through a program with USM. SSP’s are Linguistic students that provide home/community services for college credit.

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

Assistive technology services and assistive technology devices are provided to individuals with disabilities as determined by an individual’s vocational goal and appear as prescribed services on the respective individual’s signed IPE. DVR works closely with Maine cohorts, Alpha One, ALLTECH and Mainely Access and Maine CITE, assistive technology organizations which provide assistive technology technical assistance services, as well as assistive technology devices. Maine CITE is the assistive technology grantee for the state of Maine through the Administration for Community Living.

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

BRS supports staff involvement in the USDA’s AgrAbility project. Maine AgrAbility is administered by Alpha One and the University of Maine. The liaison to the project ensures that DVR staff is knowledgeable about AgrAbility and related resources.Current efforts are also looking at incorporating AgrAbility into Pre-Employment Transition Services and work-based learning to support increased interest in farming and agricultural careers in Maine. .

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

DVR works with other state agencies and many councils and committees, including the Governor’s Children’s Cabinet which is examining the needs of out-of-school youth.

5. STATE USE CONTRACTING PROGRAMS.

DVR follows State of Maine Procurement policies and procedures to contract with qualified organizations to provide employment support services for DVR clients. Services procured include: Pre-Employment Transition Services, Job Seeking Skills, Job Skills Training, Job Development and Placement Services; Job Coaching and Supported Employment; and Business Engagement. These services are paid on a fee per service unit cost. DVR also contracts with Maine’s sole Center for Independent Living, Alpha One.

D. COORDINATION WITH EDUCATION OFFICIALS

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

1.DVR has a strong partnership with the Maine Department of Education (DOE). This has been demonstrated through collaborative efforts on Employment First legislation, data sharing, joint training and technical assistance and the launch of interagency efforts, such as the Cross-Agency Council for Transition. A DOE staff member serves on the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) and the DVR Director serves on the IDEA Part B State Advisory Panel.

The Cooperative Agreement between the Maine Department of Education, Special Services and Maine DVR – and Maine DBVI - was updated in 2018 and now includes language to support implementation of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014. The Agreement was developed using technical assistance available through the National Technical Assistance Center on Transition (NTACT) and the Workforce Innovation Technical Assistance Center (WINTAC).

The purpose of the Cooperative Agreement is to set forth the commitments of DOE and DVR/DBVI to cooperate to meet the needs of students with disabilities and to better coordinate the process of student transition. DOE and DVR/DBVI are committed to the belief that all youth with disabilities can work and that they should have the opportunity to prepare to enter competitive integrated employment through participation in work-based learning and other career preparation activities before high school graduation or exit.

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.

Provide information on the formal interagency agreement with the state educational agency: DVR will assist in transition planning and in the development of each student’s individualized education program (IEP). For students eligible for services with an agreed upon vocational goal, DVR is expected to develop an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) before the student leaves the school setting.

In providing transition services, DVR will facilitate the use of available and appropriate community–based services. Services will be provided in the most cost-effective manner. In recognition of the importance of promoting information sharing and in order to ensure an effective and timely system of referrals for DVR services, DVR requests that school personnel adopt the following process: When a student with an Individualized Education Program (IEP) begins the transition planning process prior to entering ninth grade, the student and his/her parents or guardians will receive general information about VR services, including those Pre-Employment Transition Services available to Potentially Eligible students. This information will introduce VR and will inform the parents/guardians when it is appropriate to make a VR referral. When the student to be referred is within two years of school graduation or exit, the services offered by VR should be re–introduced at the student’s IEP or 504 meeting. Both the student and the parents/guardians should have an opportunity to receive materials outlining VR services and to ask questions concerning the referral. If during or after the meeting, they (or the adult student) are interested in having a referral made for services the school will assist in doing so.

Provide information on the formal interagency agreement with the state educational agency with respect to consultation and technical assistance to assist educational agencies in planning for the transition of students with disabilities from school to post–school activities, including VR services.

The purpose of the Cooperative Agreement is to set forth the commitments of DOE and DVR to cooperate to meet the needs of students with disabilities and to better coordinate the process of student transition. The Agreement also sets forth that consultation and technical assistance will

be provided to assist educational agencies in planning for the transition of students with disabilities from school to post–school activities, including VR services.

The mission of the MOU is to help students with disabilities achieve full participation in society by ensuring equal opportunity and access to education, employment and community. To achieve this mission: • People will work together for the student’s benefit • Students and families will be included and respected • Regular and meaningful communication will be established • Personnel Development will be collaborative • Data will be shared to improve outcomes. The parties shall agree on methods to maintain updated information about best practices and resources related to the transition of students, including the use of Dispatches and maintenance of a copy of the Agreement on the agencies’ websites. Consultation and technical assistance to educational agencies in planning for the transition of students with disabilities from school to post–school activities, including VR services; DOE and DVR will work together to inform the following entities about the existence and intent of this Agreement: • Superintendents of Schools • Directors of Special Education • Parent Training & Information Center • DVR Regional Managers, Supervisors, and Transition Counselors • Directors of Career & Technical Education • Directors of Adult Education • Client Assistance Program • Protection and Advocacy for Beneficiaries of Social Security (PABSS) • State Special Education Advisory Panel Effective implementation requires ongoing communication and sharing of information between the parties.

A student with a disability is defined as a student between the ages of 14 and 21 who is enrolled in an educational program and who is eligible for and receiving special education and related services under Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (20 U.S.C. 1411 et seq.); or is an individual with a disability under Section 504. (Note: This definition includes students who may be in an alternative placement, enrolled in post-secondary education or homeschooled, among other settings)

Under the WIOA amendments to the Rehabilitation Act, a youth with a disability may be defined as an individual with a disability who is between the ages of 14 and 24 and who is or is not enrolled in an educational program.

It is especially critical that any changes in resources, regulations, policies and procedures that affect students served jointly by DOE and DVR/DBVI be immediately communicated and that coordinated efforts are made to mitigate any negative impact that may occur as a result of those changes. DVR will provide schools with an orientation video, brochures, and PowerPoint presentation on services for transition–age youth and a representative to serve as a member of the Maine IDEA Part B State Advisory Panel.

DVR will also support VR counselors with transition caseloads to join Maine Administrators of Services for Children with Disabilities (MADSEC) and participate in regional and state meetings and training. DVR will provide technical assistance to DOE and school districts on disability–specific information and resources issues and issues concerning eligibility and referral for services as requested. DVR will provide technical assistance and training as requested to DOE and school districts on the Americans with Disabilities Act in conjunction with the State ADA Coordinator. DOE will notify DVR of issues of mutual interest identified during monitoring or as a result of a special education due process finding.

For students who have applied for VR services, DVR staff work closely with students, parents and the LEA to collect and share information (with a signed release) that allows for timely determination of eligibility (60 days) and development of the Individualized Plan for Employment (90 days). Current postsecondary goals identified on Individualized Education

Programs often present excellent starting points for development of the IPE. Training to LEA staff as well as DVR staff helps to reinforce the importance of collaboration to create a coordinate set of activities to promote transition opportunities for the student.

1. PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION SERVICES

Under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014 amendments to the Rehabilitation Act. VR agencies are required to set aside 15% of their federal grant funding to provide a new set of “Pre-Employment Transition Services” to eligible or potentially eligible students with a disability. Pre-Employment Transition Services must be available statewide to all students with disabilities who need them. Services begin once a request has been made and a Pre -Employment Transition Services registration form has been completed along with documentation of disability.

There are five required services and nine authorized services (that may be provided if funds remain after the required activities are provided) along with pre-employment transition coordination. Pre-Employment Transition Services are to be delivered in conjunction and collaboration with schools and are designed to assist students with identifying career interests.

The required Pre- Employment Transition Services are:

• Job exploration counseling

• Work-based learning experiences, which may include in-school or after school opportunities, experiences outside of the traditional school setting, and/or internships

• Counseling on opportunities for enrollment in comprehensive transition or postsecondary educational programs

• Workplace readiness training to develop social skills and independent living

• Instruction in self-advocacy

If funds remain, VR agencies may provide the following nine authorized Pre-Employment Transition Services to improve the transition of students with disabilities from school to postsecondary education or an employment outcome:

• implement effective strategies that increase independent living and inclusion in their communities and competitive integrated workplaces;

• develop and improve strategies for individuals with intellectual and significant disabilities to live independently, participate in postsecondary education experiences, and obtain and retain competitive integrated employment;

• provide training to vocational rehabilitation counselors, school transition staff, and others supporting students with disabilities;

• disseminate information on innovative, effective, and efficient approaches to implement Pre-Employment Transition Services;

• coordinate activities with transition services provided by local educational agencies under IDEA;

• apply evidence-based findings to improve policy, procedure, practice, and the preparation of personnel;

• develop model transition demonstration projects;

• establish or support multistate or regional partnerships that involve States, local educational agencies, designated State units, developmental disability agencies, private businesses, or others; and

• disseminate information and strategies to improve the transition to postsecondary activities of those who are traditionally unserved.

Funds reserved for pre-employment transition services may be used for the required, authorized, and Pre-Employment Transition Services coordination activities.

Pre-Employment Transition Services coordination consists of:

• Attending individualized education program meetings for students with disabilities, when invited;

• Working with the local workforce development boards, one-stop centers, and employers to develop work opportunities for students with disabilities, including internships, summer employment and other employment opportunities available throughout the school year, and apprenticeships;

• Working with schools, including those carrying out activities under section 614(d) of the IDEA, to coordinate and ensure the provision of pre-employment transition services;

• When invited, attending person-centered planning meetings for individuals receiving services under title XIX of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 1396 et seq.);

Eligibility and Registering for Pre-Employment Transition Services

Potentially Eligible

In addition to authorizing new services, the WIOA amendments also now allows students with disabilities who are “Potentially Eligible” to receive Pre-Employment Transition Services without needing to apply and be found eligible for VR services. Potentially Eligible students are those who meet the definition of a “Student with a Disability” (see below) and who have not yet applied and been found eligible (or ineligible) for VR services. In the event that there is a waitlist for VR services, individuals who have been found eligible and placed on a waitlist may only receive Pre-ETS if they were receiving Pre-ETS services before being found eligible.

Registering for Services

In order for students to receive services as Potentially Eligible they (and their guardian if under age 18) must complete and sign a registration form. The registration form collects basic demographic information that is then inputted into the AWARE case management system to create a case record. The record must reflect that the student has a disability. Documentation that is acceptable includes the following:

• Information from an education official documenting spec ed or 504 status

• Case note documenting counselor observation or review of medical information from the referral source

• Referral from Juvenile Justice with data elements

• IEP

• SSA award letter

• Medical documentation

A student with a disability is defined as a student between the ages of 14 and 21 who is enrolled in an educational program and who is eligible for and receiving special education and related services under Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (20 U.S.C. 1411 et seq.); or is an individual with a disability under Section 504. (Note: This definition includes students who may be in an alternative placement, enrolled in post-secondary education or home-schooled, among other settings)

Under the WIOA amendments to the Rehabilitation Act, a youth with a disability may be defined as an individual with a disability who is between the ages of 14 and 24 and who is or is not enrolled in an educational program.

If students with a disability require interpreter or reader services or accessible informational materials to ensure equal access to work-based learning experiences or other Pre-Employment Transition Services, those supports may be paid by VR with reserved funds, unless they would customarily be paid by another source, including local education agencies.

It is the expectation that DOE and DVR/DBVI will work closely together to ensure that students, families and schools are aware of the availability of Pre-Employment Transition Services and will jointly promote Pre-Employment Transition Services activities so that students with disabilities have access to these important career preparatory resources.

Schools can aid in increasing access for students with a disability to Pre-Employment Transition Services by:

• identifying students to refer to Pre-Employment Transition Services

• Collecting registration forms for Pre-Employment Transition Services

• Developing and delivering Pre-Employment Transition Services with VR staff.

• Braiding and blending funding for Pre-Employment Transition Services activities.

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;

In order to promote better understanding and implementation of best practices in transition planning, DOE and DVR/DBVI will collaborate to offer technical assistance, cross-training and joint training opportunities. Topics may include transition services, Pre-Employment Transition Services, rehabilitation technology or other. All training and technical assistance will be provided in an accessible format and may be delivered via in-person, conference call, webinar, Zoom, Skype or other appropriate means.

In recognition of the importance of promoting information sharing and in order to ensure an effective and timely system of referrals for DVR services, DVR requests that school personnel adopt the following process: 1. When a student with an Individualized Education Program (IEP) is in the transition planning process prior to entering ninth grade, the student and his/her parents or guardians will receive general information about VR services. 2. When a student is within two years of school graduation or exit from school, the services offered by VR should be re–introduced at the student’s IEP or 504 meeting. Both the student and the parents/guardians should have an opportunity to receive VR materials outlining services and to ask questions concerning the referral. 3. VR Counselors should be invited to attend IEP meetings for students who have been determined eligible for services, as well as in cases where the presence of the Counselor at the meeting would assist in determining the appropriateness of a referral to VR.

VR Counselors will provide support to the IEP team to facilitate the IEP process as appropriate. DVR will provide information as requested to school personnel on access to "Long Term Support." DOE will provide guidance to schools on the release of information (including assessment, IEP, Summary of Performance etc.) for students who are working with DVR or who are in the eligibility process. DVR will inform the designated school case manager as to the status of the DVR referral/intake process on individual students with appropriate releases. DVR will determine eligibility and provide services to eligible students within two years prior to expected high school graduation or exit.

If disagreements arise regarding any aspect of the implementation of this Cooperative Agreement, they should first be attempted to be resolved between the specific parties involved. If this is unsuccessful, the dispute should be taken to the next successive leadership level until resolution is achieved.

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

DOE and DVR will collaborate on possible grant opportunities that have an impact on services to students. DOE will assist DVR to share information about vocational rehabilitation services with students with disabilities who may be eligible for VR and provide DVR with de–identified data on an annual basis of numbers and demographics of transition–age students with disabilities who have reached ninth grade in public and private schools across Maine. DOE will provide information to DVR on eligibility, availability, and accessibility of CTE (Career and Technical Education) programs.

DOE will provide technical assistance to schools on IEP transition plan development. DVR will participate in DOE’s efforts to maintain students in school and to prevent and reduce drop–out rates among students with disabilities. The agency will collaborate with schools on the delivery of the "Career Exploration Workshop" curriculum for eligible students with disabilities. At least annually, an in–house training for Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors on topics in best practices in working with transition–age youth will be provided.

DOE and DVR are committed to promoting competitive, integrated employment opportunities for all Maine youth with disabilities as they transition from high school. To meet the requirements of Section 511 of the Rehabilitation Act, DVR/ in consultation with DOE will undertake the following process for youth with a disability:

Outreach and Identification – DVR will develop informational materials that describe services available for students and families who may be considering sub-minimum wage employment. These materials will include information on Pre- Employment Transition Services and individualized transition services available through DVR. DOE will assist by sharing this information with schools and families. Documentation – DVR will collect information to satisfy the requirement to document the completion of required activities under Section 511 for youth who are seeking subminimum wage employment. This documentation will include:

• Youth’s name;

• Determination made or activity/services completed;

• Name of individual making the determination or providing the service/activity; date determination made or required service or activity completed

• Applicable signatures of DVR/VRC transmitting documentation to youth and dates; and

• Method via which documentation was transmitted to the youth (including if refusal, youth names, description of refusal and reason, signature of youth or guardian, signature of DVR VRC documenting the refusal, date of signatures, date and method).

VR will provide documentation to the youth of all activities completed (such as the Bridge Career Exploration Workshop or career planning ), regardless of whether they were completed under the VR program or IDEA. DOE will support the schools to provide documentation to VR no later than 30 days (after the completion of each activity) unless there are extenuating circumstances of all transition services completed by the youth under IDEA. It is the expectation that all documentation is exchanged and maintained in a confidential manner. MDOE assures that it will not enter into, nor permit any school to enter into a contract or other arrangement with an entity as defined in 34 CFR 397.5 (d) for the purpose of operating a program under which a youth with a disability is engaged in work compensated at a subminimum wage.

**Note:** On March 18, 2020, Maine's Governor Janet Mills signed into law LD 1874 "An Act to Amend the Laws Governing the Subminimum Wage" which disallowed the payment of subminimum wages to persons with disabilities in the state of Maine and subminimum wage is no longer a possibility for students with disabilities exiting high school. Maine has no individuals working under subminimum wage certificates at the time of this plan.

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

This agreement does not involve any financial compensation or exchange of funds between DOE and DVR/DBVI. However, it is the expectation that in the development and implementation of services, DOE and DVR/DBVI will provide in–kind resources and will promote cost efficiency and non–duplication through collaboration. Nothing in this agreement relieves either party of the responsibility to provide or pay for any transition service that the agency would otherwise provide to a student with disabilities who meets the eligibility criteria of that agency. If a participating agency, meaning a state or local agency other than the educational agencies responsible for the student’s education, that is financially and legally responsible for providing transition services to the student fails to provide the transition services described in the IEP, the education agency shall reconvene the IEP team to identify alternative strategies to meet the transition objectives for the child set out in the IEP.

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

DVR will inform DOE in writing of procedural changes that may impact the eligibility of students with disabilities for vocational rehabilitation services, so that DOE may disseminate the information to local school districts. DOE will notify DVR concerning proposed changes in regulations, policies and procedures at the state or federal level that may impact students with whom DVR works.

DVR will collect de–identified information on informal/formal complaints and due process hearings that involve school–aged youth; this data will be provided on an annual basis to DOE, as well as numbers and demographics of transition–aged students served. DVR will provide a list of Transition Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors and the schools they serve to DOE and each school district on an annual basis. A protocol to serve students who are in out–of–district placements in accordance with current policy is currently in development but was delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

E. COOPERATIVE AGREEMENTS WITH PRIVATE NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

While Maine DVR does not have any third-party cooperative agreements with private non–profit VR service providers, the agency does work closely with many non-profit organizations across the state through informal collaborative relationships. Additionally, Maine DVR follows State of Maine procurement policies to contract with private nonprofits to provide services to VR clients where and when appropriate.

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

DVR works closely with the Department of Health and Human Services to support partnerships that benefit individuals in need of supported employment services. One way this is accomplished is by leveraging resources - such as career planning - through the Department of Health and Human Services that help to prepare individuals for supported employment and assist them with accessing long term supports following VR services.

Career planning is a person-centered, comprehensive employment planning and direct support service. It is a focused, time-limited service that helps a person identify a career direction and develop a plan with the goal of achieving competitive, integrated employment at or above the State’s minimum wage. The service provides assistance to obtain, maintain, or advance in competitive employment or self-employment. The service is provided up to 60 hours, is not to exceed a six-month period, and must occur in the community in businesses, Career Centers or other community locations.

Career Planning Goals:

• Identify skills, priorities, and capabilities determined through an individualized discovery process

• Provides opportunity to explore self-employment and determine potential steps necessary to develop a business

• Discover a career direction and creation of a career plan to be used in a person’s individual plan for employment with VR.

