

The mission of the KY Office of Vocational Rehabilitation is to empower Kentuckians with disabilities to maximize independence and economic security through competitive, integrated employment.

OVR Portion of the State Plan | Kentucky Office of Vocational Rehabilitation

2024 - 2028

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– Draft –

Table of Contents

Section A: Statewide Council for Vocational Rehabilitation	1
Section B: Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment.....	21
Section C: Goals, Priorities, and Strategies.....	72
Section D: Evaluation and Reports of Progress: VR and Supported Employment Goals .	92
Section E: Supported Employment Services and the Distribution of Title VI Funds	116
Section F: Annual Estimates	127
Section G: Order of Selection	128
Section H: Waiver of Statewideness.....	134
Section I: Comprehensive System of Personnel Development	135
Section J: Coordination with Education Officials.....	152
Section K: Coordination with Employers	166
Section L: Interagency Cooperation with Other Agencies.....	171
Vocational Rehabilitation Program Performance Indicators	182

Section A: Statewide Council for Vocational Rehabilitation

A. 1. All VR agencies, except for those that have an independent consumer-controlled commission, must have a State Rehabilitation Council (Council or SRC) that meets the criteria in Section 105 of the Rehabilitation Act. The designated State agency or designated State unit, as applicable, has:

— established a State Rehabilitation Council

A. 2. In accordance with Assurance (a)(1)(B), if selected, please provide information on the current composition of the Council by representative type, including the term number of the representative, as applicable, and any vacancies, as well as the beginning dates of each representative's term.

Council Representative	Current Term Number/Vacant	Beginning Date of Term Mo./Yr.
Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC)	2	06/21
Parent Training and Information Center	Vacant	06/21
Client Assistance Program	1	10/21
Qualified Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Counselor (Ex Officio if Employed by the VR Agency)	1	01/22
Community Rehabilitation Program Service Provider	2	08/22
Business, Industry, and Labor	2	08/22
Business, Industry, and Labor	2	08/22
Business, Industry, and Labor	2	08/22
Business, Industry, and Labor	1	02/23
National Federation for the Blind	1	08/22
Kentucky Council for the Blind	1	08/22
Bluegrass Council for the Blind	1	08/22
Committee of Blind Vendors	Vacant	N/A

– Draft –

Council Representative	Current Term Number/Vacant	Beginning Date of Term Mo./Yr.
Current or Former Applicants for, or Recipients of, VR services	Vacant	N/A
Representative of a disability group that includes individuals with physical, cognitive, sensory, and mental disabilities.	Vacant	N/A
Representative of a disability group that includes individuals with disabilities who have difficulty representing themselves or are unable due to their disabilities to represent themselves.	2	06/21
Section 121 Project Directors in the State (as applicable)	N/A	N/A
State Educational Agency Responsible for Students with Disabilities Eligible to Receive Services under Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)	Vacant	N/A
State Workforce Development Board	Vacant	N/A
VR Agency Director (Ex Officio)	2	07/19

A. 3. If the SRC is not meeting the composition requirements in Section 105(b) of the Rehabilitation Act and/or is not meeting quarterly as required in Section 105(f) of the Rehabilitation Act, provide the steps that the VR agency is taking to ensure it meets those requirements.

Kentucky's State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) is established under the Kentucky Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) by Kentucky Revised Statute (KRS) 151B.245, as the Kentucky Statewide Council for Vocational Rehabilitation (hereafter referred to as "SCVR" or "Council").

The SCVR convenes at least four quarterly meetings each year, in accordance with Section 105(f) of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended by Title IV of WIOA and 34 CFR 361.17(j).

Currently, the Council is not in compliance with the composition requirements in Section 105(b) of the Rehabilitation Act, as amended, due to six (6) vacancies pending appointment, including an eligible reappointment. The OVR has taken multiple steps to meet the composition requirements of the Council, which include the following actions: sending recommendations with applications and resumes to the Kentucky Boards and Commissions; creating a Nominating and Bylaws committee to stay informed of expiring terms and to create a membership pipeline

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process; engaging interested citizens who have applied by inviting them to the SCVR and committee meetings; and building the SCVR guest listserv for public awareness and engagement. However, the Governor has the sole discretion to appoint members to the state's SRC. The Council continues to carry out its functions since "no vacancy affects the power of the remaining members to execute the duties of the Council" as stated in 34 CFR §361.17(f)(2).

A. 4. In accordance with the requirements in Section 101(a)(21)(A)(ii)(III) of the Rehabilitation Act, include a summary of the Council's input (including how it was obtained) into the State Plan and any State Plan revisions, including recommendations from the Council's annual reports, the review and analysis of consumer satisfaction and other Council reports.

The Statewide Council for Vocational Rehabilitation (SCVR) is established under the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) by KRS 151B.245 as the state's SRC in accordance with 34 CFR 361.16(a)(2).

As part of the agency's commitment, OVR will continue to provide funding support for the SCVR to be used for the publication of the Annual Report and conducting both the Consumer Satisfaction Survey (CSS) and the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA). Reimbursement of expenses will be provided to members for expenses incurred related to activities and functions of the Council.

OVR works with the SCVR to seek input and recommendations, which may occur through both formal and informal communications, such as during committee meetings and trainings. Due to the complexity and comprehensiveness of the agency, OVR provides an Annual Refresher Training for existing members and support staff as well as a New Members Training to address the learning needs of rotating and newly appointed members. OVR encourages questions and seeks advice from the Council to make the agency aware of any concerns and to ensure the voice of the consumer is heard through these formal and informal occurrences.

The SCVR has met quarterly with a full quorum in attendance from October 1, 2022, through September 30, 2023. At every meeting, reports are provided by the Executive Director's Office and the Directors of each division within the OVR. This Executive Leadership Team (ELT) reports on division updates, statistics and other information regarding the delivery of services to our consumers. Other reports, presentations and/or topics may be provided at quarterly meetings at the request of the Council or the Executive Director.

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The following six standing committees assist in carrying out the mission and functions of the full Council: Executive, Policy and Planning, Public Awareness and Legislative, Consumer Services and Program Evaluation, Nominating and Bylaws and Blind Services. In April 2023, all committees began meeting between the full Council quarterly meetings, except the Executive committee, which meets the same day of and prior to the full Council meeting. Below accounts the activity of the Council as required in Section 101 of the Rehabilitation Act, as amended, during the FFY 2023 from October 1, 2022, through September 30, 2023.

October 24, 2022, Quarterly Meeting

The SCVR Meeting

The Council met with a full quorum, and the SCVR Chairperson presided over the meeting. An open forum was provided to give the public an opportunity to comment. There were no public comments offered.

Executive Leadership Reports

The Executive Director's Office provided updates on the progress of the new case management system, the status of Employment First Council, leadership changes within the cabinet and upcoming conference events. Agency fiscal matters were discussed, and the staff meetings required for the implementation of the new case management system.

The Executive Leadership Team (ELT) gave division updates for each division within OVR. Division of Blind Services provided program updates, staffing information, student enrollment at the McDowell Center, consumer certificates obtained in the Bioptic Driving Program and an update on the remediation of the dorms. Division of Field Services provided updates on the number of consumers served and credentials received by consumers since the beginning of the year, an agency-wide in-person leadership meeting, staff diversity training and Skill Enhancement Training for new staff. Approaches to managing caseload were discussed, which was an area of emphasis in the Corrective Action Plan. Division of Kentucky Business Enterprises (KBE) provided updates on the progress of multiple bids and expanding micro-market opportunities to assist vendors in being more profitable. The division expressed concerns of not yet operating at pre-COVID levels. However, the division is identifying possible opportunities in private sectors and exploring the 8-A federal program for disadvantaged populations for priority contracts with blind vendors. Division of the Carl D. Perkins Vocational Training Center (CDPVTC) provided updates on consumer enrollments, including those on a waitlist, high demand programs and plans to separate the Jobs Readiness Training Program from the Vocational Training Programs to address

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the need for the development of consumer's soft skills. Outreach efforts across the state of the Perkins First Team were discussed. Comments were made by the Council, and there were no questions asked.

Additional Reports

The Community Rehabilitation Provider (CRP) Satisfaction Survey results were presented, including the response percentage. Members were encouraged to provide input as the survey undergoes revisions. A member asked for clarification on some offices stating they were not setting up transportation. Staff responded that OVR has not agreed to allow this service. A member commented regarding the upcoming revisions.

The Client Assistance Program reported the number of cases for FFY 2022, the outcome of those closed, and carryover cases for FFY 2023. There were no further questions or comments.

Committee Reports

The Executive committee met, and the SCVR Chair provided the report. The committee discussed chair vacancies on two committees. New chairs were approved and appointed for Blind Services and Nominating and Bylaws committees and are now members of the Executive committee, in accordance with the bylaws. A member was moved from Public Awareness and Legislative committee to Blind Services upon request. There were no recommendations to the Council.

Public Awareness and Legislative committee met, and the committee chair provided the report. The committee discussed several legislative updates related to current wage trends in comparison to sub-minimum wage holders. The subject of parental rights of parents with disabilities was discussed. The timing of reimbursements and/or payments from OVR were briefly discussed. An update on the completion of the Annual Report was provided. The committee reviewed the nomination for the Arthur Campbell Jr. Advocacy Award and the committee voted to observe this nominee as the winner. A recommendation will be made to the Council to observe the nominee as the winner. A conversation with the Council regarding how the award should be presented will occur, later.

Blind Services committee met, and the committee chair provided the report. The committee was given updates by staff regarding the McDowell Center, current staffing and the need to fill an Orientation and Mobility staff position. Recent and upcoming events were discussed. There were no recommendations to the Council.

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Policy and Planning committee met, and the committee chair provided the report. Staff encouraged the committee to ask any questions and/or express any concerns with OVR policy and process. However, there were no questions raised at this time. A brief discussion with a guest intern regarding the field of Social Work and her career path occurred. There were no recommendations to the Council.

Nominating and Bylaws committee met, and the committee chair provided the report. The committee discussed the need to fulfill a vacancy for the area Business, Industry and Labor. Five terms expiring June of 2023 were discussed and the need for applications of interested citizens to be submitted by January of 2023 to accommodate the processing time for appointments. The committee discussed clarity in the use of the word 'designee' rather than 'proxy' by members as it relates to a member's absence. A recommendation to strike the word 'designee' from the SCVR bylaws will be made to the Council for consistency with the bylaws. The length of time required to make a change to the bylaws and the need for a shorter time was discussed. A recommendation to shorten the length of time for changes to the bylaws in Article VII will be presented and a recommendation will be made to the Council.

Consumer Services and Program Evaluation committee met. A report was provided by a representative of CAP. The 2021 Consumer Satisfaction Survey (CSS) Report was set for approval at the August quarterly meeting but was not brought forth for a vote. The question list was reviewed, and changes were made to the first two questions. These changes are regarding what accessible means, as well as clarifying virtual meetings being covered when asked about vocational rehabilitation offices. The Work Incentive Program update quality assurance was provided to the two vendors who have been using it for the last two years. The reports were reviewed and found to be good quality reports. Suggestions were provided and the vendors were receptive. An issue regarding a consumer being denied accommodations by an employer and a resolution for training was posed to CAP, and a brief discussion was had.

Business Meeting

The Council reconvened, and SCVR Chairperson called the meeting to order for business. SCVR Chairperson entertained a motion to accept the 2021 Consumer Satisfaction Survey (CSS) report as provided at the last meeting. A motion was made and seconded, and the motion carried unanimously. A motion was made to accept the nominee for the Arthur Campbell Jr. Advocacy Award as the winner. A motion was made and seconded, and the motion carried unanimously. The Council discussed how best to give recognition for the contributions of members

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before a member's term expires. After the Council sought to understand how this was done previously, the SCVR Chair made a recommendation to present exiting members with a certificate of appreciation. A motion was made and seconded, and the motion carried unanimously. Staff informed the Council that the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA) bid process had been initiated and will be next calendar year January 1st through December 31st, 2023. The request for proposal (RFP) has been approved by Fiscal, is currently moving through Legal, and will be posted within the next week. The SCVR Chair posed having a member's refresher training for existing members to be reacquainted with the role of the Council. Further discussion was sought to determine the date and time of the training. A council member recommended the training take place as soon as possible.

Nominating and Bylaws presented two changes to the bylaws to the Council. A motion was made to incorporate language in the bylaws to allow a shorter timeframe for changes to the bylaws in Article VII. The motion carried unanimously. A motion was made to strike the word 'designee' from the bylaws and continue using the non-voting 'proxy' for clear understanding and consistency with the bylaws. A motion was made and seconded, and the motion passed unanimously. The SCVR Chairperson began the open forum for public comment on any items discussed on the agenda. The public did not offer questions or comments. The meeting adjourned.

January 23, 2023, Quarterly Meeting

The SCVR Meeting

The Council convened with a full quorum, and the SCVR Chairperson presided over the meeting. An open forum was provided to give the public an opportunity to comment. There were no public comments offered.

Executive Leadership Reports

The Executive Director's Office reported fiscal updates involving the intent to return unmatched funds, updates on projects such as the new CMS, legislative updates regarding possible pay increases for staff, and the 2023 federal award. An update was given regarding the Corrective Action Plan as it relates to fiscal responsibility and a presentation from the fiscal department was offered to the council for understanding and transparency. An update regarding RETAIN, HB7 legislation and the impact on OVR, and the Everyone Counts Initiative was given. The Council was informed that a presentation of Employment First would occur later to understand the basics of the initiative.

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The ELT gave division updates for each division within OVR. Division of Blind Services provided updates for the dorm restoration, indicating that it is near complete. An invitation to an Open House event in April was offered to the Council to celebrate and tour the new dormitories at the McDowell center. Quarterly statistics and data were reported for the center, OIB program, Bioptic Driving Program, and counselor caseload. An assessment of staffing needs was identified as a priority for the renovated dorms. Division of Field Services provided statistical data for 2022, including cases served, number of new cases reported, credentials and average hourly wage recorded. Updates were provided for social security reimbursements, four new establishment projects awarded, and statewide Common Measures training with VRTAC QM to fulfill part of the Corrective Action Plan. No formal appeals were reported. A member asked to clarify ‘credentials’, and a member asked to elaborate on social security reimbursements. They were both provided clarification for credentials and understanding of social security reimbursements. A member commended the staff of OVR for their hard work, citing tremendous increase in stats reported. Division of KBE provided statistics on gross sales, products purchased, payroll totals and income from unassigned vending. Updates on site visits, RFP, vending sites and staffing were given. There were no bids for the last quarter. Division of CDPVTC reported on consumer enrollment, consumers on a wait list, and regional consumer representation. Updates were given for the Assisted Living Branch, the Life Skills Enhancement Program, Speech Therapy, the Vocational Services Branch and Student Services Branch. The average hourly wage for CIE, average hours worked, and referrals between districts were reported. Updates were provided for the new separation of the Job Readiness Training Program into a six-to-nine-week class for soft skill development, the new process for the Training Enrollment Employment Meeting and the ALPHA Program with new certification opportunities for consumers.

Additional Reports

A brief presentation of Employment First was given for the Council to understand it’s composition and mission as the newly established council under OVR.

The SCVR Chairperson read the essay submitted by the nominee and presented the winner a plaque for receiving the Arthur Campbell Jr. Advocacy Award. The winner spoke, accepted the award and provided words of encouragement to the Council.

Committee Reports

The Executive committee met, and the SCVR Chair reported that the Member’s Refresher Training will be held on February 23rd. The Chair entertained a motion

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to hold the committee meetings between each quarterly full council meeting. A motion was made and seconded, and the motion passed to hold committee meetings between full council meetings. The committee discussed member introductions for a future meeting and how best to implement this exercise. The SCVR Chair announced the quarterly meeting dates for the remainder of the year as April 24th, July 24th and October 23rd.

Public Awareness and Legislative Committee met, and the committee Chair provided the report. Legislative updates were provided regarding sub-minimum wage and the submission of the 2022 Annual Report. The committee was informed that staff will attend Kentucky Chamber Day Dinner and will report any updates back to the Council. There were no recommendations to the Council.

Blind Services Committee met, and the committee Chair provided the report. The committee was given updates by staff on dorm renovations at the McDowell Center, the starting of a new video series that would highlight the Center and new staff. The committee discussed how to initiate more feedback from consumers attending McDowell and how to streamline the process. There were no recommendations to the Council.

Policy and Planning Committee met, and the committee Chair provided the report. The committee discussed the application process for OVR. The old application is not compatible in CMS as it is currently formatted, so alterations to update the form will be made. Staff explained that concerns has been expressed regarding utilizing a consumers social security number. Discussion is being had to create a specific identification for consumers in the program without using the SSN to reduce any potential breach of information. There were no recommendations to the Council.

Nominating and Bylaws Committee met, and the committee Chair provided the report. Five upcoming vacancies in June within the Council was discussed. Staff will assist in the recruitment for the State Educational Agency Representative and the Workforce Innovation Board Representative, with assistance from the current member representatives. Applications and resumes for other upcoming vacancies have been submitted. Necessary changes to the bylaws regarding the Open Meetings Laws were discussed among the committee and presented during the meeting as exhibits. These changes will be brought to the floor during the full Council meeting.

Consumer Services and Program Evaluation committee met, and the committee Chair provided the report. The committee discussed changes to the Consumer Satisfaction Survey (CSS) question list and was sent to the Human Development

– Draft –

Institute (HDI) for approval. Regarding the survey, a random listing of consumers who did not complete the online survey have been contacted via telephone to follow-up. An update on the Work Incentive Program was provided to the committee. Data for the 2022 FFY has been analyzed and found that roughly 80% of beneficiaries with an IPE had officially received benefits counseling, either provided by staff or through an approved vendor. A representative of the Client Assistance Program (CAP) provided a report to the committee with referral information, cases reported and carryover cases to fiscal year 2023. There were no recommendations to the Council.

Business Meeting

The Council reconvened, and a quorum was established. SCVR Chairperson called the meeting to order for business. The SCVR Chair reminded members that those attending via video-teleconference who wish to have their attendance counted must have their cameras on and be visible the duration of the meeting per the Open Meetings Act. Council members reviewed the minutes from the October quarterly meeting. A member made a motion to accept the minutes with an adjustment to a second made by a council member who did not have the camera on at the time the motion was made. The suggested wording was “a second was made”, rather than citing a specific member. The SCVR Chairperson seconded, and the motion carried unanimously. Staff provided the Council an update on the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA), and it was explained that there were no applicants for the posted RFP, resulting in a repost to begin on Sunday, January 29th. A date for the Council Member Refresher Training was established for February 23rd at 10:00AM and will be given by OVR Administrator and liaison to the Council.

Nominating and Bylaws presented changes to the bylaws to incorporate the Open Meetings Law regarding video teleconferencing option. The proposed changes were read aloud to the Council. A member raised a question regarding the citation for the particular “Kentucky Open Meetings Act” in the second sentence and suggested the committee provide the specific law. The SCVR Chairperson requested a motion to accept the changes to the bylaws. A motion was made and seconded, and the motion carried unanimously.

The SCVR Chairperson began the open forum. There were no comments or questions offered. The Chairperson requested a motion to adjourn the council meeting. A motion was made and seconded, and the meeting adjourned.

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SCVR Training

Members Refresher Training was provided on February 23rd, 2023, to all members wanting to be reacquainted with the role of the Council. The mission of the Council was reviewed, and the role committees play in the overall effectiveness of carrying out the functions of the Council. Committee responsibilities were discussed, and the role of the committee chair and staff support was explained. The information discussed was provided to all members.

April 24, 2023, Quarterly Meeting

The SCVR Meeting

The Council convened with a full quorum, and the SCVR Chairperson presided over the meeting. An open forum was provided to give the public an opportunity to comment. There were no public comments offered.

Executive Leadership Reports

The Executive Director's Office provided updates on staff, personnel stabilization after last year raises, and current vacancies. Several staff will be attending fiscal responsibility training in Bethesda Maryland to ensure policies and procedures and internal controls are in place so that money is spent correctly, and no monies are returned. The new Case Management System (CMS) and a Statewide Assistance Training are in progress. The Council was informed on other initiatives, such as the implementation of House Bill 7, an invitation to apply for the Stay-At-Home, Return-To-Work program, Pathways to Partnerships and Employment First.

The ELT gave division updates for each division within OVR. Division of Blind Services provided statistics and staffing information for McDowell Center, IL/OIB Branch, Deaf Blind Program and Orientation and Mobility Branch. It was reported that out of 499 cases across 100 counties, 83% of those cases are older individuals who are blind. Outreach activities are underway, and one being the Optometry Conference. Training for staff in assistive technologies and other areas was discussed. An update on the McDowell center remodeling project and the upcoming Open House was given. Division of Field Services provided statistical data for the first quarter of the year for referrals, potentially eligible students, applications taken and those that were eligible for services and IEP's. A council member asked how the numbers compared to pre-COVID in 2019. The division director responded that the numbers are currently even higher than reported then, with numbers doubling in some areas. A member asked what may be contributing to the rise in cases. Staff responded that the number of staff on hand to assist,

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the rising economy and people seeking work were contributing factors. Cases closed in Competitive Integrated Employment (CIE) and the average hourly wage was provided. Updates on social security reimbursements, CMS, and various trainings for staff were given. Key staff are traveling on Listening Tours, providing staff Common Measures Training which are requirements in the Corrective Action Plan. Division of KBE discussed staff training in financial reporting and gave updates on bids and site visits responding to RFP's. Vendor upcoming events and trainings, including those facilitated at National Automated Merchants Association (NAMA), National Restaurant Association, and the National Association of Blind Merchants (NABM), which focuses on micromarket training, were discussed. Division of CDPTVC provided consumer insights and statistics for the center and programs. Updates on center activity were provided, such as collaborations with three high schools with the Online Permit Class. Upcoming trainings for staff were discussed, including the Association of People Supporting Employment First (APSE) Conference, Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR) and the Reaching Team at the Center. Program information was discussed, and the Forklift Program was reported as in high demand. Several needs for the center were HVAC controls, Living Unit restrooms, hopes to install a new gymnasium floor and p-tac units throughout the building. More needs are foreseen at the center and upcoming projects will assist these needs. The CDPTVC graduation in June was mentioned and the Center's 50th year anniversary.

Additional Reports

A budget update was provided by the Fiscal department. For State Expenditures through March 31st, OVR is currently around 78% spending. The current cash balance is around \$2.8M. OVR is currently at around 45% matched of the Federal Fiscal Year 2023 (FFY23) grant. She does not foresee OVR spending the approximately \$67M by the end of the FFY23. Based on current spending patterns, it is not likely OVR will have to meet the grant match. There are currently 38 vacancies that Fiscal would like to see filled by August 1st. If the vacancies were filled, this would help in spendings. There are some vendors that do not send invoices on time and stresses the importance of contacting the vendors to ensure these invoices are not delayed. Receiving these necessary invoices would greatly increase spending patterns. Vice Chairperson asked for clarification on who could contact these vendors and how this task could be accomplished. Martie responded it would be whoever is overseeing the contract with any particular vendor, so it could span different branches within OVR. A discussion was had, and OVR will look into the suggestion of staff sending reminder calls to vendors. Pre-ETS has spent around 41% of their FFY22 funds as of March 31st.

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Consumer Rehabilitation Program (CRP) Branch Manager presented the questions and results of the Supported Employment Provider Satisfaction Survey. The survey was revised based on previous Council responses. The revised CRP is more specific to supported employment providers, adds more clarity to the questions and provides more measurable responses. This survey was provided across the state in January, with the expectations of receiving a baseline of consumer experiences in 2022. A suggestion was made that methods of engagement other than email should be utilized to lower the 'no response' percentage from one of the questions. The feedback was taken, and there were no further comments.

The Principal Investigator from Human Development Institute gave a thorough presentation of 2022 Consumer Satisfaction Survey (CSS) results to the full Council. The report concluded, and there were no further questions or comments. The complete survey will be made available to the Council and placed on OVR website.

Client Assistance Program Division Director provided an update. Since January, CAP has opened and closed 5 information referrals: two regarding CAP specifically, and three with OVR. A description of case type and activity was given. The Council was informed that CAP has created a PowerPoint training for OVR staff, and they have attended multiple meetings and sessions with different organizations such as INTACT Kentucky and the National Disability Rights Network. Several trainings are scheduled that CAP will participate in or attend. CAP Coordinator informed the council of an upcoming meeting with OVR staff to provide a recorded training that can be simplified and easily accessed by OVR staff. Information was given for an upcoming meeting on May 26th for Protection and Advocacy for Individuals with Developmental Disabilities and Mental Illness, CAP's advisory body. A link will be sent to the SCVR Chairperson and the Council to register for this event. The report concluded, and there were no further questions or comments.

Committee Reports

Executive Committee met, and the SCVR Chairperson provided the report. The Member's Refresher Training that was held in February was discussed and more members were encouraged to attend the next training. The committee discussed the certificates to be presented to outgoing members that will be addressed later in today's meeting. The dynamics of an Annual Retreat for the Council was discussed. The committee members feel this would be beneficial to the Council as a whole, allowing members to make connections with one another. This will be brought to the full Council during New Business. Dates for the next committee

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meetings were discussed and will be sent out to those committees once decided. A new member was appointed to the Consumer Services and Program Evaluation Committee. Nominations for new SCVR Officers will be held later during the business meeting.

Blind Services Committee met on April 5th, 2023, and the committee chair provided the report. Staff provided updates on the McDowell Center and an ongoing project to create informational videos on the McDowell Center that can be shared with the public. The committee has set a goal with the Older Blind Program to serve all counties across the state, and it was reported that most of the counties are currently being served. The committee discussed employment, open positions at the McDowell Center, and how to disseminate that information to the public. A member provided an update on the NFB Newsline and how to incorporate this service with individuals in OVR. There were no recommendations to the Council.

Nominating and Bylaws Committee met on April 6th, 2023, and the committee chair provided the report. The committee reviewed the previous bylaws changes and will be presented to the full council. The nominations for SCVR Officers were discussed, and a member gave a brief explanation of how the nominating process will work and the requirements to hold these positions. Applications for appointment are in progress to fill the upcoming council vacancies. A member who resigned has recommended a referral to fill the remainder of the term which expires in 2024, and the committee is waiting on the referral's application and resume. The committee discussed the importance of maintaining a full and active Council and would like to implement a pipeline of referred individuals. A motion was made and seconded for the Council to accept the changes to the Bylaws as presented. The motion carried unanimously.

Public Awareness and Legislative (PAL) Committee met on April 13th, 2023, and the committee chair provided the report. A legislative update was provided regarding the sub-minimum wage. The Annual Report will be discussed during the business meeting. A new SCVR informational document was discussed and will be shared by the Nominating and Bylaws Committee. There was a brief discussion regarding a SCVR Member Retreat. Staff attended the Annual Kentucky Chamber Day Dinner on February 9th and provided a short summary of this event to the committee. There were no recommendations for the Council.

Consumer Services and Program Evaluation Committee met on April 13th, 2023, and the committee chair provided the report. The CSS report was provided by a guest provided the CSS report, and it was discussed with the committee. The chair made a motion to approve the 2022 CSS, and a second was provided. The

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motion carried unanimously. An update was given regarding the CSNA. Plans and introductions are expected to be presented at the next quarterly meeting. DB101 is being updated to be more user-friendly and to be utilized on mobile devices.

Policy and Planning Committee met on April 25th, 2023, and the committee chair provided the report. The committee reviewed the state OVR-10B form related to equipment inventory and disposal. Concerns were presented with the use of committee time and internal forms. It was decided moving forward that matters such as forms for internal use will not be discussed within the committee. Locations and hybrid options for future meetings were discussed, along with potential guest speakers. The committee will continue to discuss its purpose during the next meeting and plans to discuss the Strategic Plan.

Business Meeting

The Council reconvened, and a quorum was established. SCVR Chairperson called the meeting to order for business. Council members reviewed the Minutes from the January quarterly meeting. A motion was made and seconded, and the motion carried unanimously.

SCVR Chairperson recognized five members whose terms will expire in June with a certificate of appreciation for their service. One of the members, having attended the meeting in-person, was presented with a certificate and gave a short speech about time spent with the Council. For members who attended virtually, certificates will be mailed to their home. A member attending virtually also shared kind words with the Council. The Officer election was performed by the Member-At-Large for the Council. A new SCVR Chairperson was nominated. A motion was made and seconded, and the motion carried unanimously. A new Vice-Chair was nominated. A motion was made and seconded, and the motion carried unanimously.

A motion to adjourn was requested by the SCVR Chairperson. A motion was made and seconded, and the meeting adjourned.

July 24, 2023, Quarterly Meeting

The SCVR Meeting

The Council convened with a full quorum, and the SCVR Chairperson presided over the meeting. An open forum was provided to give the public an opportunity to comment. There were no public comments offered. Introductions were made by staff and members.

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Executive Leadership Reports

The Executive Director's Office provided updates on personnel, fiscal affairs, CMS, internal controls and the quarterly report for the Corrective Action Plan. The Leadership Retreat/Executive Advance will be held in September to discuss expenditure of funds and strategic planning for the upcoming year. Major focus continues to be on policy and procedures. The progress of rate setting and the Vendor Manual was discussed. A member commented about the slow reimbursement rate of CRPs, and asked if there were continued updates to the process to ensure timely payment from OVR. Staff responded that the agency is bound in some areas but will look to identify where areas of improvements can be made. The member suggested meeting with those CRPs to address their issues and concerns.

The ELT gave division updates for each division within OVR. Division of Blind Services provided statistics and staffing information for McDowell Center, Deaf Blind Program, IL/OIB Branch, and Orientation and Mobility Branch. A progress report of the merging of the IL/OIB and CMS was given. The three high school aged transition camps (PATH Project, KY Deafblind Project and Expanded Core Curriculum Week) and the completion of the promotional bioptic driving video were discussed. Division of Field Services provided a summary of metrics comparing program year 2022 with 2019, 2020 and 2021. Improvements with consumers obtaining credentials and staff entering these updates into the system was discussed. The average hourly rates of consumers, closure rates and competitive integrated employments goals were given. Updates on staff trainings were provided, including Listening Tours, Skills Enhancement Training and the new CMS. A member asked to elaborate on credential reporting. The division director responded that it is believed credentials are being obtained, but system requirements to report credentials can be an issue for staff. A member asked to provide examples of measurements taken to keep case engagement up compared to in the past. The division director responded this project started several years ago when a close-up look at 60-day and 90-day eligibility plan determination was observed and the process streamlined. A report was also developed to summarize the number of consumers who have not received an authorization or staff provided service in five months. This is helpful information for each counselor to know which consumers cases may need additional attention and to engage with the consumer. Minor issues were reported with Supported Employment and rate issues and plans to provide special attention to this area. Staff discussed training for mentors for engagement between consumers and staff. Division of KBE provided updates on an awarded rebid, scholarships, and the Emerging Leaders Program. Trainings were discussed, including federal trainings in D.C., the National Automated Merchants Association (NAMA) in Atlanta, the National

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Restaurant Association in Chicago and the National Federation of Blind Merchants in Iowa along with other upcoming trainings. Vendors received Green Light Training as a refresher and as an update on new available software. New micromarket installations and RFPs were discussed, and a presentation was given at Morehead State University to students at INSIGHT. Division of CDPVTC provided consumer statistics for the center, including referrals, credentials received and facility tours. Updates were provided for the Student Services Branch, staffing, and several capital projects for renovations and needed upgrades for the center. The division director announced the date of the Center's 50th Anniversary Celebration as September 14th. A member asked what drives the decision to add programs at CDPVTC. The division director responded that most of the decisions are made from current market trends by comparing other centers like CDPVTC.

Additional Reports

University of Kentucky's Human Development Institute (HDI) provided an in-depth presentation of the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA) plans. A description of the CSNA report was given and project plans and timelines were given.

Client Assistance Program (CAP) provided an update on calls, referrals and cases. The agency will be focusing on systemic advocacy such as attending HB144 meetings, employment committee meetings, National Technical Assistance Center on Transition (NTACT), etc. Information was provided regarding CAP and PNA trainings with a recording available for OVR counselors, exhibit booths at Kentucky Assistive Technology Services (KATS) and APSE events and an interview with Demand and Disrupt Podcast on Sheltered Workshops.

Committee Reports

Executive Committee met, and the SCVR Chairperson provided the report. The committee discussed the Strategic Plan and the SCVR retreat to be held in Louisville in 2024. A survey will be sent to the members to gather feedback on who may want to serve on the ad hoc committee for planning the retreat. There are currently five pending appointments/reappointments to the council that will hopefully be received by the Governor's Office soon. The SCVR Chairperson provided the dates for the next block of committee meetings set to be held before the 4th quarterly full council meeting. The Executive Committee discussed wanting staff from Rehabilitation Technology to meet and present to the council.

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Blind Services Committee met on July 5th, and the committee chair provided the report. Staff provided an update for the McDowell Center and Blind Services. The committee discussed the upcoming Open House event to be held at the McDowell Center on July 26th. Staff anticipates the dorms to fully reopen during August or September. Staff discussed the recent project completion of the Bioptic Driving video. There were no recommendations for the Council.

Public Awareness and Legislative (PAL) Committee met on July 6th, and a member provided the report. There will be a continued focus on employment and transportation related topics. The lack of sufficient and accessible transportation options/services for people with disabilities throughout the state were discussed amongst the committee. Some of the options discussed was Medicaid paid resources, Uber, Lyft, public transit, etc., recognizing some are more restrictive than others and vary from place to place. The committee made progress on the Annual Report and chose the theme “Building on a Solid Foundation.” The committee members determined this theme focuses more on growth while giving credit to past accomplishments. The need for more marketing of vocational rehabilitation services was also discussed. The SCVR Chairperson provided legislative updates.

Nominating and Bylaws Committee met on July 6th, and the committee chair provided the report. There are currently five expired terms that are awaiting appointment. The Policy and Planning Committee currently has two active members and one vacancy. Five terms are set to expire in 2024. It is the hope of the committee to establish a pipeline of applicants built from exiting members. Members can provide the council with two to three referrals upon their term expiration. The Joining SCVR document could be useful for potential new members. There were no recommendations to the Council.

Policy and Planning Committee met on July 12th, and the committee chair provided the report. Members reviewed the committee description and goals. Staff provided information for the first upcoming State Forum on September 19th. Members provided questions that might be asked by the public for OVR to consider regarding the services offered, transportation, awareness of OVR program in schools, accessibility, etc. Committee members will attend at least one of the five (5) forums. There were no recommendations to the Council.

Business Meeting

The Council reconvened, and a quorum was established. SCVR Chairperson called the meeting to order for business. The Chairperson entertained a motion to create an Ad Hoc Committee to plan the 2024 SCVR Retreat. The motion was made and seconded, and the motion carried unanimously. The finalized State

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Plan Forum dates, locations and times were provided. The dates were September 19th (virtual sessions, morning and evening); October 17th at CDPVTC (hybrid, evening) and October 24th at McDowell Center (hybrid, morning and evening). A member suggested to add a discussion of the ABLE account to the agenda for a future meeting. Staff will have the discussion added to the next meeting agenda. The Chairperson asked members if they were satisfied with the way the reports are given by staff. Several members expressed that they were pleased with the reports as given. A motion to adjourn was requested by the Chairperson. A motion was made and seconded, and the meeting adjourned.