• If applicable, a referral to benefits planning

• If applicable, a referral for an assessment for use of assistive technology to increase independence in the workplace

• Provides information which should be included as part of the application to Vocational Rehabilitation for services

Who can access the Career Planning Service?

The Service is designed for people with disabilities who have had limited experiences with competitive, integrated paid employment and who are unclear about their career direction, skills, interests and abilities. A person may request Career Planning through their individualized planning process; either at OADS or at Vocational Rehabilitation. Career Planning is NOT required for accessing Vocational Rehabilitation Services but may be used as part of the discovery process for a career direction.

Waiver Funded Career Planning

Waiver members can request and be authorized to receive Career Planning funded through Section 18, 20, 21 or 29 of MaineCare as part of their Person-Centered Planning (PCP) Plan of Care (POC) process. The service must be provided by an authorized Provider of waiver services who have staff who are certified to provide Career Planning.

The Service will be authorized up to 60 hours and is not to exceed a six-month period. The Career Planner will schedule at least weekly meetings. These meetings help the planner learn about the person, and their community, as well as explore businesses by completing tours and other activities which will lead to the creation of a Career Plan.

Process and documentation will be through two options (chosen by the person); Discovering Personal Genius™ or Maine Career Planning. The Career Plan will be submitted to OADS QA staff for monitoring, feedback and recommendations three times during the process.

At two weeks the Career Planner will:

• Assist the individual with an application to VR Services including documentation of disability, releases, copy of the PCP/POC, and filling out the health checklist

• Assist with an application for Benefit Counseling Services, including a release

• Assist with a referral for Assistive Technology assessment (if required)

Connecting Career Planning to Vocational Rehabilitation Services

People receiving Career Planning Services through OADS waiver funding are also either recipients of SSI or SSDI benefits. Since disability determination has already occurred by SSA or MaineCare, OADS consumers are presumed eligible for VR or DBVI once the application process has been completed. Case Managers and/or Care Coordinators can provide additional information during the application process to assist DVR/DBVI n this process. The goal is to create a smooth transition from Career Planning to the development of a VR Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE). The IPE goal could include counseling and guidance which will occur during the Career Planning process. If funded by OADS, the Career Planning Process can also be considered a comparable benefit as a service on VR’s IPE. The Career Planner, with the person, will share the Career Plan and be available to review, discuss and share discovery information to inform the development of the CARNS and the IPE.

Career Planning is a discovery-based service designed to explore businesses, careers and skills. A waiver member who receives Career Planning has chosen to seek employment and coordination of services between the OADS and BRS must occur in order to support the person on a path to employment.

The Career Plan will be shared with VR counselors, with a release as part of the application for services and again when it is final by either the Career Planner or the Case Manager/Care Coordinator.

The Career Plan shall be maintained in the person’s file and a copy given to the person and team members. If a person requires Career Planning again in the future all prior information will be used and reviewed as part of the development of an updated Career Plan and may not require the full 60 hrs. authorization.

Referral for Long Term Support -

DVR maintains a protocol with DHHS to allow for clients to achieve timely access to long-term supports following stability on the job. This process assists individuals who have an identified need for ongoing job coaching. Steps include DHHS' case manager/care coordinator working with the individual to discuss waiver work support providers and the process for selection of a provider. Following a vendor call, the approved transfer form will be completed identifying key information on the business site, wages, schedule, level of support, technology and natural support plan and selected work support provider. The VR counselor works closely with the individual and case manager to ensure a smooth transition.

G. COORDINATION WITH EMPLOYERS

1. VR SERVICES; AND

1. VR services; and

DVR is in the process of rebuilding a business services team A Youth Employment Consultant is focused on creating business relationships to benefit the entry of youth – including students with disabilities – into the world of work through work-based learning opportunities and regular employment. The position is also charged with the responsibility of facilitating Progressive Employment in Lewiston and Portland. The Progressive Employment Model is a dual–customer strategy that is designed to assist jobseekers with significant barriers to employment and assist employers who may be averse to hiring with disabilities. The model coordinates rehabilitation counseling with job placement and

business account management. Progressive Employment offers hands-on work-based activities in the community that assist our dual client offering career exploration to students and risk-free opportunities to employers.

The Youth Employment Consultant has worked successfully with employers in Maine’s southern and western counties to set up opportunities for summer work experiences for youth – thereby meeting employer needs through introducing them to a new generation of potential workers. Videos describing the Progressive Employment model are available on the Maine DVR website which can be accessed through [www.maine.gov/rehab](http://www.maine.gov/rehab).

DVR has also hired a Rehabilitation Counselor II in the Bangor office to focus on business services and job development. Two other positions – a Rehabilitation Counselor II in Machias and a Rehabilitation Counselor I in Presque Isle – are currently advertised and have a focus on business engagement, job development and job coaching.

A Regional Manager assists to coordinate the efforts of the business relations team as well as to oversee the use of Progressive Employment in Regions 3, 4, and 5.

Other Employer Engagement - DVR continues to be responsive to employer need through techniques such as:

• Staff outreach to businesses to address their workforce needs

• Partnership with the Career Center business staff to assist in delivery of job fairs

• Documentation of business engagement via the Maine Job Link

• Conducting business development via contracted Community Rehabilitation Providers.

• Participation on a Statewide Workforce Action Team (SWAT) that brings workforce system partners together to plan coordinated activities.

• Membership in Local Workforce Boards.

• Delivery of training and resources to business such as disability etiquette (including by certified Windmills trainers), ADA, and reasonable accommodations.

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

In addition to Progressive Employment, the Maine Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR)’s Transition Work-Based Learning (TWBL) Model Demonstration grant was a partnership with Jobs for Maine Graduates (JMG), the Institute for Community Inclusion (ICI) at the University of Massachusetts Boston, American Institutes for Research (AIR), and the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR). This project used a quasi-experimental design to conduct rigorous evaluation of two innovative interventions, Enhanced JMG and Progressive Employment. Maine DVR used the Progressive Employment model to expand employer relationships and align this dual customer community-based strategy with Enhanced JMG programs for students with disabilities.

These interventions served students with disabilities that were within two years of graduation from high school to test whether a model of work-based learning improves attainment of competitive integrated post-secondary employment and education outcomes. Specifically, under this grant, JMG expanded its services to five high schools in the Bangor area and DVR launched Progressive Employment in the Augusta and Bangor regions.

Maine DVR expected that the TWBL Model Demonstration would enhance statewide collaboration that facilitates the transition process from secondary and postsecondary schools, to competitive integrated employment at or above minimum wage. Within 1 year after graduation, at least 90 percent of study participants will enter postsecondary education or competitive integrated employment.

https://www.explorevr.org/progressive-employment-maine-transition-work-based-learning-model

The TWBL grant concluded on Sept 30, 2021. Despite the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on community activities during years four and five of the grant, there were a number of positive findings from the grant. During the life of the grant 355 students received Progressive Employment Services and at least 131 students participated in at least two work-based learning experiences. TWBL’s evaluators found that (1) JMG programming had a significant impact on high school completion for students with disabilities. (2) an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) through DVR has a significant positive impact on employment and earnings outcomes for youth (3) There is a significant impact on youth earnings when youth received both JMG and VR services under an IPE – as well as other findings that will be posted with supporting materials on the Maine DVR website.

Maine DVR works with employers to support activities such as: informational interviews, job shadows, business tours, on–the–job training/apprenticeships and work experiences. Business Development during the pilot project includes identifying potential business leads based on the goals of the individual referrals and contacting the employer; requesting an informational interview; requesting a tour of the business or facility; sharing information about DVR and determining if the employer is willing to allow assessments, informational interviews, job shadows or on–the–job training at this location. Through the business development process, as it is described, the purpose is to gain an understanding of the various positions which this business employs and to ascertain the work environment and work culture.

H. INTERAGENCY COOPERATION

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

DVR/DBVI, OADS and DHHS-OBH have resumed is currently in negotiations to develop a joint MOU in accordance with WIOA regulations. The COVID-19 pandemic has delayed completion of this MOU, however it will be a priority for completion during 2022. .

Through its collaboration with DHHS and specifically the coordination of Maine’s Benefits Counseling Network, DVR/DBVI has been able to develop opportunities and overcome barriers to competitive integrated employment for individuals with disabilities who are eligible for MaineCare, the State’s Medicaid program.

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

To ensure that individuals with the most significant disabilities receive quality vocational rehabilitation services and equal access to employment opportunities throughout the state of Maine, the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation takes a multi–faceted approach that includes workforce development, engagement of business and the availability of support services for clients who need them, as described in the MOU with the DHHS Office of Aging and Disability Services mentioned elsewhere in this state plan.

DVR/DBVI, in collaboration with the Maine Department of Health & Human Services (DHHS), continues to contract with Syntiro, a technical assistance and training provider, to administer a comprehensive workforce development system for Employment Specialists in the Community Rehabilitation Provider sector. This project, Employment for ME Workforce Development System, includes basic certification (ACRE) training, advanced topical skills training, maintenance of a comprehensive training calendar and for newly certified employment specialists. The system was launched in July 2011.

Coordinated planning with DHHS’ Office of Aging and Disability Services promotes implementation of best practices, smoother transition between systems and improved access.

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

DVR has a MOU that guides the Maine Department of Labor’s Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS), through its Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired and the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, and the Maine Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), through its Office of Behavioral Health (DHHS-OBH), in the course of planning and implementing an aligned service delivery system that promotes evidence–based practices. It contains information about policies and processes that pertain to maintaining and enhancing the relationship between these two entities.”

A new MOU, to reflect all requirements of WIOA, is in final development.

In addition to providing ongoing employment support to more than 200 employed individuals with mental illness through contracts with CRP’s, the DHHS Office of Behavioral Health (DHHS-OBH) has several initiatives currently underway to promote employment among the individuals they serve:

Community Employment Specialist Program: DHHS-OBH contracts with Maine Medical Center’s Vocational Services to provide Employment Specialists that are embedded in behavioral health organizations across the state to assist individuals living with serious mental illness. They assist with career exploration and securing employment, and provide other supports as needed. In keeping with best practices, these Employment Specialists work as a team with behavioral health professionals to improve outcomes. This service is supplemental and not necessarily a replacement service for Vocational Rehabilitation services through the DOL Bureau of Rehabilitation Services.

The Clubhouse Model of Psychiatric Rehabilitation: Clubhouses help support members with overcoming barriers to employment by offering a variety of services such as in-house prevocational programs, transitional employment and competitive employment in the community with or without Supported Employment services. Prevocational programs give members the opportunity to contribute to the daily operation of the clubhouse on a volunteer basis while learning valuable skills. Transitional employment (not supported through Vocational Rehabilitation) offers members the chance to work at temporary part time jobs through Clubhouse partnerships with local employers, with on-the-job support from both the Clubhouse and the employer. Members also work in permanent positions in the community, at a job of their choosing, with SE as needed. There are four clubhouses in Maine.

Promoting Employment Through Traditional Mental Health Services: Both the primary Community Support Services (Community Integration Services, Assertive Community Treatment and Community Rehabilitation Services), as well as Behavioral Health

Home services require the development of an Individual Support Plan (ISP). Every 90 days, through the Individual Support Planning process, individuals receiving these services are asked about their vocational status and about unmet vocational needs. DHHS-OBH funds specific employment services and collaborates with the Department of Labor’s Division of Vocational Rehabilitation to provide resources to address vocational needs. In keeping with the fidelity of the model, all ACT teams are required to have an employment specialist.

Jointly Funded Work Incentives Planning: Six Community Work Incentive Coordinators (CWICs) are available statewide to provide all Social Security beneficiaries with disabilities access to benefits counseling services. This initiative is a collaboration between DHHS-OBH, OADS, and the Department of Labor’s Bureau of Rehabilitation Services DVR/DBVI.

Jointly Funded Employment Workforce Development System and Website: Maine has an Employment Workforce Development System that is jointly funded by DHHS (DHHS-OBH and OADS) and DOL BRS DVR/DBVI. This provides infrastructure for coordinating employment specialist trainings, webinars and advance topical trainings as well as maintaining a database of certified employment specialists.

DHHS (DHHS-OBH and OADS) and DOL BRS DVR/DBVI also collaborate on the development and maintenance of a comprehensive website, www.employmentforme.com, providing information on best practices and resources for employment for people with disabilities. The website is broken into four target audience sections – job seekers, service providers, youth in transition and employers. Another collaboration that is ongoing is the training and certification infrastructure.

DHHS (DHHS-OBH and OADS) also made available Balancing Incentive Program funds to increase system capacity to support individuals with disabilities on the path to employment. This initiative included training for Work and Benefits Navigators, the development of an advanced Work and Benefits Navigator training for Employment Specialists, the development of a Pathways to Employment infographic, and training in Individual Placement and Support and Supported Employment.

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

1. SYSTEM ON PERSONNEL AND PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT

A. QUALIFIED PERSONNEL NEEDS

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;

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:

–At the time of the state plan draft, DVR had 88 staff in the following positions:

Bureau Director - 1

DVR Director - 1

Systems Improvement & Quality Assurance Director - 0

DVR Assistant Director - 1

Regional Manager – 4

Casework Supervisor - 7

Rehabilitation Consultant - 4

Management Analyst - 1

Procurement and Contract specialist - 1

Rehabilitation Counselor II - 50

Rehabilitation Counselor I - 7

Support Staff - 11

Maine DVR averaged a 15 % turnover rate for Rehabilitation Counselor II’s (RCII) VR Counselors in FFY 20. There are currently 17 RC II positions that are vacant. Maine’s turnover rate continues to be deeply affected by the tight labor market and retirement, given the age of its workforce and less competitive wages when compared to private sector employment. VR Counselors are being actively sought by private sector employers who offer higher pay, work from home positions and other benefits. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic impacted staffing rates. Assuming retention levels remain consistent, it can be projected that DVR staffing needs could require as many as 19 new Rehabilitation Counselors in the next 5 years. The average turnover rate for non–rehabilitation counselor staff has been relatively consistent, approximately 13–15 percent annually. In examining staffing patterns of all other DVR staff, the turnover rate is approximately 17 percent. During FFY 2020, DVR hired 13 Rehabilitation Counselor II’s. At the time of this writing 28 positions (various roles) are vacant across the agency.

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

When applying the average turnover rates, it can be forecasted that Maine DVR will need to replace:

1 Regional Manager,

3 Casework Supervisors,

7 Paraprofessionals,

3 Clerical/Support Personnel and

0 Rehabilitation Consultants

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.

Within the next five years. The projections for staff vacancies are dependent upon current levels of funding as well as stability in state hiring and contracts. Maine DVR will keep RSA apprised of developments on this issue

Projected vacancies over the next 5 years:

1

* Director Vocational Rehabilitation: 0 Vacancies
* Director SIQA: 1 Vacancy
* Director, Division for the Deaf, Hard of Hearing and Late Deafened: 0 Vacancy
* Assistant Director Vocational Rehabilitation: 0 Vacancies
* Regional Manager: 1 Vacancy
* Casework Supervisor: 3 Vacancies.
* Rehabilitation Consultant: 0 Vacancies
* Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor II: 15 Vacancies
* Paraprofessional: 2 Vacancies
* Support Personnel: 3 Vacancies

DVR estimates that approximately 8500 individuals with disabilities will be served by Vocational Rehabilitation in PY 2022. Reorganization and reclassification of DVR positions is occurring in light of new learning during the pandemic – as well as an ongoing tight labor market. Service delivery is performed by Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) staff, consisting of 68 Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor II’s (including Rehabilitation Counselors for the Deaf), 10 Rehabilitation Counselor I’s, , eight Casework Supervisors, and three Regional Managers. DVR staff receives administrative and organizational support and guidance from the Director of DVR, the Assistant Director of DVR, the Director of SIQA (Systems Improvement and Quality Assurance), the Director of the Division for the Deaf, Hard of Hearing and Late Deafened, , and four Rehabilitation Consultants (program specialists), one management analyst, two Clerical Supervisors, and support services from 12 office personnel... DVR reserves up to three lines for use for interns.

B. PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT

I. A LIST OF THE INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE STATE THAT ARE PREPARING VR PROFESSIONALS, BY TYPE OF PROGRAM;

The University of Southern Maine (USM) is the only in–state institution of higher education offering a graduate program which satisfies the standards set forth by the Rehabilitation Act. In the last academic year, 34 students were enrolled full–time or part–time in its Master of Science in Rehabilitation Counseling Program. USM classes are offered on campus and via distance education. USM did not pursue the recent competition for RSA’s Long-term Training Grant. The University of Massachusetts Boston is now the nearest university which received funding under this program.

The University of Maine at Farmington (UMF), in partnership with the University of Southern Maine, began offering an accelerated program in the Fall of 2015 that allows counseling students to graduate with a master’s degree a year sooner. Graduates of the five–year program will be able to quality for both State licensing for counseling and national certification for rehabilitation counseling. The Program is accredited by the Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Programs and the Council on Rehabilitation Education.

UMF typically graduates 16-20 students per year with a B.S. in Rehabilitation Services. When combined with experience, this new program will meet the standards set forth under WIOA.

This year Maine DVR has launched an initiative to offer paid internship slots for a limited number of graduate and undergraduate students. It is hoped that the offer of paid internships will attract a more diverse group of interns – including those who could not afford to participate in an unpaid internship. Internships have been an effective way to expose undergraduates to the world of vocational rehabilitation and to begin to create a career ladder.

DVR has limited resources to pay educational/training costs associated with its efforts to develop and maintain a fully qualified staff and, as such, conducts ongoing investigation of distance education programs that offer RSA grant funding to participants to share with staff who are interested in also moving up the career ladder with Maine DVR.

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

During FFY 2020, Maine DVR had one (1) Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor (VRC) enrolled in the RSA–funded Rehabilitation Counseling program at University of Southern Maine.

Institutions; Students enrolled; Employee sponsored by agency and/or RSA; Graduates sponsored by agency and/or RSA; Graduates from the previous year;

2020 RSA Graduates sponsored by agency = 1

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.

2020 University of Southern Maine, RSA Grant Graduates = 1

2020 VR Staff to obtain CRC credential = 0

2020 VR Staff currently enrolled in USM Master’s in Rehabilitation Program = 0

2. PLAN FOR RECRUITMENT, PREPARATION AND RETENTION OF QUALIFIED PERSONNEL

DVR, with the support of the Commissioner of the Department of Labor, continues to work closely with the State of Maine’s Bureau of Human Resources (BHR) to fill vacancies. Recent recruitment efforts have included electronic vacancy postings on national and State of Maine websites, local postings with community providers and information sharing with the University of Maine at Farmington (undergraduate) and the University of Southern Maine (graduate) rehabilitation programs. .

Recruitment efforts for fully qualified rehabilitation counselors have become increasingly difficult, in comparison to previous years. COVID-19 has exacerbated the challenge to fill positions. Increasingly, Maine DVR VR counselor positions are competing for candidates with case management agencies and private programs that offer increased salary and flexibility. While client applications fell during the initial months of the pandemic, those numbers are beginning to rebound, and DVR will need to have staffing to meet these needs. Positions are remaining vacant for extended periods – in most cases – for some months.

A new initiative to increase diversity, equity, and inclusion has included efforts to attract and retain a diverse workforce. To support that effort, Maine DVR has begun to offer paid internships for a limited number of undergraduate and graduate students from the rehabilitation programs at the University of Maine at Farmington and the University of Southern Maine. Internships have been an effective means to introduce the world of state agency vocational rehabilitation services and create a pathway into employment. To strengthen the partnership with the universities, a Casework Supervisor sits on the Advisory Board of the University of Southern Maine’s Rehabilitation Counseling program and DVR staff are regularly asked to be speakers to undergraduate and graduate students. . DVR invites USM and UMF faculty to participate in training opportunities throughout the year.

DVR works closely with the Bureau of Human Resources to assist eligible individuals with disabilities to access Maine State Government’s "Special Appointment" program. DVR has several employees with disabilities and provides appropriate accessibility accommodations to support employment. The State of Maine is an Equal Employment Opportunity/Affirmative Action employer.

An area of concern for Maine DVR is the retention of qualified staff. DVR is committed to offering personnel development opportunities that enhance the work environment and support service delivery. Intensive training efforts in Diversity, Equity and Inclusion strategies as well as Motivational Interviewing are helping to increase staff skill level while also promoting opportunities for more staff to become involved in agency-wide improvement efforts. DVR hosted a “lunch and learn” panel discussion for staff who had an interest in promotional opportunities within the agency. Panel members shared their career paths, reflected on steps they took to prepare themselves for career growth and talked about the transition to a new role and challenges and supports that were helpful to them. Feedback from the session was very positive. DVR continues to review and assess essential job functions within the Division in view of the CSPD requirements and seeks the development of alternative and evidence–based approaches in the provision and maintenance of high-quality service delivery. The experience of the COVID-19 pandemic has allowed DVR to learn more about remote work and its impact on delivery of client services. Staff surveys conducted during the pandemic indicate that opportunities to continue hybrid (remote/in-person) work schedules post-pandemic will be key to retaining staff.

3. PERSONNEL STANDARDS

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

With the implementation of WIOA and reauthorization of the Rehabilitation Act, Maine DVR has revisited its personnel requirements and hiring practices. Maine DVR recognizes that the standards for rehabilitation counseling personnel outlined in WIOA represent the minimum standards for qualification. These standards require a minimum of attainment of a baccalaureate degree in a field of study reasonably related to vocational rehabilitation, to indicate a level of competency and skill demonstrating basic preparation in a field of study 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; and

(2) Demonstrated paid or unpaid experience, for not less than one year, consisting of -

(i) Direct work with individuals with disabilities in a setting such as an independent living center;

(ii) Direct service or advocacy activities that provide such individual with experience and skills in working with individuals with disabilities; or

(iii) Direct experience in competitive integrated employment environments as an employer, as a small business owner or operator, or in self-employment, or other experience in human resources or recruitment, or experience in supervising employees, training, or other activities; or

Maine DVR continues to give priority to applicants and staff who possess master’s degrees in counseling or a counseling–related degree, defined as Social Work, Psychology, Special Education, Rehabilitation and Counseling in alignment with WIOA’s alternative requirement of attainment of a master's or doctoral degree in a field of study 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.

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.

When recruiting or hiring new staff, Maine DVR gives preferences to those with a master’s degree in Rehabilitation Counseling, a closely related master’s degree in Social Work, Psychology, Special Education, or Counseling or having Rehabilitation Counselor Certification (CRC). Through the interview process, DVR assesses the applicant’s ability to demonstrate an understanding of the labor force and needs of individuals with disabilities. Maine DVR supports staff to obtain and practice 21st century skills through opportunities for training through the RSA-funded Technical Assistance Centers and state and local workforce development partners, including Maine DOL’s Center for Workforce Research and Information.

DVR partners with DBVI to ensure active participation and representation on regional workforce boards across the State. Information is shared with DVR staff to provide local county workforce trends, high growth and demand industries, career pathways and future workforce needs. DVR’s presence on these boards allows for increased awareness of hiring individuals with disabilities to local employers.

DVR is co-located with the Bureau of Employment Services statewide in CareerCenters. This co-location allows for increased collaboration on information sharing, co-enrollment opportunities, dual employer engagement and training opportunities. WIOA Memoranda of Understanding have also increased discussion of needs, delivery of training and collaborative work across all CareerCenter partners.

4. STAFF DEVELOPMENT

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

Staff development is delivered through formal and informal modalities, internal and external. DVR employees participate in annual performance reviews, a portion of which specifically addresses personnel development. At these reviews, staff and supervisors jointly identify training required to address performance enhancement.

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

DVR completed two, four-week New Counselor Training (NCT) series to incoming RCI’s and RCII’s. The series covers over 60 topics pertaining to the delivery of Vocational Rehabilitation services.

DVR and DBVI supervisors are involved in weekly MI supervision group to enhance and support the ongoing technique of Motivational Interviewing.

DVR staff completed Motivational Interviewing bootcamp. This training was offered regionally over the course of a year to engage small group discussion to highlight MI practices.

DVR and DBVI leadership attended the three-part Ability to Execute (A2E) training offered by McKinsey and Company.

DVR maintains numerous recorded webinars on its intranet site – allowing easy access for ongoing refreshers as needed.

To promote better use of the agency’s case management system – AWARE – the Systems Improvement and Quality Assurance Unit held weekly AWARE drop-in sessions to present content and respond to questions and needs from the field.

A sample of trainings that staff attended PY20:

Apprenticeship Town Hall

Motivational Interviewing- RCI and RCII focus

Excel 101- Adult Education

Work and Benefits Navigator Training (Part I and Part  2)

New Counselor Training (2x)

Apprenticeship Townhall

DVR Eligibility Training

Get Aware Live: Celebrating 100th Anniversary of Vocational Rehabilitation

WOWI Refresher

Virtual Job Shadow

Self-Employment Quarterly

Apprenticeship Townhall

Motivational Interviewing- Supervisor focus

McKinsey Leadership Training

PEERS

Windmills – Two staff were certified as trainers

Governor Office Opioid Response Seminar Series

McKinsey A2EE Train the Trainer

Transition Summit

OOS4 Implementation and Training

Virtual Job Shadow

5. PERSONNEL TO ADDRESS INDIVIDUAL COMMUNICATION NEEDS

DVR has four Rehabilitation Counselors for the Deaf positions – one is currently vacant. The other three Counselors are Deaf users of ASL.. The Director of the Division for the Deaf, Hard of Hearing and Late Deafened (who is Deaf himself) supervises the four Rehabilitation Counselors for the Deaf and provides direction, education and outreach on issues impacting individuals who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing.

As a state with a high percentage of older residents, there has been an increasing need to serve individuals who have age–related hearing loss and who wish to remain working. The Division Director has offered many workshops on deaf awareness/etiquette to employers, providers and state agencies this year to help increase awareness of promoting inclusion of employees who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing or Late Deafened. The Division Director meets once a month with his staff to address topics such as best practices in case management, communication strategies for individuals who use gestural communication for their primary mode of communication, among many other topics.

Staff who are Deaf have videophones at their desks for visual communication with consumers. During the pandemic, Rehabilitation Counselors for the Deaf were able to use their laptops and cell phones for Zoom and other video communication. DVR employs one other VR counselor who is fluent in ASL and two other staff who are deaf and use other means of communication.. DVR offices are co–located in Maine’s CareerCenter network. CareerCenters offer telecommunications devices including Interpretype, Ubi Duo, Video links, Video Relay and Video Remote Interpreting. Captioning (CART) services are used frequently to ensure access for staff and clients alike and are provided as needed. Zoom and Microsoft TEAMS are available across the State of Maine IT enterprise system to promote remote access.

 Spoken language interpreter services are accessed through a statewide contract for both in–person and remote interpreting. DVR has a small number of staff who are proficient in a language other than English.

DVR continues its collaborative efforts with the Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired, University of Southern Maine Linguistics Department, Helen Keller National Center (HKNC) for the Deaf-Blind, and the Maine Deaf-Blind Project, (a project which is a member of the New England Consortium of Deaf Blind Projects and provides technical assistance for students until the age of 21 and focuses on transition age youth) to improve services for clients who are deaf-blind or dual sensory impaired from hearing and vision loss. Although the program, "Independence Without Fear” has discontinued, the collaboration has expanded to include the Department of Health and Human Services, Disability Rights Maine, Division of Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and Late Deafened, and A Tri-state Collaborative with Vermont and New Hampshire. Efforts have included discussions to recruit, train and maintain a database of specially trained volunteers who can facilitate communication for people with significant vision and hearing impairments, as well as other services that are available to the dual sensory population. HKNC and OIB-TAC have provided training to staff on services to this targeted population.

DVR, as an agency in the Maine Department of Labor (MDOL), adheres to MDOL Policy No. 009 on Language Access. The Maine Department of Labor (MDOL) recognizes its obligation to provide linguistic access to services for individuals whose primary language is not English. Individuals for whom MDOL staff may need interpreter services include applicants, customers, family members, and/or companions. When MDOL staff does not speak the language needed, staff will inform the applicant/consumer that interpreter services are available to ensure equal access to programs and services provided by this Department and its contractors. Accordingly, it is the policy of MDOL to provide its staff with interpreter resources to be utilized in providing access to programs and services to Limited English Proficient persons as well as to persons who are deaf or hard of hearing. This policy outlines guidelines and procedures for the use of such interpreter services. All programs, benefits or services provided by MDOL shall be made available to all eligible persons regardless of their abilities to speak, write and/or understand English and who are deaf or hard of hearing. MDOL will provide interpreter services at no cost to individuals applying for or participating in MDOL programs. MDOL will have policies and procedures which combine the use of in-person and telephone interpreter services as well as translated material necessary for effective communication. MDOL is committed to the continued evaluation and improvement of these services, as well as education of staff in available resources and procedures. Every other quarter, DVR’s regularly scheduled meetings with Maine’s protection and advocacy agency – Disability Rights Maine – focus on Deaf Services to identify and address emerging or systemic needs.

The State Rehabilitation Council and DVR have looked at the need to have more materials available in languages other than English. During the last year, DVR conducted a staff survey to learn more about language access needs in the field and inform decision-making.

6. COORDINATION OF PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT UNDER THE INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES EDUCATION ACT

As outlined in Section 606 (Employment of Individuals with Disabilities) of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, Maine DVR continually makes “positive efforts to employ and advance in employment qualified individuals with disabilities in programs assisted under this title”. Approximately 25 Transition VR Counselors are assigned to work with the more than 200 Maine High Schools, as well as with out–of–school youth and youth attending private institutions. During PY 20 youth aged 15-22 represented over 41% of all DVR clients. However, this number should be considered to be lower than what would have been expected due to the negative impact of the pandemic on traditional outreach, school visits and other information sharing about VR services – as well as some families not prioritizing referrals to VR during this challenging time. Transition-age youth remain the fastest growing populationserved by DVR due to increased focus under WIOA on Pre-Employment Transition Services.

Maine DVR joins the Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired in a Statewide Transition Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Advisory Group that has increased its frequency of meetings during the pandemic from quarterly to monthly to promote best practices in the provision of VR transition services. During the last year, the group has focused on exchange of effective practices in providing remote service and maintaining engagement with youth, families, schools and employers. The group has particularly focused on increasing delivery of Pre-Employment Transition Services during the pandemic – including through informational interviews over Zoom, use of Virtual Job Shadow, Virtual Job Clubs and the Virtual Transition Career Exploration Workshop. .

As outlined in DVR’s current Cooperative Agreement with the Maine Department of Education (DOE), DVR has provided technical assistance to DOE and school districts on disability–specific information and resources issues and issues concerning eligibility and referral for services as requested. The DVR Director is the Chair of the IDEA Part B State Advisory Panel which is responsible for advising DOE on issues related to students with disabilities ages 3–20. The DVR director regularly presents to school groups on best practices for supporting work experience for youth through WIOA.

The DVR Director is also a member of the State Special Education Directors’ Association (MADSEC). DVR and DBVI worked closely with the Maine Department of Education and developed an updated interagency Memorandum of Understanding in June 2018. During the coming year, the MOU will again be updated to reflect technical assistance and training efforts currently being provided to Maine through the National Technical Assistance Center on Transition: the Collaborative (NTACT-C). In January of 2021, the Maine Department of Education issued an administrative letter expanding the age of eligibility for special education services to an individual’s 22nd birthday. The VR Director and a number of DVR staff have been involved in the Extended Eligibility Workgroup and joined a three-day transition summit held in the Summer 2021 with support from NTACT-C. Additionally, the DVR Director is representing DVR and the Maine Department of Labor on the LD 924 Taskforce which is charged to examine post-secondary services for young adults – particularly those with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities.

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;

In June 2014, Maine’s legislature enacted the Employment First Maine Act (Sec. A-1. 26 MRSA c.3), which was a natural progression in Maine’s focus on competitive integrated employment as a valued outcome for the state’s citizens with disabilities. It set forth that the Departments of Health and Human Services, Labor, and Education must implement employment as a core component of services and supports provided and is the first and preferred service or support option offered to individuals with disabilities.

The act also convened a time-limited coalition of interested parties, including employers, state agency representatives, advocacy organizations, and people with disabilities, to review and make recommendations regarding the improvement of the administration of employment services and the employment outcomes of people with disabilities. Before its sunset in October 2016, the Employment First Maine Coalition produced a report summarizing the work that was completed and identifying twenty-seven recommendations for consideration by the Governor, the Legislature and state agencies, primarily identifying strategies that encourage the employment of youth and adults with disabilities, engage the business community, and improve EFM performance measures.

DVR is committed to the philosophy of Employment First and this has shaped all procedural guidance and operations since the law’s passage in Maine. In particular, DVR has expanded opportunities for work-based learning and paid work experience for students with significant disabilities which has resulted in changing trajectories for young people who may have not been thought of by their families and schools as able to work in the community at a competitive wage.

DHHS currently supports approximately 6,000 people with developmental disabilities, brain injuries, other related conditions and physical disabilities through five Centers for Medicaid and Medicare Services (CMS) 1915c Waivers. Individuals receiving waiver services have significant disabilities and require supports and services to obtain and maintain employment.

The waivers allow individuals who have been found eligible for the Maine Office of Aging and Disability Services (OADS) Services based on disability/eligibility to become prepared for employment through Community Supports Services that can assist the person to volunteer, increase work-readiness skills, and address issues of health and safety. The Brain Injury waiver expanded to include a Work Ordered Day Clubhouse and the first one opened in the fall of 2017 in southern Maine. Career Planning Services are now available under all four waivers for people who need to spend time exploring interests, skills and abilities prior to going to Vocational Rehabilitation.

The service of Career Planning funded under the waivers has continued to serve 75 to 100 people a year prior to a referral for Vocational Rehabilitation. Furthermore, OADS is providing on-the-job support through the waivers to about 1,000 people who are working throughout Maine. These waivers funded services which provided support to both the individual to maintain employment, including support to the employer.

Beginning in 2018, all Intake and Eligibility staff share information on employment as they meet people and their families for the first time. In the packet OADS provides during intake, there is an Employment Pathway visual, an Employment Services VR brochure, and Work and Benefit Counseling information, all of which show work is possible.

The Department of Health and Human Services, in conjunction with other State Agencies and partners, continues to implement the recommendations that were developed by the Employment First Maine Coalition. The Offices of Substance Abuse and Mental Health, Child and Family Services, and Aging and Disability Services have committed to work together to ensure that the outcome of employment of people with disabilities is a strong focus of the services they provide.

During the past year, DHHS has created new resources, developed additional employment services, and has begun to expand expectations that service providers all have a responsibility to promote employment as the first and preferred outcome.

The data shows there are 36,860 SSI recipients and 64,708 SSDI recipients living in Maine. Based on the fact many of these individuals are eligible for both SSI and SSDI, BRS cannot compute a precise total of individuals eligible for Social Security benefits. It is estimated there are approximately 83,603 Social Security beneficiaries with disabilities living in Maine, all of whom would meet the DVR eligibility definition of “substantial impediment to employment.” For more information see https://www.maine.gov/rehab/dvr/stateplan/

B. WHO ARE MINORITIES;

Vocational rehabilitation services to minorities with disabilities in Maine have always been a challenge to DVR because of the state’s relatively homogeneous population and low ethnic diversity. Residents are primarily White (94.6%) with small representation of Black (1.6%), Asian (1.2%), and Native American (0.7%) individuals in certain geographical areas of the state. Native Americans represent a historically recognizable group and Maine has nearly 18,500 tribal members who are located both on reservations and defined land, as well as scattered across the state. Tribal members are primarily located in Penobscot, Washington and Aroostook counties. Unemployment figures among Micmac and Maliseet tribes range from 55% to 76%.

DVR continues to work collaboratively with the Houlton Band of Maliseet’s, which was recently re-awarded a five-year Section 121 grant. The grant has been extended until 2025.

While Maine’s minority population is small, two areas of Maine have seen significant increases in the numbers of non–English speakers due to refugee resettlement programs. According to the 2014 American Community Survey, approximately 65,000 Maine residents speak a language other than English at home. Targeted culturally appropriate outreach may be needed to ensure that information concerning VR resources is available to individuals who belong to potentially underserved minority populations.

The FFY 19 data in the most recent CSNA highlighted that 92% of the VR population is White and 8% identify themselves as being members of a racial or ethnic minority. https://www.maine.gov/rehab/dvr/stateplan/

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

Among the groups that DVR considers when examining who has been unserved or underserved by the VR program include: Individuals with minority status (including New Mainers and indigenous populations), Individuals reentering from the corrections system, older workers, Veterans, individuals receiving Temporary Assistnace for Needy Families (TANF), individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing. Maine DVR is also beginning to examine the representation of individuals who identify as LGBTQ+ related to access to services.

To estimate the number of people eligible for DVR services in Maine, we use information from the American Community Survey (ACS), conducted each year by the United States Census Bureau. In Maine, among the civilian noninstitutionalized population in 2013-2017, 16% reported a disability. The likelihood of having a disability varied by age – from 7% of people under 18 years of age to 53% of people 18 to 64 years old, and to 40% of those 65 and over. ((ACS), 2013-2017). The ACS is designed to provide both national and State level data on demographic, social, economic and housing characteristics of U.S. households.

Per DVR’s most recent CSNA https://www.maine.gov/rehab/dvr/stateplan/, the following discrepancies were noted between the population being served by DVR and those who may be eligible for services:

• DVR participants are generally less educated than the eligible population with 20% lacking a high school diploma versus only 18% in the ACS with a disability sample.