A. 5. Provide the VR agency's response to the Council's input and recommendations, including an explanation for the rejection of any input and recommendations.

Recommendation 1

The SCVR recommended that OVR provide certificates of appreciation to members whose terms are near expiration.

Response to Recommendation 1

OVR agrees. OVR will provide certificates of appreciation to members whose terms are set to expire at their last full Council quarterly meeting.

Recommendation 2

The SCVR recommended a regular training be offered to members as soon as possible to learn about the council on a continuous basis.

Response to Recommendation 2

OVR agrees. An annual Member's Refresher Training will be provided by the SCVR liaison to assist members in being reacquainted with the role of the Council. The training will also be available to staff support assisting the Council, as needed.

Recommendation 3

The SCVR suggests OVR implement a process of reminding vendors to turn in invoices by contacting them to help increase spending patterns.

Response to Recommendation 3

OVR agrees. OVR will work to implement a process of reminder calls to vendors who have not submitted invoices. The implementation will need to span across

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different branches and multiple staff within OVR as different staff oversee contracts.

Recommendation 4

A suggestion was made to use methods of engagement other than email to lower the 'no response' percentage from one of the questions on the CRP report. The feedback was taken,

Response to Recommendation 4

OVR agrees. However, after reviewing the options of phone calls and interviews, it was determined that this method was not feasible due to the number of Employment Specialists employed by CRPs. OVR has decided to utilize regular mail for CRPs to distribute to their Employment Specialists in the event the email is not answered.

Recommendation 5

The SCVR suggested implementing a process to ensure timely payment to CRP's that could address the slow reimbursement rate.

Response to Recommendation 5

Staff responded that the agency is bound in some areas but will look to identify where areas of improvements can be made.

Recommendation 6

The SCVR recommends a representative from the Rehabilitation Technology branch report to the Council.

Response to Recommendation 6

OVR agrees. OVR will have a representative from the Rehabilitation Technology branch report to the Council at a quarterly meeting.

Recommendation 7

The SCVR requested that a presentation of the STABLE/ABLE Account be added to the agenda.

Response to Recommendation 7

OVR agrees. OVR will have the STABLE/ABLE Account representative present to the Council at a quarterly meeting.

Section B: Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment

B. 1. A Individuals with the most significant disabilities and their need for Supported Employment;

Introduction:

This report provides a summary and the findings of the activities of the Kentucky Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (KYOVR) in an effort to comprehensively assess the various vocational rehabilitation (VR) needs in the Commonwealth of Kentucky conducted in 2023. This assessment was conducted for strategic planning purposes and to meet the comprehensive needs assessment requirement of the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) as defined in 34 CFR 361.29. This federal regulation requires the agency to assess the following areas:

- 1.) Services to individuals with the most significant disabilities, including their need for supported employment services.
- 2.) Services to individuals who are minorities or in unserved or underserved populations.
- 3.) Services provided to individuals with disabilities through various components of the workforce development system
- 4.) Youth and students with disabilities, including their need for transition services.
- 5.) The need to establish, develop or improve community rehabilitation programs

The Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA) provides a summary of the surveys and the findings of OVR activities to understand the needs and concerns of the disability community that we serve throughout the state. The report assists OVR in recognizing its current state and in making any needed adjustments based on those findings.

In addition to the triennial assessment, OVR uses a variety of methods to inform the state plan the needs of the disability community in the commonwealth. By obtaining information and data from SCVR meetings, staff trainings and surveys,

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the Consumer Satisfaction Survey (CSS), public forums, and other reports, OVR is better situated to address service concerns or issues and equitable access to services more strategically, and therefore more effectively. Through this process of gathering information, the agency is able to address and plan for the evolving needs of the disability community and also for staff to meet those needs.

KYOVR previously conducted a comprehensive needs assessment in 2021. Federal regulation requires the needs of individuals with disabilities in the state be assessed every three years. The current study (2023) is also intended to identify and provide recommendations for trends in the service needs, disability populations and any environmental factors possibly impacting Kentuckians with disabilities. Information from the current survey is intended to allow a more informed strategic planning process, seeking to address the identified trends and prioritize them based on data identified in the needs assessment.

The current comprehensive needs assessment was conducted in 2023 with guidance provided by the Kentucky Statewide Council for Vocational Rehabilitation (SCVR), as required by 34 CFR 361.17(h)(3). KYOVR and the SCVR offered input into the methodology and data analysis of the assessment, assuring the research would adequately reach the target population, would return valid and reliable data, and would produce recommendations that would guide the strategic planning and budget development process.

Kentucky's 2023 Comprehensive needs assessment contains both quantitative and qualitative data addressing the needs of the state vocational rehabilitation system. The data collection included:

- 1.) a review of OVR metrics data of individuals receiving services.
- 2.) demographic information for Kentucky.
- 3.) a review of the Satisfaction Survey of closed cases successful and unsuccessful.
- 4.) input from stakeholder focus groups.
- 5.) input from online surveys.
- 6.) facilities assessment of maintenance needs.
- 7.) strategic planning;
- 8.) input from public forums; and

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- 9.) data reports and feedback from the Rehabilitation Services Administration off site monitoring and the draft monitoring report.

A Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA) was implemented to identify gaps in existing services that can be reduced through programs and policies by the KYOVR. A mixed method of online surveys and forums was used to collect insights about the rehabilitation needs of Kentuckians with disabilities. The insights gained from the CSNA will provide the information needed for the development of the State Plan for services. The Needs Assessment was carried out by OVR staff working with the staff and faculty at the Human Development Institute (HDI).

CSNA Methodology

The Concerns Report Methodology, conceived by researchers at the University of Kansas in the 1980s, is a Participatory Action Research framework extensively utilized for eliciting pertinent consumer concerns and establishing an agenda for essential changes in both policy and service provision. This methodology revolves around identifying perceived strengths and issues within a specific demographic, resulting in a comprehensive catalogue of strengths and weaknesses pertaining to policy and practices in a given domain. It goes further by offering recommendations aimed at preserving identified strengths and remedying weaknesses. What sets this methodology apart is its inclusive approach—individuals with disabilities act as partners in the CRM research process, actively contributing to the selection of data collection elements, determining effective data collection methodologies, participating in analysis, interpreting results, and devising problem-solving strategies, thereby ensuring their voices are integral in decision-making processes.

The HDI Evaluation Team is employing the Concerns Report Methodology to drive the KYOVR Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA) through a multifaceted approach. This involves conducting focused discussions via focus groups involving consumers with disabilities, community rehabilitation providers, and OVR staff members. These interactions aim to gather critical insights that will directly shape the survey items tailored for these groups, facilitating the creation of a comprehensive list delineating OVR's strengths and areas necessitating improvement. Moreover, these survey results will inform recommendations made to OVR as a result of the CSNA. Importantly, this methodology extends beyond survey creation. It encompasses post-survey forums designed to provide constituents with platforms to contribute feedback on the survey outcomes and the subsequent recommendations, ensuring their perspectives continue to steer

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the decision-making process within the OVR, promoting inclusivity, and aligning strategies more effectively with the real needs of the community.

The culmination of priority concerns exposed in all methods of assessing the needs for the state from the most recent CSNA were:

- 1.) The recruitment, training and retention of a competent workforce of staff with specialized knowledge in the field of rehabilitation.
- 2.) Community Rehabilitation Provider Capacity inclusive of services operations (staff, recruitment, training, data collection), transition services and referrals and funding from OVR.
- 3.) Increased outreach for the area of employer engagement and public awareness to increase opportunities for services and increased employment outcomes.
- 4.) OVR will ensure all information, communications and technology is accessible so that everyone will have equal access to agency services and resources.
- 5.) Increased efficiency in agency processes in order to serve consumers in a more timely and effective manner.

The concerns identified above align with the goals and priority areas of 1) Sound Fiscal Management, 2) Quality Assurance, 3) Staff Resources and 4) Consumer Services and 5) Public Awareness. For the area of Provider Capacity, the concerns align with the goals set for the distribution of Title VI, Part B Funds.

Focus Group and Results

To this point the HDI Evaluation Team has conducted focus groups with SCVR, OVR staff, Community Rehabilitation Providers, and finally with public constituents. Each focus group and corresponding themes are discussed below.

Focus Group 1: Statewide Council for Vocational Rehabilitation (SCVR)

The SCVR focus group was conducted on 10/23/23 at 1:00 PM and resulted in the following themes and subthemes.

- 1.) Services:
 - Core offerings or programs provided by the organization.

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- Considerations or challenges related to transportation services.
 - Offering or promoting services without cost-sharing obligations
- 2.) Knowledge/Expertise:
- Demonstrating proficiency and specialized knowledge within the team or organization.
- 3.) Networks:
- Strong connections or partnerships within the industry or community.
- 4.) Promoting Services:
- Challenges or strategies related to advertising or making services known to the public.
 - Opportunities to enhance marketing strategies and target specific audiences effectively.
- 5.) Hiring and Retaining Staff:
- Challenges in recruiting and maintaining a competent workforce.
- 6.) Getting and Retaining CRPs (Consumer Rehabilitation Providers):
- Efforts and challenges related to attracting and maintaining service providers.
- 7.) Funding:
- Concerns, limitations, or uncertainties regarding financial resources.

Focus Group 2: Community Rehabilitation Providers (CRPs)

The HDI Evaluation Team conducted a virtual focus group with community rehabilitation provider administrators and staff on 10/31/23 at 10:30 AM. This focus group resulted in the following themes and sub-themes.

- 1.) Communication and Relationship Management
- Emphasis on open communication between OVR, counselors, and CRPs.

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- Challenges with counselor and consumer communication.
 - Lack of community understanding about OVR services.
- 2.) Service Delivery and Support for Consumers
- Insufficient funding impacting service provision.
 - Need for better vetting of consumers and clearer expectations.
 - Challenges with transportation options and service availability
- 3.) Challenges with Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS)
- Issues with the rollout, sustainability, and accessibility of Pre-ETS.
 - Desire to restore original services and funding levels.
- 4.) Provider Support and Collaboration
- Calls for transparent and inclusive long-term planning.
 - Desire for increased support, financial transparency, and involvement of CRPs.
 - Advocacy for CRP needs, cultural shifts, and regular budget examination.
- 5.) Training and Resources
- Need for more training and resources for counselors and CRPs.
 - Calls for standardized training, quality-focused training for CRPs, and better tools/resources.
- 6.) Process Efficiency and Timeliness
- Concerns about lengthy processes, authorization delays, and intake procedures.
 - Desire for better systems and technology to streamline communication and processes.
- 7.) Workforce Issues and Caseload Management

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- Counselor overload and overwhelmed staff.
- Need for appropriate caseload numbers and additional staff training.

8.) Flexibility and Adaptability

- Desire for a more flexible and adaptive approach to service delivery.
- Need for innovative solutions, advanced technology, and leveraging current workplace shortages.

Focus Group 3: OVR Staff

A focus group was conducted with OVR staff and counselors on 11/02/23 at 2:00 PM. The following themes and subthemes emerged from this focus group.

1.) Staffing Challenges and Recruitment

- Difficulty in finding qualified candidates.
- Long-term employees and retention issues.
- Need for competitive pay and benefits.
- Short-staffed offices.

2.) Internal Operations and Accessibility

- Internal accessibility updates needed.
- Office updates required.
- Case management system improvements.
- Redundant paperwork and processes.
- Lack of policy guidance and procedural limitations.

3.) External Communication and Promotion

- Strengthening communication post-pandemic.
- Better promotion of services to the public.

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- Communication with special education (SPED) and contractors/vendors.
- Lack of Consumer Rehabilitation Providers (CRPs).

4.) Service Enhancement and Accessibility

- Opportunities for staff/counselor training and continuing education.
- Accessibility assessments and updates needed.
- Improving services for independent living (IL).
- Removal of specialized caseloads and transition youth emphasis.
- Transportation options and no cost-sharing services.

5.) Technology and Office Infrastructure

- Sub-par Commonwealth of Technology (COT) office services.
- Difficulty with technology updates and system navigation.
- Lack of technology updates in OVR offices.

6.) Consumer Needs and Services

- Inability to handle all consumer needs.
- Emphasis on income increase and no cost-sharing services.
- Lack of specialized caseloads and CRPs.

7.) Evaluation and Work Environment

- Counselor evaluations appropriateness.
- Increased access to quality professional development opportunities.
- Focus on improving work environment and reducing redundancy in processes.

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Focus Group 4: Public

Two public focus groups were conducted by the HDI Evaluation Team on 11/14/23 at 10:30 AM and at 7:00 PM. The following themes and subthemes emerged from these groups.

1.) Service Provision:

- Various types of services catered to youth, specific needs, and complementary support.
- Consistency and wide-ranging support within services provided.

2.) Accessibility and Communication:

- Challenges in reaching staff members and the discouragement associated with multiple attempts.
- Difficulty with website usability and contact information accessibility.
- Weak internal communication structure within the organization.
- Long wait times and difficulties in scheduling appointments for consumers.

3.) Staffing and Workload:

- Understaffing leading to overworked and overwhelmed current staff.
- Need for more OVR staff to meet consumer demands.

4.) Consumer Interaction and Support:

- Compassionate and caring attitude of counselors while addressing consumer needs.
- Efforts made by counselors to ensure consumers receive maximum benefits.
- Education needed for consumers on effective communication methods with OVR.

5.) Technology and System Challenges:

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- Outdated phone systems and websites posing difficulties for consumers.
- Privacy concerns regarding consumer information shared with OVR.

6.) Consumer Awareness and Outreach:

- Need for outreach and marketing campaigns to raise awareness about OVR services.
- Stigmas preventing consumers from accessing OVR services need to be addressed.

7.) Process Improvement:

- Need for improved internal processes, including expedited processes for clients and conducting exit interviews.

8.) Partnerships and Resources:

- Call for creating more partnerships to expand resources and support for consumers.

2022 Consumer Satisfaction Survey (CSS)

As part of federal requirements, OVR has collaborated with the Statewide Council for Vocational Rehabilitation (SCVR), the state's SRC, and the University of Kentucky Human Development Institute (HDI) since 1996 to coordinate the annual OVR Consumer Satisfaction Survey (CSS). The most recent survey was for cases closed between October 2021– September 2022. The CSS was presented to the SCVR at the quarterly meeting on April 24, 2023.

The sample of people randomly selected to participate was stratified to reflect the population of all consumers with cases closed in fiscal year 2022. IQS Research contacted consumers by email and/or telephone in January through March of 2023 to participate in the survey. A total of 1,042 individuals participated in the survey which was available as both a telephone and online survey, with responses included from each of the districts. Phone surveys accounted for 38.1% of responses and 61.8% of responses were collected via online surveys. The overall response rate for the survey was 23.8%. There was a 46% response rate via phone contacts and 18% via email contacts. HDI compiled the results, and the final report was reviewed by the SCVR Consumer Services and Program Evaluation Committee prior to HDI presenting to the entire council during the April 2023 quarterly meeting.

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A total of 1,042 individuals participated in the survey with responses received from each of the 19 field districts. The overall statewide consumer satisfaction was 88.8% with an average score of 3.49 on a four-point scale (1 = very poor, 2 = poor, 3 = good, and 4 = very good)

Highlights from the report include the following:

- 1.) Regardless of case closure status, respondents indicated that overall services provided by the Office were good or very good (88.8%).
- 2.) The overall rating is highest for those individuals who closed Successful in Competitive integrated employment (96.6%).
- 3.) More than three fourths (76.6%) of respondents whose cases were closed successfully felt that OVR helped prepare them for their current job.
- 4.) 92.4% of consumers said they would return to OVR in the future.
- 5.) 93% of consumers who were employed indicated they are satisfied with the kind of work they do.
- 6.) 86.6% reported being satisfied with the salary they receive.
- 7.) 85.5% reported overall satisfaction with the quality of services as good to very good.

OVR Strategic Planning

In conjunction with the Statewide Council for Vocational Rehabilitation (SCVR), OVR utilized the strategic planning process to implement a four-year plan of action for the agency. The OVR Strategic Plan developed includes the goals, objectives and strategies for the agency and provides measures for determining the effectiveness in accomplishing its goals. The process was used as a part of the triennial Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA). Information gained from this process was used to inform the State Plan.

The planning process was implemented in two planning sessions across a three-day period with the Executive Leadership Team (ELT), Regional Branch Managers and Cabinet staff, including the SCVR Liaison and Fiscal Team members. The strategic planning sessions began at 1PM on Tuesday, September 26, 2023, and ended at 12PM on Thursday, September 28, 2023.

During the first planning session on Tuesday, the ELT and staff met to analyze the agencies current goals and objectives to determine the progress of those

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goals and others that should carry forward in the new plan. In addition, the ELT reviewed the results of an agency-wide survey that was distributed to staff in late August of 2023. The survey results expressed the needs and concerns of staff and identified areas of improvement needed for staff to be more efficient in service delivery. The ELT focused on identifying those areas that presented an opportunity to implement within the next plan year and those areas that would become part of the final four-year strategic planning document.

On Wednesday, UA Currents staff led by Robin Freeman joined the staff and conducted team building interactive activities that focused on building work relationships for the overall mission and vision of the agency. UA Currents Staff surveyed and engaged staff in team-building exercises to address the changing dynamics since the COVID-19 pandemic, which included communications, personality assessments, diversity and inclusion awareness and generational understanding within the workplace. The exercises were interactive, and staff were placed in rotating categories and on multiple teams to learn more about one another, their perspectives and their personalities related to work. One of the main purposes of the activities was to assist in efforts such as the strategic planning process to build trust, confidence and good working relationships amongst both seasoned and developing staff to accomplish agency goals as the OVR expands.

During the final planning session on Thursday, the team continued to work on the Strategic Plan for the agency. The six areas of focus identified on the October 1, 2021, through September 30, 2024, strategic plan was: (1) Sound Fiscal Management, (2) Quality Assurance, (3) Staff Resources, (4) Center Operations, (5) Consumer Services and (6) Public Awareness. The ELT determined that multiple areas of focus from the last plan were still relevant and are currently being implemented or planned. Therefore, the six areas of focus will remain in the new OVR strategic plan and in the same priority listed to complete. However, some revisions, additions and removals were made to the objectives within the areas of focus to reflect the identified needs of the agency, which are also laid out in Sections C and D of this State Plan. The following new goals are:

- 1.) Implement sound fiscal management that aligns with federal and state regulations for accurate and consistent reporting and operations
- 2.) Compliance with federal and state regulations in all areas to ensure continuous improvement and quality outcomes for consumers.
- 3.) Maximize technology and business processes to effectively support accessibility and the evolving needs of all stakeholders.

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- 4.) Improve facilities and expand programs to increase competitive, integrated employment outcomes.
- 5.) Implement innovative practices to improve quality outcomes.
- 6.) Implement an ongoing, flexible outreach plan and process to improve public awareness of VR programs, services, and agency employment.
- 7.) Changes were made to the goals for title VI, Part B Funds in keeping with the identified need for provider capacity for the community rehabilitation programs. There is one goal with multiple objectives and strategies.
 - Goal 1: Build capacity within supported employment services for individuals with the most significant disabilities.

OVR State Plan Forums

In accordance with Section 101 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, the OVR held public meetings from September 19, 2023, through October 24, 2023, to gain public comment and input regarding the delivery of services to persons with disabilities prior to the implementation of the state plan.

SCVR collaborated with OVR in the planning of OVR State Plan Public Forums and participated in several forums, providing input and comments. The forums were hosted by the SCVR liaison, and staff represented various areas of OVR at each forum. A representative from CAP attended and participated in forum discussions. OVR held five public forums, both virtual and hybrid (in-person and virtual) options, to provide all Kentuckians access and an opportunity to comment on the services delivered to persons with disabilities in the state.

Information regarding the forums were announced to the public through multiple venues, such as the webpages for the Education and Labor Cabinet (ELC), OVR and SCVR. Announcements were also made during the SCVR meetings, both the quarterly and committee meetings, prior to the event, and an informational document was distributed through social media and agency wide and to the Council for sharing. All forum materials and accompanying documents, including the previous OVR portion of the state plan, were created in an accessible format. An announcement video-log was created to ensure the deaf and hard of hearing community were aware of the forum activities. Sign Language Interpreters were present at each forum to provide interpreting services for the deaf and hard of hearing to participate in the discussions.

Forums were held at the following locations, dates and times:

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- Virtual Public Forum: Sept. 19, 2023, 10 – 11 a.m. EST.
- Virtual Public Forum: Sept. 19, 2023, 6:30 – 7:30 p.m. EST.
- Thelma (in-person and virtual options): Oct. 17, 2023, 6:30 – 7:30 p.m. EST, Carl D. Perkins Vocational Training Center, 5659 Main St., Thelma.
- Louisville (in-person and virtual options): Oct. 24, 2023, 10 – 11 a.m. EST, Charles W. McDowell Center for the Blind, 8412 Westport Road, Louisville.
- Louisville (in-person and virtual options): Oct. 24, 2023, 6:30 – 7:30 p.m. EST, Charles W. McDowell Center for the Blind.

The information sought by OVR was based on collaborative discussions and activities within the larger Education and Labor Cabinet through the Kentucky Workforce Innovation Board's Interagency Team for the state plan. Common themes of interest were based around access, equity and work, which are all included in the vision and mission of the agency serving individuals with disabilities. Most importantly, the specific needs of OVR consumers were the significant part of the public's discussion, which included accessibility, outreach and technology. However, the public was encouraged and given the opportunity to provide input on any area other than the thematic information sought in relation to OVR's portion of the state plan and the delivery of services to consumers.

The information received from the forum had consistencies with other areas of the statewide comprehensive needs assessment and were taken into account on the approved and final OVR strategic plan which was presented to the SCVR at the last quarterly meeting of the year. The common themes identified during the forum discussions presented by the public were:

- 1.) Outreach;
- 2.) Transportation;
- 3.) Building Relationships with Employers;
- 4.) Building Relationships with Local Communities/Schools; and
- 5.) Assistive Technologies.

Below is a summary of all forum discussions with comments made by the public.

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OVR State Plan Forum: Public Input and Comment

Sought input on how to better assist in networking with employers to expand access for good jobs for persons with disabilities:

- Continue outreach to employers and target education at the Chamber of Commerce events to provide available data on the benefits of hiring individuals who have disabilities.
- OVR needs more feet on the ground, sending people to employers, building relationships and contacting them.
- Showing the employee how a job is done in that work environment, specifically someone with a disability. It was suggested that a video of how the work is performed could be created to give the employee an idea of the work.
- Attending local employer meetings to assess the hiring needs.

Sought to learn how easy or difficult it is to find a job:

- Transportation in rural areas make the process difficult, including job coaching.
- Bioptic driving and transportation concerns were expressed in rural areas for people who are blind or have low vision and not being able to make appointments.
- Both easy and difficult were reported but noted that it may be harder to get in a position where the disability is a new thing. It would be easier if someone was there with a disability, so that part would not be new to the other people there. So, it was difficult in areas where that was not the case.

Sought to understand if there are any gaps in the services we provide, and if we are missing any areas of service that could better assist our consumers in obtaining a good job:

- Acknowledgment was given that OVR does a good job with CIE while the gap identified was more outreach, introducing more people with disabilities to the services offered, and transportation options.

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- Issues with consumers odd schedules are not working for employers, and if any issue arises, employers may not want to allow another chance for the consumer.
- Focus more on long term careers rather than jobs.
- Involve caregivers or the support systems for those who have a disability trying to get to work. Having the caregiver understand the dynamics of that person will benefit the consumer—involve the natural support system.
- Gaps in Orientation and Mobility services in order to navigate the home and job, which is important for those who are blind.
- Paying close attention to the area of retention.
- Determining accommodations for the consumer to do the best job they can.

Sought to understand the assistive technologies OVR should consider that are important for consumers moving into 2024:

- Having assistive technologies within the home to help consumers get prepared for work, such as technology in the kitchen.
- OVR was thanked for offering assistive technologies.
- Providing adaptive equipment for those working from home and in-person.
- Viewing remote work as important for people with disabilities, with assistive technology and adaptive equipment if needed.
- Van modifications are very important for people who use wheelchairs and very important for employment.
- Assistive Technology (AI) has promising abilities for people who are blind or low vision, for example the ability to read hand-written letters. OVR was encouraged to stay abreast of these products and findings to be available to consumers.

Sought to find out consumer and community preference for in-person and virtual appointments that OVR offers:

- The initial appointment visit should be in person to build better relationships with counselors. After that, virtual is fine.

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- Understanding if in-person appointment is difficult at this time.

Sought input as to how OVR can ensure VR services are reaching all Kentuckians across state:

- For better consistency throughout the state, more VR specialist/pre-ETS could reach out to the schools regarding VR services for those with IEP's and 504's. In certain areas, parents have no knowledge of the services OVR offers. Equip the schools with education about VR services so that employment will not be an afterthought.
- Utilize more resources to help spread the word about OVR services, including newspapers.
- Provide more in-person outreach, especially in rural areas like Eastern Kentucky that does not have broadband and lack technology.
- Being present at career fairs and community events.
- Ongoing media outreach.
- Outreach to the medical field, such as clinics, would provide VR service information to rural and/or underserved areas.
- Stay in touch with schools of higher education to assist with transition.
- Present VR services to students in college, not only in special education, but other disciplines as well.
- Building relationships locally are very important for school outreach.

OVR State Plan Forum: Public Questions and Answers

While the forum sought input and comment, OVR staff provided answers to questions for those who were either unfamiliar with our services or needed further information. Answers were provided to the following questions and posted to the OVR website and SCVR webpage:

Question 1:

How do we get the message out about OVR and awareness? Do we participate in career fairs?

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Answer 1:

OVR coordinates multiple outreach efforts to inform the public about the state's vocational rehabilitation programs and services.

OVR participates in state and community events, partner meetings, and visits high schools to bring awareness of vocational rehabilitation programs and services offered throughout the state. OVR provides resourceful information on the OVR website and social media platform regarding events, meetings, forums, spotlights, etc. that may be of public interest. OVR's website details the wide variety of services offered and contact information for each division so interested individuals, particularly persons with disabilities, have knowledge of and access to available resources and services.

Additionally, OVR Counselors, Job Placement Specialists, and Transition Services Branch Staff distribute outreach material and answer questions at various career fairs for people that might be interested in learning more about the services offered. On a broader scale, the agency's Annual Report is widely distributed and spotlights consumer stories and the agency's performance for community awareness and engagement and to strengthen connections with stakeholders.

While OVR finds it helpful and effective when consumers, their families and communities spread the word about our services, we continue to recognize more efforts are needed to reach the wider disability communities across Kentucky. Currently, OVR's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion team has a strategic plan with a goal of increasing outreach to underserved populations. We are continuously looking at more ways to increase awareness about OVR services in accordance with the requirements in the Uniform Guidance at 2 C.F.R. 200.467.

Question 2:

What are the changes to rules in the bioptic driving?

Answer 2:

782 KAR 1:070. Relates to KRS 186.480, 186.576, 186.579, 186.577, 186.578, and 186.579.

The changes to the Kentucky Bioptic Driving Law that occurred in 2022 included updates to correctly identify the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, Division of Blind Services as the state entity administering the Bioptic Driving Program, as opposed to the Office for the Blind.

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The changes also corrected the amount of time the operator's license is effective; previously it stated that it was only effective one year and then needed renewal. It was updated to state that renewal happens at 4 to 8 years, in line with all other operator's licenses in Kentucky.

Another change was made to better reflect how our program is currently operating. It allows new drivers to take the daytime and nighttime operator's license examination on the same day, as opposed to waiting 24 hours between the exams. It also clarifies when individuals who transfer from another state, and currently hold an operator's license with a bioptic restriction must take a night or day examination.

Question 3:

Who to connect with in the state regarding bioptic driving?

Answer 3:

Speak with an OVR Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor in your area to get connected.

Question 4:

Do we have funding sources in Kentucky for Assistive Technology?

Answer 4:

Yes, the Kentucky Assistive Technology Services (KATS) Network and Kentucky Assistive Technology Loan Corporation (KATLC).

The KATS Network has many resources like a lending library to borrow assistive tech equipment on a short-term basis. They also have demo centers to try out technology and a system for collecting, refurbishing and redistributing assistive tech and durable medical equipment throughout the state. Here is a link to their web page:

[KATS Network – Disability Solutions Through Technology](#). They can also connect you to other resources around the state through their funding guide at this link: [The Buck Starts Here... | A Guide to Assistive Technology Funding in KY](#)

The KATLC is the Assistive Technology Alternative Financing Program (ATAFP) for Kentucky. KATLC provides financial loans for the purchase of assistive technology with its lending partner for individuals with disabilities or the parent or legal guardian of an individual with a disability. KATLC has joined with the Appalachian Assistive Technology Loan Fund (AATLF) to provide no interest, no

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fee loans from \$100-7,000 for assistive technology to promote independence and enhanced quality of life for individuals with disabilities.

KATLC is funded by both private and public monies to assist Kentuckians with disabilities to obtain low interest loans for the purchase of assistive technology that will promote their independence and enhance their quality of life. KATLC is actively working to obtain a new lending partner to provide loans over \$7,000.

Question 5:

What is OVR currently doing to network with employers?

Answer 5:

The OVR Employer Services Branch employs a statewide Employer Services Branch Manager and Job Placement Specialists across the state. With the branch manager's guidance, the job placement specialists are responsible for developing relationships with local employers to facilitate the placement of OVR consumers into competitive integrated employment. Job placement specialists utilize the targeted industry sectors, as determined by their local workforce region, in order to provide specific labor market information to consumers, employers and agency partners.

Currently, the Employer Services Branch networks with employers in the following ways:

- Staff meet with hiring managers or their representatives in person to discuss VR services and work experience programs on a consistent basis each month. This helps build relationships with decision makers and key personnel, directly.
- Every year, staff attend hiring events, such as job fairs within the state for visibility and awareness of our services and the consumers we serve.
- Staff attend monthly, quarterly, and yearly meetings with various employer groups including, but not limited to, the Chamber of Commerce, Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM), Networking Neighbors (a local employer group) and Neighborhood Coffee (a local employer group). In addition, staff attend the Workforce Summit that was recently held in Lexington, Ky. By attending these group meetings, staff are able to meet with new employers as well as solidifying the existing relationships with employers. This has been a great strategy for learning the employer's needs and expectations, job descriptions, potential for job carving and identifying a direct contact for employers.

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- The Kentucky Career Centers (KCC) serve our consumers in multiple ways. The KCC often hold mini job fairs and employer forums with the opportunity for consumers to participate in mock interviews, all on a more personal level. Working with community partners and our staff in different regional KCC locations throughout the state have been a great asset in networking with employers.
- The VR Employer Services Branch Manager is a member of multiple employment focused councils, boards, and organizations, including Workforce Advisory Group with CareerOneStop, National Rehabilitation Association (NRA), Kentucky Rehabilitation Association (KRA), and Kentucky Job Placement Division (KJPD). The Branch Manager is also a representative for the National Employment Team (NET). This allows the Branch Manager opportunities to strategically network with employers and effectively lead staff, regionally, in engaging with employers.

The Employer Services Branch is always seeking more opportunities to engage with employers to assist our consumers in obtaining competitive integrated employment.

Question 6:

Does VR go and do presentations for students who are in college learning how to be teachers, especially special education teachers?

Answer 6:

Yes. OVR has provided presentations to students in the Bachelor of Arts program for Special Education at University of Kentucky to ensure that students who will serve individuals with disabilities in the future will have knowledge of our programs and services. OVR is currently in discussion about entering the classrooms of more educational institutions within the state as well as a broader range of disciplines to bring awareness of our programs and services to students. OVR's Diversity, Equity and Inclusion committee has been working on strategies specifically for college and university outreach for students studying not only Special Ed., but also Social Work, Psychology, Sociology, Criminal Justice, and other human services fields.

Assistive Technology Branch

A high-tech driving system is one in which electronic gas, brake, and/or steering is required to allow an individual to operate a motor vehicle safely and independently. From January of 2022 through September 2023, high tech driver evaluations were completed for 21 consumers. Of these, 12 were repeat vehicle

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modifications. Repeat modifications are relatively streamlined because evaluations can be completed in the consumer's current vehicle and training is not typically required. The average time to evaluation for these repeat services was just over 3 months. The 9 remaining evaluations were for new high-tech drivers. On average, for the new drivers, it took approximately 120 days from referral before a completed evaluation report was returned to the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation.

Once an individual is evaluated and a driving system recommended, they must have an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) approved for the modification before services can continue. This process typically takes less than a month and occurs for both new and experienced high-tech drivers. With the IPE approved, training authorizations are obtained immediately for new high-tech drivers. However, due to the lack of availability of the van, services are delayed several months while waiting for a van for training. Once the van is available, the minimum training time for a high-tech vehicle is 20 hours and can be up to about 60 hours. Where possible, training is completed in 2 to 4 weeks. It is important to complete the training at one time because driving is a skill that is lost if not practiced regularly. It is not effective to train for a day and then wait a few weeks and train another day. The van must be available for an extended period that matches the expected training time of the consumer before training is started. Vehicle setup is also an issue in providing efficient services. It can take a day to properly set up a vehicle, and this time takes away from training time when a van is borrowed.

For completed high-tech vehicle modifications in 2022 and 2023 for new drivers, the average time from referral to completion is 16 months vs. a time of 8 months for van modifications where lower technology modifications are required. The lack of creates a significant delay for consumers. It takes approximately 8 months longer for a consumer to obtain a high-tech vehicle modification when compared to a lower tech van modification.

Currently, a van is borrowed from Superior Van and Mobility when a high-tech evaluation (or training) needs to be completed. However, the van available through Superior is shared among states where Superior has dealerships and therefore, its availability is limited. If the agency owned a vehicle, the evaluations and training could be scheduled much more quickly, and consumers would have the independence they need to go to work. With our own van, OVR could set up the vehicle and leave it set for the consumer until training is complete. Then the setup could be switched for the next consumer. This is more effective use of both staff time and allowing consumers who require new high-tech modifications to be served more quickly. If the agency owned a vehicle, the evaluations and trainings

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could be scheduled much more quickly, and consumers would have the independence they need to go to work.

Therefore, the need assessed for the Assistive Technology Branch that is pressing within the next four years is to secure an evaluation and training vehicle for consumers to be effectively evaluated and trained in order to obtain, and be ready for, competitive integrated employment.

Kentucky Business Enterprises

Kentucky Business Enterprises is one of the nation's vending and foodservice programs operated by individuals who are visually impaired or blind. The program trains and places individuals as self-employed operators of snack bars, dining facilities and automated vending facilities in public and private buildings across the state. The program provides full-time employment and career opportunities for Kentuckians who are legally blind while providing high-quality vending and food services for government and businesses.

The mission of KBE is to provide opportunity and independence to blind entrepreneurs across the Commonwealth. This mission will continue as we find our new normal after COVID, all while working to replace opportunities, improving efficiencies, and maintaining and updating current locations. KBE's goal is to increase independence, fiscal prosperity, and the abilities of its blind vendors through technology and industry proven best practices.