• DVR participants are more likely to be make (56% versus 44%)

• DVR serves proportionately few individuals of racial or ethnic minorities than those identified in the ACS work disability population.

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

Colocation in Maine’s network of Department of Labor (MDOL) One–Stop CareerCenters has provided DVR the opportunity to work in partnership with several other programs that are components of the statewide workforce system and can support the employment of people with disabilities. The CareerCenters provide several employment programs that serve people with disabilities. The redesigned Maine Job Link is an online accessible CareerCenter tool to allow job seekers from around the state to be matched with real-time available open positions.

Programs overseen by the Bureau of Employment services reported the following enrollment numbers and identified participants with disabilities. These numbers indicate that there are many opportunities for co-enrollment, particularly with the youth population:

Labor Exchange Self Service: 135,733 – disability info n/a

Labor Exchange Employment Services: 2,494 – 267 individuals with a disability or 10.7%

Adult Services – 580 – 75 individuals with a disability or 12.9 %

Dislocated Worker – 358 – 31 individuals with a disability or 8.7%

Youth – 395 – 195 individuals with a disability or 53.4%

While the Bureau of Employment Services (BES) collects data on self-reported disability, it does not require that individuals disclose having a disability. As a result of past work through collaborative efforts, including two rounds of the Disability Employment Initiative grant funding, there is increased awareness and attention in the CareerCenter to increasing access to expanded services for customers with disabilities. There are concerns about the accuracy of the current case management database; the system defines disability status within the context of vocational rehabilitation. Individuals who have a disability, which does not constitute a significant barrier to employment, are often not recorded as having a disability at all. Administrative override is required to update a person’s disability status when they disclose post-enrollment.

During the COVID-19 Pandemic, CareerCenter services moved to a virtual model that provided increased access for individuals who were not able to travel to a physical location. Live chat and other features allowed for quicker response to jobseekers’ questions and needs.

Research has shown that the number of people with disabilities served by CareerCenters is under-reported. According to 2020 estimates from the American Community Survey, people with disabilities comprise 16% of Maine’s working age population. ((ACS), 2015-2019) . With the exception of the youth population, it would appear that people with disabilities are underrepresented in usage of workforce services. For additional information see Maine's WIOA State Plan for PY 20-23 and DVR's CSNA https://www.maine.gov/rehab/dvr/stateplan/

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

Since passage of WIOA and promulgation of the final rules, Maine DVR has worked to develop, adopt and implement procedural guidance, programming and training to support the identification and registration of students with disabilities who are eligible or potentially eligible for Pre-Employment Transition Services. Through previously established relationships with school districts and through outreach initiatives and pilot activities, Maine DVR has sought to offer Pre-Employment Transition Services across the state. According to the most recent 2019 data from the Maine Department of Education, there are 10, 450 students from ages 14-20 receiving special education services across the state. Additionally, approximately 3000 students grade 9-12 were identified as having a 504 plan. While overall numbers of school-age students have dropped in Maine, the numbers and percentage of students enrolled in special education services continue to increase. In 2015, 17.25 % of Maine students received special education services; in 2019 this number had risen to 18.9 %. Maine DVR has targeted the problem of early exiters from VR services and is collecting data and implementing targeted initiatives for transition-age youth designed to engage youth with disabilities and get them involved in community-based work experiences and other work-based learning sooner.

• Autism numbers continue to grow with a total number of students (n=859) in 2016, further analysis reveals that this number will be increasing significantly in the coming years.

• While not all of these potentially eligible students will become VR clients, based on most recentanalysis, there may be greater capacity in certain areas of the state than others. In

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particular, Region I (Cumberland and York) has the potential to be asked to serve a greater number of transition-age clients per counselor in comparison to Region III (Kennebec, Knox, Lincoln, Somerset, and Waldo) and Region V (Aroostook).

• In Region II (Androscoggin, Franklin, Oxford, and Sagadahoc) and Region IV (Hancock, Piscataquis, Penobscot and Washington), there appears to be more equitable ratio of students to counselors. For more information see CSNA at · https://www.maine.gov/rehab/dvr/stateplan/

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

While DVR has not had the need to establish, develop, or improve community rehabilitation programs within the State, the agency has pursued a new payment structure that is designed to better support contractual agreements with community rehabilitation providers while reinforcing the importance to client outcomes of timely and available services.https://www.maine.gov/rehab/dvr/stateplan/

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

Since the passage of WIOA and promulgation of final rules, DVR has worked closely with the Maine Department of Education to understand the numbers of students with disabilities in Maine who are eligible for Pre-Employment Transition Services. At the local education agency level, this has played out as VR counselors have worked with individual school districts to determine what services are already being provided in the school, what other service providers are involved, and how the LEA can partner with DVR to jointly deliver Pre-Employment Transition Services. Education and outreach to LEA’s has focused on the value of starting early, at age 14, with Pre-Employment Transition Services. Maine Department of Education’s Special Services IDEA monitoring team has reinforced this message by providing VR materials during monitoring visits along with examples of how Pre-Employment Transition Services can inform the Individualized Education Program (IEP).

With partners at the Institute for Community Inclusion and the American Institutes for Research, Maine DVR is undertaking an evaluation of the impact of delivery of Pre-Employment Transition Services on eventual application and eligibility for DVR Transition Services. It is anticipated that by providing a rich array of Pre-Employment Transition Services earlier in students’ high school careers, that some students with disabilities may not need individualized transition services through DVR. It is possible, however, that with increased awareness of VR services – through exposure to Pre-Employment Transition Services some students will not need Vocational Rehabilitation services.

Maine DVR continues in its efforts to fully and properly implement of WIOA, working cooperatively with agencies that have the most impact on transition–age students and prepare them well for post-secondary education and employment success.

Maine DVR has assigned a Transition VR Counselor to every high school in the state. Students are offered Pre-Employment Transition Services in conjunction with the LEA on an individualized district by district plan. DVR has developed and made available statewide tools like the Transition Career Exploration Workshop https://www.maine.gov/rehab/73422/maine\_cew/cew\_transition/index.html and the Financial Literacy Guide for Transition Age Youth https://www.maine.gov/rehab/dvr/youth\_transition.shtml. Over 300 transition age youth participated in Paid Work Experiences during 2019. For additional information see https://www.maine.gov/rehab/dvr/stateplan/

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K. ANNUAL ESTIMATES

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

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, from 2015 through 2019, just over 210,000 persons with one or more disabilities resided in Maine, equal to about 16 percent of its civilian non-institutionalized population of 1.3 million. Just over half of Maine people with a disability are considered of working-age 18-64.

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

A. THE VR PROGRAM;

In FFY 21 , DVR served individuals. Based on projected estimates impacted by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, estimates for FFY 22 and FFY 23 are for 8,500 individuals served each year.

B. THE SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM; AND

Maine DVR was not able to expend Supported Employment grant funds in recent fiscal years. . In FFY 21, DVR received $252,000 in Supported Employment grant funding. DVR has struggled to expend Supported Employment funds in recent years due to limitations on how funding may be used. Specifically, DVR has demand for Supported Employment (A) funds but not the matching demand for Supported Employment (B) funds. Supported Employment (A) funds may only be drawn down at the same amount as Supported Employment (B) funds are – which has resulted in Supported Employment funds being returned

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

The expected services provision for FFY 22and FFY 23 by priority category is as follows:

FFY 22

OOS 1 – 4590 = 54%

OOS 2 –3902 = 46%

OOS 3 – 8 = .1%

OOS 4 – n/a

FFY 23

OOS 1 - 4590 = 54%

OOS 2 - 3910 = 46%

OOS 3 - n/a

OOS 4 = n/a

3. THE NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE ELIGIBLE FOR VR SERVICES, BUT ARE NOT RECEIVING SUCH SERVICES DUE TO AN ORDER OF SELECTION; AND

At the time of this State Plan - DVR has 514 individuals who are in delayed status in Categories OOS3 and OOS 4 and are unable to be served.

During FFY 2016, DVR determined that it could no longer serve individuals in OOS Category 3 due to lack of resources. The projected number of clients to receive services after being found eligible is 8500 of which 6,000 are expected to be served under an employment plan. A very small number of pen cases in Category 3 were found eligible before the waitlist was established and they will continue to be served, .

Following identification of a misalignment in Order of Selection categories at the time of the last Unified State Plan in 2020, RSA provided technical assistance to Maine. Maine DVR undertook a rule change in 2021 to resolve this misalignment by adding a new Order of Selection Category 4 “All other qualified individuals”. OOS Category 4 is currently also in delayed status.

A recent law requiring hearing aids to be covered by Maine insurance companies is also predicted to reduce applications for VR services for individuals who have fewer barriers to employment and would have been found eligible in Categories 3 or 4.

While DVR is fiscally able to serve individuals, who are on the waitlist. Severe staffing instability during the COVID-19 pandemic would make it irresponsible to open the waitlist at this time.

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.

During FFY 21, DVR expended $ $16,520,434

to serve

a total of 7,809 clients in all case statuses from Application to Closure.

 (including supported employment and Pre-ETS but excluding those on the OOS 3 delayed status waitlist). DVR estimates the following costs for each priority category going forward in FFY 22 & 23.

For FFY 22 and FY 23 - $19,000,000

OOS Category 1 - $ 10,260,000 (4590 clients)

OOS Category 2 - $8,690,000 (3905 clients)

OOS Category 3 - $50,000 (5 clients)

OOS Category 3 - Delayed (Waitlist) Status -

OOS Category 4 – Delayed (Waitlist) Status – n/a

L. STATE GOALS AND PRIORITIES

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

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.

Maine DVR, in concert with the DVR SRC has discussed State Plan goals and progress at its meetings throughout the year which has aided development of the plan. The SRC provides data on consumer satisfaction which is reviewed along with DVR’s triennial customer satisfaction assessment.

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

Goal 1

Maine DVR clients will reach their employment goals and be valued members of Maine’s workforce as measured by a. measurable skill gains, b. credential attainment and c. successful employment closures in competitive integrated employment.

Goal 2

All individuals, including those with the most significant disabilities, will be served in a timely manner -which means determining eligibility within 60 days and developing Individualized Plans for Employment for all eligible clients within the 90-day time frame. DVR will continue to maintain no wait list for those individuals in categories 1 and 2 and will monitor the ability to again serve those in categories 3 and 4 in the future.

Goal 3

All Individuals served by DVR receive high quality vocational rehabilitation services in an accessible and culturally-competent manner that reflects the principles of universal design, informed choice and Diversity, Equity and Inclusion as measured by consumer feedback and case review.

Goal 4

Maine DVR services will be provided in partnership with Maine’s workforce development system as measured annually by documented collaborative activities, co-enrollment, technical assistance, and training – leading to increased employment and credential attainment opportunities for jobseekers with disabilities.

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;

Maine DVR completed its comprehensive needs assessment and presented it to the State Rehabilitation Council for comment. The State Rehabilitation Council reviewed the Assessment and associated data when considerting input to the goals and strategies included in this plan.

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

Maine tracks progress on Common Performance Measures - as well as some key (former) Standards and Indicators - in the Maine AWARE case management system. This software enables Maine DVR to track its progress in real time. Maine DVR relies heavily on data for informed decision making and has incorporated the quarterly Data Dashboards released by RSA in this data review. DVR collects and analyzes data through the agency's Division for Systems Improvement and Quality Assurance in collaboration with agency leadership.

Data is shared across the agency (through monthly, quarterly and annual reports) to promote accountability and increased understanding of trends, outcomes, and agency needs. All VR counselors, supervisors, and managers have been trained on Common Performance Measures and Performance Management Form goals were updated for all VR Counselors and Casework Supervisors to increase alignment of practice and performance with d performance with the Common Performance Measures.

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 recommendations from SRC to DVR in their most recent Annual Report.

During DVR's 2017 RSA monitoring, two program areas were identified as needing improvement - time to eligibility and time to IPE development. These had also been identified by DVR prior to the monitoring and steps had begun to be taken to demonstrate improvement. Current efforts include::

• Targeted new counselor and ongoing staff training on strategies to determine eligibility within 60 days

• Targeted new counselor and ongoing staff training on strategies to develop an initial IPE within 90 days

* Addition of Peformance Management objectives concerning 60- and 90-day timelines for VR Counselors and Casework Supervisors

• Quarterly reporting by region to assess progress

• Training for supervisors and managers on supporting VR counselors to meet both standards.

* Quarterly case reviews to document progress and identify areas of continued need.

• Regular discussion and data sharing with the State Rehabilitation Council regarding these two areas of need.

DVR has been notified by RSA that they will conduct a Corrective Action Plan virtual visit during March 2022 to follow-up to the 2017 monitoring findings.

M. ORDER OF SELECTION

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

If services cannot be provided to all eligible individuals who apply, the Director of DVR will implement an Order of Selection (OOS) as set forth in this section. After determining eligibility counselors must assign a priority category and follow the Order of Selection set forth below for the provision of services. Individuals determined eligible prior to the date of implementation of the Order of Selection will continue to receive cost services. Maine DVR will notify all eligible individuals of the priority categories in the Order of Selection. Eligible individuals in priority categories not currently being served will be notified in writing of their assignment to a category and their right to appeal their category assignment.

Whether in an Order of Selection or not, Maine DVR has assigned all applicants to an OOS category to ensure that DVR continues to serve the most significantly disabled. This was upon the advice of RSA staff during the 2011 Section107 Monitoring review. The priority category shall be assigned, based on their level of significance of disability; “Level of significance of disability” means one of the following: Priority Category 1, “ individual with a most significant disability”; Priority Category 2, “individual with a significant disability”; Priority Category 3, “individual with a significant disability” or Priority Category 4 “ All other eligible individuals” . Individuals with disabilities shall be served first based on significance of disability and second by date of application. Eligible individuals who do not meet the Order of Selection category currently being served will have access to services through information and referral. Individuals will be appropriately referred to other programs – including those of other core WIOA partners.

B. THE JUSTIFICATION FOR THE ORDER

In late 2015, DVR was made aware of a potential shortfall in funding. Further analysis of the reasons behind the projected shortfall revealed: • The required 15% Title I set–aside for Pre-Employment Transition Services is reducing the funding available for all other clients other than Students with Disabilities. • Case service costs and expenditures have increased over the past year by approximately 20%, mostly due to an increase in applications by individuals seeking assistance with hearing aid costs • DVR has increased the numbers of individuals served and successfully closed in employment in each of the last five years while funding has not increased. • A high level of staff vacancies over the last year may result in immediate and premature referrals to fee–for–service providers.

When DVR became aware of the situation, the State Rehabilitation Council was advised and offered feedback and support for the implementation of an Order of Selection for Category 3 via their regularly scheduled executive committee and full group meetings. Additionally, in December 2015 two phone calls were held with RSA to apprise them of the situation.

Following the submission of the 2020 WIOA State Plan, DVR was notified by RSA of an error in the definition of Order of Selection Category 2. To correct this error with the least impact to clients, DVR consulted with RSA, the SRC and stakeholders and changed its rules to add Order of Selection Category 4 in 2021 – “All other eligible individuals”. In accordance with Maine DVR’s State Plan and policy guidance, this Priority Category also remains closed.

At the time of these modifications, DVR’s fiscal situation has improved enough to allow for opening of the two closed OOS Categories – however, the dire shortage of staff during the COVID -19 pandemic has made opening the waitlist at this time irresponsible as DVR needs to have the human resources to be able to provide high quality services. DVR continues to work closely with the State Rehabilitation Council and with its fiscal and quality assurance units to determine when stability of human resources has been reached such that the waitlist can be eliminated and OOS Categories 3 and 4 reopened.

 DVR regularly reviews the waitlist status and is actively exploring opportunities to ensure that individuals who are found eligible in Categories 3 and 4 have awareness and access to other resources in the community.

C. THE SERVICE AND OUTCOME GOALS

Maine implemented an Order of Selection for Category 3 on January 18, 2016 and for Category 4 upon rule change and subsequent implementation in December 2021. The projected numbers of clients to be served under an IPE is 6000 in FFY 2022and FFY 2023. The proposed case service budget is $ 6, 000,000. The expected service provision by category is as follows: OOS Category 1 = 54%= $ 3,240,000

OOS Category 2 = 45 % = $ 2,700,000

OOS Category 3 = ≤ 1% = $ 60,000 (individuals found eligible prior to waitlist implementation)

 Maine DVR projects that FFY 22 and FFY 23 closure goals will be 500 and 750 due to extended impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and ongoing waitlist – as well as focus on measurable skill gain and credential attainment to create opportunities for meaningful career pathways before VR exit. .

OOS 1 - 54% =Closures (270 FFY 22, 408 FFY 23)

OOS 2 - 45% =Closures (225 FFY 22, 339 FFY 23)

OOS 3 - ≤1% = Closures ( 5 FFY 22, 3 FFY 23)

00S 4 – n/a = 0 Closures

Total: 500 – FFY 2022, 750 – FFY 2023

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

Per FFY 20 21data, DVR estimates that it will take individuals in each OOS category the following time to reach their IPE goals

OOS 1- 27 months (average)

OOS 2 - 19 months (average)

OOS 3 - 73 months (Based on 1 case closure)(note - given the small number of cases served in OOS 3 due to the waitlist the average is impacted by an outlier case)

OOS 4 – n/a

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

Individuals with disabilities shall be served first based on significance of disability and second by date of application in the following priority order: Priority Category 1, “most significantly disabled”; Priority Category 2, “significantly disabled”; Priority Category 3, “significantly disabled” or Priority Category 4 “All other eligible”.

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

Maine DVR has not selected to serve eligible individuals in this manner.

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

Goal 1

Maine DVR clients will reach their employment goals and be valued members of Maine’s workforce as measured by a. measurable skill gains, b. credential attainment and c. successful employment closures in competitive integrated employment.

Goal 2

All individuals, including those with the most significant disabilities, will be served in a timely manner -which means determining eligibility within 60 days and developing Individualized Plans for Employment for all eligible clients within the 90-day time frame. DVR will continue to maintain no wait list for those individuals in categories 1 and 2 and will monitor the ability to again serve those in categories 3 and 4 in the future.

Objective 2.3: Maine DVR will address the underemployment of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities by assisting them to prepare for, reach, maintain and advance in careers of their choice in keeping with Maine’s Employment First law and as documented by measurable skills gains, credential attainment and successful closures in employment.

Strategies: a. DVR will partner with Maine DHHS’ Office of Aging and Disability Services and the Maine Department of Education to develop a plan to improve employment outcomes of people with disabilities in competitive integrated settings. b. DVR will work with DHHS’s Office of Aging and Disability Services to provide joint education and outreach to individuals, families, case managers and other providers, on the benefits of employment and the process to access DVR services including through proposed co-location of staff d. Continue to provide access to and training on the BRIDGE – Career Exploration Workshop including virtual modules developed with input from self-advocates.

Maine DVR places a priority on serving individuals with the most significant needs including those in need of supported employment. While DVR is able to expend all SE-A funds, the requirements tying SE-A spending to SE-B has been challenging due to the limited need currently to expend SE-B funds in accordance with federal guidelines. Coordination with other state agency partners, focus on employment fit and natural supports, and employer-provided supports have minimized the need to continue to need to expend SE-B funds for extended periods. DVR will continue to work with partners and will continue to provide training for staff on supported employment. DVR's Pre-ETS work will also help to build a pipeline of more youth who are entering employment - including those with the most significant disabilities who may need supported employment supports.

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

Maine DVR has developed procedural guidance for staff on the use of extended services for youth. This guidance states that DVR will make available extended services for youth with the most significant disabilities in supported employment for a period not to exceed four years or until such time that a youth reaches the age of 25 and no longer meets the definition of a youth with a disability. Extended services are defined as ongoing support services and other appropriate services that are needed to support an individual with the most significant disability in supported employment. During the comprehensive assessment of rehabilitation needs, and participation in Pre-Employment Transition Services, it may be determined that a youth with a most significant disability will benefit from extended support services.

If the youth does not have access to extended support services through a comparable benefit, and other supports are not available or do not meet the client's needs, the VR counselor will work with the client and guardian such that there is agreement that the employment placement and extended services with or without assistive technology and accommodations will enable the youth to develop adequate natural supports such that other supports are not needed or will connect them with other sources of support.

DVR will authorize one year of extended supports at a time. In limited individualized circumstances, the plan may be updated for an additional time period, up to one year at a time but under no circumstances for longer than four years or after the youth turns 25.

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.

DVR has a close working relationship with our partners at DHHS Office of Aging and Disability Services and Office of Behavioral Health a procedural directive, spells out how waiver services will fund career planning and other discovery activities and will coordinate with a referral to DVR who will work with the case manager and agency to proceed with job development and perhaps further exploration as needed. Then, when an individual has been successfully placed in a job and is stable and closed out successfully (may utilize extended services for this as needed), waiver funds will then pick up again and cover long term support services (usually job coaching), which will help the individual continue to remain stable on the job. This agreement is being updated at the time of this State Plan,

O. STATE'S STRATEGIES

1. THE METHODS TO BE USED TO EXPAND AND IMPROVE SERVICES TO INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES

These Goals, Objectives and Strategies to attain PY 2020-2023 goals developed based on the recommendations from the most recent Statewide Needs Assessment as well as input from the State Rehabilitation Council.

Goal 1

Maine DVR clients will reach their employment goals and be valued members of Maine’s workforce as measured by a. measurable skill gains, b. credential attainment and c. successful employment closures in competitive integrated employment

 Objective 1.1: To continue to reduce early exit from DVR services from 2,636 in PY 2018 to 2, 500 in PY 2020 and further reducing to 2, 000 in PY 2023.

Strategies: a. Provide staff training on techniques that promote engagement – such as Motivational Interviewing and Progressive Employment b. Explore technological options to promote regular communication between clients and VR counselors c. Promote retention of qualified staff through analysis of reasons for departure and development of retention approaches informed by learning through the COVID-19 pandemic.

 Objective 1.2: To promote increased access to and delivery of Pre–Employment Transition Services to all students with disabilities from 1,769 PY 2018 to 3,000 in PY 2020 and 4000 annually by PY2023 leading to improved post-secondary education and employment readiness.

Strategies: a. Through use of Progressive Employment, Summer Work Experience, and other work- based learning opportunities, DVR will support at least 300 students with disabilities to have paid work experiences annually during PY 2020 through PY 2023. b. Maine DVR - in collaboration with DBVI and with support from PolicyWorks – will launch a statewide peer mentoring effort during PY 2022. Peer mentoring will be provided by “near peers” to support preparation for post-secondary education and employment. c. In partnership with the Maine Department of Education and Local Education Agencies, Maine DVR will deliver Pre-Employment Transition Services to Potentially Eligible and Eligible students with disabilities across Maine. This will include through joint activities such as job tours, job clubs, Transition Career Exploration Workshop, and delivery of information on labor markets and career pathways. d. Maine DVR will partner with the Maine Department of Education’s Special Services and Career and Technical Education offices to develop opportunities to increase the delivery of Pre-Employment Transition Services to students in Career and Technical Education programs. e. Maine DVR will partner with the Maine Department of Health and Human Services’ Office of Child and Family Services to ensure access to and participation in Pre-Employment Transition Services of youth served through child welfare and children’s behavioral health services. f. Maine DVR will expand delivery of strategies to address the needs of rural youth including through online resources and Virtual Job Shadow. g. Maine DVR will work with Maine’s Parent Training and Information Center to increase family awareness of Pre-Employment Transition Services and the value of early career exploration and planning for students with disabilities h. Through its Division for the Deaf, Hard of Hearing and Late Deafened, DVR will develop and deliver targeted Pre-Employment Transition Services in conjunction with the Maine Educational Center for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing/Governor Baxter School. i. Maine DVR will explore opportunities to support delivery of Pre-Employment Transition Services in conjunction with Job Corps and YouthBuild programming. j. Maine DVR will participate in the Cross-Agency Council on Transition and support inclusion of DVR clients in the “Youth Advisory Group” to receive feedback and input on needed transition services and related policies. k. In keeping with current research, Employment First, and the State of Maine’s Economic Development plan - collect and record data to track progress towards ensuring that all Maine youth have a paid work experience before high school graduation. l. Maine DVR will disseminate, implement and sustain promising practices and lessons learned for work-based learning from the RSA-funded Transition Work Based Learning Model Demonstration Grant.

Objective 1.3: To promote careers in high wage-high growth, STEM, and other promising industry sectors through the exploration and inclusion of career pathways in DVR clients’ Individualized Plans for Employment.

Strategies: a. Deliver joint training opportunities for DVR staff and Community Rehabilitation Providers on best practices in the use of Career Pathways. b. Provide training for DVR staff on using the Comprehensive Assessment of Rehabilitation Needs to promote use of Apprenticeship and self-employment as approaches to Career Pathways c. DVR will build on pilot efforts in partnership with the Maine Department of Labor’s Apprenticeship program to develop statewide policies and practices to promote increased use of Apprenticeship as a Career Pathways strategy. d. DVR will work with DBVI and the Maine Department of Labor’s Apprenticeship Program to ensure that clients who Deaf/Hard of Hearing or who have significant disabilities are included in the growth and expansion of apprenticeships in Maine. e. Open and closed case reviews will monitor for inclusion of career pathway strategies.

f. DVR will participate in RSA-funded Technical Assistance Centers’ training and assistance on utilization of Career Pathways strategies

Objective 1.4: Through lessons learned from the use of Progressive Employment, expand the number of Maine employers who implement diversity hiring activities through engagement with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and workforce system partners.

Strategies: a.. b. Partner with local Chambers of Commerce, the Society of Human Resource Managers (SHRM), and others to expand business outreach/network. c. Actively participate in the Statewide Workforce Action Team (SWAT) that is made of Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) core partners and others in the workforce development system to grow and diversify Maine’s workforce through targeted outreach to employers. d. Develop, support and maintain a team of DVR staff across the state to function as a Business Relations Team – including in partnership with Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired business relations staff.

Goal 2 All individuals, including those with the most significant disabilities, will be served in a timely manner -which means determining eligibility within 60 days and developing Individualized Plans for Employment for all eligible clients within the 90-day time frame. DVR will continue to maintain no wait list for those individuals in categories 1 and 2 and will monitor the ability to again serve those in categories 3 and 4 in the future.

Objective 2.1: To continue progress to reach substantial compliance (90%) in determining eligibility within 60 days of receiving an application for DVR services. DVR will progress from 79.7% in PY2018 to substantial compliance in PY 2021 and maintain substantial compliance or better in PY 2022-2023.

Strategies: a. Collect data on eligibility determination and disseminate quarterly to DVR supervisors and managers to support best practices in the field. b. Deliver staff training and supervision on best practices in eligibility determination – including use of strategies provided through technical assistance provided by RSA c. Provide education and outreach on the use and ease of new electronic options to access and submit an application and supporting materials for DVR services.

Objective 2.2: To continue progress to reach substantial compliance (90%) in timely plan development by increasing the percentage of clients who are have an Individualized Plan for Employment developed within 90 days from 78.9% in PY 2018 to substantial compliance in PY 2020 and maintain substantial compliance or better in PY 2021-2023.

Strategies: a. Collect data on timely plan development and disseminate quarterly to DVR supervisors and managers to support best staff practices in the field. b. Deliver staff training and supervision on best practices in IPE plan development and Order of Selection (OOS) determination. c. Increase use of the Career Exploration Workshop, which has been shown to decrease case length time. d. Work closely with the Maine Department of Education to ensure implementation of the joint Cooperative Agreement and best practice guidelines on referral and timely application for transition age students.

Objective 2.3: Maine DVR will address the underemployment of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities by assisting them to prepare for, reach, maintain and advance in careers of their choice in keeping with Maine’s Employment First law and as documented by measurable skills gains, credential attainment and successful closures in employment.

Strategies: a. DVR will partner with Maine DHHS’ Office of Aging and Disability Services and the Maine Department of Education to develop a plan to improve employment outcomes of people with disabilities in competitive integrated settings. b. DVR will work with DHHS’s Office of Aging and Disability Services to provide joint education and outreach to individuals, families, case managers and other providers, on the benefits of employment and the process to access DVR services including through proposed co-location of staff.. c. Increase post-secondary education and employment participation for high school students on the Autism Spectrum through participation in the DVR-sponsored “Step Up” program – a 5-week summer residential program held on a college campus. Step Up includes a 3-credit undergraduate course, paid work experience, and social skill instruction among other components. d. Continue to provide access to and training on the BRIDGE – Career Exploration Workshop including virtual modules developed with input from self-advocates.

Objective 2.4: Maine DVR clients will have timely access to appropriate Community Employment Services – including the use of qualified Community Rehabilitation Providers.

Strategies: a. DVR will maintain and review data quarterly on the use of Community Rehabilitation Providers and related outcomes. b. DVR will partner with other state agencies to grow and maintain professional development for employment support providers through Maine’s Employment for ME Workforce Development system leading to increased employment support availability across systems. C. Maine DVR will pilot the use of internal staff to provide job coaching and employment specialist services in hard-to-serve regions.

Objective 2.5 Maine DVR will ensure client services reflect access to and best practices in the use of Assistive Technology.

Strategies: a. DVR staff will participate in training opportunities provided by Maine CITE, Maine’s federally- funded Assistive Technology program. b. Individualized Plans for Employment will address the need for Assistive Technology as appropriate. c. DVR will develop in-house capacity around the use of Assistive Technology to support vocational rehabilitation services through the support of two to three DVR staff in the new University of Maine at Farmington post-bachelor’s certificate in Assistive Technology Studies.

Goal 3 All Individuals served by DVR receive high quality vocational rehabilitation services in an accessible and culturally-competent manner that reflects the principles of universal design, informed choice, and Diversity, Equity and Inclusion as measured by consumer feedback and case review.

Objective 3.1: Maine DVR will work closely with Maine’s Section 121 VR Grant – Wabanaki Vocational Rehabilitation, to increase co–enrollment from 3 individuals in PY2019 to 10 individuals annually by PY 2023.

Strategies: a. Maine DVR will include Wabanaki Vocational Rehabilitation in training and technical assistance opportunities – including New Counselor Training. b. Wabanaki VR will provide training and technical assistance to Maine DVR on issues related to cultural competency and best practices in Native employment supports. c. DVR will work with Wabanaki VR to increase opportunities for collaboration on delivery of Pre-Employment Transition Services to Native American students with disabilities attending Maine high schools. d. According to the joint Memorandum of Understanding, Maine DVR and Wabanaki VR will meet at least annually to review the agreement.

Objective 3.2: To address the growing numbers of Maine residents who are “New Mainers” and who may be eligible for DVR services, Maine DVR will strengthen its services to this population through the lens of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion and following these strategies:

a. Provide staff training and development to DVR staff to increase cultural competence as measured through pre- and post- training evaluation. b. Conduct educational and outreach activities to community organizations to increase awareness of availability of DVR services. c. Join with other workforce system partners to address common barriers to employment – such as transcript analysis, English language skills, and need for support services. d. Ensure language access in all DVR-produced and delivered materials. e. Include best practices in hiring and retaining New Mainers in employer engagement activities.

Objective 3.3: To support the successful reentry of individuals with disabilities exiting the correctional systems and reentering employment, Maine DVR will strengthen its services to this population through the following strategies:

a. Building on a successful pilot effort, Maine DVR will partner with the Department of Corrections and the Bureau of Employment Services to expand delivery of a targeted pre-release “Career Exploration Workshop” to state and county correctional facilities throughout the state. b. Strengthen DVR participation in the Reentry Network – and other justice advisory groups - leading to increased knowledge of resources and supports to promote employment and reduce recidivism. c. Maintain “Corrections Liaisons” in each office. Liaisons will be paired with regional correctional facilities leading to increased collaboration and timely pre-release referrals. Liaisons will participate in joint DVR/Department of Corrections quarterly meetings leading to increased coordination of services for mutual clients. d. Provide annual staff training on best practices leading to successful employment for individuals with a criminal history. e. Increase access to Pre-Employment and other Transition services for youth through coordination with Maine Youth Center staff and educators.

Objective 3.4: To support successful employment of individuals who are Veterans, DVR will strengthen its services to this population through the following strategies:

a. Continue to collaborate with Bureau of Employment Services’ Veterans Services leading to increased co-enrollment opportunities for veterans with disabilities b. DVR will maintain “Veterans Liaisons” in each office. Liaisons will participate in quarterly Bureau of Employment Services’ Veterans Services team meetings to exchange information and plan joint events (such as targeted job fairs). c. During PY2022, DVR will update its Memorandum of Understanding with federal Veterans’ Affairs Vocational Rehabilitation & Employment leading to increased referrals of Veterans eligible for both services. d. DVR will provide training to staff on the employment needs of Veterans.

Objective 3.5: To support successful employment and community inclusion of individuals with dual sensory impairments (Deaf/Blind), DVR will strengthen its services to this population through the following:

Strategies: a. Through its Division for the Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and Late Deafened, DVR will work in partnership with DBVI and other community organizations to explore opportunities to build capacity of Support Service Providers across the state.

Objective 3.6: Maine DVR will develop new strategies to increase the employment of people with mental health disabilities:

Strategies: a. DVR will partner with the Department of Health and Human Services’ Office of Behavioral Health and MaineCare Services to explore opportunities for collaboration to strengthen and expand employment services to individuals with mental health disabilities including through staff training. b. DVR will work with the Department of Corrections through its quarterly joint meetings to identify effective practices in referring and supporting individuals for whom mental health is a barrier to employment. c. DVR will partner with Clubhouses (that are certified or pursuing certification) to provide employment services that meet Clubhouse International standards. d. DVR will maintain a liaison to the local Clubhouse in each office and work with them on joint training and outreach needs. e. DVR will provide staff training at least annually on best practices in vocational rehabilitation for individuals with mental health disabilities.

Objective 3.7: Maine DVR will continue implementation of a Memorandum of Understanding with the public Workers’ Compensation system in order to better serve injured Maine workers who eligible for Vocational Rehabilitation services.

Strategies: a. DVR will maintain a roster of Board-approved Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors. b. In conjunction with the Board, DVR will ensure at least annual training for all Board-approved VRCs. c. DVR will meet at least annually with the Workers’ Compensation Board to assess the success of the MOU initiative.

Objective 3.8: Maine DVR will work with state agencies, treatment providers, and other partners to promote and support employment for individuals impacted by substance use.

Strategies: a. DVR will provide training to staff, at least annually, on best practices in supporting the employment of individuals impacted by substance use. b. DVR will participate in grant advisory and other work groups as requested. c. DVR will participate with WIOA and other partners in targeted efforts to promote employment of individuals impacted by substance use. d. DVR will explore effective strategies – like Progressive Employment – for use with this population. e. DVR will gather and analyze data during PY2022 on the extent of the impact of substance use as a barrier to employment for DVR clients.

Objective 3.9: Applying a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion lens, Maine DVR will provide equitable vocational rehabilitation services to potentially eligible students and eligible youth and adults who identify as LGBTQ+.

Strategies: a. DVR will continue its work group to review best practices in serving this population and make recommendations for policy and practice changes. b. DVR will develop and provide staff training o increase capacity to serve meet the employment needs of this population. c. DVR will review policies, forms, and other materials at least annually to ensure inclusive practices. . d. DVR will develop or adopt resources to meet employer needs – particularly around best practices in inclusion of transgender, non-binary and other gender minority individuals.

Objective 3.10 Maine DVR will work with Maine’s TANF/ASPIRE programs and contracted providers to increase collaboration – leading to improved employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities.

Strategies: a. Partnering with the Bureau of Employment Services, the Department of Health and Human Services and FEDCAP, pilot activities in two locations that build interagency collaboration and braid services on behalf of program recipients. b. Enhance New Counselor Training with a poverty-informed module targeted to meeting the needs of individuals who receive these benefits.

Goal 4. Maine DVR services will be provided in partnership with Maine’s workforce development system as measured annually by documented collaborative activities, co-enrollment, technical assistance, and training – leading to increased employment and credential attainment opportunities for jobseekers with disabilities.

Objective 4.1: Maine DVR will refer clients to workforce system programs and services to meet their needs and increase access to comparable benefits.

Strategies: a. DVR staff will participate in cross-training on WIOA programs and partners to increase knowledge of available resources for clients and employers. b. DVR will work with WIOA core partners to increase use of a common referral form. c. DVR will work with partners at the local, regional and state level to deliver job fairs, targeted training, and other activities to meet the needs of jobseekers with disabilities. d. DVR will work with WIOA partners to promote accessibility of CareerCenter programs and services.

Objective 4.2: Maine DVR will work with Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act partners to share data and information leading to increased alignment of program and services and expanded opportunities for DVR clients.

Strategies: a. DVR will complete Memoranda of Understanding with all required partners. b. DVR, in conjunction with DBVI, will provide representation on Local Workforce Boards. c. DVR will engage MDOL’s Center for Workforce Research and Information to produce updated disability data on the employment status of Maine people with disabilities. d. DVR will develop strategies with WIOA core partners to provide referrals to workforce services for individuals found eligible for DVR under Category 3 but unable to be served by DVR due to waitlist.

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

Assistive technology services and assistive technology devices are provided to individuals with disabilities as determined by each individual’s vocational goal and appear as prescribed services on the respective individual’s signed IPE. DVR services include assistive technology and assistive technology devices if required for the individual’s IPE, necessary for the attainment of the individual’s employment goal. DVR works closely with Maine cohorts, Alpha One and ALLTECH, assistive technology organizations which provide assistive technology technical assistance services as well as assistive technology devices.