As telework becomes the norm and more staff work from home, it reduces the opportunities for blind vendors in federal and state buildings that were once filled with staff daily. The continued telecommuting trend means modifications to KBE sites will continue to be necessary. This includes updating equipment, changing the service line from a snack shop to a micro market, utilizing self-ordering technology, and other possibilities which may not even be on the market yet. KBE must maintain a first mover advantage, to introduce up to date concepts to our locations around the state. The food service industry has been quick to embrace rapidly changing technology, with the intention of reducing costs and/or decreasing labor. This creates a unique challenge for KBE as we look at fiscal planning for the future of the program. Much of the technology we will be purchasing in a year or two may be only in the development stage right now. This is why industry training and education is essential for blind vendors and KBE staff.

The future of vending, as we have known it, is uncertain and ever changing. KBE will need funding to embrace new technology as it comes on the market. This new tech is still expensive, with time needed to train and implement, thus the need for

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strong funding is needed to support this revolutionary change. KBE must be revolutionary rather than evolutionary to provide a world class product to our vendors and our customers. We will look to industry groups (Kentucky Restaurant Association, National Restaurant Association, National Automated Merchandisers Association) consumer groups (National Association of Blind Merchants, Randolph Shepard Vendors of America, Kentucky Committee of Blind Vendors), and other stakeholders (General Services Administration, Department of Defense, Kentucky Finance Cabinet) to identify the future technology which will provide new or greater independence to blind vendors, and superior service to the locations we serve.

Ongoing education and training will be essential for Kentucky's vendor population and agency staff, in the future, this includes new vendor training. As always, traditional industry trainings are important, and training on emerging technology will be vital. In addition to technology, vendors need education and training in all areas from customer service and food safety to business practices. These trainings may be provided by agency staff, or be industry and specialty led. These training opportunities may be, but are not limited to, national industry events that require travel and the associated costs, including the cost of accessible, independent travel for the blind vendors. Vendor participation in industry events increases active participation from the vendors in the assessment of needs and the purchasing process for new equipment.

With dwindling sales due to building staff permanently telecommuting, many vendors will no longer be able to make a sustainable wage at their current locations. There will be an increased need for KBE to provide additional opportunities by obtaining new sites for blind vendors, while maintaining the current locations. As history has shown, KBE will not willingly be awarded locations that are lucrative for others. In many cases, this involves legal battles with federal and state entities to defend the Randolph- Sheppard priority against those who do not recognize it, or the comparable state law. Legal options should always be a last resort, but in most cases, have proven to be both necessary, and quite costly. These legal expenses are often prolonged over time and can necessitate a long-term financial outlay by the agency. KBE will always provide the location and vendor with the most current and advanced assets that meet all stakeholders needs.

As the Agency evolves, it is critical to update operational equipment to service our vendors needs in a safe and efficient manner. A pressing request currently and as we move forward is a modified box truck. The truck we need must meet certain criteria, including a high weight liftgate, the ability to secure items while in route, and the capacity for moving large amounts of equipment at one time. The liftgate

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is necessary as KBE moves equipment statewide and many locations do not have loading docks or receiving areas. Having a box truck will allow KBE to meet the needs of our locations and vendors in a timely manner. Many times, we need to move things with only a day's notice. Currently, if we need a box truck, rental agencies can't always accommodate us, as it is hit or miss whether they have a truck available with the modifications we need. We may have to wait for an extended time before one becomes available. This is not good business practice. Our vendors and locations depend on us and are left without machines that should be serving their customers and earning income for the vendor. The cost of this purchase would also need to include maintenance, repair, and fuel needs for the life of the vehicle.

The agency has experienced significant growth over the last two years. It is our goal that this growth in staffing to support the vendors statewide will continue. There is a need for a full-time administrative assistant with our recent additions. The vendor body has made a request to see a new coordinator position that specializes in micro markets, a fast-growing trend in vending. There is also a need for a technology/business specialist to work one on one with vendors. This would be a combination assistive technology specialist, business advisor role. This role in many cases will assist vendors at a very remedial level of experience with technology and business acumen. This hybrid training specialist will be essential as the program strives to develop the next generation of entrepreneurs to lead this program. The addition of any staff comes with cost past just salary alone. Each staff comes with benefits cost, plus office space and technology needs. Each new staff will need to increase the KBE fleet on a 1:1 need as basis.

KBE's needs are ever changing as is the business world in which we operate. A new change we have experienced recently is the need to provide our own drink machines. In years past, bottling companies such as Coke and Pepsi provided and maintained these machines, in exchange for vendors purchasing the product from them. This is changing as bottlers no longer want to maintain this equipment, and vendors want the flexibility in where and how to purchase this product. This will lead to an increase in monthly lease payments as we add this new equipment into our inventory. Kentucky is in year five of its rental program National Vending. This will restart the terms for the original equipment as it is replaced, and we should expect an increase in the rental rates. The percentage of increase is unknown at this time.

Case Management System

Kentucky continues to use a VR case management system that is approximately 23 years old. The system processes are cumbersome time consuming and

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plagued with technical problems. System modifications take time, which means we can focus only on the critical additions and changes with little time for effective process improvements.

OVR released an RFP in FY 2021 and through a competitive bid process chose a vendor. OVR is now in the process of design and development. The project is delayed and behind schedule due to change orders in place to assure the required functions for customization are met as stated in the contract. At this time, we do not have a set go live date.

RSA monitoring, Data Reports and the Corrective Action Plan

OVR was last monitored through an offsite monitoring with the Rehabilitation Services Administration during the time period of July 16, 2021, through August 20, 2021. OVR received their final monitoring report on January 22, 2022. After a thorough review of the recommendations, findings and corrective actions, OVR utilized the information in formulating a plan of corrective action to address the issues identified by RSA regarding the Vocational rehabilitation and Supported Employment Programs. OVR had ten findings in the following areas for Performance: 1) Insufficient Internal Controls for Management of the Federal Award and 2) Non-Compliant and Outdated State Education Agreement. OVR had findings in the following areas for Financial Management: 1) Missing/Insufficient Internal Controls and Financial Management Deficiencies. Five of the ten findings have been resolved. The main focus area from the monitoring that OVR continues to focus on is the implementation of sufficient internal controls for both financial and performance management. OVR is in the process of the development of a new case management system to meet the growing needs of the agency and address reporting concerns and issues.

Throughout the year, RSA has conducted quarterly performance data reviews that has assisted OVR in identifying areas of concern from the RSA data dashboards. This allowed for comprehensive discussions and RSA provided technical assistance during the sessions. One area of focus is specific to pre-employment transition services and the number of students completing those services but not making application to OVR. Our rates of application have maintained at around 8 percent. The other area of concern identified is the attrition rates for individuals existing services prior to development of the plan.

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B. 1. B Individuals with disabilities who are minorities and individuals with disabilities who have been unserved or underserved by the VR program;

Kentucky is a primarily rural state, incorporating 54 Appalachian counties, and characterized by a high poverty rate relative to other U.S. States. The geographic isolation of Kentucky's rural communities poses significant challenges for persons with disabilities in achieving competitive, integrated, and lasting employment and community participation and integration. The rural nature of Kentucky and the centralization of employment opportunities in urban areas create significant transportation and access barriers to employment opportunities. (Project E3).

Populations in Kentucky that are unserved or underserved are individuals with mental illness, individuals with criminal backgrounds, out of school youth, the blind and visually impaired and the deaf and hard of hearing. OVR is committed in its effort to build the capacity to effectively serve individuals with most significant disabilities who are unserved and underserved.

In Kentucky, 3.5% of 25–64-year-olds are deaf. Employment rates among deaf individuals from the National Deaf Center 2017 National Deaf Center on Postsecondary Outcomes report show that 56% of deaf individuals are not in the workforce, 4 % are unemployed and 40% are employed with medium earnings of 40,000 annually. In Kentucky, 14.7% of deaf people receive SSI benefits.

Underserved communities, especially communities of color, experience higher rates of violent crime, especially hate crimes and gun violence, which have devastating effects on victims, their families, and their communities. OVR will provide vocational rehabilitation services to all individuals who have disabilities who are eligible for services regardless of gender, race, national origin, religion, color, disability, or age. The Agency assures the provision of services to American Indians who are individuals with disabilities to the same extent as it provides services to other significant populations or individuals.

OVR Diversity Committee

In 2021, OVR created a diversity committee to address diversity and inclusion inequities within OVR. The OVR Diversity Committee team is made up of OVR staff, and representation from the state Office of Diversity, Equality and Training (ODET). An agency-wide survey was distributed in September of 2021 to better understand staff views on diversity within the agency and within the community we serve. Representatives of ODET from the Personnel Board provided feedback and shared their expertise to keep the committee focused and aware of state level initiatives as it implements a strategic vision for the agency. As a result, the

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committee created its first 3-year strategic plan. The following goals remain a priority for the agency:

Staff Diversity

Goal:

Recruit, hire and retain a diverse and inclusive staff to provide high quality services to Kentuckians with Disabilities.

Objective 1:

Increase recruitment and hiring to fill vacant positions with staff who are representative of the population we serve.

Objective 2:

Increase staff retention to ensure continuity of high quality of services to Kentuckians with disabilities and to increase diversity at all agency levels.

Consumer Diversity

Goal:

Ensure equitable service provision to all Kentuckians with disabilities through outreach, training, and data analysis.

Objective 1:

Develop a system to periodically review data regarding consumer diversity as well as policies, and practices that impact service provision.

Objective 2:

Raise awareness of OVR services in underserved communities through targeted outreach.

Objective 3:

Create a more welcoming and inclusive environment for all VR stakeholders.

The OVR Executive Director is a member of the CSAVR Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion professional Network. This allows for OVR to participate in a national workgroup addressing racial disparities specific to the field of vocational rehabilitation.

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Management and staff shall focus on the agency mission, which is competitive integrated employment, in assignment of tasks, planning and utilization of work time, initiation of self-directed work teams, and innovative projects. This includes expanding the diversity of the Agency in terms of employment outcomes to individuals with the most significant disabilities who are minorities. Staff shall ensure that persons with the most significant disabilities who are minorities will receive the same employment related services that non-minority and individuals with disabilities receive. OVR works to develop outreach activities to minorities to facilitate increased consumer referrals to the Agency. OVR encourages staff to get to know key community leaders and minority organizations to facilitate outreach. The Office follows Equal Employment Opportunity guidelines and Affirmative Action Procedures. The Office encourages existing minority staff to play an active role in policy and program development, service delivery and program monitoring activities.

The Office provides cultural diversity training to staff in order to develop a better understanding of different cultures and value systems. Staff participates in the Governor's Equal Employment Opportunity Conference. Service demographic and population data is utilized to determine the number of minorities in regions and develop strategies to increase percentages. OVR will utilize different methods and channels of communication in targeting minority populations. This will include usage of the "Language Line" that will enable our staff to communicate with non-English speaking applicants in their native language.

Individuals who are minorities have equal access to vocational rehabilitation services. OVR is committed in its effort to build the capacity to effectively service individuals with most significant disabilities who are minorities.

The following outlines the actions in OVR's outreach plan for 2021 - 2022:

- Management and staff shall focus on the agency mission, which is employment, in assignment of tasks, planning and utilization of work time, initiation of self-directed work teams, and innovative projects. This includes expanding the diversity of the Agency in terms of employment outcomes to individuals with the most significant disabilities who are minorities.
- Staff shall provide leadership in implementation of the Career Center Systems throughout the Commonwealth. Staff shall ensure that persons with the most significant disabilities who are minorities will receive the same employment related services that non-minorities and individuals with disabilities receive.

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- Recruit and hire Rehabilitation Counselors from minority and culturally diverse groups. Improve system linkages with the Department of Workforce in order to reach more minorities across the state. Collaboration with other entities will allow for effective coordination of services and referrals.
- Integrate internal controls through quality assurance to identify areas where there is successful outreach and best practices and identify areas needing additional outreach.
- Develop outreach activities to minorities to facilitate increased consumer referrals to OVR. OVR supports staff in making linkages with community leaders and minority organizations to facilitate outreach.
- Encourage existing minority staff to play an active role in policy and program development, service delivery and program monitoring activities.
- Provide cultural diversity training to staff in order to develop a better understanding of different cultures and value systems.
- Utilize service demographic and population data to determine the number of minorities in regions and develop strategies to increase percentages.
- Encourage minorities to play an active role in the State Rehabilitation Council, participating forums and the provision of input into policies and procedures.

Kentucky's Older Population and Vision Loss

OVR contracted with VisionServe Alliance (2022). Kentucky's Older Population and Vision Loss: A Briefing, St. Louis. of Kentucky's Older Population with Vision Loss to identify the growing need for this underserved/unserved community.

Introduction

Vision impairment and blindness often have profound effects upon older people and those who care for and about them. Vision impairment can make common activities difficult or impossible; for example, climbing stairs, crossing a street, driving, using public transportation, preparing meals, and performing household activities may be compromised. Older people experiencing vision impairment may have difficulty managing accounts, paying bills, and identifying prescribed medications. Falls or fear of falling may further compromise their independence. Vision impairment is often isolating, keeping people at home when they prefer to be with family and friends. Many older people with vision loss do not interact with

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others who are going through the same experience, creating further isolation and depression.

An estimated 9.7% of older Kentuckians report vision impairment or blindness. Those most at risk for vision impairment are African Americans and older age groups. Older people with vision impairment are more likely to report less education and to experience poverty. They are also more likely to have age-related chronic conditions compared to older people without vision impairment. As Kentucky's population continues to age, the number of people experiencing vision impairment will likely increase.

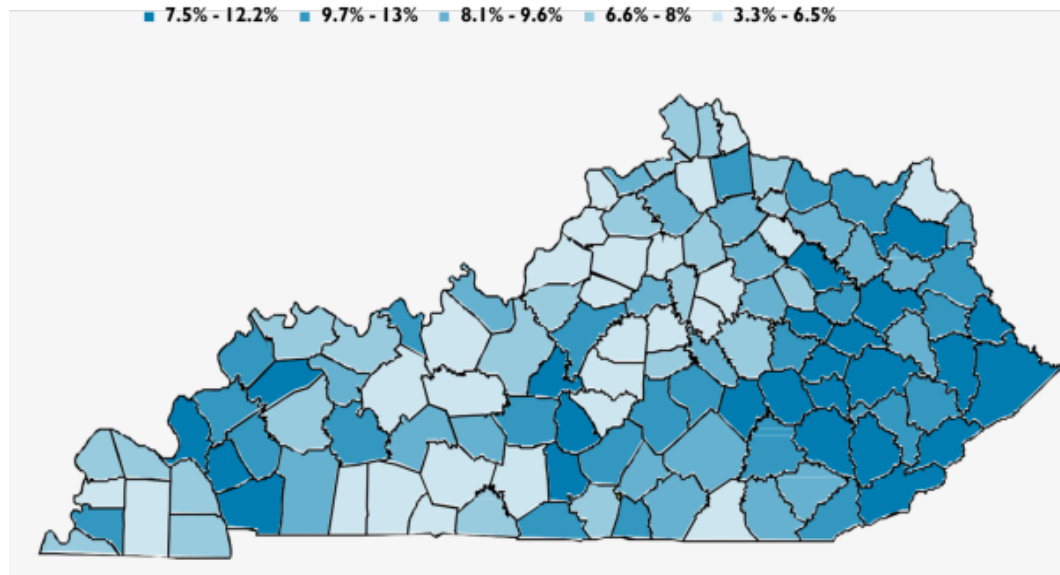
While the circumstances and risk factors associated with aging and vision loss are serious, much can be done to ameliorate the effects of vision impairment. For example, improved access and utilization of vision and eye health, as well as the availability of comprehensive vision rehabilitation service providers, promoting independence and autonomy, are effective strategies often enabling older people in Kentucky to live independently and remain in their community.

Geographic Distribution

Vision impairment is not evenly distributed across the United States or within states. Figure 1 below shows the prevalence of vision impairment among people aged 65 years and older among the 120 counties of Kentucky. Five categories of prevalence are presented, ranging from about 3.3% to 23.5%. Higher prevalence of vision impairments tend to occur in more rural counties where resources and care providers may be scarce. Lyon County (23.5%), Owsley County (23.3%), Martin County (22.7%), Lee County (21.8), and Breathitt County (20.8%) report the highest prevalence of vision impairment among older people while Logan County (3.3%), Simpson County (3.4%), Spencer County (4.3%), Shelby County (4.4%), and Ohio County (4.5%) report the lowest prevalence.

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Figure 1: County Level Estimated Prevalence of Vision Impairment and Blindness by County, Kentucky, American Community Survey, 2019

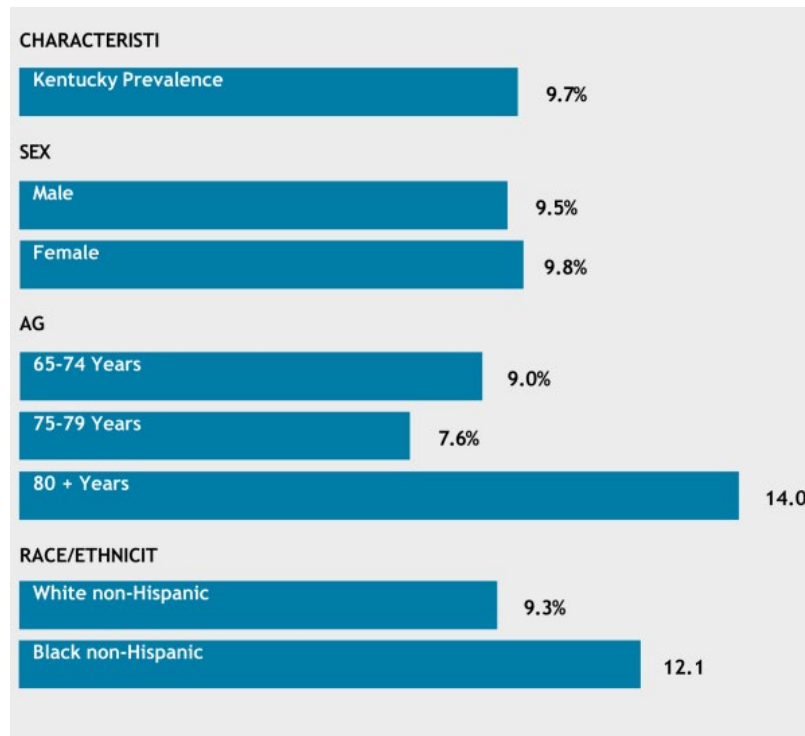


Demographic Characteristics

As shown in Figure 2 below, an analysis of 2019 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System data reveals that 9.7% of people 65 years of age and older report vision impairment in response to the question, “Are you blind or do you have serious difficulty seeing, even when wearing glasses?” While 9.8% of older women over age 65 years report vision impairment, 9.5% of men do so. Women, however, comprise 56% of the older population of people with vision impairment. In Kentucky, vision impairment varies by race: 9.3% of whites report vision impairment compared to 12.1% among African Americans.

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Figure 2: Prevalence of Vision Impairment by Age, Sex, and Race/Ethnicity among People Aged 65 Years and Older, Kentucky, BRFSS



Vision Rehabilitation Program

A central component of supports for older people with vision impairment is a network of public and private agencies providing vision rehabilitation services addressing communication, activities of daily living, personal care, self-advocacy, travel and mobility skills, diabetes, and medication management, as well as access to assistive technology (e.g., smart phones, tablets, and computers). Services often include counseling, information, and referrals to community resources and supports. Vision rehabilitation services generally include low vision evaluations and the provision of adapted vision devices. Moreover, older people with vision impairment benefit from peer support groups where older people share common experiences and exchange information about successful management strategies. These services are often provided in the client's home or in an agency setting. The sum of vision rehabilitation services improves independence, self-esteem, health, and quality of life.

Despite the best effort of these agencies, only about 3% of older people with vision impairment nationally receive vision rehabilitation services

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(see: healthypeople.gov). This gap between need and response represents a major public health and public policy concern recently addressed by a National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM, formerly the Institute of Medicine) seminal report Making Eye Health A Population Health Imperative: Vision for Tomorrow.⁸ The NASEM report asserted, “Vision rehabilitation is essential to maximizing the independence, function, participation, safety, and overall QOL of people with chronic vision impairment. Yet there are numerous barriers to high quality and universally accessible vision rehabilitation services” (p. 414).⁸ A goal of Healthy People 2030 is to increase access to vision rehabilitation services by only 10%, to 3.3% over a ten-year period (see [Healthy People 2030](#)).

Discussion

The experience of vision impairment for older people is complex and multidimensional.

This report estimates the population and distribution of older people with vision impairment in Kentucky, and it characterizes the population in terms of health, chronic conditions, health-related quality of life, and disability status—variables available from the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System and the American Community Survey. These findings reveal that upstream circumstances related to poverty and poorer education create the potential of downstream outcomes in poorer overall health and quality of life as well as increased disability.

While this briefing provides considerable insight into health, chronic conditions, and quality of life factors at the population level, the report does not tell the personal stories of older people who have lost vision. It does not chronicle the isolation or struggle to find eye care or vision rehabilitation service providers. It does not describe the positive effects of vision rehabilitation or the power that older people feel when participating with peers to share their stories or solve common problems. That gap will be filled by others.

Conclusion

About 9.7% of people aged 65 years and older respond yes to the question “Are you blind or do you have severe difficulty seeing even when wearing glasses.” African Americans and people who are older, poorer, and less educated report higher prevalence of vision impairment. People who are older and visually impaired report higher prevalence of chronic conditions, poorer overall health, and poorer health-related quality of life.

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These factors appear associated with higher prevalence of disability indicators. These findings reveal that people with vision impairment are disadvantaged in multiple ways that place them at greater risk for compromised independence and autonomy.

The findings in this report are designed to inform policy makers and providers about the circumstances of older people with vision impairment so that decisions and programs can be designed to better support older people with vision loss.

B. 1. C Individuals with disabilities served through other components of the workforce development system; and

In Kentucky the Kentucky Workforce Innovation Board (KWIB) serves as an advisory board to the Governor on workforce training and development issues. The KWIB is charged with creating a statewide vision for workforce development and adopting a plan to move Kentucky forward through workforce training and development. Kentucky offers a wide range of workforce education and training activities tailored to meet the needs of employers and job seekers in varied and unique communities across the state. The certified Kentucky Career Centers (KCC) are the storefront, but the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act's (WIOA) core and optional one-stop partner services reach into communities as well.

OVR has five regional managers that are assigned as liaisons with the local workforce areas in their regions. As the liaison they work closely with the local managers and operators for their areas. They serve on the local workforce boards and their respective committees. The Regional Managers submit reports quarterly to the Field Services Director and the Executive Director summarizing activities and projects on the local area.

OVR collaborated with agencies across the Department of Workforce Development for state plan activities and to analyze Kentucky's workforce needs throughout the ten local workforce regions. The Kentucky Workforce Innovation Board (KWIB) created an Interagency Team to meet regularly to facilitate activities that promote collaborations between all Core Programs and the Cabinet. The OVR Executive Director, Deputy Executive Director, Vocational Rehabilitation Administrator and SCVR liaison, and Regional Program Managers within the Division of Field Services, participated in the Interagency Team activities. From June through October 2023, the OVR staff attended meetings, traveled across the local workforce development areas (LWA) and engaged in various listening sessions to learn the concerns, ideas and challenges of these local communities.

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Insight was gathered from learning the public's perception of the current Kentucky workforce system and how it might be seen as a valuable resource for the local communities. Some communities discussed the need for more emphasis on on-the-job training programs for youth while in high school, community housing and the accommodations needed for the economic growth of the area, the difficulty in finding and keeping employees and the lack of broadband in rural areas. These concerns are often compounded for individuals with disabilities, which is discussed throughout the OVR state plan and specifically in the OVR forum.

The collaborative efforts continued until the completion and final submission of the state plan.

B. 1. D Youth with disabilities, including students with disabilities and their need for pre-employment transition services. 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 IDEA.

The Kentucky Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) continues to partner with the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) through the National Technical Assistance Center on Transition (NTACT). OVR and KDE have representatives that co-lead a team dedicated to improving transition services to Kentucky students with disabilities. This team met bi-weekly throughout 2023 and received intensive technical assistance from NTACT. The team also sent a group to the NTACT Capacity Building Institute in Charlotte, NC to receive additional technical assistance and training.

To determine specific areas of need for students with disabilities, the team conducted focus groups with seven different school districts throughout the Commonwealth of Kentucky. Each of the five OVR regions was represented by these seven schools and care was taken to choose a diverse group of school districts, including both urban and rural districts. The intent of the focus groups was to determine the level of collaboration between each school district and the local OVR office assigned to serve those schools. Additionally, three focus groups were conducted with OVR staff assigned to local school districts. Although all focus groups have been completed, a data analysis is currently being conducted and a report of the findings is not yet available. However, a review of the transcripts from the focus groups reveals some common themes.

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Many of the school districts that participated in the focus groups did not have a good understanding of the OVR process, including how and when to refer students to OVR. Some school staff stated that they did not know how to contact or had never met the OVR Counselor assigned to their school. This was more common among rural districts, where the OVR Counselor is responsible for multiple school districts. These Counselors are also responsible for providing services to adults with disabilities. Staff turnover, both OVR and school staff, was mentioned in multiple focus groups as a significant barrier to services. Many teachers and OVR Counselors in the focus groups were new to their roles.

Another common theme was an apparent lack of understanding of the continuum of VR services, including Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS), Transition Services, and Employment-Related Services. Some school staff mentioned that they would try to refer students with IEPs to OVR late in their senior year, just before graduation. Others stated that they did not understand the difference between Pre-ETS and other OVR services.

It is our hope that students with disabilities in Kentucky will begin receiving Pre-Employment Transition Services as early as age 14. These Potentially Eligible students may receive Pre-ETS over a two-year period before they apply for OVR services. Early in the third year of secondary school, these students should apply for OVR services so they may begin working with a VR Counselor to determine an appropriate job goal. At this point, they will begin receiving transition services to help them achieve their job goal.

Through the strategic planning process with the Employment First Council that OVR administers in the state a focus group was held of students at the Carl D Perkins Center in June of 2023. The main topic of the focus group was “transitioning from high school to post-secondary education. There were six students that participated in the focus group facilitated by the Facilitation Center at Eastern Kentucky University. The emerging themes from this group that were shared for planning purposes were the following: 1) addressing transportation; 2) Employers taking disabilities more seriously; 3) life skills and being able to live on your own; 4) Steady cash flow/income; and 5) understanding benefits. Another focus group held through this process was with six OVR Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors and Pre-Employment Services Coordinators. This group focused on key issues and potential actions for the area of Transition Services. Emerging themes to consider in planning were: 1) Lack of coordination and cooperation in state agencies, provider to client, within providers, 2) Lack of education for a broad group 3) Pre-employment transition services need to grow 4) Transportation and 5) Turnover and lack of staff and the impacts.

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B. 2. Identify the need to establish, develop, or improve community rehabilitation programs within the State.

Through the most recent CSNA, the University of Kentucky Human Development Evaluation Team conducted a virtual focus group with community rehabilitation provider administrators and staff on 10/31/23 at 10:30 AM. This focus group resulted in the following themes and sub-themes:

- 1) Communication and Relationship Management
 - Emphasis on open communication between OVR, counselors, and CRPs.
 - Challenges with counselor and consumer communication.
 - Lack of community understanding about OVR services.
- 2) Service Delivery and Support for Consumers
 - Insufficient funding impacting service provision.
 - Need for better vetting of consumers and clearer expectations.
 - Challenges with transportation options and service availability
- 3) Challenges with Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS)
 - Issues with the rollout, sustainability, and accessibility of Pre-ETS.
 - Desire to restore original services and funding levels.
- 4) Provider Support and Collaboration
 - Calls for transparent and inclusive long-term planning.
 - Desire for increased support, financial transparency, and involvement of CRPs.
 - Advocacy for CRP needs, cultural shifts, and regular budget examination.
- 5) Training and Resources
 - Need for more training and resources for counselors and CRPs.

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- Calls for standardized training, quality-focused training for CRPs, and better tools/resources.
- 6) Process Efficiency and Timeliness
- Concerns about lengthy processes, authorization delays, and intake procedures.
 - Desire for better systems and technology to streamline communication and processes.
- 7) Workforce Issues and Caseload Management
- Counselor overload and overwhelmed staff.
 - Need for appropriate caseload numbers and additional staff training.
- 8) Flexibility and Adaptability
- Desire for a more flexible and adaptive approach to service delivery.
 - Need for innovative solutions, advanced technology, and leveraging current workplace shortages.

Through the strategic planning process with the Employment First Council OVR administrates in Kentucky, a focus group was held of service providers of employment in June of 2023. The main topic of the focus group was identifying “key issues and potential actions for the area of competitive integrated employment”. There were five providers that participated in the group. Emerging themes to consider in planning were: 1) Collaboration-we need to all be working together; 2) Creating a statewide coalition on best practices; 3) Informing consumers and their families early and using a K – 12 approach with school systems; 4) starting at infancy; 5) more involvement with the chamber; and 6) more schools willing to collaborate; 7) Focus on solutions; 8) streamline communication of visions; 9) there is no best practice curriculum within special education; 10) measuring the wrong metrics; and 11) employer education.

OVR conducted a statewide survey of field counselors to explore the need and availability of Customized Supported Employment services for individuals with the most significant disabilities. It was expected, due to Section 511 of WIOA, that there would be an increase in the need and demand for Customized Supported Employment Services. Fifty-two percent (52%) stated that there are Community Rehabilitation Program (CRP) providers in their area that provide CSE. However,

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62% also stated that it's not readily available due to limited staff or oversized caseloads. Around 93% of the counselor's state that only 3 or fewer of their individuals have been able to utilize this service due to lack of availability. When asked if there was a need for CSE in their area, overwhelmingly, 85% stated that there was a need. Over 46% stated that they have at least 4 or more consumers on their caseloads that could benefit from CSE. Over 17% state that they have at least 8 or more consumers that need this service. As a result, the OVR implemented 3 Establishment Project MOAs to assist in making this service readily available to individuals with the most significant disabilities in the areas of the state that need it most. The primary purpose of this project is to expand the evidence-based model of customized employment throughout a four- year period. At this time the projects are finishing up the first year of planning. As existing MOAs approach expiration, consideration will be given to new MOA recipients for continued expansion of customized employment. OVR is also exploring the implementation of a customized employment fidelity scale. The OVR CRP Branch staff participates in supported and customized employment Community of Practice meetings, which includes ongoing discussions pertaining to the development and implementation of fidelity scales.

A thorough review of existing and prospective agencies was conducted by OVR. OVR conducted several meetings with Department of Behavioral Health (DBH) staff throughout the state to obtain information of existing agencies that have longitudinally strong relationships with DBH, and that also exemplifies high quality service delivery. The purpose of such a selection process is to increase the likelihood of success among programs. This process aided in the identification of potentially new and existing providers that could be used in expanding IPS to those in unserved or underserved areas, as well as provide an evidenced based model of IPS SE to individuals with intellectual disabilities. As a result, OVR implemented four establishment projects for the expansion of IPS to single mothers with serious mental illness and/or substance use concerns. The primary purpose of this project is to expand the evidence-based model of IPS SE throughout this 4-year period to the greatest extent possible to individuals who do not have access to this type of service. At this time the projects are finishing up year one of the planning year.

This past year, the Kentucky Employment First Council partnered with the Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy on the National Expansion of Employment Opportunities Network Initiative. This collaborative effort aimed to develop strategic plans for increasing competitive integrated employment opportunities, including those with significant disabilities. Kentucky's involvement in Project NEON created momentum for agencies to align policies with the state's definition of competitive integrated employment. As part of Project

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NEON, Kentucky hosted a "Best Practice Day" attended by nearly 50 stakeholders, including national subject matter experts. This milestone event in Frankfort, KY fostered strategic development across multiple stakeholders to enhance competitive integrated employment through policy improvements, expanded partnerships, and sharing of best practices. Out of this project a need for the Council and OVR to focus on provider capacity came to the fore front. On November 16th, 2023, the Kentucky Office of Vocational Rehabilitation was awarded 300 additional technical assistance hours to continue their efforts in collaboration with Project NEON, this time, specifically focusing on provider capacity/support throughout the state. This reinforces the results of the last needs assessment findings that there are not sufficient numbers of Community Rehabilitation Providers with the needed experience and expertise in serving job seekers.

OVR State Owned and Operated Rehabilitation Centers

The Charles W. McDowell Center and the Carl D. Perkins Vocational Training Center are the State-owned and operated comprehensive rehabilitation centers in Kentucky. Both are community rehabilitation programs providing necessary vocational rehabilitation services to individuals with disabilities. The Centers provide supports, training, and resources to the most unserved and underserved populations in Kentucky to maximize their opportunities to obtain competitive integrated employment. The centers serve individuals, largely from rural areas of the state, with significant, complex or multiple disabilities such as sensory impairments, criminal justice backgrounds and mental illness.

In order to keep the Centers operational and ensure continuity of service provision, at times it is necessary for the State to repair or replace systems and equipment within the center, including, but not limited to electrical, plumbing and hot water, fire prevention, ventilation, sewage, etc., that go beyond ordinary repairs and maintenance. The State will submit requests for prior approval to RSA for related costs that exceed the capital expenditure threshold used by the State. Master Agreements are in place for scheduled routine maintenance and inspection of the facility.

The Charles W. McDowell Center

The Charles W. McDowell Center is a rehabilitation facility serving individuals from across the Commonwealth and is owned and operated by the Kentucky Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR). The facility provides office and meeting space for OVR Field Services Division Staff as well as dormitory and classroom space for the residential and training program for blind and visually impaired consumers.

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The McDowell Center, located in Louisville, is the only facility in the state of Kentucky which provides blindness skills training to adults, making it a singular and particularly important resource for individuals who are blind and visually impaired wishing to adjust to their vision loss and pursue competitive integrated employment. The McDowell Center offers training in vocational preparation, personal adjustment services, independent living skills, orientation and mobility, Braille, assistive technology, academic remediation, career assessment, vocational planning, work adjustment and work experience.

OVR's East Jefferson District staff and the Central Blind District field staff (i.e., VR counseling staff, assistants, assistive technology staff, community rehabilitation branch staff) are housed in the building. This greatly increases the foot traffic of VR participants and other stake holders in the building. In the last year, the Center had between 220 and 250 program applicants/consumers and other stakeholders travel through the lobby's front desk per month for scheduled appointments and meetings. The McDowell Center blindness skills training program receives referrals from across the state. The number of staff housed at the Center is around 65 when fully staffed. In the 2023 state fiscal year, 83 blind and visually impaired individuals, representing both day and residential students, received training services through the McDowell Center and 1,170 received services through the VR unit housed at the Center.

Master Agreements are in place for scheduled routine maintenance and inspection of the facility. On a monthly basis, elevator, water treatment and pest control inspections occur. The HVAC system is provided quarterly maintenance. Backflow testing is conducted annually.

Semi-annually, the kitchen equipment, grease traps and electrical systems for fire alarms are inspected and maintained. On an annual basis, maintenance and inspections of the sprinkler system and kitchen hood occur.