Objective 2.5 Maine DVR will ensure client services reflect access to and best practices in the use of Assistive Technology

Strategies:

1. DVR staff will participate in training opportunities provided by Maine CITE, Maine’s federally-funded Assistive Technology program.

2. Individualized Plans for Employment will address the need for Assistive Technology as appropriate.

3. DVR will develop in-house capacity around the use of Assistive Technology to support vocational rehabilitation services through the support of two to three DVR staff in the new University of Maine at Farmington post-bachelor’s certificate in Assistive Technology Studies.

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

Goal 3

Goal 3 All Individuals served by DVR receive high quality vocational rehabilitation services in an accessible and culturally-competent manner that reflects the principles of universal design, informed choice, and Diversity, Equity and Inclusion as measured by consumer feedback and case review.

Objective 3.1: Maine DVR will work closely with Maine’s Section 121 VR Grant – Wabanaki Vocational Rehabilitation, to increase co–enrollment from 3 individuals in PY2019 to 10 individuals annually by PY 2023.

Strategies:

1. Maine DVR will include Wabanaki Vocational Rehabilitation in training and technical assistance opportunities – including New Counselor Training.

2. Wabanaki VR will provide training and technical assistance to Maine DVR on issues related to cultural competency and best practices in Native employment supports.

3. DVR will work with Wabanaki VR to increase opportunities for collaboration on delivery of Pre-Employment Transition Services to Native American students with disabilities attending Maine high schools.

4. According to the joint Memorandum of Understanding, Maine DVR and Wabanaki VR will meet at least annually to review the agreement.

Objective 3.2: To address the growing numbers of Maine residents who are “New Mainers” and who may be eligible for DVR services, Maine DVR will strengthen its services to this population through the lens of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion and following these strategies:

a. Provide staff training and development to DVR staff to increase cultural competence as measured through pre- and post- training evaluation. b. Conduct educational and outreach activities to community organizations to increase awareness of availability of DVR services. c. Join with other workforce system partners to address common barriers to employment – such as transcript analysis, English language skills, and need for support services. d. Ensure language access in all DVR-produced and delivered materials. e. Include best practices in hiring and retaining New Mainers in employer engagement activities.

Objective 3.3: To support the successful reentry of individuals with disabilities exiting the correctional systems and reentering employment, Maine DVR will strengthen its services to this population through the following strategies:

a. Building on a successful pilot effort, Maine DVR will partner with the Department of Corrections and the Bureau of Employment Services to expand delivery of a targeted pre-release “Career Exploration Workshop” to state and county correctional facilities throughout the state. b. Strengthen DVR participation in the Reentry Network – and other justice advisory groups - leading to increased knowledge of resources and supports to promote employment and reduce recidivism. c. Maintain “Corrections Liaisons” in each office. Liaisons will be paired with regional correctional facilities leading to increased collaboration and timely pre-release referrals. Liaisons will participate in joint DVR/Department of Corrections quarterly meetings leading to increased coordination of services for mutual clients. d. Provide annual staff training on best practices leading to successful employment for individuals with a criminal history. e. Increase access to Pre-Employment and other Transition services for youth through coordination with Maine Youth Center staff and educators.

Objective 3.4: To support successful employment of individuals who are Veterans, DVR will strengthen its services to this population through the following strategies:

a. Continue to collaborate with Bureau of Employment Services’ Veterans Services leading to increased co-enrollment opportunities for veterans with disabilities b. DVR will maintain “Veterans Liaisons” in each office. Liaisons will participate in quarterly Bureau of Employment Services’ Veterans Services team meetings to exchange information and plan joint events (such as targeted job fairs). c. During PY2022, DVR will update its Memorandum of Understanding with federal Veterans’ Affairs Vocational Rehabilitation & Employment leading to increased referrals of Veterans eligible for both services. d. DVR will provide training to staff on the employment needs of Veterans.

Objective 3.5: To support successful employment and community inclusion of individuals with dual sensory impairments (Deaf/Blind), DVR will strengthen its services to this population through the following strategies:

1. Through its Division for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, DVR will work in partnership with DBVI and other community organizations to explore opportunities to build capacity of Support Service Providers across the state.

Objective 3.6: Maine DVR will develop new strategies to increase the employment of people with mental health disabilities:

Strategies: a. DVR will partner with the Department of Health and Human Services’ Office of Behavioral Health and MaineCare Services to explore opportunities for collaboration to strengthen and expand employment services to individuals with mental health disabilities including through staff training. b. DVR will work with the Department of Corrections through its quarterly joint meetings to identify effective practices in referring and supporting individuals for whom mental health is a barrier to employment. c. DVR will partner with Clubhouses (that are certified or pursuing certification) to provide employment services that meet Clubhouse International standards. d. DVR will maintain a liaison to the local Clubhouse in each office and work with them on joint training and outreach needs. e. DVR will provide staff training at least annually on best practices in vocational rehabilitation for individuals with mental health disabilities.

Objective 3.7: Maine DVR will continue implementation of a Memorandum of Understanding with the public Workers’ Compensation system in order to better serve injured Maine workers who eligible for Vocational Rehabilitation services.

Strategies:

1. DVR will maintain a roster of Board-approved Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors.

2. In conjunction with the Board, DVR will ensure at least annual training for all Board-approved VRCs.

3. DVR will meet at least annually with the Workers’ Compensation Board to assess the success of the MOU initiative.

Objective 3.8: Maine DVR will work with state agencies, treatment providers, and other partners to promote and support employment for individuals impacted by substance use.

Strategies:

1. DVR will provide training to staff, at least annually, on best practices in supporting the employment of individuals impacted by substance use
2. DVR will participate in grant advisory and other work groups as requested.
3. DVR will participate with WIOA and other partners in targeted efforts to promote employment of individuals impacted by substance use
4. DVR will explore effective strategies – like Progressive Employment – for use with this population.

e. DVR will gather and analyze data during PY2022 on the extent of the impact of substance use as a barrier to employment for DVR clients.

Objective 3.9: Applying a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion lens, Maine DVR will provide equitable vocational rehabilitation services to potentially eligible students and eligible youth and adults who identify as LGBTQ+.

Strategies: a. DVR will continue its work group to review best practices in serving this population and make recommendations for policy and practice changes. b. DVR will develop and provide staff training o increase capacity to serve meet the employment needs of this population. c. DVR will review policies, forms, and other materials at least annually to ensure inclusive practices. . d. DVR will develop or adopt resources to meet employer needs – particularly around best practices in inclusion of transgender, non-binary and other gender minority individuals.

Objective 3.10 Maine DVR will work with Maine’s TANF/ASPIRE programs and contracted providers to increase collaboration – leading to improved employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities.

Strategies:

1. Partnering with the Bureau of Employment Services, the Department of Health and Human Services and FEDCAP, pilot activities in two locations that build interagency collaboration and braid services on behalf of program recipients.

2. Enhance New Counselor Training with a poverty-informed module targeted to meeting the needs of individuals who receive these benefits.

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)

Objective 1.2: To promote increased access to and delivery of Pre–Employment Transition Services to all students with disabilities from 1,769 PY 2018 to 3,000 in PY 2020 and 4000 annually by PY2023 leading to improved post-secondary education and employment readiness.

Strategies: a. Through use of Progressive Employment, Summer Work Experience, and other work- based learning opportunities, DVR will support at least 300 students with disabilities to have paid work experiences annually during PY 2020 through PY 2023. b. Maine DVR - in collaboration with DBVI and with support from PolicyWorks – will launch a statewide peer mentoring effort during PY 2022. Peer mentoring will be provided by “near peers” to support preparation for post-secondary education and employment. c. In partnership with the Maine Department of Education and Local Education Agencies, Maine DVR will deliver Pre-Employment Transition Services to Potentially Eligible and Eligible students with disabilities across Maine. This will include through joint activities such as job tours, job clubs, Transition Career Exploration Workshop, and delivery of information on labor markets and career pathways. d. Maine DVR will partner with the Maine Department of Education’s Special Services and Career and Technical Education offices to develop opportunities to increase the delivery of Pre-Employment Transition Services to students in Career and Technical Education programs. e. Maine DVR will partner with the Maine Department of Health and Human Services’ Office of Child and Family Services to ensure access to and participation in Pre-Employment Transition Services of youth served through child welfare and children’s behavioral health services. f. Maine DVR will expand delivery of strategies to address the needs of rural youth including through online resources and Virtual Job Shadow. g. Maine DVR will work with Maine’s Parent Training and Information Center to increase family awareness of Pre-Employment Transition Services and the value of early career exploration and planning for students with disabilities h. Through its Division for the Deaf, Hard of Hearing and Late Deafened, DVR will develop and deliver targeted Pre-Employment Transition Services in conjunction with the Maine Educational Center for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing/Governor Baxter School. i. Maine DVR will explore opportunities to support delivery of Pre-Employment Transition Services in conjunction with Job Corps and YouthBuild programming. j. Maine DVR will participate in the Cross-Agency Council on Transition and support inclusion of DVR clients in the “Youth Advisory Group” to receive feedback and input on needed transition services and related policies. k. In keeping with current research, Employment First, and the State of Maine’s Economic Development plan - collect and record data to track progress towards ensuring that all Maine youth have a paid work experience before high school graduation. l. Maine DVR will disseminate, implement and sustain promising practices and lessons learned for work-based learning from the RSA-funded Transition Work Based Learning Model Demonstration Grant.

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

While DVR has not had the need to establish, develop, or improve community rehabilitation programs with the State, the agency has pursued a new payment structure that is designed to better support contractual agreements with community rehabilitation providers while reinforcing the importance to client outcomes of timely and available services.

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

Performance accountability indicators under section 116 of WIOA – DVR is a partner with Adult Education, the SWIB, and the larger workforce development system to incorporate and apply the new rules related to the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), including drafting a unified state plan adopting new performance measures and further collaboration with the One–Stop system. DVR is a member of the Maine WIOA steering committee, which is guiding the Act’s implementation, and also has participants on multiple related sub–committees. In addition to Maine unemployment insurance wage data, Maine will access the State Wage Interchange System (SWIS) data by submitting regularly scheduled data requests. BRS has contracted with the National Student Clearinghouse and will access data from that source on a regular basis to document credential attainment, both academic and occupational. BRS is also developing a data sharing agreement with Maine’s Department of Education, to assist with documenting adult, secondary and career and technical credentials and measurable skill gains. Progress on these initiatives have been delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic and related staffing resources but efforts to improve internal controls and data quality assurance will continue during the remaining two years of this Unified State

DVR presented is providing ongoing training to all staff so that they have a solid working knowledge of WIOA and how it impacts the work they do. Training topics have included: an overview of WIOA partners; common performance measures, career pathways and best practices in serving the needs of employers. BRS has an intensive technical assistance agreement in place with WINTAC to assist with this effort and to further their expertise on

Common Performance Measures, Internal Controls, Career Pathways, Apprenticeships and Peer Mentoring.

BRS and its core partners are using the Maine Job Link as a common data collection tool for performance data regarding Effectiveness in Serving Employers.

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

Goal 4

Maine DVR services will be provided in partnership with Maine’s workforce development system as measured annually by documented collaborative activities, co-enrollment, technical assistance, and training – leading to increased employment and credential attainment opportunities for jobseekers with disabilities.

Objective 4.1: Maine DVR will refer clients to workforce system programs and services to meet their needs and increase access to comparable benefits.

Strategies:

1. DVR staff will participate in cross-training on WIOA programs and partners to increase knowledge of available resources for clients and employers.

2. DVR will work with WIOA core partners to increase use of a common referral form.

3. DVR will work with partners at the local, regional and state level to deliver job fairs, targeted training, and other activities to meet the needs of jobseekers with disabilities.

4. DVR will work with WIOA partners to promote accessibility of CareerCenter programs and services.

Objective 4.2: Maine DVR will work with Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act partners to share data and information leading to increased alignment of program and services and expanded opportunities for DVR clients.

Strategies:

1. DVR will complete Memoranda of Understanding with all required partners

2. DVR, in conjunction with DBVI, will provide representation on Local Workforce Boards.

3. DVR will engage MDOL’s Center for Workforce Research and Information to produce updated disability data on the employment status of Maine people with disabilities

4. DVR will develop strategies with WIOA core partners to provide referrals to workforce services for individuals found eligible for DVR under Categories 3 and 4but unable to be served by DVR due to waitlist.

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

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

Maine is a large geographical state, which spans 30,843 square miles. The state is primarily rural in nature with a dispersed population of 1.3 million people and a density of 43 people per square mile. The largest population center can be found in southern Maine in the greater Portland area where approximately 91,200 individuals reside. Residents are primarily White (93.5%) with small representation of Black (1.5%), Asian (1.2%), and Native American (0.7%) individuals in certain geographical areas of the state. Maine’s population growth is significantly lower than the rest of the country with a rate of 0.6% between 2010 and 2017 as compared to the national rate of 5.5%.[1] Additionally, the 2017 demographic profile released by the US Census Bureau indicates that Maine’s median age is 44.0 years, which is the oldest in the country.

According to the Maine Department of Labor’s Center for Workforce Research and Information[2], economic conditions in much of Maine are favorable. The size of the economy and the number of jobs continue to reach new highs, driving unemployment and other measures of labor market slack to new lows. These tight labor market conditions provide a positive environment for individuals with high numbers of job openings and rising wages, but they are a challenge for employers, who are concerned about finding the staff they need. The economy continues to grow. Total output, measured by gross domestic product, has been increasing at an accelerating rate in recent years. GDP in Maine reached $64 billion in 2018.The statewide seasonally adjusted unemployment rate has been below 4% each month since the beginning of 2016, the longest period on record. Unemployment has been close to 3% throughout the second half of 2019.

The tight labor market is driving wages up. Over the last four years the average wage paid in Maine has increased at the fastest rate in decades after adjusting for inflation. In the 12 months through June 2019 the average wage per job reached $46,100. Per capita personal income has steadily increased. Over the last two decades, per capita income in Maine relative to the nation was higher in the two recessionary periods (early 2000s and 2008 & 2009) than it was during expansionary periods. That is because the downturns were not as deep here as in much of the country. For the last seven years per capita income in Maine was close to 90% of the national level. The labor force participation rate has declined in Maine for nearly 20 years and the size of the labor force has not changed appreciably in 14 years. The primary reasons labor force participation has declined, and is expected to continue to do so, are the advancing age structure of the population and lower participation in areas of the state where the economic base has eroded.

In an environment in which the labor force is shrinking, Maine does not have the luxury of tens of thousands of people less than fully engaged in the workforce. Many will require education or training intervention to acquire meaningful skills employers need. (CWRI, 2015).

The passage of The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) of 2014 and reauthorization of the Rehabilitation Act of 1998, along with the subsequent release of final rules in 2016, has resulted in important changes to the practices of state vocational rehabilitation agencies including increased collaboration with other workforce development system partners and expanded services to students with disabilities.

Many changes designed to help youth and adults with disabilities access employment education, job training and support services, have been made, including:

• Establishing a much larger role for public vocational rehabilitation (VR) as youth with disabilities make the transition from school to adult life. Public VR funds in the amount of a 15% set-aside, must now be used for transition services, specifically pre-employment transitions services that include job exploration counseling, work-based learning experiences, counseling on post-secondary opportunities, workplace readiness training, and training on self-advocacy. Each local VR office must also undertake pre- employment transition coordination activities and they must involve schools and workforce development system in these activities.

• Focusing supported employment state grants to VR agencies on youth. Half the money the state receives under these grants will now have to be used to support youth up to age 24 with the most significant disabilities to achieve supported competitive integrated employment.

• VR may now provide extended supported employment services for up to 24 months (previously the limit was 18 months).

• Limiting the use of sub-minimum wage. Section 511 is specifically intended to reduce the number of transition-age youth entering sheltered workshops and working for sub-minimum wage. The emphasis is on moving young people with significant disabilities into integrated community employment. The bill prohibits individuals with disabilities age 24 and younger from working in jobs paying less than the federal minimum of $7.25 per hour unless they first apply for and receive vocational rehabilitation services, among other requirements. There are exceptions but only for those already working for subminimum wage and cases where individuals may be deemed ineligible for vocational rehabilitation services. Section 511 also prohibits schools from contracting for services, training or work experiences that involve the use of sub-minimum wage.

• Requiring state VR agencies to have formal agreements with the state Medicaid systems, and the state intellectual and developmental disability (IDD) agency.

• Adding a definition of “customized employment” in federal statute, and an updated definition of “supported employment” that includes customized employment.

• Adding a definition for “competitive integrated employment” as an optimal outcome.

• Enhancing roles and requirements for the general workforce system and One-Stop Career Centers in meeting the needs of people with disabilities, including the expectation of full programmatic accessibility. (Lisa A. Mills, 2015)

This Act regulates a major portion of the state’s rehabilitation services, including consumer-related services that are routinely purchased from community-based service providers.

The Bureau is engaged at all levels as the implementation of WIOA transforms existing systems into a more cohesive, effective and collaborative entity through participation in restructuring the One-Stop Career Center processes, Workforce Boards, training, employment and youth workforce activities. DVR is a full contributor to the unified State Plan and is actively engaged in WIOA implementation across the workforce system.

Demand for community inclusion and access to employment by people with disabilities and their supporters continues to be strong across the country with consumer choice and opportunity for full participation being important for all. The advocacy and advice of the State Rehabilitation Council, Independent Living Council, and Disability Rights Maine, as well as groups, such as Maine APSE and the Alliance for Full Participation, help to ensure that rights are being respected, laws are being followed, and practices are being improved to increase the successful employment of people with disabilities.

In June 2014, Maine’s legislature enacted the Employment First Maine Act (Sec. A-1. 26 MRSA c.3), which was a natural progression in Maine’s focus on competitive integrated employment as

a valued outcome for the state’s citizens with disabilities. It set forth that the Departments of Health and Human Services, Labor, and Education must implement employment as a core component of services and supports provided and is the first and preferred service or support option offered to individuals with disabilities.

The Act also convened a time-limited coalition of interested parties, including employers, state agency representatives, advocacy organizations, and people with disabilities, to review and make recommendations regarding the improvement of the administration of employment services and the employment outcomes of people with disabilities. Before its sunset in October 2016, the Employment First Maine Coalition produced a report summarizing the work that was completed and identifying twenty-seven recommendations for consideration by the Governor, the Legislature and state agencies, primarily identifying strategies that encourage the employment of youth and adults with disabilities, engage the business community, and improve EFM performance measures. (See complete report at: http://employmentfirstmaine.org/). Since that time, the Commission on Disability and Employment, which is a subcommittee of the State Workforce Board, has been monitoring progress on the recommendations with the Departments of Education, Labor, and Health and Human Services.