State facility staff performed an assessment of the facility needs in 2019 and 2020. In 2021, state facility staff engaged architecture and engineering consultants to provide further review of the building and mechanical systems. It was determined that the work should proceed in phases and prioritized to address most critical issues related to dormitory renovations in 2021 and 2022. This Phase I work is complete. In 2023, state facility staff engaged these consultants again to determine Phase II work.

The results are as follows:

- 1.) Building Renovation - The interior Architectural and all Mechanical, Electrical and Plumbing Engineering Systems (MEP) must be evaluated for

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replacement based on current operating condition, equipment life expectancy, and energy usage. All systems should be evaluated to determine the most effective means of controlling building spaces to desired set points for humidity and temperature.

- All Building automation systems (BAS) should be upgraded to current standards and must provide for remote access via internet, centralized served storage, and application software. User interface must allow access to logic programming, graphics, data logging, trend data, alarms, and self – diagnostics.
 - All building sanitary drain piping must be replaced due to systemic failure of current piping system materials. All proper engineering standards and Housing Building Construction (HBC) plumbing codes must be followed. Architectural renovation to allow improved and expanded ability to serve consumers should also be included in this process, including but not limited to lighting, tactile surfaces, training areas, safety, interior design improvements for visually impaired and ADA for mobility affected students.
 - Paint, flooring and signage throughout entire building
 - Sun shading awning over windows of south facing cafeteria to prevent extreme heat and glare into south facing cafeteria.
 - Cafeteria kitchen – due to the age of existing equipment combined with lack of use during the pandemic, anticipate updates and replacement to appliances such as the ice machine, water dispenser, salad bar, freezer and dishwasher.
 - Consumer Training Kitchens – Updates Needed: Renovate three consumer training kitchens to facilitate increasing the numbers of students who can receive training and improve workspace and layout to accommodate students using a wheelchair.
 - This project may require completion in two phases based on work scope, building occupancy and timing of work.
- 2.) Dormitory Restroom Accessibility and Safety – The dormitory restrooms require renovations to address ventilation, flooring, safety grab bars, storage and fixtures. All restrooms require accessible “ADA” shower areas. Wheelchair users cannot navigate into the shower for safe transfer, and controls for the shower are located outside the shower. Water from the

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shower is not contained and is a safety concern. Updates Needed: Recess the concrete slab in order to lower the shower panel, which would prevent water from draining out into the main bathroom area. Renovation to showers would allow for transfer and access to controls.

- 3.) Security Cameras – additional security cameras to be added to existing security system, for front entrance lobby, instructional hallways and building hallways. Intercom system at dormitory entrance in order for residential staff to converse with individuals at door.
- 4.) Campus Grounds Accessibility Updates Needed: Complete last phase of paved access encircling facility allowing safe exit from all exit doors.
- 5.) Orientation and Mobility paved quarter- mile to half-mile walking path behind building on existing acre for independent travel and exercise around the training campus.
- 6.) Exterior Repairs – Updates Needed: Retention walls require repairs to add proper drainage system, replace dislodged and crumbling bricks, and add a protective cap to the top of the wall. The service dog outdoor enclosure needs to be replaced.

The Carl D. Perkins Vocational Training Center

The Carl D Perkins Vocational Training Center at Thelma, KY is a multidisciplinary comprehensive residential rehabilitation and vocational training facility opened in 1973. The Perkins Center's mission is to assist Kentuckians with disabilities achieve suitable employment, maximize independence, and gain self-respect through individualized comprehensive services.

The Perkins Center is the only comprehensive, post-acute residential rehabilitation facility within Kentucky and regularly provides services to rehabilitation consumers throughout the Commonwealth. OVR Counselors located throughout Kentucky make referrals to the Perkins Center for a variety of rehabilitation programs and services based on the needs of eligible persons. The five programs of operation that comprise most of the Center's operation and meet high standards for program quality are Vocational Evaluation, Job Readiness Training, Vocational Skills Training, Assisted Living/Physical Restoration/Outpatient Rehabilitation, and the Lifeskills Enhancement Program.

The Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF) accredits the Evaluation and Training Units of the Perkins Center. To maintain quality program services and retain CARF accreditation while adequately serving individuals with

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the most significant disabilities, the Perkins Center must have adequate technology, a sufficient number of staff, and be able to continue to make improvements to the facility, which allows consumers, including those with the most significant disabilities, to access the facility. The following needs were identified by facilities and maintenance personnel:

1. Renovate Assisted Living Unit Restrooms and Replace all PTAC's

The need was identified in the Assisted Living Unit of the building interior on July 8, 2020, when facilities maintenance staff conducted a thorough assessment of the building. Renovation is needed to increase capacity in the assisted living unit by making the restrooms accessible. Many of the existing restrooms, built in 1973, are not accessible and require the use of a common shower area within the Unit. The work needed includes selective demolition, removal and replacement of plumbing systems, replacement of existing light fixtures, concrete slab replacement, doors/frames/hardware replacement, interior finishes including tile work (walls, floors, and base), drywall, painting and restroom accessories. The Assisted Living Unit is joined structurally to the existing building and does not constitute a separate building and costs do not exceed the appraised value of the building. We currently have full capacity assigned to those 13 rooms and 12 consumers on the waiting list for vacancies as they are available. Completion of this project would increase room space to 14, allow consumers to use their own accessible restroom area, allowing the Perkins Center to meet consumer needs timely while increasing the numbers served due to our continuous waiting list for the Assistant Living Unit. The Perkins Center has 113 PTAC (Package Terminal Air Conditioner) units located in dorm rooms and offices. These units are 17 years old or older and have become costly to repair, if repairing is possible. The HVAC industry recommends such units be replaced if such units are more than 10 years old and functioning properly becomes an issue.

2. Industrial Truck/Forklift Training Area

This program is designed to meet entry level workforce needs of any business that employs industrial truck/forklift operators. Perkins Center consumers enrolled in this program will have the opportunity to obtain a 3-year renewable OSHA approved Industrial Truck/Forklift Operator's license. Upon completion of this training, consumers typically go to work in a multitude of businesses including, but not limited to retail stores, manufacturing plants, warehouses, wholesalers, or distribution centers. The outdoor training area is a tennis court that was built more than 30 years ago and has an asphalt surface. The surface has deteriorated over time, allowing the program to only use about one half of the entire surface for training purposes, currently. The program's Industrial Trucks are stored in a

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building on campus and require them to be driven to the training area. This program has grown tremendously in recent years and the following numbers will further explain our need for this project:

2017: 20 consumers completed the program; 11 consumers received a license; and 2,834 units/hours of total services were provided.

2018: 27 consumers completed the program; 19 consumers received a license; and 4,635 units/hours of total services were provided.

2019: 28 consumers completed the program; 26 consumers received a license; and 6,024 unit/hours of total services were provided.

2020 and 2021: During the COVID-19 Pandemic, the Perkins Center experienced difficult years due to the restrictions on programs. However, the program continued to serve consumers with over 1500 hours of training were provided during 2021.

2022: 22 consumers completed the program; 22 consumers received a license; and 5,662 units/hours of total services were provided.

2023 (through September): 27 consumers completed the program; 27 consumers received a license; and 6,170 unit/hours of total services were provided.

By utilizing the old tennis court location to construct a 5000 sq. ft. steel engineered building, Perkins Center would provide storage and training area for the Forklift Operations Program. More specific, concrete building pad should be at least 10,000 sq. ft. to accommodate outdoor training area as well. Building would require minimum temperature control, supply air/ventilation system for exhaust from propane powered fork trucks. Building should be equipped with a minimum of one 10' roll up door and one 36" utility door for access. Lighting should be high bay LED style and be no lower than 12' above floor. One multi-use bathroom should be included in the design. Suitable electrical, plumbing and internet systems should be included in the design. Completion of this project will allow the Perkins Center to train consumers timely, during all seasons and within an environment similar to the jobs available in this field.

3. Fire Panel System and HVAC BAS Software/Controls Renovation

A large part of our facility fire monitoring system continues to run on a decades old system that needs to be merged into one active panel. This upgrade would

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allow us to get all our monitoring points up to code and eliminate the myriad of problems along with inconveniences of the old panel. The Center HVAC system controls in the main building are obsolete and operating on a system that cannot be upgraded or repaired if there is any major repair required. A new system with remote access, server operable, provides user interface for both graphics and logic operation while being capable of trending and data storage is needed. The system will need to interface with all building systems in use and sized for future needs. The system should also be capable of interfacing with multiple energy meters for the purpose of monitoring and data storage. The obsolete BAS controls in the main building should be replaced with current version equipment. The new system must provide remote access, be server operable, provide for user interface for both graphics and logic operation, be capable of trending and point data storage. Any remote modules must be able to be downloaded from remote connection. In addition, it must be able to interface with all building systems presently in use and sized for future needs. The system must also be able to interface with multiple energy meters for the purpose of monitoring and data storage.

4. Site Access and Security

The Perkins Center presently has two driveways onto the property and 22 doors allowing access into the building. The current layout is difficult for security to monitor and poses a safety threat for staff and students. The property is contained on three sides by fencing but is open to the road in the front. To further complicate the situation, the security office and camera monitoring station is in the rear of the building with no easy access to the front of the property. A building will need to be constructed roadside for security staff to be housed. An automatic gate with key card and remote operation will also be necessary for both entrances. There are four doors that are identified for replacement due to being mechanically irreparable and structurally deteriorating due to age (outside Cosmetology training area, both doors entering into the playground area, and two exiting the gymnasium to the rear concrete basketball area). A walk-through metal detector will need to be placed at the main entry to the building. This will allow staff to identify any persons who may have concealed weapons or other devices that are not allowed on center property. The overall objective is to provide a secure and safe environment.

5. Site Drainage and Riverbank Erosion

The frontage property of the Perkins Center is lower than the main road and the buildings on the property. Drainage piping is there and has been for many years. The original drain leading to the rear of the property is compromised and causes water to pond in low lying areas of the site during wet weather. The original drain

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needs to be assessed to determine if all or part of it can be replaced/repaired to allow water to drain from the property. Mowing and caring for this part of the Perkins Center property is often difficult and requires extra labor due to the condition of the ground. It also presents as a hazard to consumers on-site when there is standing water.

Erosion/Slippage Area: There is significant erosion of property near the Big Sandy River, which joins the property. The goal of this project is to stabilize the erosion/slippage area at rear of property boundary. This section of the property is bordered by the Levisa Fork of the Big Sandy River. As the rivers water level rises and falls, it has eroded approximately 100 feet of shoreline at the rear of the property. This has left drain lines exposed and is undermining the security fence. It is a safety concern for those using the adjacent soccer field. This will require an engineering study to determine project scope.

6. Plumbing -Building Drain Lines

Plumbing systems have been repaired and replaced as needed over the years. The manhole in our Courtyard area is central to the drain system of our kitchen and dormitory areas. An assessment of that drain to the sewer plant is needed along with those systems leading from the dormitory into it. Frequent repairs have been made to maintain the interior drain lines from inside the building, however these failures have steadily increased in recent years. A complete assessment of these plumbing/drain systems is needed to determine the extent of what needs repair/replacement.

7. Exterior Security Lighting

Areas around the main and perimeter buildings are adequate but should be updated to LED type to provide longer life and reduce energy costs. However, there are issues with site perimeter lighting that need to be addressed. This includes repair parking lot lighting and additional lighting installed around the perimeter of the property. This will require removal of asphalt to repair the underground line, or another method of lighting such as solar be established. The front perimeter of the property, adjacent to Main Street does not have any lighting, making it very dark the entire 950' of frontage and 100' onto the property. The other area of concern is along the adjacent street (Riverview Drive), and it spans an area of 450' of property frontage by approximately 50' onto Perkins Center property. Correcting these concerns would provide a much safer and secure environment for consumers and alleviate issues security staff encounter when monitoring those areas by video and in person.

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8. Renovation/Replacement of Store Front Windows

The glass “store front style” windows surrounding the interior of the main building and half of the physical therapy area, leaks whenever it rains. Towels must be kept throughout the building to catch the water from those windows when there is precipitation. There is rust and corrosion present. It is unclear if new structure is needed or replacement glass and seals to resolve the issue. Most of the glass and structure is original to the building built in 1973. The interior glass measures 2,608 sq. ft. and the physical therapy glass is 225 sq. ft. A complete assessment as to the extent of repairs, or replacement, of the glass is needed.

9. Resurface Gymnasium Flooring

The current gym surface (73’5” long x 39’5” wide) is badly worn and in need of repair. It is original to the construction of the gym. It will need installation of a layer of Tarkolay over existing floor, then a 5+2 pad and pour system, game lines painted, vinyl base along walls, and a vinyl reducer along doorways and openings.

10. The Perkins Center Front Entrance including Childcare Area

The main entrance to the Center needs a canopy constructed to allow those loading/unloading to safely do so without concern for snow, rain and other weather conditions that may occur. Also, a covered walkway should be constructed to the outside entry of the Childcare room. Often, consumers, family members and staff must load/unload vehicles packed with clothing, food items, electronics, and other items at our front entrance where there is no cover from the elements. Parents/caregivers of children that utilize our daycare are also subject to weather events and a covered walkway to their entry would be attached to the structure and main building. Using a wheelchair lift is also a task that often becomes difficult due to rain, snow, or adverse conditions where the pavement may become slick or hazardous. A canopy and covered walkway have also been identified as a need on our Accessibility Plan performed by an Occupational Therapist.

11. Perkin’s Center Hot Water Systems

Replacement of aging Hot Water Heaters throughout the facility are needed. The site currently operates its hot water supply by utilizing twenty separate hot water heating units, eleven of which are near specified end of life service for these types of units and are not performing at full capacity. A planned replacement schedule should be determined and implemented before a failure constitutes an emergency.

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12. The Carl Perkins Center Rooftop HVAC Units

The facility operates heating and cooling for all areas except the student dormitory by means of RTU's (rooftop HVAC units) located on the rooftops of various sections of the buildings. There are 23 individual units, 21 of which are 2001 or older manufacture. These units are beyond the specified 15–20-year service life cycle and are expensive to operate and maintain. Many of the units are not performing at 100%. All units provide cooling utilizing R-22 freon which is now obsolete to manufacture. Several units are either non-operational or operating in a limited capacity, currently. Based on evaluations of all RTU units, a scope for replacement is being developed to provide a timeline and an accurate cost determination.

13. The Carl Perkins Center Facility Wastewater Treatment Plant

The facility is served by an onsite Wastewater Treatment Plant that was installed in 2004/2005. This plant has a capacity to process up to 25k gallons of wastewater per day. The primary tank structure typically has a lifespan of 25-30 years. The support structure and decking, piping, electrical controls, blowers, pumps, and other hardware have a service life of 10-15 years. Based on an assessment completed by the original manufacturer, it is recommended that these system components and hardware be renovated, and suspect parts be replaced. The goal of this renovation would be to make the Plant viable for another 8-10 years before full replacement would be required.

14. The Carl Perkins Center Parking, Driveway, and Entry Areas

The facility has approximately 110,000 square feet of areas that need replacement of asphalt, parking stops, concrete curbs, and grading. The entry/exit area to Cosmetology training will require a 900 square feet concrete pad.

15. The Carl Perkins Center Therapy Pool

The facility has a therapy pool utilized by consumers participating in therapy services. The liner for the pool is approximately 15 years old and is beginning to show signs of aging. The pool is used a minimum of 30 hours per week for both physical therapy and wellness participants. The typical pool liner has a lifespan of 15–20 years.

16. The Carl Perkins Center Building Exterior

The facility is 50 years old with an exterior made of aluminum/metal. The exterior has only been painted one time in the past 28 years. Many areas of the structure are stained and show signs of weathering. Because the structure includes a five-

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story dormitory, there are areas unreachable by facility maintenance staff and requires special equipment to reach.

17. The Carl Perkins Center Custodial/Building Maintenance/Maintenance Equipment

There is more than 75,000 square feet of flooring that requires daily cleaning and maintenance. The Center currently has a ride-on floor scrubber that is approximately 15 years old. It has been repaired multiple times and will soon need to be replaced. This equipment is used by both the Center janitorial staff and as part of the Building/Maintenance Training program.

18. The Carl Perkins Center Carpeting

There is approximately 15,000 square feet of flooring that is currently covered in commercial grade carpeting. These areas include the Cafeteria, common areas, training areas, and conference rooms. Several of these areas have carpeting that is more than 20 years old that needs to be replaced.

19. The Carl Perkins Center Paging/Intercom/Clock System

Currently the Center has an intercom system that is more than 30 years old. The dormitory has more than 100 rooms in which the intercom system should operate for emergency notifications and announcements; however, approximately 20% of the intercoms are inoperable. Furthermore, the intercom system should work throughout the building. As with the dormitory, several of these devices no longer work or are inaudible for announcements and notifications.

20. Carl Perkins Center Portable Stage

The Carl Perkins Center has a portable stage that is more than 15 years old. It is used for graduations, celebrations, and events such as job placement activities or movie nights. This stage is nearing the end of its' lifespan. Multiple sections are repaired each time it is utilized, and some sections are to the point of not being repairable. The replacement of this portable stage will be a priority in the near future.

Section C: Goals, Priorities, and Strategies

C. 1. Describe how the SRC and the VR agency jointly developed and agreed to the goals and priorities and any revisions; and

The 2023 Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA) was conducted in 2023 and completed in 2024 by the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) with input and participation from the Statewide Council for Vocational Rehabilitation (SCVR). The OVR State Plan contains goals and strategies based on the needs identified through the CSNA and other assessments performed. The SCVR, for the Combined Agency, reviewed, gave input and approved the goals for this state plan. During the quarterly meetings, the Council was informed of progress on the corrective action plan and OVR's progress in meeting the goals of the plan. The Executive Director and Division Directors report out at every quarterly meeting on the metrics data for services, capital plans and progress on the strategic plan goals. The council was given the opportunity for input on the goals and priorities and was involved in the decision-making process of keeping in place the existing goals moving forward. The existing goals address the issues in the corrective action plan as well as issues presented throughout the current statewide needs assessment.

The 2023 CSNA informs the OVR strategic and state plan; meets the Federal regulatory requirements of 34 CFR §361.29; and provides vital information on the State VR program which is used by both public and private disability advocacy agencies. The State Rehabilitation Councils along with the OVR worked collaboratively to assess the needs of individuals with disabilities.

C. 2. Goals, Priorities, and Strategies - 2

2. a. Support Innovation and Expansion Activities;

OVR will use innovation and expansion funds to support the following activities: To support the Statewide Council for Vocational Rehabilitation (SCVR), Kentucky's SRC, including all meeting expenses and expenses related to conducting an annual survey of consumer satisfaction (CSS); the Annual Report of the council; and the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA). Although the Statewide Independent Living Council (SIILC) is now independent of the state and has established its own 501C (3) nonprofit, OVR will continue to provide annual funding in the amount of \$65,000. Effective July 14, 2022, legislation was passed that appoints the Department of Workforce

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Development, Office of Vocational Rehabilitation as the administrator of the Employment First Initiative as well as the Employment First Council through KRS 151B.212.

It is anticipated the tasks identified in the current plan would provide expansion and innovation related to Supported Employment and the state owned and operated facilities and public community rehabilitation programs. OVR has in place three Establishment Projects for customized employment projects and four for the area of Individualized Placement Supports (IPS).

2. b. Overcome barriers to accessing VR and supported employment services;

OVR has taken steps to ensure equitable access to and participation in federally funded programs for all consumers and for agency staff regardless of race, color, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or age. The agency takes into consideration the needs of staff in correlation to the service needs of individuals with disabilities in Kentucky specifically for: Individuals with the most significant disabilities, including the need for supported employment services; and individuals with disabilities who are minorities and individuals with disabilities who have been unserved or underserved by the vocational rehabilitation program. We will comply with the provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Public Law 101—336, and applicable federal regulations relating to prohibiting discrimination against otherwise qualified disabled individuals under any program or activity and adhere to the US Department of Labor Final Rule on Federal Executive Order 11246.

Office of Vocational Rehabilitation is committed to a policy of equal opportunity to all qualified applicants without regard to race, color, national origin, gender, age or disability. OVR encourages applications for employment from persons who are members of groups that have been traditionally underrepresented in the workplace such as members of racial or ethnic minority groups, women, and those with disabilities. There is an explicit commitment to assuring equal access for all communications through outreach, media contact of any form inclusive of social media, websites, online learning or flyers, and other announcements or correspondence under the project.

OVR has an accessibility workgroup that focuses on ensuring all materials and electronic communications are accessible to VR participants. Information is provided to individuals participating in services in their preferred language. OVR is committed to assuring that all individuals with disabilities have equal access to participate in services using the provision of reasonable accommodations and

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assistive technology and other available auxiliary aids and services. In 2023, this workgroup developed an Accessible Information & Communication Technology policy and procedure for the agency that is currently under review by the Executive Leadership Team.

The OVR Executive Director and designee are members of the CSAVR Diversity, Equity and Inclusion professional Network. This allows for OVR to participate in a national workgroup addressing racial disparities specific to the field of vocational rehabilitation.

In 2021, OVR created a diversity committee to address diversity and inclusion inequities within OVR. The OVR Diversity Committee team is made up of OVR staff, Office of Employer Apprenticeship Services (OEAS) and representation from the state Office of Diversity, Equity and Training and the State Employee Assistance. An agency-wide survey was distributed in September of 2021. OVR's main purpose is to lead the way in moving from a culture of talk to one of action. Representatives of ODET from the Personnel Board provide feedback and share their expertise to keep the committee focused and aware of state level initiatives.

The committee created a strategic plan with the following goals to address this area:

Staff Diversity

Goal: Recruit, hire and retain a diverse and inclusive staff to provide high quality services to Kentuckians with Disabilities.

Objective 1: Increase recruitment and hiring to fill vacant positions with staff who are representative of the population we serve.

Objective 2: Increase staff retention to ensure continuity of high quality of services to Kentuckians with disabilities and to increase diversity at all agency levels.

Consumer Diversity

Goal: Ensure equitable service provision to all Kentuckians with disabilities through outreach, training, and data analysis.

Objective 1: Develop a system to periodically review data regarding consumer diversity as well as policies, and practices that impact service provision.

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Objective 2: Raise awareness of OVR services in underserved communities through targeted outreach.

Objective 3: Create a more welcoming and inclusive environment for all VR stakeholders.

The OVR Executive Director is a member of the CSAVR Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion professional Network. This allows for OVR to participate in a national workgroup addressing racial disparities specific to the field of vocational rehabilitation.

Management and staff shall focus on the agency mission, which is competitive integrated employment, in assignment of tasks, planning and utilization of work time, initiation of self-directed work teams, and innovative projects. This includes expanding the diversity of the Agency in terms of employment outcomes to individuals with the most significant disabilities who are minorities. Staff shall ensure that persons with the most significant disabilities who are minorities will receive the same employment related services that non-minority and individuals with disabilities receive. OVR works to develop outreach activities to minorities to facilitate increased consumer referrals to the Agency. OVR encourages staff to get to know key community leaders and minority organizations to facilitate outreach. The Office follows Equal Employment Opportunity guidelines and Affirmative Action Procedures. The Office encourages existing minority staff to play an active role in policy and program development, service delivery and program monitoring activities.

The Office provides cultural diversity training to staff in order to develop a better understanding of different cultures and value systems. Staff participates in the Governor's Equal Employment Opportunity Conference. Service demographic and population data is utilized to determine the number of minorities in regions and develop strategies to increase percentages. OVR will utilize different methods and channels of communication in targeting minority populations. This will include usage of the "Language Line" that will enable our staff to communicate with non-English speaking applicants in their native language.

Individuals who are minorities have equal access to vocational rehabilitation services. OVR is committed in its effort to build the capacity to effectively service individuals with most significant disabilities who are minorities.

The following outlines the actions in OVR's outreach plan for 2021 - 2022:

- Management and staff shall focus on the agency mission, which is employment, in assignment of tasks, planning and utilization of work time,

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initiation of self-directed work teams, and innovative projects. This includes expanding the diversity of the Agency in terms of employment outcomes to individuals with the most significant disabilities who are minorities.

- Staff shall provide leadership in implementation of the Career Center Systems throughout the Commonwealth. Staff shall ensure that persons with the most significant disabilities who are minorities will receive the same employment related services that non-minorities and individuals with disabilities receive.
- Recruit and hire Rehabilitation Counselors from minority and culturally diverse groups. Improve system linkages with the Department of Workforce in order to reach more minorities across the state. Collaboration with other entities will allow for effective coordination of services and referrals.
- Integrate internal controls through quality assurance to identify areas where there is successful outreach and best practices and identify areas needing additional outreach.
- Develop outreach activities to minorities to facilitate increased consumer referrals to OVR. OVR supports staff in making linkages with community leaders and minority organizations to facilitate outreach.
- Encourage existing minority staff to play an active role in policy and program development, service delivery and program monitoring activities.
- Provide cultural diversity training to staff in order to develop a better understanding of different cultures and value systems.
- Utilize service demographic and population data to determine the number of minorities in regions and develop strategies to increase percentages.
- Encourage minorities to play an active role in the State Rehabilitation Council, participating forums and the provision of input into policies and procedures.

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2. c. 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, post-secondary education, employment, and pre-employment transition services); and

In Kentucky there are 171 school districts consisting of 1,477 schools. There are more than 106,000 students with IEPs that are potentially eligible in the state according to the Kentucky Department of Education. Currently, the Department of Education has no way to count the number of students with 504 plans or those who would qualify as a student with a disability that do not have an IEP or 504 plan. The number of students in private or home schools that would qualify as students with disabilities is also not readily available.

OVR will use a variety of methods to improve and expand VR services for students. As stated in this section internal and external methods utilized are WEBI, Crystal Reports, Case Reviews, Satisfaction Surveys, Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment, 107 Monitoring, the State's performance under the performance accountability measures of section 116 of WIOA and the Strategic Planning Process.

As stated earlier in this section, OVR conducts a statewide comprehensive needs assessment in order to satisfy requirements in the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended. The assessment has a component that identifies additional VR service needs of both students and youth. A part of the assessment is tailored to this population to identify emerging needs. Information gained through this process is then analyzed to develop conclusions and potential action strategies in serving this population.

OVR uses the strategic planning process as one of its methods to ensure the effective implementation of rehabilitation programs and services to this target population. Through quality assurance processes, OVR provides internal and external methods and examinations to identify areas where improvement and training are needed. OVR will utilize the case review process to Improve Professional Skills to review transition cases.

OVR continues to receive technical support from the National Technical Assistance Center on Transition: The Collaborative (NTACT:C). A KY NTACT team has been formed to develop an Intensive Technical Assistance Plan to achieve goals related to data-sharing and quality transition services. This is a

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collaborative effort between KY OVR and KY Department of Education and with other community partners providing services to transition age youth.

OVR created the Transition Services Branch in October 2020 to engage with and provide Pre-Employment Transition Services and Transition services to students with disabilities. The branch consists of one (1) Branch Manager, three (3) Program Administrators, one (1) Administrative Specialist, and six (6) Pre-ETS Coordinators. The Branch Manager oversees all branch activities and represents the agency on inter-agency teams. The Program Administrators coordinate and monitor Pre-ETS and Transition services throughout the state, including specific contracts with service providers. The Administrative Specialist provides clerical support to the branch. The Pre-ETS Coordinators work with Potentially Eligible students in their specific regions. They collaborate directly with schools and providers to receive referrals, coordinate Pre-Employment Transition Services, and monitor the progress of Potentially Eligible students to help determine if/when it is appropriate for a student to apply for OVR services. The Pre-ETS Coordinators transfer the Potentially Eligible students' cases to VR Counselors who determine eligibility for services and develop Individualized Plans for Employment. Pre-ETS Coordinators do not determine eligibility or develop IPEs. They only work with Potentially Eligible students.

The Transition Services Branch:

- Formulates, develops and interprets policies, standards and procedures.
- Maintains a comprehensive knowledge of and assures that OVR adheres to all Federal and State Regulations, administrative rules and policies for transition and pre-employment transition services.
- Assists in the evaluation of the effectiveness of agency transition policies and procedures.
- Coordinates the activities of transition/Section 511.
- Coordinates the activities of Pre – Employment Transition Services.
- Facilitates the development and maintenance of agency fee schedules and cooperative agreements.
- Collaborates regularly with partners by participating in workforce partner meetings, community rehabilitation, OVR team meetings, vendors/contractors and Department of Education staff.

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- Facilitates effective communication with the Executive Leadership, Field Services Management and field staff to assure the attainment of agency goals.
- Represents the agency by participation and representation on Transition Related events and Councils.

The Transition Services Branch has the following goals for the next three years:

- 1.) Develop and implement strategies to increase the number of students applying for VR service through engagement
- 2.) Implement a system for approving new Pre-ETS provider to ensure high quality services are provided statewide.
- 3.) Develop a process to implement a data sharing agreement with partner agencies.
- 4.) Identify underserved populations by partnering with community agencies and KDE.
- 5.) Evaluate service efficacy through SWOT analyses.
- 6.) Seek feedback from providers and OVR staff to facilitate continuous improvement
- 7.) Build provider capacity.

OVR receives technical assistance from the NTACT: C to ensure that OVR is meeting RSA requirements. Transition Services Branch staff participate in webinars and communities of practice to learn about different ways to deliver services and complying with the latest guidance from NTACT: C.

The Transition Services Branch continues to refine ways to do outreach to identify more students, to ensure that providers are following established guidelines, and to ensure students receive high quality transition services. Technical assistance will be sought out from NTACT:C, as needed.

To assure the coordination of services to facilitate the transition students from school to postsecondary life (including the receipt of VR services, post-secondary education, competitive integrated employment, and Pre-Employment Transition Services) OVR utilizes the following process. The Pre-ETS Coordinator and VR Counselor is responsible for the schools located in their assigned region. Pre-ETS Coordinators and VR Counselor work with school staff and service providers to

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identify potentially eligible students assuring that they are given the opportunity to apply for services starting at age 14. While the student is enrolled in school, the Pre-ETS Coordinator and VR Counselor work with school staff to ensure that student receives the needed services to aid in the transition to post-secondary life. The Pre-ETS Coordinators will work with Potentially Eligible students who only require Pre-ETS. These Coordinators will monitor students' progress and will transfer the students to a VR Counselor for application when they require other VR services. The VR Counselor will then take applications, determine eligibility, and determine appropriate services to help students achieve Competitive, Integrated Employment.

Services include but are not limited to:

- Pre-Employment Transition Services,
- Other VR services and programming offered by OVR, and
- Other services specific to transition aged students by school districts and other entities.

VR Counselors provide individualized services and where gaps in services are identified, staff work to develop new and innovative services in the students' home area to better serve this population.

As stated in other sections of the plan, OVR has representation and involvement in several organizations and councils as follows:

- OVR was appointed to serve as a voting member of the State Interagency Council (SIAC) for Services and Supports to Children and Transition-Age Youth.
- Regional OVR representation has been established for the Regional Interagency Councils (RIAC) for the system of care to have consistent OVR representation.
- OVR and Kentucky Department of Education continues to meet quarterly with interested interagency partners and serve as the catalyst for development and implementation of an infrastructure which supports youth with disabilities to transition from high school to post-secondary school and employment.
- OVR has Memorandum of Understanding with the KDE for transition planning and service delivery for secondary students with disabilities.

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2. d. Improve the performance of the VR and Supported Employment programs in assisting individuals with disabilities to achieve quality employment outcomes.

Sound Fiscal Management

Goal 1:

Implement sound fiscal management that aligns with federal and state regulations for accurate and consistent reporting and operations.

Objective 1-A:

Develop internal controls that are embedded throughout service delivery.

Strategies 1-A:

- Conduct a risk analysis and identify needed procedures for internal controls.
- OVR staff works closely with Cabinet-level fiscal staff (budget, procurement, and accounting) in the development and implementation of written procedures that adhere to state and federal requirements.
- Develop needed policies and procedures.
- Train staff on established policies and procedures.

Measures 1-A:

- Internal controls are implemented in day-to-day service delivery.

Objective 1-B:

Best practices and effective policies are embedded in day-to-day operations.

Strategies 1-B:

- Dedicated staff are assigned to quality assurance monitoring over the internal control processes.
- Develop a quality assurance monitoring plan.
- Implement the quality assurance plan.
- Metrics are established for internal control processes.

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Measures 1-B:

- Clean audit with no findings.
- Reduction of case review errors.
- Timely submission of reports with no errors.

Objective 1-C:

Proper allocation and expenditure of funds.

Strategies 1-C:

- Conduct fiscal forecasting.
- Develop a plan for expenditure for the grant award.

Measures 1-C:

- Fiscal forecasting completed
- Adequate expenditure of funds

Quality Assurance

Goal 2:

Compliance with federal and state regulations in all areas to ensure continuous improvement and quality outcomes for consumers.

Objective 2-A:

Enhance program compliance through the development and maintenance of policies and procedures.

Strategies 2-A:

- Identify an agency standard of accessibility.
- Develop a structure to maintain, update, and review policy and procedures.
- Train staff on the new process for policy and procedures.
- Train staff on common performance measures

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Measure 2-A:

- Completion of a formal policy and procedure manual.
- Meets or exceed the RSA negotiated performance rates.

Objective 2-B:

Consistently analyze and use data to inform planning.

Strategies 2-B:

- Implement a consistent development and review process.
- Obtain input of leadership and management to identify outcome data needs.
- Hire staff to develop a strong data review process.
- Partner with internal and external stakeholders in education and workforce to obtain necessary data.

Measures 2-B:

- Data is always used in the decision-making process.

Staff Resource

Goal 3:

Maximize technology and business processes to effectively support accessibility and the evolving needs of all stakeholders.

Objective 3-A:

All forms and documents meet accessibility standards.

Strategies 3-A:

- Ensure staff use accessible forms and documents.
- Staff responsible for creating forms will create forms that meet accessibility standards.
- Policies and procedures are in place for compliance.
- Train staff on accessibility and compliance.

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Measure 3-A:

- All forms and documents meet established accessibility standards.

Facility Operations

Goal 4:

Improve facilities and expand programs to increase competitive, integrated employment outcomes.

Objective 4-A:

Upgrade building facilities to provide a safe and accessible environment for all staff across the state.

Strategies 4-A:

- Develop a formal plan for ongoing and regular maintenance of state-owned buildings.
- Identify building locations private and state owned that present potential service, health and safety risks for staff.
- Identify relocation needs.
- Follow and adhere to all state and federal processes.
- Implement approved projects in a timely manner.

Measure 4-A:

- All facility projects are completed and operational as identified in the Capital Plan.
- All facilities meet facility and safety requirements.

Objective 4-B:

Increase capacity to offer statewide services at state operated Centers.

Strategies 4-B:

- Expand curriculum and training opportunities in industry-standard computer software programs (e.g., computer literacy).
- Address hardware, software, and connectivity access barriers.

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- Expand learning formats to include a variety of online and hybrid programs.
- Develop and implement a plan to ensure adequate resources for the learning format expansion.
- Centers will increase outreach efforts to reach consumers in all 120 counties.

Measures 4-B:

- Increase training enrollments by 25% for both Centers by 2024.
- Increase competitive, integrative employment by 25% for both Centers by 2024.