According to the Center for Workforce Research and Information[3], from 2013 through 2017, an average of 208,600 persons with one or more disabilities resided in Maine, equal to about 16% of its civilian non-institutionalized population of 1.3 million. This proportion was higher than that of the United States, where an estimated 13% of residents had a disability. Of additional note, is that the age distribution of civilian noninstitutionalized population with disabilities differs from the general population (with and without disabilities), with higher shares of persons over 64 and lower shares in cohorts 64 or younger. In Maine, nearly 40% of the population with disabilities is over 64 years, more than double the comparable share of the general population (18%).

Workers with disabilities in Maine are less likely to be employed than adults without disabilities. Fewer than half work or seek work; the unemployment rate among adults with disabilities is three times that of other working age adults. From 2013 through 2017, 33% of working-age Mainers with disabilities was employed compared to 80% of those with no disability. Those who do work earn less than those with no disability; median earnings of Maine workers with disabilities were $18,434 in a twelve-month period, compared median earnings of $31,217 among Maine workers with no disability.

Adults with a disability are more likely to live in or near poverty, regardless of work status, and are less likely to have postsecondary education than adults with no disability.

While DVR services are an important resource for individuals with disabilities who are looking to enter, or re-enter the Maine workforce, VR services are only one option in an expanding array of employment supports and services. Co-location in Maine’s network of Department of Labor (MDOL) One-Stop CareerCenters has provided DVR the opportunity to work in partnership with several other programs that support employment of people with disabilities.

The CareerCenters provide several employment programs that serve people with disabilities. The redesigned Maine Job Link is an online accessible CareerCenter tool to allow job seekers from around the state to be matched with real-time available open positions.

Programs overseen by the Bureau of Employment services reported the following enrollment numbers and identified participants with disabilities. These numbers indicate that there are many opportunities for co-enrollment, particularly with the youth population:

Labor Exchange Self Service: 135,733 – disability info n/a

Labor Exchange Employment Services: 2,494 – 267 individuals with a disability or 10.7%

Adult Services – 580 – 75 individuals with a disability or 12.9 %

Dislocated Worker – 358 – 31 individuals with a disability or 8.7%

Youth – 395 – 195 individuals with a disability or 53.4%

While the Bureau of Employment Services (BES) collects data on self-reported disability, it does not require that individuals disclose having a disability. As a result of past work through collaborative efforts, including two rounds of the Disability Employment Initiative grant funding, there is increased awareness and attention in the CareerCenter to increasing access to expanded services for customers with disabilities. There are concerns about the accuracy of the current case management database; the system defines disability status within the context of vocational rehabilitation. Individuals who have a disability, which does not constitute a significant barrier to employment, are often not recorded as having a disability at all. Administrative override is required to update a person’s disability status when they disclose post-enrollment.

During the COVID-19 Pandemic, CareerCenter services moved to a virtual model that provided increased access for individuals who were not able to travel to a physical location. Live chat and other features allowed for quicker response to jobseekers’ questions and needs.

Research has shown that the number of people with disabilities served by CareerCenters is under-reported. According to 2020 estimates from the American Community Survey, people with disabilities comprise 16% of Maine’s working age population. ((ACS), 2015-2019) . With the exception of the youth population, it would appear that people with disabilities are underrepresented in usage of workforce services. For additional information see Maine's WIOA State Plan for PY 20-23 and DVR's CSNA https://www.maine.gov/rehab/dvr/stateplan/

[1] US Census Bureau. Maine Quick Facts. https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/ME. Retrieved January 24, 2018.

[2] Center for Workforce Research and Information, https://www.maine.gov/labor/cwri/publications/pdf/Maine2019AnnualWorkforceReport.pdf

[3]https://www.maine.gov/labor/cwri/disabilities/index.html

B. SUPPORT INNOVATION AND EXPANSION ACTIVITIES; AND

State Independent Living Council (SILC) To assist the SILC to increase organizational capacity and member effectiveness, Maine DVR continued to support the SILC to employ an Executive Director to envision and articulate the organization’s goals and establish the systems and mechanisms to achieve these goals. The SILC Executive Director is responsible for conducting the work of the SPIL under the supervision and direction of the Maine SILC to accomplish tasks such as a) recruitment and management of members and volunteers b) establish and maintain partnerships with community members and organizations c) market and promote the Maine SILC d) increase and diversify the resources related to the six core areas of the SILC. State Rehabilitation Council Support Innovation & Expansion funds are used to support the activities and administration of the Statewide Rehabilitation Council (SRC) for the Division and the SRC meets monthly as a full council. The SRC has standing committees that meet regularly. These committees include, DVR/SRC Policy Group, CSPD Subcommittee, Membership, Annual Meeting, Website committee, and the Executive Committee. For more information regarding the SRC, please visit www.mainesrc.org.

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.

DVR does not have separate efforts to provide these services. All services are geared to assist individuals with most significant disabilities.

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

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

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

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

Goal 1

Maine DVR clients will reach their employment goals and be valued members of Maine’s workforce as measured by a. measurable skill gains, b. credential attainment and c. successful employment closures in competitive integrated employment

Objective 1.1: To continue to reduce early exit from DVR services from 2,636 in PY 2018 to 2, 500 in PY 2020 and further reducing to 2, 000 in PY 2023.

*DVR continues to prioritize minimization of early exit from VR services – particularly during this period of the COVID-19 pandemic*. *PY 20 numbers of early exiters was 1875 meeting and surpassing the target set for this objective. DVR has implemented its strategy of training all staff on the principles of Motivational Interviewing. As follow-up DVR contracted with an expert in (a) Motivational Interviewing to provide ongoing instruction and practice for supervisors so that they would be better able to support VR counselors in their use of Motivational Interviewing with clients. Internal capacity has been created through identification of Motivational Interviewing “champions” as well as through distribution of monthly Motivational Interviewing tips. Progressive Employment, with its dual customer approach and early engagement focus, has now expanded across the state and has grown from its initial use with youth to now be available a strategy for adult clients as well. An Institute for Community Inclusion-developed Progressive Employment training curriculum is now posted on the DVR website for easy access for new VR staff and Community Rehabilitation Providers. (b) During the COVID-19 pandemic, DVR staff quickly moved to offer VR services remotely and to stay connected with clients. This included use of cell phone, text, email and video-conferencing. VRCs have anecdotally noted that missed appointments have decreased and that reduced travel time to in-person appointments has allowed for increased availability for communication with clients. All DVR VR counselors have Microsoft TEAMS and Zoom videoconferencing available on their State of Maine-issued laptops.*

Objective 1.2: To promote increased access to and delivery of Pre–Employment Transition Services to all students with disabilities from 2, 287 reported activities in PY 2018 to 3,000 in PY 2020 and 4000 annually by PY2023 leading to improved post-secondary education and employment readiness.

*(a, c, f) The COVID pandemic that began in March of 2020 had a negative impact on community-based work experience activities as safety became the top priority. Many employers were closed early in the pandemic or did not want to take on the risk of having students on site. Many families were hesitant to have their young person in the community. Where work-based learning and other Pre-ETS could be held in the community – employment settings that were outside and not working in close proximity were sought. Additionally, the closure of schools or move to remote classes reduced access to teachers and students and therefore reduced referrals and collaborative activities. A previously established pilot contract for the Virtual Job Shadow online job shadow platform was expanded to be available to Pre-ETS youth across the state. The Virtual Job Shadow curriculum allowed students, teachers and VR counselors to meet on the platform and share lesson plans and track student progress. (b) Peer mentoring was redeveloped with assistance from PolicyWorks under the umbrella of WINTAC and the redesigned model was launched as a pilot in one region of the state. Based on feedback from staff and contracted providers, the model was again reworked and launched in January 2022 as statewide virtual peer mentoring. Offering the service virtually through diverse modalities is anticipated to meet student needs. Near-peer certified mentors with experience in disability will be available and efforts will be made to recruit diverse individuals. (d) Representatives of Maine Department of Education’s Special Services and Career and Technical Education offices have met regularly with VR leadership over the last two years. This has included jointly participating in technical assistance to promote better alignment of services to students offered by the National Technical Assistance Center on Transition: the Collaborative. A field guide for Career and Technical Education programs on best practices to promote success and inclusion of students with disabilities will be released in Spring 2022 and includes information on partnering with Vocational Rehabilitation. Every Career and Technical Education Center has an assigned Maine DVR transition counselor. (e, f) To better promote the transition of young people who have experienced Maine’s foster care system, DVR has designated liaisons in each office who have additional knowledge of child welfare and are able to promote connections between transition specialists through the Maine Department of Health and Human Services’ Office of Child and Family Services and VR counselors. At least annual team meetings are complemented by local efforts. As an example, VR staff recently participated in a workshop for youth in foster care where they offered an overview of VR services and showcased the Virtual Job Shadow tool. (g) DVR partners regularly with Maine Parent Federation to increase awareness of VR services for students with disabilities. VR staff participate in the training of all Family Support Navigators and share resources to be distributed through Maine Parent Federation’s newsletters and website. (h) Rehabilitation Counselors for the Deaf deliver summer and school year Pre-ETS services through local schools and in partnership with the Maine Educational Center for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. One successful example has been the launch of a transition club for students who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing. The club meets regularly and focuses each meeting on a particular aspect of Pre-Employment Transition Services. Rehabilitation Counselors for the Deaf co-lead and have noted students’ increasing self-confidence and ability to self-advocate. (i) In 2021 DVR updated its MOU with the Penobscot Job Corps. The MOU describes the partnership process – including delivery of Pre-Employment Transition Services. COVID-19 disrupted Job Corps residential programming. DVR’s Job Corps liaison is continuing to work with Center staff to explore opportunities for collaborative delivery of Pre-ETS. During this time period no targeted outreach has occurred with Youth Build programs. (j) Cross-Agency Council on Transition has expanded and been subsumed under other collaborative transition work as a result of the expansion of eligibility of special education services to age 22 and technical assistance efforts to Maine transition partners through the National Technical Assistance Center on Transition: the Collaborative. Maine Parent Federation’s youth leadership initiative is ongoing and DVR will finalize a contract in Spring 2022 to support youth feedback through that organization. (k) DVR has established a special indicator in the AWARE case management system to track paid work experience before high school exit. The DVR Director sits on the Governor’s Children’s Cabinet staff group and is involved in planning for the launch of Career Exploration – as detailed in the State of Maine’s Economic Development 10-year strategic plan and as supported through American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds. (l) The Transition Work Based Learning Model Demonstration Grant concluded on September 30, 2021. The final report was submitted on January 31, 2022. Materials, findings and recommendations from the grant’s research will be made available via posting on DVR’s website as well as through dissemination on the National Clearinghouse of Rehabilitation Training Materials website. A presentation of findings and recommendations related to work-based learning has been developed for staff and stakeholder training during 2022 and beyond.*

Objective 1.3: To promote careers in high wage-high growth, STEM, and other promising industry sectors through the exploration and inclusion of career pathways in DVR clients’ Individualized Plans for Employment.

*(a)Training on best practices in the use of Career Pathways has been offered to staff. Training for Community Rehabilitation Providers will be included in a series of trainings made available through Maine’s Employment Workforce Development System – which is currently in the procurement process. (b) To better support self-employment for VR clients, DVR is currently engaged in a pilot initiative with the University of Montana’s Rural Institute to test their self-employment materials with DVR staff and clients. Training on the use of the Comprehensive Assessment of Rehabilitation Needs to promote use of Apprenticeship and self-employment has taken place with staff around the state as part of the Apprenticeship pilot project*. (c, d) *MDOL has been awarded Apprenticeship funding that includes support for a Bureau of Rehabilitation Services-housed Apprenticeship Navigator to promote the inclusion of individuals with disabilities. This position will be filled in the coming weeks. Rehabilitation Counselors for the Deaf have been leaders in the Apprenticeship pilot. An individual who is Deaf was showcased in his Apprenticeship as part of an Apprenticeship Town Hall meeting. Performance Management objectives were updated during the last year for all VR counselors to include a measurement on use of career pathways with clients. In addition to case reviews, this will be another place to measure and reinforce the use of career pathways. (f) DVR made use of WINTAC resources while they were available. Since the conclusion of WINTAC, DVR is exploring resources through the new TA Centers to continue to support this work. Additionally, DVR worked with Division for the Blind to put together a training for partners in the CareerCenters on use of career pathways.*

Objective 1.4: Through lessons learned from the use of Progressive Employment, expand the number of Maine employers who implement diversity hiring activities through engagement with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and workforce system partners.

*The initiative at the Maine Retail Association (a) was discontinued due to factors outside of VR. The importance of partnering with businesses to use a business to business approach was supported through other means (b) including through redevelopment of a DVR-based business relations team which continues to strengthen and is providing coordinated outreach to employers – and connecting employers to other employers. Business engagement activities – delivered by DVR or contracted providers are entered into the Maine Job Link for Common Performance Measure reporting. The DVR business team and other key staff participate in employer events like the State Human Resource Management conference and attend targeted Chamber of Commerce events. (c) DVR maintained an active presence with the Statewide Workforce Action Team and is involved in a current reconstitution of the group following a key leader’s departure. (d) A member of the DVR business team was part of a Disability Bootcamp project supported through TA from USDOL’s Office of Disability Employment Policy. That initiative led to the creation of curriculum modules on disability employment that can lead to microbadge credential attainment.*

 Goal 2 All individuals, including those with the most significant disabilities, will be served in a timely manner -which means determining eligibility within 60 days and developing Individualized Plans for Employment for all eligible clients within the 90-day time frame. DVR will continue to maintain no wait list for those individuals in categories 1 and 2 and will monitor the ability to again serve those in category 3 in the future.

Objective 2.1: To continue progress to reach substantial compliance (94%) in determining eligibility within 60 days of receiving an application for DVR services. DVR will progress from 79.4% in PY2018 to substantial compliance in PY 2020 and maintain substantial compliance or better in PY 2021-2023.

*Eligibility determination rates have been negatively impacted due to the COVID-19 pandemic – related staffing shortages and difficulty in obtaining supporting medical and school documentation during closures – However, in PY 20 eligibility was determined within 60 days 85.5% of the time with another 6.8% of eligibilities occurring following eligibility determination extension. All DVR supervisors and managers receive detailed reports (a) on eligibility determination rates in the units on a quarterly basis. Additionally, each has the ability to access real-time information from the AWARE case management system to aid them in providing support to VR counselors. (b) at least annually – and included in New Counselor Training – DVR provides regional training on determining eligibility that reinforces strategies to promote timely eligibility determination as provided by RSA in earlier monitoring visits. VR counselor performance management goals included objectives on timely eligibility determination. While WORK Services was discontinued (c), DVR has an online application option that is now available statewide. Particularly during the pandemic, this online option has increased the speed at which applications can be received and processed. This option has been shared broadly – while maintaining other traditional methods to receive applications for VR services.*

Objective 2.2: To continue progress to reach substantial compliance (94%) in timely plan development by increasing the percentage of clients who are have an Individualized Plan for Employment developed within 90 days from 78.9% in PY 2018 to substantial compliance in PY 2020 and maintain substantial compliance or better in PY 2021-2023.

*Timely plan development reports (a) are shared with DVR supervisors and managers on a quarterly basis. Each also has access to real-time data through the AWARE case management system to better support supervision of VR counselors. (b) DVR staff participate in regular (at least annually) training on timely plan development in addition to training provided through New Counselor Training. During the pandemic, the Career Exploration Workshop (c) was redesigned for virtual use and as a result the Workshop could be offered through partnership between VR counselors across the state. This had the effect of reducing any delay in access in one’s own region as clients could access a Workshop series every week virtually rather than a once monthly offering pre-pandemic. DVR continues to work closely with the Maine Department of Education (d) and is currently involved in a joint TA effort around transition with assistance from the National Technical Assistance Center on Transition: the Collaborative.* DVR materials are provided to each Maine school during the monitoring process to assist them with meeting the requirements of IDEA Part B Indicator 13.

Objective 2.3: Maine DVR will address the underemployment of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities by assisting them to prepare for, reach, maintain and advance in careers of their choice in keeping with Maine’s Employment First law and as documented by measurable skills gains, credential attainment and successful closures in employment.

DVR meets monthly with DHHS’ Office of Aging and Disability Services and discusses the needs of mutual clients. (a) Over the last year, DVR has joined Maine Department of Education and the Office of Aging and Disability Services in a joint effort to promote a comprehensive approach to promoting employment outcomes for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. This has occurred as part of an Expanded Eligibility workgroup hosted by the Department of Education and as part of a Legislative Taskforce charged to address the transition needs of this population. (b) the Office of Aging and Disabilities Services joins with DVR to offer regular opportunities to educate stakeholders on services available through VR. One example are joint calls that have been held for case managers who can serve as gatekeepers to employment planning. (c) DVR launched the “Step Up” five-week summer program in 2019 for students with Autism who had an interest in pursuing college. During 2020 and 2021 the program was offered virtually and the curriculum was modified to fit that modality. While Step Up has been a success, the goals of the program are best met through an in-person on-campus experience. (d) The former “Bridge – Career Exploration Workshop” was discontinued as a face-to-face workshop during the pandemic and instead DVR collaborated with members of the self-advocacy group - Speaking Up For Us - to provide feedback on and pilot new curriculum modules that were delivered via Zoom. The result of this work is more accessible training sessions that are able to be used across a variety of settings.

Objective 2.4: Maine DVR clients will have timely access to appropriate Community Employment Services – including the use of qualified Community Rehabilitation Providers.

*Recognizing the need for more comprehensive access to Community Rehabilitation Providers across the state, DVR undertook a RFP process that resulted in employment services contracts being awarded to a primary Provider in regions 1, 2 and 3. (a) DVR receives quarterly data on the use of Community Rehabilitation Providers and meets monthly with the selected Providers in regions 1, 2, and 3. In regions 4 and 5, multiple Community Rehabilitation Providers provide services. (b) To support high quality employment services, DVR contributes resources and funding to Maine’s Employment for ME Workforce Development system. These services are currently out to bid following a RFP process. The selected provider will deliver webinars, in-person training, and access to archived training materials to promote continuing improvement and learning among Providers, VR staff and other stakeholders. Partners in the Workforce Development System include Office of Aging and Disability Services, Office of Behavioral Health, Office of Child and Family Services, Department of Education, as well as Maine’s VR agencies.*

Objective 2.5 Maine DVR will ensure client services reflect access to and best practices in the use of Assistive Technology.