Objective 4-C:

Maximize job readiness training and work experience opportunities.

Strategies 4-C:

- Expand job readiness training and work experience opportunities at the Centers.

Measures 4-C:

- 75% of McDowell Center VR participants complete a work experience.
- Re-establish all the Perkins Center's current relationships and expand those by 25%.
- Completion of job readiness training at the Perkins Center will increase by 25% by 2024.

Consumer Services

Goal 5:

Implement innovative practices to improve quality outcomes.

Objective 5-A:

Increase the number of credentialed vendors.

Strategies 5-A:

- Incorporate vendor recruitment as a part of the outreach plan.

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- Train staff on new vendor credentialing and processes for vetting.
- Recruit new vendors for increased consumer choice.
- Maintain a strong application/recruitment/retention vendor process.

Measure 5-A:

- All newly approved vendors are credentialed.
- Increase supported employment providers by 5%.

Objective 5-B:

Consumers have access to industry-driven training, career, and other resources.

Strategies 5-B:

- Develop a list and expand the number of agency-approved vendors.
- Develop a plan for consumers to have access to technology and virtual services.
- Counselors place greater emphasis on providing informed choices.

Measure 5-B:

- Increase the number of consumers who are engaged in and complete training by 10%.

Objective 5-C:

Strengthen existing workforce partnerships, develop new partnerships, and expand learning opportunities.

Strategies 5-C:

- Employer Services Branch will develop and implement a plan to partner with employers who offer jobs in targeted sectors.
- Increase work-based learning opportunities in targeted sectors.
- Train staff using career pathways strategy guides.

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Measure 5-C:

- 10% increase in competitive, integrated employment outcomes in targeted sectors.

Objective 5-D:

Counselors implement a career pathways approach to increase quality employment outcomes.

Strategies 5-D:

- Expand types of employment placements into higher-paying, lower turnover jobs.
- Increase use of Labor Market Information in employment goal development.
- Increase consumer engagement.
- Implement policies that guide the implementation of the career pathway approach through team-based, early intervention strategies.

Measure 5-D:

- Annual increases in the required federal common measures.
- Decrease cases closed “unable to contact/refused services” by 10%.

Objective 5-E:

Ongoing Systematic Training for all Staff

Strategies 5-E:

- Formation of a Training Development Team
- Develop a systematic training Schedule.
- Implement a systematic training schedule for all staff.

Measure 5-E:

- Training Plan Developed by December 2024.
- Ongoing systematic training is implemented by June 2025.

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Objective 5-F:

Increase service capacity and customer engagement through additional staff resources.

Strategies 5-F:

- Conduct an assessment of statewide staff needs based on a internal job duties analysis and service delivery trends.
- Develop a talent management plan.
- Recruit and hire staff to fill identified positions.

Measures 5-F:

- Assessment of statewide staff needs completed by June 2024
- Talent Management plan completed by December 2024
- # of Positions Filled

Public Awareness

Goal 6:

Implement an ongoing, flexible outreach plan and process to improve public awareness of VR programs, services, and agency employment.

Objective 6-A:

Implement a comprehensive outreach plan for the agency.

Strategies 6-A:

- Hire a dedicated outreach person.
- Create an outreach plan.
- Develop outreach materials to recruit vendors.
- Outreach materials that reflect current information and are engaging and in accessible formats.
- Outreach materials are made available to staff and consumers.

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Measures 6-A:

- Staff hired to oversee outreach.
- All outreach materials are updated and maintained in appropriate, accessible formats.
- Social Media presence on most popular accessible sites.
- All outreach materials will be located for easy access to staff and consumers (agency website/paper material to Perkins for distribution/DocuShare Drive).

Objective 6-B:

Recruit talent.

Strategies 6-B:

- Identify a staff representative to work with the Education and Labor Cabinet and Personnel Cabinet on issues related to talent recruitment.
- Identify staff representatives to make presentations to colleges, universities and technical colleges regarding OVR services and employment opportunities.
- Expand the quantity and types of internship programs with university programs.
- Leverage social media as a tool for recruitment.

Measures 6-B:

- Open positions are filled with qualified candidates.

The Kentucky Office of Vocational Rehabilitation set the following goals for the distribution of Title VI, Part B Funds. Kentucky has set the following goals to assist with increase employment outcomes for adults and youth with a significant disability

Goal 1:

Build capacity within supported employment services for individuals with the most significant disabilities.

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Objective 1.1:

Increase the number of CRP's providing supported employment services.

Strategies:

- Recruit more IPS providers for supported employment by holding outreach opportunities for potential providers.
- Implement additional IPS Establishment Project contracts to continue expansion of the IPS model throughout KY.
- Recruit more Employment Specialists for participation in the University of Kentucky's Human Development Institute Leadership Series on Customized Employment.
- Implement additional Customized Employment Establishment Project contracts to continue expansion of Customized Employment throughout KY.
- Continue existing contract with the University of Kentucky to allow scholarship opportunities among Employment Specialists to participate in the Leadership Series training.
- Hire internal staff to serve as IPS Trainers and Fidelity Monitors
- Hire additional CRP Branch Consultant staff to increase recruitment of new CRPs.

Measures:

- Increase in the number of providers (10%).
- Increase the number of certified employment specialist in customized employment (10%)

Objective 2.1:

Reduce attrition among CRPs providing supported employment.

Strategies:

- Revamp supported employment payment structure.
- Develop and implement CRP Sustainability Survey.

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- Research supported employment payment structures from other state VR agencies.
- Hire additional CRP Branch Consultant staff to strengthen CRP technical support.

Measures

- Development, approval and implementation of new supported employment payment structure.

Objective 3.1:

Improve monitoring and exploration of additional strategies to improve CRP service quality and compliance.

Strategies:

- CRP Branch staff will facilitate monthly meetings with CRP and VR staff to address quality and compliance issues.
- CRP Branch will regularly assess and amend the CRP Manual to ensure up to date and accurate information is readily available to CRP and VR staff.
- Train staff on new policies related to customized employment and person-centered planning.
- Provide quarterly CRP Branch Bulletin newsletter to CRP and VR staff.

Measures:

- Quarterly report
- Scorecard

Objective 4.1:

Seek alternative strategies for providing and funding Extended Services.

Strategies:

- Provide Extended Services support to youth with disabilities as outlined in CFR 361.5 (19).
- Gather input from staff, education partners, service providers, individuals with disabilities, their families, and other stakeholders.
- Explore state funding earmarked for Extended Services.

Section D: Evaluation and Reports of Progress: VR and Supported Employment Goals

D. 1. Progress in achieving the goals and priorities identified for the VR and Supported Employment Programs;

Sound Fiscal Management

Goal 1:

Implement sound fiscal management that aligns with federal and state regulations for accurate and consistent reporting and operations.

Objective 1-A:

Develop internal controls that are embedded throughout service delivery.

Strategies 1-A:

- Conduct a risk analysis and identify needed procedures for internal controls.
- OVR staff works closely with Cabinet-level fiscal staff (budget, procurement, and accounting) in the development and implementation of written procedures that adhere to state and federal requirements.
- Develop needed policies and procedures.
- Train staff on established policies and procedures.

Measures 1-A:

- Internal controls are implemented in day-to-day service delivery.

Objective 1-B:

Best practices and effective policies are embedded in day-to-day operations.

Strategies 1-B:

- Dedicated staff are assigned to quality assurance monitoring over the internal control processes.
- Develop a quality assurance monitoring plan.

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- Implement the quality assurance plan.
- Metrics are established for internal control processes.

Measures 1-B:

- Clean audit with no findings.
- Reduction of case review errors.
- Timely submission of reports with no errors.

Objective 1-C:

Proper allocation and expenditure of funds.

Strategies 1-C:

- Conduct fiscal forecasting.
- Develop a plan for expenditure for the grant award.

Measures 1-C:

- Fiscal forecasting completed
- Adequate expenditure of funds

Progress:

Significant progress has been made in Goal 1. OVR has an intensive technical assistance agreement with the VRTAC-QM under an intensive agreement established in 2022 for the area of financial accountability and internal controls. The agency is actively working on the development of policy and procedures to establish internal controls. Policies and procedures once approved by OVR leadership are submitted to the VRTAC-QM for review, comments and edits. OVR then submits them to RSA for review and comments/questions and once the final edits are addressed a final draft is created. Upon compilation of all approved drafts the agency compiles and submit to the agency Accessibility Coordinator to ensure all documents meet agency established accessibility standards. Following the accessibility confirmation, the agency will work with the Education and Labor Cabinet legislative liaison to coordinate with Legislative Research Commission (LRC) in Kentucky for promulgation into regulation. Currently the agency has finalized drafts for: RSA 911, RSA-17, 9169, Authorizations, Service Fee Memorandums, Rate Setting, Vendors, Prior Written Approval and Third-Party cooperative Agreements. Monthly meetings occur between OVR program and

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grant staff and Cabinet fiscal staff to discuss fiscal operations across divisions and programs. Additional staff resources have been dedicated to associated job duties to ensure compliance in all areas. As policies are approved pertinent staff are provided with training including Cabinet fiscal staff as we continue to work toward implementing internal controls in the day-to-day service delivery. An intensive training from the VRTAC-QM provided executive leadership staff, agency fiscal staff and cabinet fiscal staff with training on D-RAN or Delegable, Reasonable, Allocable and Necessary expenditures with a focus on Period of Performance as well. An obstacle for accuracy of reporting data that the agency is currently working toward resolution on is the implementation of an updated or new case management system to ensure that accurate data is captured for reporting purposes. As we work toward resolution with a new system, staff have outlined additional manual processes in their procedures for additional checks and balances to assist with the accuracy of the information of reports, including measures for corrective action for identified errors.

Quality Assurance

Goal 2:

Compliance with federal and state regulations in all areas to ensure continuous improvement and quality outcomes for consumers.

Objective 2-A:

Enhance program compliance through the development and maintenance of policies and procedures.

Strategies 2-A:

- Identify an agency standard of accessibility.
- Develop a structure to maintain, update, and review policy and procedures.
- Train staff on the new process for policy and procedures.
- Train staff on common performance measures

Measure 2-A:

- Completion of a formal policy and procedure manual.
- Meets or exceed the RSA negotiated performance rates.

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Objective 2-B:

Consistently analyze and use data to inform planning.

Strategies 2-B:

- Implement a consistent development and review process.
- Obtain input of leadership and management to identify outcome data needs.
- Hire staff to develop a strong data review process.
- Partner with internal and external stakeholders in education and workforce to obtain necessary data.

Measures 2-B:

- Data is always used in the decision-making process.

Progress:

The agency continues to work on this goal. There has been significant progress for this area. The Case Review Process was analyzed by the VRTAC-QM as part of an intensive technical assistance agreement established in 2022. Agency staff and VRTAC-QM have worked closely together to develop policy and procedures for this process that include associated forms and standardized practices for feedback to staff that will lead to quality improvements. Staff performance evaluations now include expectations related to timely completions of Eligibility and IPE determination with reviews conducted on interim and annual basis. All staff have been trained on common performance measures and timely and accurate data entry. The accessibility workgroup developed an agency standard of accessibility and is under review of the agency Executive Leadership Team. A structure to maintain, update and review policy and procedures was developed and implemented. Currently, leadership holds weekly administrative review meetings inclusive of subject matter experts that work on policy development and procedures. Once the content is established a standardized format is applied to the documents and submitted to VRTAC-QM for review/comments/updates followed by the same process for submitting to RSA for input into the finalized draft. Additional staff have been hired to provide additional supports for the case review processes. The agency has established a collaborative relationship with fiscal Cabinet level staff. Cabinet staff are included in agency developed or sponsored training initiatives to ensure that they are trained on topics crucial to the implementation of federal requirements for the state vocational rehabilitation program. For program year 2022 OVR met all of the

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negotiated performance measures but one that was just under the set goal. An area of focus for this year will continue to be the development of a formal policy and procedure manual and the training of staff.

Staff Resource

Goal 3:

Maximize technology and business processes to effectively support accessibility and the evolving needs of all stakeholders.

Objective 3-A:

All forms and documents meet accessibility standards.

Strategies 3-A:

- Ensure staff use accessible forms and documents.
- Staff responsible for creating forms will create forms that meet accessibility standards.
- Policies and procedures are in place for compliance.
- Train staff on accessibility and compliance.

Measure 3-A:

- All forms and documents meet established accessibility standards.

Progress:

The agency has in place an Accessibility Team, an Accessibility Coordinator and a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Team to assist with compliance and forward progress in policy and procedure as it relates to this goal. The Accessibility Team has developed a standard of accessibility and a detailed manual with recommendations for training development staff support in this area. The DEI Team has included accessibility as part of their Strategic Plan. The agency Accessibility Coordinator works closely with staff to ensure that documents, forms and other correspondence meet accessibility requirements. In addition, the coordinator also assists with ensuring that documents sent out through larger Cabinet initiatives are also accessible for our staff. This has been accomplished through a solid working relationship with staff of the Education and Labor Cabinet (ELC) Office of Communications on accessibility. The ELC is also working to secure their own accessibility specialist to assist them with internal

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assurances of compliance for all documents, forms and correspondence. They are using the OVR position description for our Accessibility Coordinator to establish the roles and responsibilities for the position they intend to hire. This continues to be a work in progress and though this goal cannot be considered completed at this time, great process has been made.

Facility Operations

Goal 4:

Improve facilities and expand programs to increase competitive, integrated employment outcomes.

Objective 4-A:

Upgrade building facilities to provide a safe and accessible environment for all staff across the state.

Strategies 4-A:

- Develop a formal plan for ongoing and regular maintenance of state-owned buildings.
- Identify building locations private and state owned that present potential service, health, and safety risks for staff.
- Identify relocation needs.
- Follow and adhere to all state and federal processes.
- Implement approved projects in a timely manner.

Measure 4-A:

- All facility projects are completed and operational as identified in the Capital Plan.
- All facilities meet facility and safety requirements.

Objective 4-B:

Increase capacity to offer statewide services at state operated Centers.

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Strategies 4-B:

- Expand curriculum and training opportunities in industry-standard computer software programs (e.g., computer literacy).
- Address hardware, software, and connectivity access barriers.
- Expand learning formats to include a variety of online and hybrid programs.
- Develop and implement a plan to ensure adequate resources for the learning format expansion.
- Centers will increase outreach efforts to reach consumers in all 120 counties.

Measures 4-B:

- Increase training enrollments by 25% for both Centers by 2024.
- Increase competitive, integrative employment by 25% for both Centers by 2024.

Objective 4-C:

Maximize job readiness training and work experience opportunities.

Strategies 4-C:

- Expand job readiness training and work experience opportunities at the Centers.

Measures 4-C:

- 75% of McDowell Center VR participants complete a work experience.
- Re-establish all the Perkins Center's current relationships and expand those by 25%.
- Completion of job readiness training at the Perkins Center will increase by 25% by 2024.

Progress:

The Carl D. Perkins Vocational Training Center (CDPVTC) and the Charles McDowell Center are both older residential facilities with complex maintenance issues that must be addressed. Both facilities have in place a formal plan for

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ongoing and regular maintenance. The agency staff, along with executive leadership, meet bi-monthly and more if needed with the Education and Labor Cabinet (ELC) facilities staff to discuss the ongoing and regular maintenance issues as well as the capital projects that have been approved by RSA and state leadership for implementation. For CDPVTC this includes a new forklift area as this is a consistently sought after certification with crucial update needs for continued program implementation. CDPVTC also has plans for medical wing updates and other maintenance initiatives to maintain or enhance current program. Charles McDowell Center staff have undergone maintenance to update dorms, safety features of the building and climate control mitigation to address moisture issues in the facility. CDPVTC continues to have Wi-Fi issues due to the large number of individuals in the building sharing the network and the number of technology devices that pull from that system such as staff computers and phones as well as student computers, phones, televisions, game systems, etc. The Wi-Fi system was updated by the Commonwealth Office of Technology in 2023 but continues to be a challenge for the area in which they are located.

The largest issue that the agency faces regarding maintenance issues, is the associated processes fiscal process from state government. Delays in approvals and project implementation/completion can significantly impact the budget projections for expenditures for period of performance as well as program progress. This in addition to labor and product shortages has impacted the work on capital projects for OVR.

Both divisions consistently work to improve facility services and the courses offered to consumers. CDPVTC is implementing a Barista program due to the increased growth in coffee houses throughout the state. They are partnering with Division of Blind Services to grow the knowledge of visual disabilities with their staff to provide services to consumers with visual impairments in a supportive role to the Charles McDowell Services. The Bioptic Driving Program is adding additional staff to support this program. COVID provided an opportunity for both centers to hone staff skills related to virtual service delivery and this continues to be a utilized training support for consumers for both of these programs. CDPVTC continues to maintain their Commission on Accreditation for Residential Facilities (CARF) status.

Consumer Services

Goal 5:

Implement innovative practices to improve quality outcomes.

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Objective 5-A:

Increase the number of credentialed vendors.

Strategies 5-A:

- Incorporate vendor recruitment as a part of the outreach plan.
- Train staff on new vendor credentialing and processes for vetting.
- Recruit new vendors for increased consumer choice.
- Maintain a strong application/recruitment/retention vendor process.

Measure 5-A:

- All newly approved vendors are credentialed.
- Increase supported employment providers by 5%.

Objective 5-B:

Consumers have access to industry-driven training, career, and other resources.

Strategies 5-B:

- Develop a list and expand the number of agency-approved vendors.
- Develop a plan for consumers to have access to technology and virtual services.
- Counselors place greater emphasis on providing informed choices.

Measure 5-B:

- Increase the number of consumers who are engaged in and complete training by 10%.

Objective 5-C:

Strengthen existing workforce partnerships, develop new partnerships, and expand learning opportunities.

Strategies 5-C:

- Employer Services Branch will develop and implement a plan to partner with employers who offer jobs in targeted sectors.

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- Increase work-based learning opportunities in targeted sectors.
- Train staff using career pathways strategy guides.

Measure 5-C:

- 10% increase in competitive, integrated employment outcomes in targeted sectors.

Objective 5-D:

Counselors implement a career pathways approach to increase quality employment outcomes.

Strategies 5-D:

- Expand types of employment placements into higher-paying, lower turnover jobs.
- Increase use of Labor Market Information in employment goal development.
- Increase consumer engagement.
- Implement policies that guide the implementation of the career pathway approach through team-based, early intervention strategies.

Measure 5-D:

- Annual increases in the required federal common measures.
- Decrease cases closed "unable to contact/refused services" by 10%.

Objective 5-E:

Ongoing Systematic Training for all Staff

Strategies 5-E:

- Formation of a Training Development Team
- Develop a systematic training Schedule.
- Implement a systematic training schedule for all staff.

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Measure 5-E:

- Training Plan Developed by December 2024.
- Ongoing systematic training is implemented by June 2025.

Objective 5-F:

Increase service capacity and customer engagement through additional staff resources.

Strategies 5-F:

- Conduct an assessment of statewide staff needs based on a internal job duties analysis and service delivery trends.
- Develop a talent management plan.
- Recruit and hire staff to fill identified positions.

Measures 5-F:

- Assessment of statewide staff needs completed by June 2024
- Talent Management plan completed by December 2024
- # of Positions Filled

Progress:

The agency has developed and implemented policy and procedures related to Vendor Approvals, credential confirmations, timely agreement distribution and returned vendor agreements. The agency has designated staff assigned specific job duties regarding the vendor process. There is still a great deal of work needed for the area of vendor recruitment and provider capacity. There are no vendor recruitment materials currently available. The agency did develop a specific Outreach packet for Kentucky Psychiatric Association professional conference held in Louisville in 2023. This was an identified area of significant need for vendor recruitment. Plans for the agency include the development of additional Outreach materials for the vendor groups. Currently, we are looking at restructuring the Employer Services Branch to maximize statewide services and address jobs in targeted sectors using of career pathway strategies. In July of 2021, OVR's Blind Services division was accepted into the Progressive Employment (PE) Development Project through Explore VR/Institute for Community Inclusion. Since that time, the division director and key McDowell staff have participated in targeted monthly technical assistance with the PE team,

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quarterly nationwide PE meetings of participating states, and have even attended one in-person learning collaborative meeting. In January, 2024, an ICI staff provided on-site training with McDowell staff and OVR field staff. The McDowell Center for the Blind (a residential and day training center for visually impaired adults) has implemented the Progressive Employment model, with the goal of providing the highest quality training opportunities and increasing competitive employment outcomes for consumers. McDowell Center outreach materials list Progressive Employment as a “core” program offering alongside Braille, Assistive Technology and Orientation and Mobility. Center participants are provided work-based learning services, such as job shadowing, informational interviews, paid work experiences, and employer site tours. Implementing the model has resulted in an updated job readiness curriculum that is more dynamic and focuses on building relationships with employers and the larger community outside the walls of the Center. Participating in Progressive Employment allows consumers to gain a deeper understanding of their career interests and skills, and to overcome the fear and anxiety related to entering or re-entering the workforce as a blind adult.

Ongoing systematic training for all staff is ongoing. This includes plans for a statewide training in 2024. In 2023, the agency held a state training for all assistantseo address areas staff identified as critical for their work to increase their individual knowledge and skills. The agency is working toward establishing a robust training team. During the past year OVR added additional staff to this area with continued plans for growth of personnel to address the diverse and specialized needs of staff. The training staff works closely with subject matter experts within the division to assist with the development and implementation of appropriate training programs. In addition, with the newly implemented Case File Review process the results will be utilized to systematically determine the needed training elements to ensure timely, accurate, data driven elements are taking place during case service delivery and follow-up. The new employee orientation for staff has been revamped to ensure timely training for all onboarding. Consumer engagement is an element of focus to reduce to the numbers of cases closed “unable to contact/refused services” and will be a training element in the statewide training initiative and ongoing training supports upon completion of a systematic training schedule for all staff.

Public Awareness

Goal 6:

Implement an ongoing, flexible outreach plan and process to improve public awareness of VR programs, services, and agency employment.

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Objective 6-A:

Implement a comprehensive outreach plan for the agency.

Strategies 6-A:

- Hire a dedicated outreach person.
- Create an outreach plan.
- Develop outreach materials to recruit vendors.
- Outreach materials that reflect current information and are engaging and in accessible formats.
- Outreach materials are made available to staff and consumers.

Measures 6-A:

- Staff hired to oversee outreach.
- All outreach materials are updated and maintained in appropriate, accessible formats.
- Social Media presence on most popular accessible sites.
- All outreach materials will be located for easy access to staff and consumers (agency website/paper material to Perkins for distribution/DocuShare Drive).

Objective 6-B:

Recruit talent.

Strategies 6-B:

- Identify a staff representative to work with the Education and Labor Cabinet and Personnel Cabinet on issues related to talent recruitment.
- Identify staff representatives to make presentations to colleges, universities and technical colleges regarding OVR services and employment opportunities.
- Expand the quantity and types of internship programs with university programs.

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- Leverage social media as a tool for recruitment.

Measures 6-B:

- Open positions are filled with qualified candidates.

Progress:

The agency conducted a statewide outreach needs assessment in 2023 to determine the resources needed by staff to adequately represent the agency at outreach events. The agency coordinated with the Education and Labor Cabinet Office of Communication the development, and design of needed resources and a process for securing the needed materials. In the future OVR may add an additional dedicated person for the area of outreach. Currently, existing central office staff work with agency leadership on these initiatives. The agency does have an Outreach Team that coordinates the distribution of all printed and electronic documents for outreach. These items are vetted by the ELC Office of Communications prior to printing and distribution to staff. There are plans for the development of additional Outreach materials for the vendor groups. OVR maintains a social media presence on Facebook with pages dedicated for the agency as a whole and specific pages for the Carl D. Perkins Vocational Training Center and the Division of Blind Services. This allows for the sharing of important information and updates with the public as well as opportunities to share success stories associated with the work and services the agency provides. The agency ensures that all protocol is followed regarding the release of identifying consumers for these Outreach initiatives.

Internships, fieldwork opportunities and job shadowing all continue to be recruitment and outreach tools for the agency. The agency works with educational entities to provide these opportunities for students. With the implementation of state raises at the agency level as well as statewide initiatives initiated by the governor, the agency has increased success in recruitment, filling positions, and retaining qualified candidates in positions.

The Kentucky Office of Vocational Rehabilitation set the following goals for the distribution of Title VI, Part B Funds. Kentucky has set the following goals to assist with increase employment outcomes for adults and youth with a significant disability

Goal 1:

Increase the number of CRP's providing Supported Employment Services

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Objective 1.1:

Recruit more providers for supported employment for unserved and underserved areas.

Strategies:

Create a strategic planning team to analyze and develop a viable and comprehensive payment system to community rehabilitation providers.

Progress:

The CRP Branch Manager participated in multiple meetings with various states to discuss rates and rate setting. The CRP Branch Manager participated in the bi-monthly Community of Practice (CoP) meetings that addressed and explored rates from other state VR agencies from around the country. Various states provided information to CoP members pertaining to their rates for CRP related services. The CRP Branch Manager and staff developed and disseminated a CRP Sustainability Survey to obtain the perspectives and input of the CRPs. The CRP Branch Manager developed a rate revision proposal for supported employment based on the information obtained from the different sources of information. When exploring possible rate and payment system changes, consideration was given to changes that would increase engagement between the consumer, CRP, and VR staff. The proposal was submitted to OVR leadership and the Program Policy and Support Branch responsible for rate setting for consideration. At this time the proposal is under review.

Strategy:

Create Establishment Projects to replicate the UPS Transitional Learning Center model and expansion of the IPS and Customized employment models to increase a network of services providers.

Progress:

OVR did not pursue establishment projects used to model the UPS Transitional Learning Center. OVR was a part of a pilot model was pursued and temporarily implemented between the employer, Kyosan Denso Manufacturing Kentucky, LLC (KDMK) and a local CRP that was funded through the current service fee memorandum payment structure. The pilot was discontinued due to staffing issues with the CRP.

There were a total of 8 contracts that were developed and implemented related to the expansion of IPS and Customized Employment. KY VR was successful in obtaining Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) approval for three (3)

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Customized and four (4) Individual Placement and Support (IPS) Establishment Project contracts. Additionally, a contract with the University of Kentucky's Human Development Institute (HDI) was created to provide technical assistance to the new IPS providers, which was vital and necessary to sustain the respective programs.

Strategy:

Increase Capacity in customized employment through participation in the Leadership Series through the University of Kentucky's Human Development Institute.

Progress:

Through an existing contract with the University of Kentucky's HDI, KY VR was able to offer opportunities for CRPs to participate in the Leadership Series to acquire certification in customized employment under Marc Gold & Associates training Gateways. Establishment Project contracts for customized employment greatly increased participation within the Leadership Series.

Strategy:

Hold outreach opportunities for potential providers.

Progress:

The CRP Branch has initiated conversations with VR Branch Managers and asked that they implement regular dialogue within their staff meetings that focuses on identifying potential providers in their respective areas. Information obtained from these meetings are to be shared with the CRP Branch so that contact can be made to prospective CRPs throughout the state. Each CRP Branch Consultant would network with each prospective CRP to pursue and gauge interest in becoming a CRP.

Strategy:

Provide training on new policies related to customized employment, IPS, and person- centered planning.

Progress:

The CRP Branch provides training to all new KY VR counselors during Skills Enhancement Training (SET). The CRP Branch has four (4) Consultants that provide training to staff throughout their respective areas address customized employment, IPS, and person-centered planning. The CRP Branch also provides

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various trainings and meetings to all CRPs throughout the state on these and other CRP related topics.

Measures:

Increase the number of providers by 5%.

Progress:

The number of providers were not increased by 5%. In PY 2021-2022 there were a total of 110 CRPs and in PY 2022-2023 there were a total of 103.

Measures:

Implementation of new service fees

Progress:

A service fee was established for Extended Services, which is only for a youth with a disability between the ages of 14-21. Exploration of revisions to current supported employment rates did occur but no final revisions were implemented. Refer to #1 under Goal 1 for additional information.

Measures:

Implementation of Establishment projects

Progress:

There was a total of seven (7) establishment project grants initiated. An additional contract was initiated to support the three (3) contracts pertaining to IPS with technical support, which is consistent with the evidenced-based model. The other four (4) contracts were designed to implement customized employment. Refer to #2 under Goal 1 for additional information.

Measures:

Of Trainings Provided

Progress:

CRP Consultants provide quarterly trainings in their respective regions. That equates to 12 trainings per year that are provided regionally. Various consultants provided training at various conferences throughout the year. CRP Quarterly Meetings include subject matter experts to provide trainings to CRPs throughout the state. The CRP Branch provides multiple external training opportunities to CRPs through email correspondence. Each Employment Specialist is required to

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obtain 15 hours of CEUs annually when providing Supported Employment or Employment and Retention services. CRPs providing pre-Vocational services are required to have 5 hours of CEUs.

Measures:

Increase in the number of competitive integrated outcomes for individuals in supported employment.

Progress:

There was a total of 289 successful outcomes in supported employment in PY 2021-PY 2022. Although there were few providers in PY 2023, there were 391 successful outcomes in supported employment in PY 2022-2023. This is an increase of 26%.

Goal 2:

Monitor Service Quality of Providers

Objective 2.1:

Develop strategies for continuous quality improvement in collaboration with the Program Policy and Support Branch.

Progress:

The Program, Policy and Support Branch created policies and procedures pertaining to audits, billing, and invoicing of contract providers. A systematic approach for fiscal and programmatic reviews are in place. Training for program administrators was provided.

Strategies:

Ensure agency compliance to WIOA requirements of Section 511 (annually)

Progress

OVR added additional staff under the Program, Policy and Support Branch to oversee compliance of Section 511 among 14C holders. Policies and procedures were developed to provide to aid staff in understanding and consistency of compliance related issues.

Strategies:

Ensure CRP compliance with the terms of their signed service agreements through annual audits and monitoring (annually).

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Progress:

CRP Branch Consultants conduct monthly audits of CRPs within their respective regions. They record detailed information on the Audit Review Form and provide feedback to the CRP. If significant issues surface through the audit process, then the CRP may have to participate in a Program Improvement Plan (PIP).

Compliance issues are addressed throughout the year and discussed in monthly meetings held by the Consultants and reiterated in the CRP Quarterly Meeting.

Measures:

Annual Audits of Services

Progress:

Each CRP Consultant conducts at least 1 audit per month, with 4 consultants, that totals 12 audits per year.

Measures:

Corrective Action Plans Program Improvement Plans

Progress:

There were two (2) Program Improvement Plans implemented in PY 2022-2023.

Scorecard

Progress:

There have been challenges with generating scorecards in a manner that reflects accurate data. The CRP Branch Manager has communicated frequently with the Program, Policy, and Support Branch to address issues. Resolution is ongoing.

Goal 3:

Seek alternative strategies for providing and funding Extended Services

Objective 3.1:

Provide another source of extended services, is if available, so there will be no interruption of services for individuals with significant disabilities.

Strategies:

- Seek input from staff and other stakeholders such as education, service providers and individuals with disabilities on extended services.

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- Identify potential strategies for the provision of services.
- Identify potential funding sources. (2023)
- Update the Supported Employment Service Fee Memorandum to include extended services to youth.

Measure:

- Additional funding secured.

Progress:

KY VR developed service fee codes for extended services for IPS, Traditional, and Customized Supported Employment services. Extended services are only to be used by youth with a disability between the ages of 14-21. VR is unable to use funding for extended services to adults participating in supported employment. KY VR participated in conversations regarding the 1915 (i) waiver to expand their service delivery coverage to include supported employment. If approved, those with the (i) waiver could access extended services after funding from VR.

D. 2. Performance on the performance accountability indicators under Section 116 of WIOA for the most recently completed program year, reflecting actual and negotiated levels of performance. Explain any discrepancies in the actual and negotiated levels; and

WIOA Section 116 (b) (2) (A) and its implementing regulations 34 CFR 361.155 (a) (1) establish the six primary indicators of performance. They are as follows:

- Employment Rate in the 2nd Quarter After Exit
- Employment Rate in the 4th Quarter After Exit
- Median Earnings in the 2nd Quarter After Exit
- Credential Attainment rate
- Measurable Skill gains (MSG) Rate
- Effectiveness in Serving Employers (Statewide)

Kentucky is committed to gathering the collective data required under section 116 of WIOA for all the core partners. KYSTATS and state agencies will work with the

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state board to ensure required reports for the performance accountability are completed to the best of the state's ability.

OVR is seeking Technical Assistance from the VRTAC-QE for employment and the VRTAC-QM for quality management. OVR has established the following goals that includes strategies that address OVR's performance on the WIOA accountability measures.

The RSA team has reviewed with Kentucky the quarterly data dashboards. RSA data rankings for PY 2022 for Kentucky are as follows. For the Median Earnings PY 20 OVR is in the 1st Quartile at \$7,768 (met). OVR is in the 2nd Quartile for the 2nd Quarter Employment rate at 59% (met). 4th quarter Employment Rate at 46.9% (met) in the 3th Quartile and Credential Attainment Rate at 27.0% in the 4th Quartile (met). For Measurable Skill Gains for PY22, OVR is in the 4th Quartile at 30.7% (not met) %.

OVR met all of the negotiated rates except for Measurable Skill Gains. The negotiated rate was 38%. OVR fell below the negotiated rates at 7.3%. OVR has provided staff training on timely data entry. This continues to be an area of needed improvement in order to accurately capture the attainment of measurable skill gains in the system. Another factor is the difficulty staff have in obtaining this information in a timely manner from VR consumers.

The current Kentucky OVR VR Case Management System (CMS); a web-based system used to collect required data, enforce workflow rules, verify data accuracy, authorize and pay for consumer services, and produce a variety of monthly and real time reports; was implemented in October 2008. The system was designed to be fully accessible with particular attention to usability with screen reading technology - a goal that none of the "off the shelf" options for case management systems for vocational rehabilitation agencies could meet at the time.

The current CMS system has reached its useful life expectancy. OVR is in process of development of a new system with a vendor. In the interim, the current system is being modified to meet the data collection requirements for common measures as well as the additional data elements required for RSA 911 quarterly reporting. The current system has allowed for us to collect the necessary data and produce accurate reports prior to the due dates for Rehabilitation Services Administration and common measures reporting.

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D. 3. The use of funds reserved for innovation and expansion activities (Sections 101(a)(18) and 101(a)(23) of the Rehabilitation Act) (e.g., SRC, SILC).

OVR will use innovation and expansion funds to support the Statewide Council for Vocational Rehabilitation (SCVR, Kentucky's SRC), including all meeting expenses and expenses related to conducting an annual survey of consumer satisfaction; the Annual Report of the council; the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment, Establishment Projects and support of the Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC).

The Kentucky Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) will provide the amount of \$65,000 each year for innovation and expansion activities from Basic Support Grant Funds for the SILC. The SILC provided OVR a resource plan that outlines the funding allowable under 34 CFR 361.35 Innovation and Expansion Activities Resource Plans for Statewide Independent Living Councils. The funds will be utilized for the support of the salary of the SILC Coordinator and expenses of the Council. The Division Director of Blind services represents the agency on the Council. The SILC is now their own 501C 3.

Statewide Council for Vocational Rehabilitation Annual Report

The recommended theme for the 2023 Annual Report was "Building On A Solid foundation" signifying the strength of OVR's organizational foundation. That foundation is the belief that employment shall be considered the first and primary option for persons with disabilities of working age who desire to become employed. The annual report contained a summary of agency statistics, consumer stories and an overview of the agency programs and successes throughout the year.

OVR Satisfaction Survey

Since 1996, the Human Development Institute (HDI) at the University of Kentucky has coordinated the annual Kentucky Office of Vocational Rehabilitation Consumer Satisfaction Survey at the request of the Statewide Council for Vocational Rehabilitation. As s part of federal requirements, OVR has collaborated with the Statewide Council for Vocational Rehabilitation (SCVR), the state's SRC, and the University of Kentucky Human Development Institute (HDI) since 1996 to coordinate the annual OVR Consumer Satisfaction Survey (CSS). The most recent survey was for cases closed between October 2021–September 2022. The CSS was presented to the SCVR at the quarterly meeting on April 24, 2023. The sample of people randomly selected to participate was stratified to reflect the population of all consumers with cases closed in fiscal year

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2022. IQS Research contacted consumers by email and/or telephone in January through March of 2023 to participate in the survey. A total of 1,042 individuals participated in the survey which was available as both a telephone and online survey, with responses included from each of the districts. Phone surveys accounted for 38.1% of responses and 61.8% of responses were collected via online surveys. The overall response rate for the survey was 23.8%. There was a 46% response rate via phone contacts and 18% via email contacts. HDI compiled the results, and the final report was reviewed by the SCVR Consumer Services and Program Evaluation Committee prior to HDI presenting to the entire council during the April 2023 quarterly meeting. A total of 1,042 individuals participated in the survey with responses received from each of the 19 field districts. The overall statewide consumer satisfaction was 88.8% with an average score of 3.49 on a four-point scale (1 = very poor, 2 = poor, 3 = good, and 4 = very good).

Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA)

OVR contracted with the University of Kentucky, Human Development Institute to complete the triennial Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA) to identify gaps in existing services that can be reduced through programs and policies by the KYOVR. A mixed method of online surveys and forums was used to collect insights about the rehabilitation needs of Kentuckians with disabilities. The insights gained from the CSNA will provide the information needed for the development of the State Plan for services. The Needs Assessment was carried out by OVR staff working with the staff and faculty at the Human Development Institute (HDI).

Establishment Projects

OVR established contracts with four community rehabilitation providers for Individual Placement and Supports (IPS) projects for a four-year period. IPS is an evidence-based supported employment program, based on eight principles, including Rapid Job Development, Competitive Employment, Systematic Job Development, Integrated Services, Benefits Planning, Zero Exclusion, Time-Unlimited Supports, and Worker Preferences. The IPS Model of Supported Employment has proven to be a successful approach for individuals with Serious Mental Illness and Substance Use. Funding through these contracts will be used to provide IPS Supported Employment (SE) for individuals with Serious Mental Illness (SMI), Substance Use Disorders, and also to individuals with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities. KY OVR will continue to be a partner in the IPS International Learning Collaborative and will provide data that may/can be used throughout partnering efforts.

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OVR established contracts with three community rehabilitation providers for Customized Employment for a four-year period under the Marc gold & Associates model of customized employment. MG & A provides technical assistance and training in support of community inclusion of people with the most significant disabilities to national and state agencies, nonprofit and educational agencies that impact the lives of individuals with disabilities and their families.

Section E: Supported Employment Services, Distribution of Title VI Funds, and Arrangements and Cooperative Agreements for the Provision of Supported Employment Services

E. 1. Acceptance of title VI funds:

(A) VR agency requests to receive title VI funds.

E. 2. If the VR agency has elected to receive title VI funds, Section 606(b)(3) of the Rehabilitation Act requires VR agencies to include specific goals and priorities with respect to the distribution of Title VI funds received under Section 603 of the Rehabilitation Act for the provision of supported employment services. Describe the use of Title VI funds and how they will be used in meeting the goals and priorities of the Supported Employment program.

Funding will be used for the implementation of supported employment services throughout KY. Funds will be utilized through the current Service Fee Memorandum payment structure to Community Rehabilitation Program providers who provide supported employment services, which is currently based on an outcome payment system. More specifically, CRPs will receive payment for supported employment services when the consumer has worked in competitive integrated employment for thirty-days (30), sixty-days (60), and at ninety-days (90). If the consumer requires additional supported employment services beyond 90-days, then this may be provided by utilizing Additional Supported Employment Services. These payments are available for consumers who may require customized employment, Individual Placement and Support (IPS), which is an evidenced-based model of SE for individuals with Serious Mental Illness (SMI), or for those who may benefit from the more traditional model of SE. The rates used by KY VR are similar or higher than other states, which are designed to assist in obtaining new CRPs and creating higher sustainability among existing CRPs. For example, IPS now has 21 providers throughout the state and has now expanded to 76 counties.

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E. 3. Supported employment services may be provided with Title 1 or Title VI funds following placement of individuals with the most significant disabilities in employment. In accordance with Section 101(a)(22) and Section 606(b)(3) of the Rehabilitation Act, describe 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; and the timing of transition to extended services.

Supported employment offers more than just the assistance needed to find and learn a job. It provides the necessary ongoing support to help an individual maintain employment. Kentucky has 89 supported employment providers throughout the state. Individualized strategies are also utilized to arrange for supported employment services outside of “organized programs” when necessary (i.e., coworkers at the job site may provide support paid for with various resources; independent supported employment specialists may be hired, etc.). More than three-fourths of Kentucky’s 120 counties have access to supported employment programs. The lack of accessible and dependable transportation often limits access to supported job opportunities.

Extended services are provided by each local supported employment program utilizing funds from a myriad of sources, including the Department for Behavioral Health, Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities (DBHDID), the Kentucky Council on Developmental Disabilities, city and county governments, United Way, fund-raising campaigns, PASS funding, Medicaid, Supports for Community Living Waiver funds, Michelle P waiver funds and other resources. Most programs utilize a combination of funding sources for the provision of extended services. Natural supports are encouraged (such as co-workers, peers, etc.) and are carefully monitored by the supported employment provider.

Kentucky OVR’s partner, the Department of Behavioral Health, Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities (DBHDID), has developed a new Medicaid Waiver that would more adequately fund supported employment services for people with developmental disabilities. The Supports for Community Living Waiver 2 (SCL2) effective in 2014 calendar year increased the fee structure and modified the service definitions for supported employment. The Michelle P., ABI, and 1915 C waivers also pay for supported employment services.

Kentucky’s supported employment programs have primarily served individuals with intellectual disability and individuals with chronic mental illness. This is

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largely due to greater availability of funding for extended services for these two groups. Individuals with other disabilities are served if funding for extended services are available and if the supported employment provider has the expertise to meet that individual's needs for employment training and support.

Kentucky has become the 12th state to participate in the Individual Placement and Support (IPS) model of supported employment, which is an evidenced-based practice. The goal is to demonstrate the effectiveness of the IPS model for supported employment for people with serious mental illness throughout Kentucky. In July 2011, four sites in Kentucky began pilot site implementation. In 2012, two sites were added. In 2013, three sites were added. In 2014 BHDDID required that all Community Mental Health Centers implement the IPS program as one of the four evidence-based practices required in their state plan. A Statewide Coordinator, employed through the University of Kentucky, Human Development Institute, oversees the pilot sites. In 2021, the OVR began the process to implement 4 Establishment Project contracts to expand IPS in KY. This initiative was successful and began implementation in March of 2023. Two of these contracts are designed to serve individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. This is an innovative strategy by KY VR, and information obtained through this process will be shared with other state VR agencies and countries within the national IPS Learning Community.

Currently there are 21 providers in KY that provide IPS supported employment services, which serves 76 of the 120 counties in Kentucky. OVR has implemented an agreement with the University of Kentucky for the purpose of increasing technical and fidelity monitoring to support new IPS providers. OVR will continue to explore establishment projects for prospective expansion initiatives with community rehabilitation providers as the existing contracts begin to phase out, which may not exceed four years.

The OVR and the Kentucky Division of Behavioral Health collaborate as Team Leading agencies for the project. The Kentucky Association for Persons in Supported Employment (KY APSE) has been successful in creating greater supported employment awareness among the legislators in Kentucky's General Assembly. These awareness/advocacy efforts will continue with the goal of increased statewide funding allocations and possible supported employment legislation to create a more solid funding base for extended services.

QUALITY Pursuant to federal regulations, supported employment services provided by approved vendors must contain these elements: 1) competitive work; 2) integrated work settings; and 3) provision of extended services. To ensure that

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supported employment services are provided according to regulation, the following guidelines must be met:

- 1.) Services will be provided to individuals with the most significant disabilities who have a documented need for supported employment services, including extended services.
- 2.) Work will be performed on a full-time or part-time basis. Everyone in supported employment and his/her OVR counselor shall jointly establish in the IPE an appropriate goal for the number of hours per week that will maximize the individual's vocational potential.
- 3.) Work must take place in integrated settings where most workers do not have disabilities.
- 4.) Wages must follow the Fair Labor Standards Act. Each supported employee will have a goal of earning at least minimum wage. Kentucky's supported employment providers adhere to the following principles:
 - The supported employment concept assumes that all persons, regardless of degree of disability, have the capacity and should be afforded the opportunity to participate in real employment with appropriate support.
 - Emphasis is placed on recognizing and maximizing opportunities in the workplace rather than just providing skills training.
 - The purpose of the program is employment with all the general expectations of a job such as wages, job security, and performing meaningful work. Job Development rather than Job Placement is the focus.
 - Ongoing, extended services are tailored to meet the needs of the consumer.
 - Individuals are offered choices in the selection and maintenance of jobs. Decisions about appropriate services are made jointly with the individual and/or the family, the supported employment provider, and the VR counselor.
 - Integration on the job site is recognized as necessary and important.

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- Opportunities are available for non-work interactions with non-disabled workers. Interactions with non-disabled co-workers are a part of regular job responsibilities. “Natural supports” are developed and emphasized.

Extended services are proactive, not merely reactive. For example, plans are developed with individuals in anticipation of career advancement rather than merely waiting for a job loss, lay off, company closing, etc., before seeking other opportunities. The primary staff responsible for providing supported employment services are “job coaches,” “job trainers,” and/or “supported employment specialists.” Positions are both full and part-time, depending on the size and service territory of the local provider. Training and Consultation for staff is provided by the Supported Employment Branch according to the needs of the provider. Completion of the Supported Employment Training Project is a requirement for all CRP Employment Specialists. This is funded through a Memorandum of Agreement between the Department of Behavioral Health Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities and the OVR. The Supported Employment Training Project is conducted by the University of Kentucky’s Human Development Institute.

Technical assistance is also provided by the OVR CRP Branch staff. A CRP manual and other policies and guidelines were developed for vocational rehabilitation counselors and CRP staff. These are periodically revised and updated so that staff may better understand the rehabilitation process regarding supported employment. Seminars, workshops, and training awareness sessions are arranged and/or participated in throughout the state with various agencies and organizations that can assist with funding, conversion, employment, and other related supported employment issues. Meetings of this nature are regularly held with such groups as The Arc of Kentucky, the Kentucky Commonwealth Council on Developmental Disabilities, Community Mental Health Centers, Kentucky Consortium for Values Based Training, KY APSE, Kentucky Rehabilitation Association, and others. The quality of supported employment outcomes is assessed individually. Such issues as Consumer satisfaction, earnings, benefits, employee and employer satisfaction, the degree of integration, availability of dependable transportation, co-worker support, socialization, work environment, and provision of support services are important. On a regular basis, the CRP Branch staff conducts technical assistance visits with each provider for quality assurance purposes. As well, each supported employment provider has established ongoing strategies to measure customer satisfaction.

EXTENT as a part of the eligibility determination process for the OVR services, supported employment will be considered as a possible vocational outcome for

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individuals with the most significant disabilities. The agency is now in an order of selection, serving all priority categories of services. The OVR will be able to provide supported employment services through approved vendors and/or individual providers.

These services include:

- 1.) Development of a Person-Centered Employment Plan (PCEP). Vocational Profile, or Career Profile with recommendations for job- development;
- 2.) Individually designed job development services, including assistance with customization, job carving, reasonable accommodation, technology and/or other support strategies;
- 3.) Intensive on-the-job skills training and other support services provided by supported employment specialists and/or co-workers and employers;
- 4.) Time-unlimited follow-up services (including regular contact with employer, trainee, parent, guardian, or others deemed appropriate) throughout the consumer's term of employment;
- 5.) Other services needed to support the individual, such as travel, training, employment advocacy, non-employment advocacy, and counseling; and
- 6.) Development of a Long-Term Support Plan, which includes an outline of the extended services to be provided, and a plan for review and update. The amount, frequency and type of services will be based on the needs of each individual once eligibility is established for supported employment. If off-job-site monitoring is determined to be appropriate, the monitoring, at a minimum, will consist of two meetings per month with the individual and one meeting each month with the employer. Extended services for individuals not considered as youth will be the responsibility of other state agencies, private organizations, and other sources of funding. These services will be considered and planned for prior to an individual receiving the services listed above. Vendor status is not approved unless assurance is made of the availability of funding for extended services. If extended services are not fully assured at the onset of the IPE, the Vocational Rehabilitation counselor and the OVR CRP Branch staff will participate with the provider in planning for these services before the Vocational Rehabilitation case is closed.

The OVR conducted a statewide survey of field counselors to explore the need and availability of Customized Supported Employment services for individuals

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with the most significant disabilities. It was expected, due to Section 511 of WIOA, that there would be an increase in the need and demand for Customized Supported Employment Services. Fifty-two percent (52%) stated that there are Community Rehabilitation Program (CRP) providers in their area that provide CSE. However, 62% also stated that it's not readily available due to limited staff or oversized caseloads. Around 93% of the counselor's state that only 3 or fewer of their individuals have been able to utilize this service due to lack of availability. When asked if there was a need for CSE in their area, overwhelmingly, 85% stated that there was a need. Over 46% stated that they have at least 4 or more consumers on their caseloads that could benefit from CSE. Over 17% state that they have at least 8 or more consumers that need this service.

As a result, the OVR implemented 3 Establishment Project MOAs to assist in making this service readily available to individuals with the most significant disabilities in the areas of the state that need it most. As existing MOAs approach expiration, consideration will be given to new MOA recipients for continued expansion of customized employment. OVR is also exploring the implementation of a customized employment fidelity scale. The OVR CRP Branch staff participates in supported and customized employment Community of Practice meetings, which includes ongoing discussions pertaining to the development and implementation of fidelity scales.

The CRP Branch within the OVR is making this a main priority to ensure the needs of the individuals being served are met, which will assist them in accomplishing their vocational goals and dreams.

Timing of Transition to Extended Services

Currently, transition from Title VI, Part B funds to various other individually determined funding sources begins 90-days post-placement in the job. The transition to extended services funding is completed (generally) after 90 days on the job. Monitoring of services continues for a minimum of 90 additional days to assure that the job is stable. The current model is under review. Consideration of a new payment structure is being explored for the purpose of building capacity and increasing sustainability among CRPs in all models of supported employment.

Extended services then continue by the provider indefinitely using funds other than Title VI, Part B. The VR case is closed when the supported employment provider, the VR counselor, and the consumer determine that stabilization has been achieved. Stabilization is measured for each individual by considering all circumstances including support needs, consumer choice and satisfaction

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regarding services, and employer feedback. Extended services are funded and made available without delay for youth with the most significant disabilities.

Extended Services are those services provided to individuals with the most significant disabilities, which include youth with the most significant disabilities. Services may be provided by a state agency, a private nonprofit organization, employer, or any other appropriate resource when the individual no longer receives support services from the agency. OVR will determine the need for and fund services on a case-by case basis dependent upon each individual's need for services. OVR will reserve and expend half (50%) of the State's allotment for the provision of supported employment services and extended services to youth with the most significant disabilities.

Extended services will be available for youth without delay for a period not to exceed four years or until the youth no longer meets the definition of a youth with a disability. OVR will work with providers to ensure another source of extended services to youth are available so there will be no interruption of services for individuals with significant disabilities.

E. 4. Sections 101(a)(22) and 606(b)(4) of the Rehabilitation Act require the VR agency to describe efforts to identify and arrange, including entering into cooperative agreements, with other State agencies and other appropriate entities in order to provide supported employment services. The description must include extended services, as applicable, to individuals with the most significant disabilities, including the provision of extended services to youth with the most significant disabilities in accordance with 34 C.F.R. § 363.4(a) and 34 C.F.R. § 361.5(c)(19)(v).

The Office will seek to expand services to unserved and underserved counties as well as unserved and underserved disability groups, including youth with the most significant disabilities. We will encourage continuous improvement in supported employment by monitoring the state fiscal climate for opportunities to partner with KY APSE (Association for Persons in Supporting Employment First) to advocate for increased state funding for extended services.

OVR will continue to do the following:

- 1.) Maximize existing dollars for extended services through collaborative agreements and contracts, increasing knowledge of Kentucky's plan for

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self—determination strategies, especially within the Medicaid Waiver (Supports for Community Living, Michelle P) programs;

- 2.) Partner with local Community Mental Health Centers;
- 3.) Recruit new Providers;
- 4.) Provide training and technical assistance to new supported employment agencies;
- 5.) Provide consultation and technical assistance to OVR staff and providers as needed; and
- 6.) Research better ways to fund and/or deliver services.

Meetings with the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities (ID/DD) are ongoing to strengthen the partnership by leveraging funding to expand IPS SE services in unserved and underserved areas.

For example, the OVR worked diligently over a two-year period on development and implementation of Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) approved Establishment Project MOAs for the sole purpose of expanding IPS to individuals with serious mental illness and individuals with ID/DD. Four IPS MOAs were implemented in the spring of 2023. Two of which are designated for ID/DD. KY is one of just a couple of states in the country that is utilizing this evidenced-based model for individuals with ID/DD. KY OVR will assess and evaluate this initiative and report findings to the National IPS Learning Collaborative, so information can be used by other states who may be considering similar initiatives. Additionally, a contract was developed and implemented with the University of Kentucky's Human Development Institute for the purpose of strengthening the infrastructure for IPS sustainability by expanding technical assistance support and fidelity monitoring. Through this contract, a State IPS Trainer and IPS Fidelity Monitor were hired to provide needed support for staff hired through the Establishment Project MOAs.

Additionally, the OVR developed Customized Employment initiatives and sought RSA approval for the implementation of three (3) Customized Supported Employment (CSE) Establishment Project MOAs for the purpose of expanding customized employment throughout Kentucky. Through an existing contract with the University of Kentucky's Human Development Institute (UK-HDI), training opportunities for employment specialists throughout the state were increased by implementing a training scholarship program. This allows Employment Specialists

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to apply for scholarships to participate in the Leadership Series, which provides training in Social Role Valorization, Discovery, Job Development, and Systematic Instruction with the last three offering certification opportunities.

The OVR established billing codes for extended services for youth who are participating in supported employment. The purpose of this billing method is to aid in the expansion of services to youth in supported employment with collateral benefits that address sustainability concerns among CRPs. Implementation of billing for Extended Services to youth in supported employment began in October of 2022.

Extended Services are those services provided to individuals with the most significant disabilities, which may include youth with the most significant disabilities. Services may be provided by the State agency, a private nonprofit organization, employer, or any other appropriate resource when the individual no longer receives support services from the agency. OVR will determine the need for and fund services on a case-by-case basis dependent upon each individual's need for services.

OVR will reserve and expend half (50%) of the State's allotment for the provision of supported employment services and extended services to youth with the most significant disabilities.

Extended services will be available for youth without delay for a period not to exceed four years or until the youth no longer meets the definition of a "youth with a disability". OVR will work with providers to ensure another source of extended services is available so there will be no interruption of services for individuals with significant disabilities.

The Office will collaborate with the Department of Behavioral Health, Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities (DBHDID) to expand supported employment options to unserved and underserved groups, as well as youth with the most significant disabilities without delay.

- 1.) Participation in Commissions established as a result of state legislation, including Commission on Services and Supports for Individuals with an Intellectual Disability and other Developmental Disabilities (HB 144); Commission on Services and Supports to People with Mental Illness and Dual Diagnoses (HB 843); and the Advisory Council on Autism Spectrum Disorders.
- 2.) Development of partnerships with Kentucky Medicaid Waiver Programs (Supports for Community Living, Michelle P, Home and Community Based

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Waivers, and Acquired Brain Injury Waivers) so that these sources of extended support funding can be fully utilized; and

- 3.) Utilization of interagency workgroups to develop better understanding and expand awareness of work incentives (such as in SCL Waiver, Social Security, etc.).
- 4.) Developing and implementing the IPS Supported Employment programs for consumers with severe mental illness within the community mental health centers.

Section F: Annual Estimates

F. 1. A. VR Program Estimates for Next Federal Fiscal Year

Priority Category (if applicable)	No. of Individuals Eligible for Services	No. of Eligible Individuals Expected to Receive Services under VR Program	Costs of Services using Title I Funds	No. of Eligible Individuals Not Receiving Services (if applicable)
1	19,168	16,676	18,252,882.56	0
2	5,717	4,974	5,376,894	0
3	907	789	588,988.50	0
4	29	25	4,407.50	0

F. 1. B. Supported Employment Program Estimates for Next Federal Fiscal Year

Priority Category (if applicable)	No. of Individuals Eligible for Services	No. of Eligible Individuals Expected to Receive Services under Supported Employment Program	Costs of Services using Title I and Title VI Funds	No. of Eligible Individuals Not Receiving Services (if applicable)
1 & 2	1,718	FY 2024 1,008	FY 2024 \$3,458,432	N/A
--	--	FY 2025 1,038	FY2025 \$3,562,185	N/A

Section G: Order of Selection

- G. 1. Pursuant to Section 101(a)(5) of the Rehabilitation Act, this description must be amended when the VR agency determines, based on the annual estimates described in description (f), that VR services cannot be provided to all eligible individuals with disabilities in the State who apply for and are determined eligible for services.**

The VR agency is not implementing an order of selection and all eligible individuals will be served.

- G. 2. For VR agencies that have defined priority categories describe--**

G. 2. A. The justification for the order

OVR utilizes a multimodal approach to assessing the resources available to allow the agency to provide vocational rehabilitation services to all eligible individuals who apply, such as the following:

- Population data related to disability incidence;
- Short and long-term budgetary outlook;
- Short and long-term staffing projections;
- Comprehensive Needs Assessment;
- Waiting list for services;
- VR Counselor caseload size and expenditures; and
- SRC input Public Forum Input.

The agency carefully analyzes information from these sources to predict its ability to provide quality services to eligible individuals with disabilities as required by the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended.

According to data from the 2021 American Community Survey (ACS), published in the Annual Compendium of Disability Statistics, 39% of Kentucky civilians living in the community report having a disability. According to this resource, Kentucky's

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overall population is 3,414,123 people. Using the percentage in 2021 and applying it to the population numbers, there is an estimated 1,330,951 people in the state of Kentucky who have a disability. The overall rate of individuals with a disability in the United States is 28.3% for 2021. The rate in Kentucky is higher than the rate nationally by 10.7%. The percentage of residents of working age (18-64) in Kentucky who are employed is 76% for 2021. The national average was 76.6% in 2021. In this instance of employment, the rate in Kentucky is slightly lower than the rate nationally.

In FFY 2021, 2022 and year to date FY 2023, agency staff along with fiscal and the State Council of Vocational Rehabilitation reviewed on a quarterly and often monthly basis data on numbers served and agency fiscal resources to determine the need to open or close categories. During FFY 2022 and year to date in 2023, budgets and fiscal resources were reviewed monthly by the agency Executive Leadership Team (ELT). Information was presented to the State Rehabilitation Council at each meeting.

G. 2. B. The order (priority categories) to be followed in selecting eligible individuals to be provided VR services ensuring that individuals with the most significant disabilities are selected for services before all other individuals with disabilities; and

The priority categories to be followed in selecting eligible individuals to be provided VR services to ensure those individuals with the most significant disabilities are selected for services before other individuals with disabilities are as follows:

- Category 1. Eligible individuals with a most significant disability and that limits three (3) or more functional capacities.
- Category 2: Eligible individuals with a most significant disability that limits two (2) functional capacities.
- Category 3: Eligible individuals with a significant disability that limits one (1) functional capacity.
- Category 4: Eligible individuals with a non-significant disability.

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G. 2. C. The VR agency’s goals for serving individuals in each priority category, including how the agency will assist eligible individuals assigned to closed priority categories with information and referral, the method in which the VR agency will manage waiting lists, and the projected timelines for opening priority categories. NOTE: Priority categories are considered open when all individuals in the priority category may be served.

Once eligibility is determined, the significance or non-significance of the disability must be established. As part of the eligibility decision, the counselor determines whether the individual has a physical or mental impairment or combination of impairments that seriously limit one or more functional capacities in terms of employment outcome. In order to be considered significantly disabled, an individual is expected to require multiple vocational rehabilitation services, one of which is assumed to be vocational rehabilitation counseling and guidance.

Presumption of Eligibility for Social Security Recipients and Beneficiaries means that an individual who has been determined eligible under Title I or Title XVI of the Social Security Act is:

Considered to be an individual with a significant disability; and Presumed to be eligible for vocational rehabilitation services under Title I (provided the individual intends to achieve an employment outcome consistent with the unique strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities, interests, and informed choice of the individual) unless the office can demonstrate by clear and convincing evidence that such individual is incapable of benefiting from vocational rehabilitation services in terms of employment outcome due to the severity of the disability of the individual.

If the Executive Director and State Rehabilitation Council determine that the agency lacks available funds and/or staff resources to serve all consumers, the office shall follow an order of selection to give priority for services according to a ranking of categories of consumers based on the severity of the disability. The Executive Director of the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation shall direct the order of selection by designating in written memorandum, the priority categories to be served.

Order of Selection will not use any of the following factors in determining eligible individual’s residency duration, type of disability; age, gender, race, color, or national origin, source of referral, type of expected employment outcome, need

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for specific services or anticipated cost of services, or the income level of the individual or its family.

The order of selection shall be implemented on a statewide basis.

The order of selection shall be implemented to assure that eligible individuals with the most significant disabilities are provided services before other eligible individuals.

The order of selection shall not affect: a) the acceptance of referrals and applicants; b) the provision of assessment services to determine whether an individual is eligible for vocational rehabilitation services; c) the individual's priority under the order of selection; d) services needed by any eligible individual who has begun to receive services under an individualized plan for employment prior to the effective date of the order of selection, irrespective of the severity of the eligible individual's disability; and e) individuals requiring post-employment services. The office will ensure that all funding arrangements for providing services under the State plan, including third-party arrangements and awards under the establishment authority, are consistent with the order of selection.

An eligible individual shall be immediately reclassified into a higher priority category whenever appropriate justification exists in the case record of the individual.

The office shall conduct an assessment to determine whether an individual is eligible for vocational rehabilitation services and the individual's priority under the order of selection. The VR Counselor determines the eligibility of the individual and their priority category based on a review of the data from the assessment.

In the order of selection each eligible individual within a closed priority category shall be placed on a waiting list until such time as the priority category is opened. The process for the waiting list is as follows:

Once an individual has been determined eligible within a closed priority category by the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor, the individual will receive notification through the counselor in writing of:

- The individual's assignment to a particular category;
- The priority categories currently being served;
- The individual's right to appeal the category assignment and the availability of the Client Assistance Program (CAP);

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- Information and referral services; and
- The individual is given the option to be placed on a waiting list by date of application until such a time the priority category can be opened, and the individual employment plan can be developed and initiated.

The waiting list will be maintained by the Director of Field Services and reviewed quarterly by both the Director of Field Services and the Regional Managers.

Consumers will be contacted annually to inform them the status of Order of Selection and their specific priority category. Additional information, (I & R) will be given. The consumer will be asked regarding their preference for remaining on the waiting list.

At the time when funds become adequate and a priority category will be opened, the following sequence of action will occur for those individuals in a closed category:

- 1.) Priority Category Two (2) will be opened and individuals on the waiting list will be served by date of application.
- 2.) The office will assure that eligible individuals, who do not meet the order of selection criteria for the priority categories, shall have access to services provided through the information and referral system in accordance with the 1973 Rehabilitation Act.
- 3.) These services will include referral to other Federal and State programs including the statewide workforce investment programs. The process for this is as follows:
 - The agency will provide the individual with a notice of referral;
 - The notice will contain a point of contact for the program or service an individual is being referred to and any relevant information regarding services for the individual relating to the preparation, securing, obtaining or retaining of employment; and
 - Documentation of the nature and scope of information and referral services provided will be included in the individual service record and entered in the Case Management System (CMS).

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Individuals who are presumed to be significantly disabled because they receive SSA benefits will be further assessed to determine if they meet the agency's criteria for "individual with a most significant disability."

Consumers making the decision not to be placed on a waiting list after they receive notification of their priority category will be closed. They will receive notification from their VR Counselor that their case will close and of their right to appeal the agency's decision, including information on how to contact CAP. The notification will include information on how they may reapply for services in the future if their circumstances change or if the agency makes changes to order of selection.

When a request for services by an eligible individual is affected by the order of selection, the individual shall be immediately notified of such in writing and provided with information on procedures for individual rights for appeal, and how the Client Assistance Program may provide help in the process.

Quarterly, the Executive Director, State Rehabilitation Council and Executive Leadership Team along with fiscal staff will reevaluate the agency circumstances to determine whether or not the agency's resources are sufficient in serving all individuals or if there is a need to implement, establish or make changes in Order of Selection. At such time that the agency finds it is able to serve those individuals in any closed priority category, that category will be re-opened. If the Agency finds that they have the resources to serve some individuals but not all individuals in a priority category, the date of application will be utilized as a criterion for ranking individuals within a priority category. The timeline for this would be a year, unless the agency's financial situation should change, drastically. Circumstances that would allow this to occur include a decrease in the number of referrals or other sources that would result in additional funds, which could be utilized to serve these individuals.

When a priority category is to be opened for services, the Executive Director shall issue an implementing memorandum to staff, with instructions that appropriate services delayed under the order of selection may be provided.

G. 3. Has the VR agency elected to serve eligible individuals outside of the order of selection who require specific services or equipment to maintain employment?

No.

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Section H: Waiver of Statewideness

Not Applicable

Section I: Comprehensive System of Personnel Development

I. 1. Analysis of current personnel and projected personnel needs including—

I. 1. A. The number of personnel currently needed by the VR agency to provide VR services, broken down by personnel category; and

I. 1. B. The number and type of personnel that are employed by the VR agency in the provision of vocational rehabilitation services, including ratios of qualified vocational rehabilitation counselors to clients;

I. 1. C. Projections of the number of personnel, broken down by personnel category, who will be needed by the VR 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.

Personnel Category	No. of Personnel Employed	No. of Personnel Currently Needed	Projected No. of Personnel Needed in 5 Years
Accountant	1	0	0
Adaptive Equipment Specialist	1	1	1
Administrative Branch Manager	1	0	0
Administrative Section Supervisor	4	0	0
Admissions Counselor	2	0	0
Assistant	95	3	4
Assistant Director	4	1	3
Bioptic Driving Instructor	2	0	1
Budget Support Specialist	1	0	0

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Personnel Category	No. of Personnel Employed	No. of Personnel Currently Needed	Projected No. of Personnel Needed in 5 Years
Carpenter Finish	1	0	0
Consumer Services Coordinator	1	0	0
Deputy Executive Director	1	0	0
Disabilities Assistance Specialized Driver	3	0	1
District Food Operations Evaluator	2	0	0
Division Director	4	0	1
Dorm Counselor	4	0	0
Electronic Technician III	1	0	0
Employment Specialist	10	2	1
Executive Director	1	0	0
Executive Staff Advisor	1	0	0
Facilities Security Officer	6	0	1
Facility Administrator	1	0	0
Facility Maintenance Worker	3	0	0
Fiscal Manager	1	0	1
Grants Administrator	2	1	0
IL/OIB Specialist	9	0	2
Instructor	19	1	1
Interpreter I	1	0	0
Job Placement	4	0	0
Licensed Practical Nurse	4	1	0
Maintenance Manager	1	0	0
Mechanical Maintenance & Operations Technician	3	0	0
Nurse Supervisor	1	0	0
Occupational Therapist	3	1	0
Occupational Therapy Assistant	1	0	0
Office Support Assistant	2	0	0
Orientation & Mobility	2	0	0
Patient Aide I	3	0	0
Physical Therapist Assistant	1	0	0
Pre-ETS	6	0	0
Pre-ETS Specialist	1	0	0
Procedures Development Specialist II	1	0	0
Program Coordinator	2	0	0
Regional Program Manager	5	0	0
Registered Nurse	4	0	0

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Personnel Category	No. of Personnel Employed	No. of Personnel Currently Needed	Projected No. of Personnel Needed in 5 Years
Rehabilitation Care Aide	1	1	0
Rehabilitation Technologist	6	0	0
Resource Management Analyst	6	0	1
Speech Pathologist	2	0	2
Staff Assistant	1	0	0
Therapy Program Assistant	1	0	0
Training Development Specialist	2	0	0
Voc Rehab Counselor	134	7	34
Voc Rehab Manager	27	0	0
Vocational Evaluator	1	0	0
VR Administrator	20	3	6
VR Specialist	1	6	0
Work Experience Coordinator	1	0	0

I. 1. D. Ratio of qualified VR counselors to clients:

Kentucky OVR employed 134 qualified vocational rehabilitation counselors for this reporting period and had 44,929/134 active consumer cases for a 335 ratio of clients to counselors. This number includes potentially eligible cases in the amount of 15,568 so in removing that number it becomes 29,361/134 with a ratio of 219 client to counselor.

I. 1. E. Projected number of individuals to be served in 5 years:

Based on the latest estimated population for Kentucky from the U.S. Census Bureau, the National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental disabilities estimate of Kentucky adults in relation to the population, the 2021 Annual Disability Statistics Compendium population of Kentucky growth from 2017 – 2021, and agency consumer growth from 2022 – 2023 the projected number of consumers to be served over the next 5 years is 247,890.

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I. 2. Data and information on personnel preparation and development, recruitment and retention, and staff development, including the following:

I. 2. A. A list of the institutions of higher education in the State that are preparing VR professionals, by type of program; the number of students enrolled at each of those institutions, broken down by type of program; and 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.

Institute of Higher Education	Type of Program	No. of Students Enrolled	No. of Prior Year Graduates
University of Kentucky	Master of Counseling with a Clinical Mental Health Counseling (CMHC) or Rehabilitation Counseling (RC) Track	65 (43 in CMHC and 22 in RC)	18 (13 in CHMC and 5 in RC)
University of Kentucky	Undergraduate Interdisciplinary Disability Studies	17	7

I. 2. B. The VR agency’s plan for recruitment, preparation and retention of qualified personnel, which addresses the current and projected needs for qualified personnel; and the coordination and facilitation of efforts between the VR agency and institutions of higher education and professional associations to recruit, prepare, and retain personnel who are qualified, including personnel from minority backgrounds and personnel who are individuals with disabilities.