Maine’s federally-funded Assistive *Technology program – Maine CITE – has hired a new director in the last year. This individual has met with DVR and DBVI leaders to share her vision for the program and learn about Maine’s needs (a). Maine CITE continues to provide training that DVR staff can access. They are working collaboratively on a number of transition initiatives where VR is also present around the state. (b, c) DVR has identified the need to grow in-house capacity around Assistive Technology to better support its identification and inclusion in Individualized Plans for Employment. A plan to train a VR counselor in each region on Assistive Technology through the use of a post-bachelor’s certificate program at the University of Maine at Farmington was delayed when a key faculty left and the program was postponed. DVR continues to plan to pursue this option when available. In the meantime, DVR accesses AT service providers across the state as appropriate. The rise in digital and virtual services during COVID-19 has brought into sharp focus the technology divide among DVR’s clients. VR counselors have worked with clients to help bridge that gap by providing instruction on technology as well as the technology itself to support continued access to VR services.*

Goal 3 All Individuals served by DVR receive high quality vocational rehabilitation services in an accessible and culturally-competent manner that reflects the principles of universal design and informed choice as measured by consumer feedback and case review.

Objective 3.1: Maine DVR will work closely with Maine’s Section 121 VR Grant – Wabanaki Vocational Rehabilitation, to increase co–enrollment from 3 individuals in PY2019 to 10 individuals annually by PY 2023.

*Maine DVR is proud to partner with Wabanaki Vocational Rehabilitation in training and technical assistance activities. (a, b, c, d) Wabanaki VR, DVR and the Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired updated their MOU in 2021 and strengthened language promoting Diversity, Equity and Inclusion as well as collaboration on Pre-Employment Transition Services. Wabanaki VR helped to arrange a cultural competence training during 2021 for Maine Department of Labor staff – including VR. Wabanaki VR also regularly provides training at New Counselor Training sessions. Approximately 5 individuals received services in PY20.*

Objective 3.2: To address the growing numbers of Maine residents who are “New Mainers” and who may be eligible for DVR services, Maine DVR will strengthen its services to this population through the following strategies:

*This objective has come under the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion umbrella as that work has progressed over the last two years. MDOL has conducted sessions across the Department to gather information on strengths and needs related to DEI. Additionally, DVR’s manager for DEI initiatives is representing DVR on the State Workforce Board’s Immigrant Workforce Committee. This has supported efforts to hear directly from a wide variety of stakeholders on this issue. (a, e) A team from DVR and Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired participated in the UA Currents’ ABC of Cultural Competence. Following the training, the team continued to meet as a workgroup on DEI issues. They developed three in-house trainings to support cultural competence – Inclusive Language, Inclusive Relationships and Lifelong Learning. These trainings are currently being rolled-out to all DVR staff with evaluation data being collected. (b) DVR seeks out and accepts opportunities to share information on VR programs and services with diverse groups around the state. The DVR Director sits on the Children’s Cabinet staff committee where issues concerning services to children and youth from diverse and historically marginalized communities is addressed. (c) DVR joins with other workforce system partners to support efforts to ameliorate barriers to employment and includes development of English language skills and support services on Individualized Plans for Employment as appropriate. (d) During the past year, DVR has worked with its SRC to discuss strategies to produce more materials in languages other than English – rather than waiting for a request to do so. This will be a joint activity with the SRC going forward in the coming year.*

Objective 3.3: To support the successful reentry of individuals with disabilities exiting the correctional systems and reentering employment, Maine DVR will strengthen its services to this population through the following strategies:

DVR maintains a current roster of staff who serve as Corrections Liaisons in each office (c). The DVR Assistant Director oversees efforts to support successful reentry and participated on the advisory group for the Department of Corrections’ Second Chance Act Youth Offender Reentry Grant as well as on the Juvenile Justice Task Force. Both groups provided recommendations to improve the corrections system for youth -including connections to training and employment preparation. While work remains, one example of success has been regional care committees that address the needs of juveniles exiting correctional involvement. DVR staff have represented the Department of Labor on these *committee and are able to offer guidance and braiding of resources where appropriate. (a) The Career Exploration Workshop pilot offered in-person was negatively impacted due to the pandemic and related limitations on entry into congregate settings. Efforts continue to develop ways to deliver virtual services as well as to plan for in-person services when allowed. (d) DVR makes available training to staff on working with individuals with a criminal history. An upcoming training for 2022 -that will be recorded for future use - is targeted to support VR and Community Rehabilitation Provider staff in assisting individuals with sexual abuse convictions to prepare for and find successful employment. This training features a panel that includes individuals who themselves have sexual abuse convictions.*

Objective 3.4: To support successful employment of individuals who are Veterans, DVR will strengthen its services to this population through the following strategies:

DVR remains committed to ensuring that Veterans with disabilities who are in need of VR services have access to those services and that they are coordinated with other Veterans’ serving programs. *(a) DVR maintains a current list of “Veterans Liaisons” who are VR staff across the state with an interest and commitment to being a resource to clients and staff on Veterans’ issue. The liaisons meet quarterly with the Bureau of Employment Services’ Veterans Services team and federal Veterans Affairs representatives to share information and resources. (c) Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, DVR was not able to focus resources on updating its Memorandum of Understanding with the federal Veterans’ Affairs Veteran Readiness & Employment (a name change from Vocational Rehabilitation & Employment) – however an annual meeting to review the partnership was held in April 2021. MOU renewal will be a priority in the coming year. Despite the lack of an updated MOU, DVR continues to connect with VR & E counselors – many of whom were previously counselors with Maine DVR.*

Objective 3.5: To support successful employment and community inclusion of individuals with dual sensory impairments (Deaf/Blind), DVR will strengthen its services to this population through the following strategies:

*The Division for the Deaf, Hard of Hearing and Late Deafened in partnership with Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired and other community organizations has worked with assistance from the Helen Keller Center to build capacity to serve individuals with dual sensory needs – including through use of Support Service Providers. Three regional meetings were held over the last year with Maine hosting one (a).*

Objective 3.6: Maine DVR will develop new strategies to increase the employment of people with mental health disabilities:

DVR *holds a monthly meeting with key partners at the Department of Health and Human Services – including the Office of Behavioral Health (formerly the Office of Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services) (a). These meetings allow for regular discussion of opportunities to collaborate to strengthen and expand employment services for individuals with mental health disabilities. (b) Through DVR and the Office of Behavioral Health’s work with the Department of Corrections – resources and strategies are shared on a regular basis to promote employment opportunities for individuals reentering post-incarceration. (c) Clubhouse operations were disrupted during the early days of the pandemic but are returning to more regular connections with assigned VR counselors spending time in each Clubhouse across the state. Some Clubhouses have opted to discontinue contracting as a Community Rehabilitation Provider with DVR, but this has not negatively impacted the partnerships. Other Clubhouses are interested in expanding opportunities to focus on transition-age youth and this will be an area for pilot initiatives in the coming year. (e) In addition to Motivational Interviewing ongoing training, DVR staff are offered opportunities during the year to participate in training to assist in meeting the employment needs of individuals with mental health disabilities through the Employment Workforce Development System, New Counselor Training, and online training opportunities.*

Objective 3.7: Maine DVR will continue implementation of a Memorandum of Understanding with the public Workers’ Compensation system in order to better serve injured Maine workers who eligible for Vocational Rehabilitation services.

*DVR continues to maintain a small roster of Board-approved Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors – despite experiencing turnover due to staff promotion and resignation (a). Annual training and an annual meeting (b,c) have not occurred formally during the pandemic and instead has been provided on an as requested/needed basis. During the coming year, renewal of the Memorandum of Understanding will be a priority.*

 Objective 3.8: Maine DVR will work with state agencies, treatment providers, and other partners to promote and support employment for individuals impacted by substance use.

*During the early days of the pandemic, when service delivery was slowed, DVR placed a priority on increasing staff training in targeted areas – including (a, b, c) employment of individuals impacted by substance abuse. A grant to the Maine Department of Labor to address employment opportunities for those impacted by the Opioid epidemic has also created public service announcements, training and other resources that have been helpful to DVR. Governor Mills has convened a Coalition that has examined a number of issues related to the Opioid epidemic. DVR staff have also accessed these resources to better support clients. (d) At the time of this writing, Progressive Employment is being actively pursued for expansion for clients of the Bureau of Employment Services through the use of American Rescue Plan Act funding. Identified target populations include individuals exiting corrections and those who have experienced substance abuse. Given DVR’s experience with Progressive Employment – and the likelihood of a high degree of dual eligibility for services – DVR will work closely with the Bureau of Employment Services to ensure successful roll-out of this effort.*

Objective 3.9: Maine DVR will provide equitable vocational rehabilitation services to potentially eligible students and eligible youth and adults who identify as LGBTQ+.

*( a, b) After convening for over two years and making recommendations on best practices, members of the DVR and DBVI LGBTQ+ workgroup sponsored a series of facilitated conversations with George Washington University’s DJ Ralston during October 2021 to coincide with National Disability Employment Awareness Month. Prior to attending the conversations, staff were asked to attend two previously-recorded trainings through GWU that provided a foundation in language and issues for consideration when conducting Vocational Rehabilitation work with individuals who identify as LGBTQ+. These conversations were well-received and fit within the framework of the Maine Department of Labor’s Diversity, Equity and Inclusion efforts. Following the training, the LGBTQ+ workgroup decided to merge with DVR/DBVI’s DEI workgroup – creating a stronger team. DVR is currently looking at flexibilities within agency policies that promote more inclusive approaches to serving individuals – particularly those who identify as transgender or non-binary.*

Objective 3.10 Maine DVR will work with Maine’s TANF/ASPIRE programs and contracted providers to increase collaboration – leading to improved employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities.

*Over the last two years, regular strategic planning at the state and regional level has brought TANF increasingly into WIOA partnership efforts. (a)This increased attention to alignment has resulted in VR being asked to share resources about accessing VR services for FEDCAP participants in two targeted locations, thereby promoting braiding of funds. Additionally, WIOA meetings on infrastructure funding agreements and implementation of Memoranda of Understanding have also increased regular communication and access between TANF and DVR leadership. (b) This year, a poverty-informed module was added to the New Counselor Training to increase awareness of the role that poverty may play in individuals with disabilities selection of employment goals and services.*

Goal 4 Maine DVR services will be provided in partnership with Maine’s workforce development system as measured annually by documented collaborative activities, co-enrollment, technical assistance, and training – thereby increasing employment and credential attainment opportunities for jobseekers with disabilities.

Objective 4.1: Maine DVR will refer clients to workforce system programs and services to meet their needs and increase access to comparable benefits.

*While the pandemic limited some in-person service delivery of WIOA services, Maine’s network of CareerCenters made a number of changes to increase access and better serve jobseekers. These included providing virtual services, creating a 1-800 number that could be answered statewide and adding live chat features to the CareerCenter website. (a) Recorded cross-training webinars highlighting WIOA partner programs are available for VR staff to watch on the agency’s intranet website. (b) Work continues to develop a common referral form for use across the state. The Maine Job Link currently assists in promoting cross-referral through customer response to registration questions. (c) DVR staff meet regularly with local CareerCenter partners and collaborate on delivery of local events like job fairs or presentations. At the regional and state level similar collaboration to support events such as employer engagement events and the State Human Resource Management conference. This year, DVR collaborated with social service providers to offer a reverse job fair to support DVR clients to market their skills to agencies looking to hire qualified staff*. (d) DVR *provides technical assistance to CareerCenter partners to support accessibility of programs and services. This is done both informally and through response to identified needs. The State ADA Coordinator is housed within DVR and is an additional resource on technical and physical accessibility issues.*

Objective 4.2: Maine DVR will work with Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act partners to share data and information leading to increased alignment of program and services and expanded opportunities for DVR clients.

*At the time of this writing, Memoranda of Understanding have been completed in two of the three Local Workforce Areas (a). The third MOU is near to final completion and should be executed by April 1, 2022. (b)DVR, in conjunction with DBVI, provides representation to each of the Local Workforce Boards. (c) DVR works with the Center for Workforce Research and Information within the Maine Department of Labor to produce a Maine Workers with Disabilities dashboard that is available at https://www.maine.gov/labor/cwri/disabilities/index.html . (d) For individuals found eligible for DVR services but placed on a waitlist for services (formerly Category OOS 3 and now Categories OOS 3 and 4), DVR will update – at least annually – a resource sheet that includes CareerCenter partner resources that may be helpful to support the individual when VR services are not yet available. This resource sheet is included in eligibility determination letters to individuals placed on a waitlist as well as sent annually to the cumulative waitlist.*

2. AN EVALUATION OF THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM GOALS DESCRIBED IN THE SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SUPPLEMENT FOR THE MOST RECENT PROGRAM YEAR WERE ACHIEVED. THE EVALUATION MUST:

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

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

Progress on goals related to Supported Employment has been impeded by the Maine DVR's inability to fully expend Supported Employment Funds given current federal regulation

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

DVR is a partner with Adult Education, the SWIB, and the larger workforce development system to incorporate and apply the new rules related to the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), including drafting a unified state plan adopting new performance measures and further collaboration with the One–Stop system. DVR is a member of the Maine WIOA steering committee, which is guiding the Act’s implementation, and also has participants on multiple related sub–committees. DVR will be using wage data from the Maine Department of Labor’s Unemployment Insurance to establish baseline and initial WIOA performance targets for employment outcomes. Although it does not provide information on individuals who are placed in self–employment or other jobs, such as federal and out–of–state positions, but DVR has recently gotten access to the State Wage Interface System (SWIS), which will expand access to national wage data.

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

State Rehabilitation Council Support -

Innovation & Expansion funds are used to support the activities and administration of the Statewide Rehabilitation Council (SRC) for the Division. The SRC meets monthly as a full council. For more information regarding the SRC, please visit www.mainesrc.org.

In FFY 21 I & E expenditures were $ 3,604 – reflecting the impact of COVID-19 and the pivot to virtual meetings that resulted in reduced SRC meeting expenses.

Q. QUALITY, SCOPE, AND EXTENT OF SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

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

The Division works together with its state partners, community providers and advocacy groups to ensure Supported Employment Services are available to eligible individuals.

A. Quality. Our management information system (AWARE) reports provide information on weekly wages, hours worked, and public assistance at the time of application and closure. The reports also provide information on the type of disabilities being served, the cost per case, and the average cost by counselor, region, and state. This information provides the information necessary to manage resources and ensure quality outcomes are achieved. The development of a joint data tracking system with the Department of Health and Human Services- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services (SAHMS)and Aging and Disability Services (OADS)-continues to be pursued and would increase the ability to monitor ongoing supports provided to an individual to obtain and maintain successful, quality, employment

The Division and the Department of Health and Human Services oversee a comprehensive workforce development system for employment staff such as Employment Specialists, Job Coaches and Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors, as well as other professionals who support individuals with disabilities in their pursuit of employment, including case managers, education staff, and care coordinators. The Employment Workforce Development System provides basic Employment Specialist certification, Advanced Topical Trainings, monthly webinars and a registry of certified Employment Specialists and Career Planners in the state. The Training Calendar provides a place where employment professionals and other human service professionals can get information on national, state and online options for employment related trainings.

Community Rehabilitation Providers who contract with The Division can be approved to provide services following two different paths to accreditation-- CARF (Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities) or The Division’s In–State approval process. In addition, they are required to employ staff who meet the Accreditation of Community Educators (ACRE) Employment Specialist qualifications, or other Division approved training, and meet ongoing continuing education requirements.

The comprehensive In-State approval process includes evaluating areas such as:

• Mission statement,

• Policies and Procedures (including assuring adherence to APSE standards for Supported Employment)

• Admission Criteria,

• Assessment Policy and Practice,

• Case Coordination,

• Client Input,

• Health and Safety,

• Personnel records documenting staff qualifications and background checks,

• Policies and practices regarding client rights and appeal procedures.

•The approval process also includes interviews with key stakeholders such as clients, employers, and funding agents.

B. Scope of Supported Employment:

The primary service provided to clients in supported employment is job coaching since funds must be now used to support an individual who is in employment status. These direct services are provided by an Employment Specialist or a Job Coach, who supports the client through activities such as interactions with supervisors and peers, and integration into the workplace culture.

Additional services that may be provided as needed include social skills training, consultation with the employer and facilitation of natural supports.

Individuals with brain injuries, physical disabilities, developmental disabilities and autism that receive assistance from the Division in obtaining employment may require ongoing supports to maintain successful employment. These individuals can access employment related services through one of the four Home and Community Based Waivers (HCBS). Career Planning is available to assist an individual in exploring interests, skills and abilities prior to a referral to VR. All four HCBS waivers offer long term work supports to provide support at the job site. These supports are also available to assist a waiver member with their own business. All employment services are determined by individual need through a person-centered planning approach that can include the VRC.

OADS has expanded available employment services to all 6,000 waiver participants during the last several years. Currently there are an estimated 1,200 of these individuals employed but an additional 3,500 are of working age and have employment funding available to them when they choose to go to work. We anticipate three to four hundred of these individuals will be applying for VR during the next year.

Individuals with Mental Illness who meet diagnostic eligibility criteria for Maine Care Section 17.02 Community Support Services, and/or Maine Care Section 92.03 Behavioral Health Home Services and require ongoing supports to maintain successful employment may access Mental Health Long Term Supported Employment Services funded by the DHHS Office of Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services (DHHS-OBH). DHHS-OBH contracts with Kepro, Inc to administer these services.

The Division also has limited state dollars available to provide long term employment supports through two separate programs to VR consumers with the most significant disabilities who have been closed successfully. The programs are The Basic Extended Support Program (BES) and the Brain Injury Support Program (BIS). The BES program has an annual cap per client of $3,000 and the BIS program has an annual cap per client of $8,000.

Employment services are also available to individuals with mental illness through Vocational Clubhouses. There are currently four vocational clubhouses in Maine. Transitional Employment (not supported through the use of VR funds) is intended to build on basic job skills and build clubhouse members’ confidence in their ability to maintain competitive employment. It is one of several employment options available through the Clubhouse approach. Transitional employment offers part-time positions in integrated worksites in the community, for 6-9 months. The individuals are paid by employers who have an agreement with the clubhouse that if the individual is not able to work their shift, the

position will be covered by staff from the clubhouse. Clubhouse staff are also responsible for the training of the member on the job site, as well as providing job coaching on the job, thereby relieving the employer of these responsibilities. Transitional employment sites are meant to be a bridge on the way to permanent employment within the community, for those who need it.

The Division will continue to work together with its state agency partners and service providers to ensure that supported employment services are provided in a quality manner that supports the outcome of integrated, community-based employment.

2. THE TIMING OF TRANSITION TO EXTENDED SERVICES

The Division’s rules state the maximum time period for DVR time–limited services is 24 months, unless the IPE indicates that more than 24 months of services are necessary in order for the individual to achieve job stability prior to transition to extended services. In day–to–day practice, a team approach is used to determine when an individual is ready to transition to extended support.

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION (COMBINED OR GENERAL) CERTIFICATIONS

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

Maine Division 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

Maine Department of Labor

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;

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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

Laura A. Fortman

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

Commissioner

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

CERTIFICATION SIGNATURE

Signatory information

Enter Signatory information in this column

Name of Signatory

Laura A. Fortman

Title of Signatory

Commissioner, Maine Department of Labor

Date Signed

June 10, 2020

ASSURANCES

The State