Recruitment for state government positions is coordinated through the Commonwealth of Kentucky Personnel Cabinet. The Cabinet advertises available positions on their website and shares the information with Linked In. In addition, all advertisements are shared statewide on the agency Kentucky KYOVR (KYOVR) listserv for those that may be interested in advancement opportunities or would like to share the information with others outside of the agency that may be interested in the applying, including agency consumers.

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The agency developed a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Team which presented and had approved a Strategic Plan. Within the strategic plan the first goal is “Staff Diversity: Recruit, hire and retain a diverse and inclusive staff to provide quality services to Kentuckians with Disabilities.” The agency is committed to this effort and the cabinet is supportive of this initiative. As result of the successful team format and progress they have made on this initiative, the Education and Labor Cabinet is establishing a DEI Council, and our agency team lead will serve on this council on our behalf.

Additional recruitment occurs because of KYOVR collaboration with the University of Kentucky for fieldwork experiences as well as internships for students when there are available staff to assume the supervision responsibilities. Multiple KYOVR staff serve on the University of Kentucky Advisory Board and attend annual meetings and ad hoc meetings that may occur. Participation this board allows the agency an opportunity to keep the university of apprised of agency goals, challenges and staffing needs while also allowing the university an opportunity to share their stats for the programs and provide updates to the KYOVR team.

In addition to the University of Kentucky Master of Counseling program, the agency also offers internship opportunities to other collegiate programs within the state that support degree programs in social work. With the ever-growing number of new hires from this related degree program, the agency is making efforts to provide exposure to our programs through additional university connections and fieldwork opportunities.

Retention of employees is being addressed in multiple ways. Pay equity has been addressed through agency supported increases, governor initiatives have created pay raises for all state employees and the agency promotes continuous development opportunities for career growth. In addition to agency efforts, the Education and Labor Cabinet now provides access to an Emerging Leaders Program that staff can apply to participate in for career development. Currently there are four agency staff participating in this initiative. Details regarding pay increase and other efforts are explained in subsequent paragraphs.

Retention issues surrounding pay have been addressed in multiple phases. In the spring of 2022, the agency was provided with approval from the Personnel Cabinet to bring all the current staff that were not already at the midpoint of their grade, to the midpoint. A new starting salary for all job classifications within the agency was created to enhance onboarding of new personnel. In addition to this change, the governor approved and provided an 8% increase for all state employees in July 2022 and another 6% was included in the budget for July 2023.

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The Governor announced in October 2023 that he has proposed the biennial budget to include a 6% increase in July 2024 and a 4% increase in July 2025 for all state employees. The midpoint raises increased starting salaries and additional pay increases through the Governor has made the agency more competitive in salaries and has helped stabilize agency retention. Some vocational rehabilitation professionals that left the agency due to pay have returned to their former positions. Exit interviews with departing staff prior to the raises indicated that the employees were leaving because of pay and not because of the work or the work environment and the return of these employees appears to verify that finding.

In addition to the raises that have taken place across the agency and state government, the Commonwealth of Kentucky Personnel Cabinet was charged by the legislators with reviewing all job classifications in the Commonwealth to ensure the relevance of the classification and the proper grading of the position based on the requirements of the job. Some reviews have resulted in increased pay for staff based on the education and experience required to fulfill the knowledge and skills for the position. The Personnel Cabinet has completed their review of all vocational rehabilitation specific positions. The reviews resulted in pay increases for the Vocational Rehabilitation Managers and Vocational Rehabilitation Specialists. The Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor classification series was changed from the former three classifications of “Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor, Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Certified I and Vocational Rehabilitation Certified II” to two classifications. The two positions are now titled “Voc Rehab Counselor” and “Voc Rehab Counselor Certified”. There was no downgrading or demotions because of the collapsing of the classifications. Those that qualified for higher level positions based on their qualification and certifications were automatically moved to their new title and grade. Those that did not have a change in their grade did not receive a pay increase nor did their job change, only their job title. The certified counselor classification requires the individual to be a Certified Rehabilitation Counselor.

The agency currently utilizes contract employees to provide additional supports for service delivery. This resource is used to supplement temporary needs but has historically been utilized due to the non-competitive salaries offered in the state positions for professional positions. The agency is reviewing this practice along with the current payrates of contracted professional services to determine if returning these professionals to the state system is achievable. These include such positions as interpreters and rehabilitation technologists. Professional services for mental health counselors, psychiatrists, and psychologists are and will be contracted through universities for services as needed. Temporary staff

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will continue to be utilized in high turnover positions such as cooks and second and third shift employees at our centers.

The Governor's Minority Management Trainee Program (GMMTP) is a state leadership program that assists in recruitment, preparation and retention within state agencies. GMMTP is a twelve-month transformational leadership development program designed to provide guidance and leadership development opportunities for minority employees in the merit system. A flagship program, the GMMTP has garnered respect and attention as a model for retaining and promoting minorities within state government. Staff interested and eligible for this program are encouraged to apply.

I. 2. C. Description of staff development policies, procedures, and activities that ensure all personnel employed by the VR agency receive appropriate and adequate training and continuing education for professionals and paraprofessionals:

- i.) 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
- ii.) Procedures for the acquisition and dissemination of significant knowledge from research and other sources to VR agency professionals and paraprofessionals and for providing training regarding the amendments to the Rehabilitation Act made by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act.

The agency believes that a well-trained professional staff is essential in providing quality services to individuals with disabilities and achieving competitive integrated employment outcomes for agency consumers. Training plans are based on federal laws, RSA monitoring findings, agency strategic plan, case reviews, continuous improvement initiatives, training needs assessment, staff and consumer input.

The agency utilizes both in-person and online resources for training from internal and external sources. Onboarding for the State of Kentucky, the Cabinet and KYOVR now includes web-based trainings offering more timely engagement. All the required trainings must be completed within 30 days of employment. These include Anti-Harassment, Workplace Violence Prevention, State Government

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Ethics, Security Awareness for Technology, Performance Evaluation Orientation and Accurate Time Reporting.

Skills Enhancement Training (SET) is the agency new employee orientation program. A new format has been developed to ensure that staff receive the two-week required training within the first 6 months of employment. This training occurs at least 4 times during the calendar year or as often as needed to accommodate new hires. Agenda items include Laws and Regulations, Organizational Structure, Specific Disabilities, Pre-Employment Training Services/Transition, Case Management, Referral and Application, Social Security, Eligibility, Follow Up and Case Closure, IPE's, Kentucky Business Enterprise Program, Diversity, Cost Sharing, Employer Services, Assistive Technology, Mental Health Issues, Visual Impairments, Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services, Kentucky Retaining Employment and Talent after Injury/Illness Network Retain (KY RETAIN), Engagement and information on both of the centers. To further enhance the new employee knowledge of the agency, two (2) of the sessions are held at the centers to showcase their programs for consumers and provide new staff with a tour of the facility. With the reformatting of SET, participants that completed the orientation training five (5) or more years ago are encouraged to attend the trainings again. Future plans are to require this "Re-Setting" at a minimum of every (5) years. Upon completion of the training the agency sends out an assessment survey to evaluate the training provided. Plans are moving forward to include a repeat assessment survey after 6 months to evaluate the usefulness of the training provided in their daily job duties.

New employees are also required to take a recently updated online training on the Client Assistance Program (CAP) developed in 2023 by the coordinator of that service. The training provides an overview of the services provided to consumers and processes for consumers to enlist the services of CAP if needed.

In April 2023 the agency conducted an assistant training focusing on the duties and responsibilities of the staff that provide support to the counselors and other agency other staff. In May 2024 the agency will conduct a statewide training for all employees providing 3 days of in-person presentations and workshops. A statewide training team with representation from all agency divisions is in place to work with the central office training team to develop an agenda that ensures the provided content applies to all classifications within the agency for pertinent professional development.

The agency counselor mentor program has grown into a program that is an essential component of successful new employee orientation for agency VR Counselors. New counselors receive training and guidance from a trained

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KYOVR Counselor Mentor. The rehabilitation counselor mentoring program was implemented in June 2002 with pilot programs and has been active since the completion of the pilot in 2003. Currently there are 21 counselors involved in the program. A Counselor Mentor Leadership oversees all aspects of this program including policies, procedures, recruitment, training materials and implementation of the annual training program for this group. The team consists of an administrator from central office, two field managers (one representing services to the blind and the other representing all other disability services) and appointed counselor mentors with required mentoring experience. There are 11 out of 19 districts represented within the mentoring program. Certified mentors are voluntary and receive no additional pay for their services. They are required to undergo additional training to maintain their mentor credentials. The development of the skills and knowledge required to perform this specific role provides an opportunity to build their resume' and prepares them to assume other leadership roles within the agency.

Eligibility requirements for an individual to apply for the KYOVR Counselor mentor program area as follows: an applicant must have the minimum of a bachelor's degree in a field of study reasonably related to vocational rehabilitation, such as vocational rehabilitation counseling, social work, psychology, disability studies, business administration, human resources, special education, supported employment, customized employment, and economics. An applicant must also have a minimum of three (3) years of experience as a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor, a Rehabilitation Counselor for the Blind (RCB), or a Rehabilitation Counselor for the Deaf (RCD) for the state of Kentucky if they are a CRC and submit a recommendation from their supervisor. If the applicant is not a CRC, they must have 5 years of experience. The applicant must have successfully completed probation. Applicants must complete a questionnaire with essays regarding their reasons for applying for the mentor program and submit a sanitized case that reflects their best casework. When the case is reviewed, the team reviews the application to determine if the deadline for submission was met, the appropriate documents for the application were provided, the case was sanitized and that the case contains the required documents as per federal law and agency policy. The Mentor Leadership Team reviews the application and case provided to determine admission into the program. If approved, the applicant attends an orientation that contains an overview of the mentor guide. All mentors are required to attend annual training designed by the mentor leadership team to hone their skills and knowledge for the mentoring process. The pandemic and salary discrepancies are variables that have impacted our ability to provide consequential data regarding the formal mentoring process on retention and improved competitive integrated employment outcomes. KYOVR

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leadership has charged the mentoring team to refocus their review to include updated data tracking the impact of this program on the areas identified.

In 2020 the agency was selected to participate in the Center for Innovative Training in Vocational Rehabilitation, an RSA grant through George Washington University. The introduction for the VR Development Groups YesLMS program is one benefit of participation in this grant as it provided staff access to an already developed VR specific training in an online format. In addition, to the training already developed, the agency training staff and staff in the counselor mentor program worked with Interworks from San Diego State University as a part of the CIT-VR grant to develop a Kentucky specific training for new counselors. In an ongoing effort to stay aware of trends and training developments, agency training staff regularly participate in the Community of Practice (CoP) meetings for Training Coordinators and Directors. Participation in the CoP allows agencies to share and receive information on innovative research, trainings, and materials available.

Due to the benefit and success of the YesLMS use, the agency contracted for access to this resource for all agency staff. This system provides staff access to already developed VR specific training in an online format. All trainings developed by the VR Development Group have certified rehabilitation counselor credits approved and available upon successful completion of the courses and quizzes associated. The system houses a large course library and developers continue to upload new relevant courses as they become available. Additionally, the system allows KYOVR to add agency specific courses to the library. Leadership and management staff can assign addition courses from the library to staff as needed. This is particularly beneficial when staff are dealing with development issues where training is available to assist them with being more successful in their work life. We find that this system is not only helpful to new employees, but also allows the agency to offer advanced training opportunities from national resources to all staff to broaden their 21st century knowledge of workforce innovations, systems and professional advancements.

The Carl D Perkins Vocational Training Center (CDPVTC) Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARP) certified which requires their employees to take training for certification compliance. These trainings include: Ethics and code of conduct, Education to stay current in the field, Education to reduce identified physical risks, Health and safety, Infectious diseases, Transportation safety, Onboarding (only new employees), Workforce development activities, Cybersecurity / HIPPA, Performance measurement (only new, managers staff), Use of positive interventions (student behavior), and Disability

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Awareness. The trainings offered online are a tremendous supplemental support for training offered onsite at the center.

Professional continuing education credits for assistive technology professionals occurs annually when the agency partners with the Kentucky Assistive Technology System (KATS) Network, Kentucky AgrAbility and Protection and Advocacy to coordinate a statewide training. The content includes current best practices, emerging trends and issues related to the various aspects of assistive technology. The Summer Assistive Technology Workshops are attended by KYOVR staff, AT professionals, educators, Occupational Therapists, Physical Therapists, and other professionals that have in interest in or contact with AT. KYOVR administers the KATS Network, the Commonwealth's Assistive Technology program. Rehabilitation Engineering and Assistive Technology Society of North America (RESNA) continuing education credits were offered as part of the training to ensure that all agency rehabilitation technology staff maintain the required credits for continuance of their professional certification.

The agency also encourages staff to utilize the training offered through other entities within and outside of state government. This type of information is disseminated via email to all staff. One partner in this endeavor is the University of Kentucky Human Development Institute (UKHDI) from the University of Kentucky. Employees also utilize the webinar series topics offered by UKHDI during a spring, summer and fall training program. Topics of 2023 included: Disability Pride: What's In a Name?, Traumatic Brain Injury; What is it and how does it manifest?, Oh, the Places You'll Go! – Transportation access in Kentucky, "The Art of the Grant Proposal" and Leadership in our Backyard: The History and Power of Advocacy in our State.

College and university level classes are highly encouraged for staff though the agency does not provide educational assistance currently. Obtaining an education degree may result in a reclassification if the reclassification also includes an increase in material duties assumed by the employee. The agency shares information with staff regarding formal educational training such as the Master of Rehabilitation Counselor degree. Included in the information are details about scholarships and grants that may be available to assist with educational expenses.

Agency staff are encouraged to participate in the Leadership and Diversity Conference hosted by the Kentucky Personnel Cabinet Office of Diversity Equality and Training. The most recent training took place in September 2023. As with many other conferences, this one took place in a virtual format which created a positive outcome of more employee participating in the event.

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Information regarding research and training pertinent to all vocational rehabilitation professionals and paraprofessionals is disseminated via email to all staff. In addition, the Executive Staff Advisor responsible for training, maintains a calendar of all training that has been disseminated along with a folder in a shared drive for all staff that contains a copy of all announcements that have been distributed along with any supporting documentation. Resources that have been shared throughout 2023 are from the following sources: National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research (NIDILRR), Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA), Vocational Rehabilitation Technical Assistance Center (VRTAC), National Technical Assistance Center on Transition: The Collaborative (NTACT:C), Workforce GPS, Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP), and the University of Kentucky Human Development Institute (HDI).

KYOVR makes every effort to have representation at and participate in national, regional, and state training events. In 2023 KYOVR staff represented the agency at the following conferences: National Rehabilitation Association Annual Conference, , Kentucky Rehabilitation Association Annual Conference, Kentucky Association of Persons for Supported Employment Conference, Kentucky Individual Placement and Support Conference, Assistive Technology Workshop, Kentucky Governor's Conference on Leadership, Equality, Accessibility and Diversity, Sagebrush Conference for Randolph-Sheppard, Council of State Administrator of Vocational Rehabilitation, National Council of State Agencies for the Blind, National Federal for the Blind, American Federation for the Blind, VR Technical Assistance Webinars, Kentucky Chamber of Commerce Inclusive Workforce Summit and Southeast Rehabilitation Institute on Deafness. Additionally, we have staff participate in the National Rehabilitation Leadership Institute that provides them with additional knowledge to share with staff based on shared ideas that learn within the program.

The agency provides training opportunities to address identified needs from the respective supervisors or as determined based on case review processes and advancements in the field of rehabilitation. Staff are supported in attending associational meetings for the rehabilitation professions such as Kentucky Rehabilitation Association and Association for Persons for Supporting Employment 1st. Staff participated in the Kentucky Chamber of Commerce's Inclusive Workforce Summit in 2023. Presentation titles included, Disability Inclusion Strategies in the Workplace, Getting Comfortable with Disability, Employment First Kentucky, The Impact of Work on Health, Using Universal Design from the Starting Gate as a Key to an Inclusive Workforce, Kentucky Retaining Employment and Talent after Injury/Illness Network Retain (KY RETAIN): The Study, the Network, the Capacity Building, Preparing Youth and

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Young Adults with Disabilities for the Workforce, Resources Employers Can Use Today, The Disability Equality Index, and Innovative Supports for Autistic Workers.

I. 3. 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

I. 3. 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

I. 3. 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.

The KYOVR defines a “Qualified Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor” as one who meets the following criteria, based on the Kentucky Personnel Classification for vocational rehabilitation counselor positions.

- 1.) A Certified Rehabilitation Counselor (CRC) is preferred.
- 2.) Master’s degree from an accredited university in master’s degree in rehabilitation, rehabilitation teaching or therapy, guidance and/or counseling, psychology, sociology, orientation and mobility, social work, special education with emphasis in vocational counseling or a related; OR
- 3.) Meets the Kentucky Personnel Cabinet standard for a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor. This position requires the individual to be a graduate of a college or university with a master's degree in rehabilitation, rehabilitation teaching or therapy, guidance and/or counseling, psychology, sociology, orientation and mobility, social work, special education, education with emphasis in vocational counseling, disability studies,

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behavioral science, human services, vocational assessment, addiction counseling, or a related field. There is a substitution clause that allows for a bachelor's degree plus two years of professional experience in rehabilitation, rehabilitation counseling, rehabilitation teaching or therapy, vocational assessment, employer relations, rehabilitation technology, vocational evaluation, supported employment, job placement, guidance and/or counseling, psychology, sociology, orientation and mobility, social work, special education, education with an emphasis in vocational counseling, customized employment, health studies, human relations/resources, addiction studies, occupational therapy, physical therapy, school counseling or a related field will substitute for the required master's degree.

Based on the above criteria of Vocational Rehab Counselor, all employed vocational rehabilitation counselors meet or exceed the criteria.

The qualifying certification for the certified position is the Certified Rehabilitation Counselor (CRC).

Managers for vocational rehabilitation counselor positions are required to meet the minimum qualification for their position and are encouraged to obtain their CRC. Currently 84% of our VR counselor managers are also Certified Rehabilitation Counselors.

Certifications required for professional and para-professional positions are supported by the agency through continuing education opportunities provided inhouse as well as other pertinent local, state, and national level training. A broader access to national training is now achieved with the implementation of online training initiatives through a variety of resources. Staff with a desire to achieve a certification in their profession are supported in the preparation phase of their efforts and with examination fee support on a onetime pass or fail basis.

- Primary certifications currently utilized within KYOVR are as follows:
- Certified Rehabilitation Counseling (CRCC/CRC)
- Assistive Technology Professional (ATP/RESNA),
- Certified Interpreters (R)
- Certified Driver Rehabilitation Specialist (CDRS)

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The agency also has need of professionals to fulfill medical and specialized services provided at Carl D. Perkins Vocational Training Center and the Charles McDowell Center. To fulfill those needs there are additional licensed or certified personnel such:

- Driver and Traffic Safety Training Certification - for those that provide on-the-road driver instructions to students.
- Certified Daycare Director - for the childcare program
- Orientation and Mobility (COMS)
- Kentucky Professional Teaching - for the vocational instructors
- Certified Speech Pathologists
- Certified Public Account
- Certified Maintenance Employees and Drivers– plumbing, electric and CDL
- Nursing Staff

Some critical services in the residential facilities must be contracted to provide specialized counseling services and those include:

- Licensed Clinical Social Worker
- Licensed Alcohol and Drug Abuse Counselor
- Licensed Psychologist

The agency training developers consistently share virtual and in-person training opportunities with staff and maintain a calendar of all of the events for easy information access for staff. Professional and paraprofessional positions are provided with supports necessary to maintain their required continuing education for their respective fields and the agency provides financial assistance for the maintenance of required professional certifications. The training team ensures that all courses developed internally provide associated professional certification for continuing education hours. Individuals seeking their credentials in their profession are supported through examination fees and are considered for reclassifications as appropriate based on their academic and professional certification changes.

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Online training options are provided through the YesLMS system library and has titles available on various topics that can provide staff with a better understanding of the evolving labor force and the needs of individuals with disabilities. The inclusion of these national trainings in the system broadens 21st century knowledge and awareness on a national level for our agency staff.

I. 4. Method(s) the VR agency uses to ensure that personnel are able to communicate in appropriate modes of communication with or in the native language of applicants or eligible individuals who have limited English speaking ability.

The agency is committed to established practices that ensure that staff is trained and knowledgeable of resources to assure consumers receive the appropriate communication resources to fully participate in agency processes and programs. Consumers in need of interpreting or communication assistance services have resources provided as part of their vocational rehabilitation process.

The agency has designated counselors with specialized skills assigned to handle caseloads serving individuals who are deaf, deaf/blind, blind and visually impaired. Recruitment of individuals with specialized skills occurs utilizing the Commonwealth of Kentucky Personnel Cabinet through their online job's portal. Classifications for these positions specifically outline the necessary skills required to fill the position.

Supporting the development of additional resources for communication is also part of the agency processes. Specifically, the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services Branch actively provides internship and volunteer opportunities for students graduating from the American Sign Language (ASL) program at Eastern Kentucky University and those graduates that need training hours for their certification. This gives the graduates a chance to learn and gain exposure to working within the state agency as an employee or serving as in an ASL contracted employee for the state.

I. 5. As appropriate, describe the procedures and activities to coordinate the designated State unit's comprehensive system of personnel development with personnel development under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

The KYOVR agency coordinates its CSPD plan to ensure the standards and qualifications of our personnel coordinate with personnel development under the

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Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), and the standards under the Rehabilitation Act, as amended.

The Kentucky Interagency Transition Council meets on a quarterly basis to address continued fulfillment of the Kentucky Interagency Agreement on Transition Services for Youth with Disabilities. The KYOVR and the Department of Education are two of the eleven state agencies that are parties to the agreement. One of the provisions of this agreement is cooperative training and staff development concerning transition issues. KYOVR staff attend Community Work Transition training offered by the University of Kentucky's Human Development Institute (HDI). Rehabilitation counselors work collaboratively with high school education teachers, local directors of special education, and Employment Specialists for students transitioning from high school into employment. KYOVR Counselors attend Individual Education Plan (IEP) and Admissions and Release Committee (ARC) meetings working with the team in establishing a vocational goal. This assures the development of the students IEP in conjunction with the vocational rehabilitation Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE). KYOVR provides support to teaching instructors, school staff and Employment Specialists regarding rehabilitation issues and other areas of agency staff expertise such as Assistive Technology to ensure successful placements. Often rural schools do not have the needed resources; therefore, KYOVR staff offer their expertise based on the individual needs of the student working closely with all staff involved with IDEA.

Section J: Coordination with Education Officials.

J. 1. Describe plans, policies, and procedures for coordination between the designated State agency and education officials responsible for the public education of students with disabilities, that are designed to facilitate the transition of the students with disabilities from the receipt of educational services in school to the receipt of vocational rehabilitation services, including pre-employment transition services.

The OVR Transition Services Branch will coordinate with education officials on a state and local level in the planning and implementation of the provision of Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) and Transition services to students with disabilities. The branch consists of one (1) Branch Manager, three (3) Program Administrators, one (1) Administrative Specialist, and six (6) Pre-ETS Coordinators. The Branch Manager oversees all branch activities and represents the agency on inter-agency teams. The Program Administrators coordinate and monitor Pre-ETS and Transition services throughout the state inclusive of the Community Work Transition Program, including specific contracts with service providers. The Administrative Specialist provides clerical support to the branch. The Pre-ETS Coordinators work with Potentially Eligible students in their specific regions. They collaborate directly with schools and providers to receive referrals, coordinate Pre-Employment Transition Services, and monitor the progress of Potentially Eligible students to help determine if/when it is appropriate for a student to apply for OVR services. The Pre-ETS Coordinators transfer the Potentially Eligible students' cases to VR Counselors who determine eligibility for services and develop Individualized Plans for Employment.

Branch Staff are currently working on the revision of policies and procedures for the branch. OVR staff will receive training on all policies to assure to timely implementation of service delivery and the effective coordination of services. OVR has a focus on internal controls for the areas of documentation and accurate data entry to ensure the efficacy of reporting.

OVR works with many agencies to provide transition services and pre-employment transition services to students with disabilities. This is inclusive of the blind and visually impaired and the deaf and hard of hearing populations. All of the collaborations described below allow for transition and pre-employment transition services to be provided by either OVR or our partners.

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OVR provides the following five required pre-employment transition activities:

- 1.) Job Exploration Counseling
- 2.) Work Based Learning
- 3.) Counseling on Post-Secondary Opportunities
- 4.) Workplace Readiness Training
- 5.) Instruction in Self -Advocacy

OVR has assigned a VR Counselors and Pre-ETS Coordinator to each of Kentucky's 171 Local Education Agencies including the School for the Deaf and the School for the Blind for the purpose of ensuring that all students with disabilities are served. The counselors work with referrals from special education and general education staff as well as the individual with a disability, their family, and other agencies who assist students with disabilities who are in need of transition services. These counselors coordinate and authorize transition services for students with disabilities, age who are eligible for VR services. The counselors also provide general coordination, information, and outreach activities about vocational rehabilitation services to the local education agency and student for use in transition planning. OVR Pre-employment Transition Services Coordinators work in conjunction with the VR counselor in the provision of services. Pre-ETS Coordinators receive referrals from services providers, schools, students, and families for students who are Potentially Eligible for VR services. Pre-ETS Coordinators approve and monitor students Pre-ETS activities to help determine when it is appropriate for the student to apply for VR services. Service coordination activities may also include resource information about vocational rehabilitation, presentations, handouts, and staff development. The VR Counselor and Pre-ETS Coordinators collaborate with the local education agency to develop the transition services section of the Individualized Education Program (IEP) and the Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) for transitioning students. Both the IEP and IPE will include, if appropriate, a statement of interagency responsibilities or any needed linkages by which the responsibilities of other entities are satisfied.

The student should be prepared to enter the competitive integrated workforce following the provision of needed services, as reflected on the IPE. The student should have ample opportunity to participate in Pre-employment Transition Services before they graduate. The OVR Counselor along with the Pre-Employment Transition Services Coordinators will engage in providing services that would be most beneficial to an individual in the early stages of employment exploration, such as counseling and self—advocacy training. These services are

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provided to students who are eligible or who are potentially eligible for VR services.

OVR partners with the public-school districts, Department of Education and the University of Kentucky Human Development Institute to provide transition services and pre-employment transition services through the Community Work Transition Program (CWTP). The CWTP is designed to provide Pre-employment Transition Services and transition services to students with the most significant disabilities to assist them in transitioning from high school to competitive integrated employment. Employment Specialists, funded by the local education agency, refer students to OVR in order to provide pre—employment transition services during their final three years of school. The CWTP contracts with the individual school districts to hire employment specialists to provide students with employment exploration and experiences, community-based evaluation, work experience and job placement while in high school.

OVR has a contract with the Jobs for America's Graduates (JAG) to provide Pre-employment Transition Services to students with disabilities in the school system. JAG is a state-based national non- profit organization dedicated to preventing dropouts among young people who have serious barriers to graduation and/or employment.

Additionally, OVR has contractual agreements with three of the nine special education cooperatives for the provision of Pre-employment Transition Services. Community Rehabilitation Providers may provide Pre-ETS through a Service Fee Memorandum.

Transition Services Branch staff work directly with the Kentucky Interagency Transition Council. These involvements help facilitate all of the partner's understanding of the unique transition needs of students with disabilities and assists in understanding the educational process of Public Schools in the State.

The Kentucky School for the Blind (KSB) serves students with visual disabilities from across the state. Students can live and attend classes at the school's Louisville location, or receive outreach services while attending their local elementary, middle and high schools. Staff in specialized positions actively participates in the vocational planning and academic progress of all of these students through collaboration and assistance with KSB's Community Based Instruction Program, and services such as vocational assessments, and annual Individual Education Plans. Staff collaborates on a variety of work-readiness and work-experience programs with KSB such as the Summer Work Program and The

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World of Work Program that provides work-based learning experiences in a competitive, integrated settings.

The Kentucky School for the Deaf (KSD) provides education to deaf and hard of hearing students from elementary through high school levels. It is a residential program in Danville, KY that also provides outreach services to students in their local schools. Vocational services include opportunities to prepare for work or continued education in the high school curriculum. An OVR Rehabilitation Counselor for the Deaf is assigned to students on campus.

Rehabilitation Counselors for the Deaf are proficient in American Sign Language and serve individuals who are deaf and hard of hearing and use this type of communication. Rehabilitation Counselors for the Deaf are also skilled in serving people who have vision limitations in addition to a hearing loss or deafness. Individuals who are deaf and use American Sign Language are served by a Rehabilitation Counselors for the Deaf. There are Rehabilitation Counselors for the Deaf statewide to provide OVR services.

The Office of Vocational Rehabilitation also has staff trained regarding the limitations that people with hearing loss may experience. These Communication Specialists receive specialized training regarding ways to serve individuals who are hard of hearing or late deafened with auditory/oral communication. This includes training regarding Hearing Aid technology and Assistive Listening Devices.

The State Coordinator of Deaf-Blind Services (SCDB) works with, consults, and provides technical assistance to KY Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) staff including the Rehabilitation Counselors for the Blind (RCB), Rehabilitation Counselors for the Deaf (RCD), and Communication Specialists. Other staff include Managers, Blind Services Division Staff, and various other administrators within OVR. The SCDB also maintains relationships for service delivery with staff from the Helen Keller National Center (HKNC), Kentucky Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (KCDHH), The Kentucky Deaf-Blind Project, KY Mental Health Services for the Deaf and Deaf-Blind, Kentucky Association of Deaf-Blind (KADB), and several other Community Rehabilitation Providers (CRP). Kentucky has one of the largest Deaf-Blind census numbers with approximately 49,000 known individuals listed as being Deaf-Blind in the State. The SCDB also coordinates, plans, and oversees training and support for staff that work with this population.

INSIGHT - Post-secondary Preparation Program for Students Who Are Blind or Significantly Visually Impaired is a collaborative project between the Kentucky

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Educational Development Corporation Special Education Cooperative, Kentucky School for the Blind, Kentucky School for the Blind Charitable Foundation, the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, MCP Orientation and Mobility Services, and Morehead State University. INSIGHT is a unique program designed to provide college bound students an opportunity to experience some of the challenges encountered when entering a university or community college. Participants gain an increased awareness of the educational, recreational, and social opportunities and challenges of the post- secondary environment.

Staff also participates with the Kentucky Deaf-Blind Project, which helps promote cooperative transition services for youth who are deaf-blind. OVR has a Deafblind Coordinator who is responsible for helping to facilitate pre-employment transition services, including all the previously described work readiness and summer work experience programs, for this population of students. OVR collaborates with the Kentucky Deaf-Blind Project to provide a weeklong summer camp for eight to nine students who are Deaf-Blind that addresses the five required Pre-Employment Transition Services. This program is unique to Kentucky, and other Deaf-Blind Projects across the nation are interested in replicating it in their states.

The PATH Program is a Pre-employment Transition Services program held either through a virtual platform or at the McDowell Center in Louisville, KY. This program is conducted in collaboration with the University of Kentucky's Teacher Preparation Program in Visual Impairments. Through the University of Kentucky, practicum students from the teacher preparation program are able to assist with the providing the Pre-employment Transition Services to up to fifteen blind or visually impaired students from across the state. The University of Kentucky also provides staff such as Orientation and Mobility Specialists that assist the McDowell Center staff provide the five required Pre-employment Transition Services.

Workforce Development Boards: OVR counselors actively participate on their local Workforce Development Board's Youth and One Stop committees to enhance and make accessible the programs and services for transition age consumers.

KY AHEAD is a professional organization whose purpose is to promote communication among professionals in post-secondary education in order to improve the development and implementation of services for persons with disabilities. Campus Disability Services Centers are an essential resource for students with disabilities attending post-secondary educational institutions. VR counselors maintain relationships with disability service center staff and strongly encourage college students to utilize the services available at the centers so that

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they can receive individualized accommodations for their coursework. Every effort is made to arrange for a student to meet with staff at the disability center prior to entry into a post- secondary program in assuring a smooth transition for the individuals.

The Kentucky Special Education Cooperative Network consists of nine special education cooperatives located across the state. These cooperatives were formed to better meet the needs of the multiple school systems across Kentucky's 120 counties. All 171 local school districts, and the Kentucky Schools for the Blind and Deaf are members of a special education cooperative. Each cooperative has VI teachers and an AT specialist to assist students with visual needs. The school districts employ other specialty service providers such as Orientation and Mobility Specialists, Physical Therapists, and Speech Therapists. OVR works collaboratively with each cooperative network across the state in the provision of information and referral for students of all ages.

J. 2. Coordination with Education Officials. - 2

J. 2. A. Consultation and technical assistance, which may be provided using alternative means for meeting participation (such as video conferences and conference calls), to assist educational agencies in planning for the transition of students with disabilities from school to post-school activities, including pre-employment transition services and other vocational rehabilitation services;

The Kentucky Office of Vocational Rehabilitation has a current Memorandum of Understanding with the Kentucky Department of Education that was signed in September of 2022 and will remain in effect for three years. Within this agreement are strategies for the two agencies to work collaboratively in evaluating, serving, and planning for a seamless transition from school for students with disabilities who are eligible or potentially eligible for Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) services. The intended result of these collaborative strategies and activities is that students will achieve their post-secondary goals as they make the transition from school to adult education, competitive integrated employment (including customized employment and supported employment), continuing and adult education, independent living, and community participation. Signed agreements are in place with the local educational agencies. These agreements are updated annually, and they outline and identify the responsibilities of each party for the provision of services. These agreements are

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designed to facilitate the transition of students with disabilities from the receipt of educational services in school, to the receipt of vocational rehabilitation services.

Currently OVR, HDI (the Center for Excellence at the University of Kentucky) and KDE are meeting monthly to address policy and procedural changes to address the Community Work Transition Program and transition services, pre-employment transitions services, data sharing agreements and a clear identification of each of the roles of the partners involved in the agreement.

OVR receives ongoing technical assistance from the National Technical Assistance Center on Transition for the area of pre – employment transitions services. NTACT staff provide guidance to assure we have a clear understanding and interpretation of the regulations and any other federal guidance received from the Rehabilitation Services administration. Based on feedback from NTACT and the results of monitoring reviews from other states, OVR is working on implementing a stronger internal controls system. OVR staff will be responsible for monitoring the delivery of pre-employment transition services provided by other entities to ensure the quality of services provided and the accurate reporting of services. Contractual agreements are in place so that OVR has more involvement in the approval of services for students with disabilities. OVR's current case management system and the ability to pull accurate information through the Web Intelligence program has not been as strong as it could be. OVR is currently in the process implementing a new case management system.

The Office participates with the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) and 21 other state agencies on the Kentucky Interagency Transition Council (KITC) in the coordination among agencies in the delivery of transition services. OVR Transition Services Branch staff are members of KITC and participate in quarterly council meetings. OVR provides ongoing technical assistance to providers of transition services and pre-employment transitions services. OVR and KDE each have staff serving as team leads on a subcommittee of KITC that meets monthly to work towards improving transition services throughout Kentucky.

The Executive Director of the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) was appointed to serve as a voting member of the State Interagency Council (SIAC) for Services and Supports to Children and Transition-Age Youth. The Executive Director or a designee attends monthly SIAC meetings to collaborate on the matters of the council as it relates to youth who are Kentucky students with disabilities. The monthly SIAC meetings give OVR the opportunity to collaborate, plan and develop on going partnerships with other state agency representatives who serve mutual individuals with disabilities. KDE also has representation on the SIAC.

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Regional OVR representation has been established for the Regional Interagency Councils (RIAC) for the system of care to have consistent OVR representation. There is a total of 18 RIAC's across the commonwealth. An OVR regional representative attends monthly RIAC meetings to establish partnership with state, public and community agencies to address concerns that families have within the regions of Kentucky. OVR regional representation supports the momentum of the system level work that is occurring statewide. Strategies are set in place to promote a spectrum of effective, community-based services and supports for children and transition-age youth, with at-risk behavioral health needs or other challenges, and their families that: are organized into a coordinated network; builds meaningful partnerships with families and youth and addresses their cultural and linguistic needs in order to help them function better at home, in school, in the community, and throughout life.

OVR and the Kentucky Department of Education continues to meet quarterly with interested interagency partners and serve as the catalyst for development and implementation of an infrastructure which supports youth with disabilities to transition from high school to post- secondary school and employment. Pre-Employment Transition Services will continue to represent the earliest set of services available under OVR for students with disabilities, which are short-term in nature and are designed to help students identify career interests.

OVR continues its work in expanding its relationship with the Kentucky School for the Deaf. A group of stakeholders is part of an Engage for Change group in Kentucky. This is a national effort through the National Deaf Center on Postsecondary Outcomes. OVR maintains strong relationships with the KY Deaf-Blind Project and the Kentucky School for the Blind, and the programs with these partners are frequently reviewed to improve the quality of these services.

J. 2. B. Transition planning by personnel of the designated State agency and educational agency personnel for students with disabilities that facilitates the development and implementation of their individualized education programs (IEPs) under section 614(d) of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act;

Under IDEA, schools are responsible for initiating transition planning at the age of 16 for each student identified with a disability. In Kentucky, as stated in Kentucky Special Education Regulation 707, KAR 1:320, Section 7:1, transition planning can start in the child's 8th grade year or when the child turns age 14, or earlier if the ARC deems it appropriate, in alignment with the child's Individual Learning Plan (ILP). The Memorandum of Understanding between OVR and KDE outlines

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general responsibilities of both parties related to transition planning for students with disabilities through the provision of information and technical assistance to local education agencies.

Since school faculty and staff are academic specialists, it is very important for the VR counselor to have early influence on the student's vocational future helping to avoid weak or unrealistic vocational training. The VR counselor acts as a vocational specialist forging the educational and future vocational needs of the child realistically together. The VR counselor is educated on the federal and state laws associated with transition and acts as an advocate for the student and parents. VR counselors attend transition related meetings as early as age 14 and act as a consultant in the student's IEP. Early contact and intervention not only save the VR counselor considerable time and effort, but it also allows the student and parents the opportunity to plan a realistic vocational path that will lead them to the vocational goal of their choice.

VR counselors attend student IEP meetings starting at age 14. The school system will continue to have the primary responsibility for accommodations and student's educational needs. Once the student graduates OVR will become the primary agent. It is mandatory that the IPE be developed with the student 90 days after eligibility or prior to graduation, whichever comes first.

An IPE is developed for each student determined eligible and that meets the current order of selection for vocational rehabilitation services. The IPE should address the student's pre-employment transition services needs in the areas of job exploration counseling, work-based learning experiences, counseling regarding post-secondary training opportunities, workplace readiness training to assist in the development of social and independent living skills, and instruction in self-advocacy.

OVR recognizes that it is the responsibility of Kentucky schools and OVR to coordinate and provide transition planning and services for students with disabilities. The VR counselor will provide consultation and technical assistance to assist the school as well as pre-employment transition services based on the student's needs. OVR recognizes that transition planning is an ongoing process and that a student may choose to go in a different direction requiring a change in their vocational goal. Ongoing exploration, work exposure, and vocational counseling will be provided to assist students in the decision-making process.

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J. 2. C. The roles and responsibilities, including financial responsibilities, of each agency, including provisions for determining State lead agencies and qualified personnel responsible for transition services and pre-employment transition services;

The Memorandum of Understanding between OVR and KDE clearly states that each entity is, “financially responsible for the services they provide under their own laws and rules.”

Additionally, Memoranda of Agreements at the local level are used in order to further the collaborative efforts detailed in the interagency cooperative agreement between the Kentucky Department of Education and the agency. These memoranda of agreements will define the basic tenets of the Community Work Transition Program (CWTP).

The rights and responsibilities of OVR and the local education agency for implementing and carrying out the CWTP are also detailed in these memoranda of agreements. OVR authorizes payment of services needed to determine eligibility and for any services provided that do not fall under the responsibility of the school district. OVR provides payment for pre-employment services such as job exploration counseling, work-based learning experiences, counseling on post-secondary education, workplace readiness training and instruction in self-advocacy.

J. 2. D. Procedures for outreach to and identification of students with disabilities who need transition services and pre-employment transition services. Outreach to these students should occur as early as possible during the transition planning process and must include, at a minimum, a description of the purpose of the vocational rehabilitation program, eligibility requirements, application procedures, and scope of services that may be provided to eligible individuals;

Outreach and involvement of the VR agency begins at age 14. OVR assigns VR Counselors to each school district to provide information regarding transition services, including Pre-employment Transition Services, and to accept referrals of students with disabilities. Local Education Agencies provide lists of students with Individualized Education Plans (IEP) and 504 Plans to VR staff and/or service providers. VR Staff or providers contact these students to encourage participation in transition services, including Pre-employment Transition Services.

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OVR obtains a list of the number of students between the ages of 14 and 21 per county that are accessing modified instructional materials due to their visual disability. Rehabilitation Counselors for the Blind receive information regarding the number of students that receive these materials to help identify where unserved students are located in the school districts. Staff conduct outreach to school staff, inclusive of Teachers of the Visually impaired to strengthen partnerships and increase awareness of available services. This includes pre-employment transition services.

The CWTP is designed to provide pre-employment transition and transition services to all students with significant disabilities to assist in transitioning from high school to competitive integrated employment. Employment Specialists, funded by the local education agency, refer students to OVR for services.

Should the student need individualized transition services during this time, OVR counselors work with the Employment Specialists to ensure that community vocational services provided lead to the completion of an individualized vocational evaluation and the development of individualized programs (IEP and IPE) to ensure successful transitioning from high school to post school activities, including employment. Upon completion of the IPE, further community—based vocational services are provided to the student in the form of training for the planned vocational goal. The desired outcome for participants in the CWTP Transition Services is a post—school outcome or competitive, integrated employment.

Outreach to students also occurs through OVR's contractual agreements with Jobs for America's Graduates (JAG) and three of the Special Education Cooperatives for pre-employment transition services. Additionally, local Community Rehabilitation Providers who provide Pre-employment Transition Services through a Service Fee Memorandum, also provide outreach to students in local schools.

Jobs for Kentucky's Graduates (JAG KY) operates its curriculum program in conjunction with the Kentucky Office of Vocational Rehabilitation to service students in their program who have disabilities and who are potentially eligible and/or eligible for the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation. JAG provides a curriculum for in-school youths with disabilities who have significant barriers to success that includes academic, physical, psychological, work related, and/or environmental barriers to success. The curriculum will include career development, job attainment, job survival, basic skills, leadership and self-development, personal skill, life survival skills, and workplace and economic empowerment. The JAG KY curriculum will also include presentations by local VR

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staff to encourage students to apply for OVR services. JAG KY employs and certify Specialist who are assigned to the schools that have a JAG KY Program through Kentucky.

The Kentucky Special Education Cooperative Network consists of nine (9) Special Education Cooperatives located across the state:

- Central Kentucky Educational Cooperative (CKEC)
- Green River Regional Educational Cooperative (GRREC)
- Greater Louisville Education Cooperative (GLEC)
- Kentucky Educational Development Corporation (KEDC)
- Kentucky Valley Educational Cooperative (KVEC)
- Northern Kentucky Cooperative for Educational Services (NKCES)
- Ohio Valley Educational Cooperative (OVEC)
- Southeast/Southcentral Education Cooperative (SESC)
- West Kentucky Educational Cooperative (WKEC)

OVR has the opportunity to enter into contracts with each of the Educational Cooperatives. Upon contract implementation, Pre-employment Specialists are hired by the cooperatives to provide the five required services to qualified students through individual and group activities. The activities will be determined by individual student need(s). The Cooperatives collaborate and utilize the student's individual education program (IEP), the student need(s), or the ARC committee decisions to determine what Pre-employment activities the students need. Outcomes are determined by multiple data points, such as evidence of participation and evaluation of readiness and engagement in the activities.

The Community Rehabilitation Programs (CRP) provide Pre-employment Transition Services on a Fee Schedule in groups or to individual students. Proposals for the provision of pre-employment services are submitted to the OVR Transition Services Branch. CRP programs may provide the five required pre-employment services: Job exploration counseling, work-based learning experiences, post-secondary counseling, workplace readiness training, and self-advocacy. CRPs provide in-school and after-school Pre-employment Transition Services.

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J. 2. E. Coordination necessary to satisfy documentation requirements set forth in 34 CFR part 397 regarding students and youth with disabilities who are seeking subminimum wage employment; and

The Memorandum of Understanding between OVR and KDE references Section 511 of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act (WIOA) which requires OVR to perform certain actions prior to an employer paying an individual a wage that is below the standard minimum wage (subminimum wage).

OVR ensures that all OVR staff are trained to understand the process that a youth (24 or under) with a disability must complete prior to entering a subminimum wage employment:

- 1.) Youth must be determined eligible.
- 2.) Youth must have an approved Individualized Plan for Employment.
- 3.) Youth must have worked toward their vocational goal for a reasonable amount of time with appropriate supports, without success and have their OVR case closed.
- 4.) Pre-employment transition services and/or Transition services, supported employment and/or customized employment are provided as appropriate.
- 5.) Career Counseling is provided and information regarding resources and other available programs in support of competitive integrated employment.

OVR provides subminimum wage facilities within the Commonwealth access to:

- A Career Counseling video that is to be shown to individuals according to the requirements set forth in WIOA.
- The Career Counseling Participation Form is completed on each individual and provided to the Community Rehabilitation Program (CRP) Branch of OVR, per Federal requirement.
- Offer multiple Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) opportunities for youth with a disability to ensure that this WIOA mandate is met.
- Provides individuals with available resources in their community to help with services for obtaining employment and support.

OVR continues to:

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- Monitor and provide technical assistance to subminimum wage facilities to ensure WIOA requirements are met.
- Retain records on all individuals that receive Career Counseling.
- Provide individuals during first year, Career Counseling twice.
- Provide individuals during subsequent years, Career Counseling annually.

J. 2. F. Assurance that, in accordance with 34 CFR 397.31, neither the SEA nor the local educational agency will 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 youth with a disability is engaged in work compensated at a subminimum wage.

The OVR will not 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 youth with a disability is engaged in work compensated at a subminimum wage.

Section K: Coordination with Employers

Vocational Rehabilitation Services

The Department of Workforce Investment (DWI) in partnership with local and state workforce organizations are dedicated to providing proactive business services and industry skills development. Through local Kentucky Career Center Business Service networks, this partnership has laid a foundation for coordinated business services that leverage the assets of the Office of Employer and Apprenticeship Services (OEAS).

Kentucky Career Center Business Services offer a streamlined approach to assisting businesses with recruiting talent, training new and existing employees, and developing tomorrow's workforce. At its core, the Business Service strategy consists of five primary organizations who provide direct resources and services to businesses:

- Local Workforce Development Boards (LWDB)
- Kentucky Education and Workforce Development Cabinet (EWDC)
- Kentucky Cabinet for Economic Development (CED)
- The Kentucky Chamber's Workforce Center (Workforce Center)
- Kentucky Community and Technical College System (KCTCS)

These partnering agencies strive to provide unified, efficient, quality, and seamless workforce services and resources to new, existing, and expanding companies within the Commonwealth. The Kentucky Career Center Business Service strategy has the following four primary components:

- Identify a single point of contact for business development within each WIOA region;
- Streamline workforce resource delivery;
- Unify and coordinate outreach and information; and
- Leverage multiagency data sharing systems.

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Core programs and partners gained access to a business customer relationship management system based on a Salesforce platform. Phase 1 allowed shared access to employer contacts and business needs, and Phase 2 gave the partnership the ability to add and assess employer programs and resources. This platform allows the tracking of business engagement and reporting for the aligned goal of furthering business services and is the tool that encompasses the Kentucky Integrated Business Engagement System (KIBES). The OVR Employer Services Branch is dedicated to employer outreach and consumer job placement services allowing for a consistent approach to services across the state. This enables the agency to focus on more intensive employer outreach, including increased emphasis on corporate employers and partnership, and expanding direct employer interaction statewide.

OVR employs ten job placement specialists across the state. These specialists are responsible for developing relationships with local employers to facilitate the placement of OVR consumers into competitive integrated employment. Employer engagement activities may include: 1) technical assistance to employers on hiring individuals with disabilities; 2) disability awareness training; 3) ongoing and regular contact with employers; 4) attending meetings of local Chambers of Commerce, Society of Human Resource Managers (SHRM), and other business-related groups; and 5) no cost accessibility surveys to employers. Job placement specialists utilize the targeted industry sectors, as determined by their local workforce region, in order to provide specific labor market information to consumers, employers and agency partners.

OVR employs a statewide Employer Services Branch Manager who is responsible for the supervision and oversight of staff and statewide employment activities. This is inclusive of providing training and technical assistance to the Job Placement Specialists, developing agency-wide relationships with large employers and acts as the agency contact for the National NET and TAP programs managed by Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR).

OVR recognizes that it has two customers, the job seeker and the employer, and works collaboratively with partner organizations in providing quality services on all levels. OVR is positioned to provide valuable services to 503 Federal Contractors with utilization goals of 7% of their workforce, employees with disabilities. DWI shares with OVR the list of federal contractors it maintains, and staff are assigned to contact those employers individually making them aware of vocational rehabilitation services available to them.

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The Statewide Council for Vocational Rehabilitation (SCVR), Kentucky's State Rehabilitation Council (SRC), and the Employment First Council include several employers and a representative of the Kentucky Workforce Innovation Board (KWIB) who provide important input on agency policy and activities related to employment. The SCVR presents the Employer Recognition Award annually to employers who work closely with the OVR and who make the hiring of persons with disabilities a priority. OVR conducts a Job Placement Month annually in October which includes many events around the state that promote collaboration with employers. Regional Employer Recognition Awards are given out during the month to employers who have hired OVR consumers.

OVR participates in Project SEARCH, the immersive job experience program for transition-aged students with disabilities. OVR's Statewide Coordinator for Project Search identifies and collaborates with employers throughout the state to introduce and promote the program designed to provide transition-age students an on-site working and learning experience. Currently, there are four major employers involved in Project Search Programs: University of Kentucky Healthcare in Lexington, Northern Kentucky University in Highland Heights, ABB Optical in Florence and Baptist Health Hospital in Elizabethtown. OVR develops relationships with employers to provide transition-age students the opportunity to explore career paths and identify opportunities that lead to competitive integrated employment after completion of the program. Transition-age students have received instruction for entry level jobs and training in high-demand career fields specific to area, such as central sterile, research and manufacturing. OVR's Statewide Coordinator continues to develop local partnerships with employers and schools to create a coalition of support for assisting transition-age students in developing, building and identifying career opportunities.

OVR will continue to partner with local initiatives like Project SEARCH in Northern Kentucky and the Coalition for Workforce Diversity in Louisville, Lexington, Ashland, and Mayfield to identify and educate employers willing to develop new programs specifically designed to focus on hiring and training individuals with disabilities.

Transition Services for youth with disabilities and students with disabilities, including pre-employment transition services.

OVR currently has innovative programs that provide high school students a variety of work-based learning, financial literacy, self-advocacy training, job exploration, career counseling, and workplace readiness training opportunities that exist in the community with employers, in our rehabilitation center, and in post-secondary institutions. A diverse array of partnerships is needed in order to

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market the benefits of earn and learn opportunities including registered apprenticeships to Kentucky businesses for individuals with disabilities, including youth and students with disabilities. OVR will work with its existing partners among workforce, economic development, education and business entities to foster work-based learning opportunities. OVR has contractual agreements with three of the nine special education cooperatives and Jobs for American Graduates for the provision of Pre-employment Transition Services.

Kentucky's registered apprenticeship program continues to be a national model in preparing individuals for successful entry into the workforce. This administrative move builds momentum by harnessing Kentucky Education and Workforce Development Cabinet's (KEWDC) existing statewide network to connect employers with potential employees and provide increased apprenticeship opportunities for Kentuckians. There are over 4,000 apprentices in Kentucky in 600+ different programs currently representing 200+ unique occupations.

The Registered Apprenticeship model is a flexible, employer-driven approach that provides high-quality job training and produces skilled, competent employees for Kentucky employers. The division is responsible for registering apprenticeship programs that meet federal standards, issuing nationally recognized and portable Credentials of Completion to apprentices, and promoting the development of new programs through education, outreach and technical assistance.

The Community Work Transition Program (CWTP) is designed to provide pre-employment transition services and transition services to assist students with the most significant disabilities in transitioning from high school to Competitive Integrated Employment upon exiting secondary education. There is a Supported Employment Consulting fee available with the CWTP to facilitate a seamless transition into Competitive Integrated Employment.

There are specific programs in place with specialized services for the blind and visually impaired.

The PATH Program focuses on job exploration, workplace readiness training, and self-advocacy and is an intensive three-week program that introduces employability skills to students with disabilities. The curriculum is specific to individuals who are blind or visually impaired. The Summer Work Experience Program is in collaboration with Community Rehabilitation Providers (CRP). CRPs are paid to find work experiences in competitive integrated settings for transition aged individuals. The goals of the work experience are to provide community-based career exploration and the opportunity to practice work readiness skills. It is also hoped that by participating in the work experience program, employers will

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be open to providing more opportunities for individuals who are blind or visually impaired in their communities.

The Summer Work Program is in collaboration with the Kentucky School for the Blind (KSB), Kentucky Kingdom, the American Printing House for the Blind, and the Louisville Zoo. The World of Work Program is another program in which the OVR and KSB provide work-based learning experiences to students. The program provides competitive integrated work experiences to students that attend the Kentucky School for the Blind. The INSIGHT Post-Secondary Preparation Program is held each summer at Morehead State University. Students are able to participate in college classes, live in the dorm, and participate in social activities both on and off campus during this eight-day program. They receive counseling on post-secondary opportunities and are taught the self-advocacy skills necessary to succeed in a post-secondary environment along with workplace readiness skills.

Section L: Interagency Cooperation with Other Agencies

L. 1. State programs (designate lead agency(ies) and implementing entity(ies)) carried out under Section 4 of the Assistive Technology Act of 1998;

The Kentucky Assistive Technology Services (KATS) Network is the state program carried out under Section 4 of the Assistive Technology Act of 1998 for making assistive technology (AT) information, devices and services easily obtainable for people of any age and/or disability, their families, employers and employment service providers, educators, healthcare and social service providers. The KATS Network serves Kentucky residents of all ages with disabilities of all types, their families, employers and employment service providers, educators, health care and social service providers, and others seeking information about assistive technology (AT) and accessible information technology.

The Kentucky Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) is the lead agency for the KATS Network. The KATS Network in turn collaborates with five nonprofit organizations to operate assistive technology resource centers (ATRCs) across the state in Louisville, Lexington, Ft. Mitchell, Hazard, and Owensboro. These ATRCs provide assistive technology demonstrations, device loans, as well as accept device donations which they refurbish and redistribute to individuals in need. In addition to the ATRC collaborations, the KATS Network teams up with many other organizations to meet individual's unique needs as well as works to connect Kentuckians to community resources. One example of this, is the Statewide Hearing Aid Reuse Program (SHARP), a program the KATS Network operates in partnership with Starkey. Starkey repairs and refurbishes donated hearing aids to SHARP and provides those hearing aids to individuals in need at a reduced cost. Additionally, the KATS Network receives financial credit for hearing aid donations which is used to cover the cost of hearing aid repairs for Kentuckians. The KATS Network is a statewide network of organizations and individuals connecting to enhance the availability of assistive technology devices and services to improve the productivity and quality of life for individuals with disabilities.

The Assistive Technology Alternative Financing Program (ATAFP) for Kentucky is the Kentucky Assistive Technology Loan Corporation (KATLC). KATLC provides financial loans for the purchase of assistive technology with its lending partner for

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individuals with disabilities or the parent or legal guardian of an individual with a disability. KATLC has joined with the Appalachian Assistive Technology Loan Fund (AATLF) to provide no interest, no fee loans from \$100-7,000 for assistive technology to promote independence and enhanced quality of life for individuals with disabilities.

KATLC is funded by both private and public monies to assist Kentuckians with disabilities to obtain low interest loans for the purchase of assistive technology that will promote their independence and enhance their quality of life. KATLC is actively working to obtain a new lending partner to provide loans over \$7,000.

L. 2. Programs carried out by the Under Secretary for Rural Development of the Department of Agriculture;

The USDA Rural Development makes available funding to rural Kentucky communities across the Commonwealth. One of the main goals of Rural Development is to strengthen the local economies by working to improve not only small businesses but also to engage the communities surrounding the businesses.

Programs and initiatives are geared towards providing resources and building bridges of communication for rural communities. The fundamental concerns for rural areas and their communities are wrapped around access and equity. This is this is relevant to Kentucky's rural populations as well, including persons with disabilities and their family support systems.

Kentuckians with disabilities living in rural areas have further challenges. Kentucky is a primarily rural state, incorporating 54 Appalachian counties, and characterized by a high poverty rate relative to other U.S. States. (Project E3). According to 2021 Census data, Kentucky is among five states with the highest disability populations in the country making up more than 17% of the state's population. This data also explains that individuals experiencing disabilities represent over half the population in rural areas throughout the country. The geographic isolation of Kentucky's rural communities poses significant challenges for persons with disabilities in achieving competitive, integrated, and lasting employment and community participation and integration. The rural nature of Kentucky and the centralization of employment opportunities in urban areas create significant transportation and access barriers to employment opportunities. (Project E3).

An important program that will assist the broader community in rural Kentucky is the USDA Rural Developments broadband initiative. The Rural Development Innovation Center's Broadband Resources for Rural America program addresses

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the digital gap in households and assists in providing internet access across these rural areas. Broadband services are important to families in rural communities for them to have access to education, training, health resources as well as connecting them to workforce opportunities.

Opportunities are opening for rural families and businesses by the support of USDA programs, offering loans, aggressively pursuing broadband access for communities, advancing infrastructure and equity initiatives for both families and businesses that will benefit people's livelihood and workforce opportunities in all areas of the state. This initiative may also help with isolation experienced by people living in rural areas.

Efforts by OVR staff to provide these available resources to consumers continue to be made. KY OVR participates in the AgrAbility program, and the Assistive Technology Branch holds an Assistive Technology Conference annually for Kentucky State University's Research Farm. The 3-day conference ensures awareness of the various programs, services and resources available. At the most recent 2023 Assistive Technology Conference held in June, the following topics discussed were:

- Assistive technology and the college experience;
- Comprehensive automotive mobility solutions;
- Built-in accessibility features in windows and other software;
- Increasing independence at home with smart home technology;
- Maximizing mobility and independence;
- Mental health in the workplace; and
- Advocacy, education and empowerment for people with disabilities.

OVR Counselors are aware of programs to assist single families living in rural areas in securing a variety of loans and grants to improve their living situations, such as the single-family housing program to assist with affordable housing for individuals with low or very-low income. Agency staff provide information and referral to consumers for these programs to meet their individual needs.

L. 3. Non-educational agencies serving out-of-school youth;

OVR serves out-of-school youth such as high school non-completers, students expelled from school or habitually truant, high school graduates and GED holders

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who are basic skills deficient, unemployed or underemployed, as well as those enrolled in postsecondary education. This is an area identified to increase outreach and strengthen those existing relationships in order to reach and engage out-of-school youth on a higher level.

In Kentucky the vocational rehabilitation agency is one of two workforce programs that are fully integrated into the Kentucky Career Centers. This has strengthened our relationships with the other core programs of the workforce development system. OVR works collaboratively with the following additional agencies and groups of individuals.

- Juvenile and Criminal Justice Systems. Juvenile Justice is responsible for prevention programs for at-risk-youth, court intake, pre-trial detention, residential placement/treatment services, probation, community aftercare/reintegration programs and youth awaiting adult placement or court.
- Faith-based Organization (i.e., churches, Jewish Family Services, health clinics).
- Community organizations like Big Brothers, Big Sisters, and other community-based organizations.
- Service Organizations (i.e., Lions, Rotary, Kiwanis, Elks)
- Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services that administers foster care and the division of family support (Medicaid, Foster Care and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program)
- Employers
- Kentucky Youth Career Center offices are located in Jefferson, Bullitt, and Shelby Counties, and are administered by KentuckianaWorks, the region's Workforce Development Board.

Overseeing and coordinating programs in the community for youth ages 16 - 21, the Youth Career Centers offer innovative education, employment, and youth empowerment services. The Kentucky Youth Career Center offers resume and interview preparation assistance, GED tutoring and help with testing fees, help applying to colleges and job-training programs, and financial assistance for college and job training. Depending on the need, referrals are made to other community services such as housing, transportation, food, and physical or mental health services. The Kentucky Youth Career Center also creates engagement

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opportunities with employers through internship and summer job programs, and fosters connections to mentors as well as other youth, and provides an ongoing series of workshops on life-enhancing topics.

L. 4. State use contracting programs;

Under the state procurement code, administered by the Finance and Administration Cabinet, there are preferences to be given by governmental entities and political subdivisions in purchasing commodities or services from specified entities. Specifically, when purchasing commodities or services, first preference is given to the products made by the Department of Corrections, Division of Prison Industries, as required by KRS 197.210. Second preference shall be given to any products produced by Kentucky Industries for the Blind, Incorporated, or any other nonprofit corporation that furthers the purposes of KRS Chapter 163, and agencies of individuals with severe disabilities as described in KRS 45A.465 i.e., Community Rehabilitation Providers (CRP). This means that state and local governmental agencies are to purchase directly from Correctional Industries, or an Industries contracted with by OVR and/or a CRP without having to utilize the competitive procurement processes.

L. 5. State agency responsible for administering the State Medicaid plan under title XIX of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 1396 et seq.);

In Kentucky, The Cabinet for Health and Family Services (CHFS) is home to most of the state's human services and health care programs, including Medicaid, the Department for Community Based Services and the Department for Public Health. Medicaid Services purchases quality healthcare and related services that produce positive outcomes for persons eligible for programs administered by the department.

OVR has worked with the Department for Medicaid Services to attempt to expand the Medicaid Works, Kentucky's Medicaid Buy-In program, to maximize the opportunities for OVR consumers to get employed in competitive, integrated employment. Eligibility requirements remain restrictive and very few individuals have qualified for Medicaid Works. OVR still feels a revised buy-in would help more individuals with disabilities become successfully employed. As discussed in (6) of this section, Medicaid Waiver funding is utilized to provide long term supports for supported employment consumers, increasing the numbers of individuals who can benefit from supported employment services.

In addition, OVR's newly established Employment First Council has representation from the Department of Medicaid Services. Most recently, through

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the implementation of the Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP), the Employment First Council was chosen to participate in the National Expansion on Employment Opportunities Network (NEON). Project NEON allows agencies, including that of OVR and the Department of Medicaid Services, to review policy in order for them to align with Kentucky's definition of competitive integrated employment to propel the movement of Employment First throughout the commonwealth.

While OVR serves on numerous councils that have representation from the Department for Medicaid Services, the agency will continue to work to ensure the provision of vocational rehabilitation services and if appropriate, accommodations or auxiliary aides and services.

L. 6. State agency responsible for providing services for individuals with developmental disabilities;

The Department for Behavioral Health, Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities is the agency that provides quality information, services and support for individuals with needs related to mental illness, intellectual disability or other developmental disability and their families.

The Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) is an active member of the Commonwealth Council for Developmental Disabilities, participating in their strategic plan development and collaborating on projects to promote independence and employment for the specific population.

The OVR works with the Division of Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities (DIDD) to improve quality Supported Employment Services and provide a smooth transition from VR supported employment services to long-term support services through the Supports for Community Living (SCL) and the Michelle P. Waiver. OVR and DIDD jointly fund the Supported Employment Training Program at the University of Kentucky's Human Development Institute to train all Supported Employment Specialists in the state.

OVR serves on numerous councils, boards, and planning committees, such as, the Commonwealth Council for Developmental Disabilities, as well as the Kentucky Advisory Council on Autism, the HB144 Commission and, the Kentucky Judicial Commission on Mental Health, relating to persons with developmental disabilities.

Additionally, effective on July 14, 2022, legislation was passed, stating, "the General Assembly finds and declares that it is the policy of the Commonwealth of Kentucky that competitive integrated employment shall be considered the first and

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primary option for persons with disabilities of working age who desire to become employed.” KRS 151B. 211. With the passage of the recent legislation, a new Employment First Council was established and delegated to be supported by OVR. With the formation of the Council, comes a representative from DIDD, several other key agencies, community partners, and advocates, to collaborate and address the five charges of the Council, which are:

- 1.) Identify state policies that create disincentives for the employment of people with disabilities and develop recommendations to address and eliminate those disincentives;
- 2.) Develop training and resources for families, self-advocates, public and private providers, and employers on the benefits of competitive integrated employment of workers with a disability;
- 3.) Recommend the development and implementation of policies and effective practices for providers of supported employment services that increase employment opportunities for workers with a disability;
- 4.) Utilize appropriate metrics to assess progress of efforts to increase the competitive integrated employment of workers with a disability; and
- 5.) Submit an annual report by December 1 to the Legislative Research Commission, the secretary of the Education and Labor Cabinet, and the Governor summarizing its findings and recommendations.

OVR continues to review ways to increase interagency collaboration and support.

L. 7. State agency responsible for providing mental health services; and

The Department of Behavioral Health (DBH) is responsible for the administration of state and federally funded mental health and substance abuse treatment services throughout the commonwealth. Publicly funded community services are provided for Kentuckians who have challenges with mental health, developmental and intellectual disabilities, or substance abuse, through Kentucky’s 14 regional Boards for Mental Health or Individuals with an Intellectual Disability (Regional MHID Boards). Regional MHID Boards are private, nonprofit organizations established by KRS Chapter 210 which serve residents of a designated multi-county region.

OVR has partnered with the DBH to implement the Individual Placement Service (IPS) Model, an evidenced based practice in Supported Employment, for

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consumers with serious mental illness. Currently, there are 21 IPS programs throughout Kentucky. In 2019, OVR participated in meetings with the Cabinet for Health and Family Services to initiate efforts to expand IPS Supported Employment services to individuals with opiate use conditions. OVR will continue to collaborate with other state partners to expand and provide IPS services to underserved populations.

The OVR serves on numerous councils that also have representation from the DBH. In 2021, the OVR began the approval process to implement 4 Establishment Project contract opportunities with CRPs to expand IPS to unserved or underserved areas. Four providers were selected and approved, two of which were selected to provide IPS to individuals with intellectual and/or development disabilities. These contracts were approved by RSA and began in spring of 2023. It's the intent of the OVR to continue with new Establishment Projects as others phase out to continue the efforts to build capacity for IPS services throughout Kentucky.

L. 8. Other Federal, State, and local agencies and programs outside the workforce development system.

OVR maximizes all available resources in collaboration with all partners and agencies in assisting individuals with disabilities to achieve competitive integrated employment. This will ensure the provision of vocational rehabilitation services described in subparagraph (A) other than those specified in paragraph (5) (D), and in paragraph (1) through (4) and (14) of Section 103 (a) of the Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1998, that are included in the individualized plan for employment of an eligible individual, including the provision of such vocational rehabilitation services during the duration of any dispute.

OVR will continue to have a collaborative relationship with agencies and entities within and outside the statewide workforce investment system both private and public agencies and programs. OVR works cooperatively with the following agencies to avoid the duplication of services and enhance the service delivery process for consumers. OVR has representation on the State Interagency Council (SIAC) for services and supports to Children and Transition-age Youth. Regional Interagency Councils (RIACs) operate as the locus of accountability for the system of care, providing a structure for coordination, planning, and collaboration of services and supports at the local level to children, adolescents, and transition-age youth and their families, to help them function better at home, in school, in the community and throughout life. OVR has representation through the Kentucky Cabinet on the Commission on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (KCDJHH). KCDJHH advisory board provides education, advocacy, and programs to eliminate

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barriers for deaf and hard-of-hearing Kentuckians. Also, Collaboration and coordination of services occur between OVR and the Veterans Administration Rehabilitation and Employment Programs. Veterans Administration provides rehabilitation services including vocational guidance and counseling, job development, and placement to veterans with disabilities.

OVR collaborates and coordinates services for individuals with disability within school districts, including the School for the Deaf and the School for the Blind. There are also nine special education cooperative networks across the state created to enhance educational opportunities.

As an agency, we receive and make referrals to the following agencies when needed: Department of Behavioral Health; Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities through their 14 Regional MH/IDD Boards for Supported Employment; Kentucky Drug Courts; Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services; Social Security Administration; Community Rehabilitation Providers; Kentucky Association of Persons in Supporting Employment First (APSE); Department of Medicaid Services; Department of Community Based Services; Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP); Employment and Training (E & T) program; American Printing House for the Blind; Kentucky School for the Blind; Kentucky Federation of the Blind; and Kentucky American Council of the Blind.

We also work closely with the University of Kentucky Human Development Institute, a University Center of Excellence established by federal legislation to promote team-based approaches to provide services for individuals with disabilities and their families. OVR also works closely with The Kentucky Assistive Technology Service (KATS), which is a statewide network of organizations and individuals connecting to enhance the availability of assistive technology devices and services to improve the productivity and quality of life for individuals with disabilities. In addition, the Office works in coordination with the Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC).

OVR works with other federal, state, and local agencies related to the rehabilitation of individuals with disabilities such as the Department of Protection and Advocacy, Department of Probation and Parole, Department of Workers Compensation, and Department of Disability Determination. The Client Assistance Program is available for additional assistance and advocacy during the entire rehabilitation process as well.

L. 9. Other private nonprofit organizations.

The Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) maintains Memorandum of Agreements with providers of private, non-profit vocational rehabilitation service

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providers to support achievement of successful competitive integrated employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities. The OVR works with Community Rehabilitation Program providers (CRPs) through a vendor application process to ensure quality services to agency consumers.

OVR currently works with 114 CRP's. Currently, 75 CRPs provide Employment and Retention services, another 89 provide Supported Employment services resulting in competitive integrated employment. Other agreements with private, non-profit OVR service providers will be made as necessary.

To provide services with the agency, the process is as follows:

- 1.) The potential vendor obtains the vendor application, vendor manual, and CRP manual from the OVR website or from an OVR staff member.
- 2.) The potential vendor reviews the Vendor and CRP Manuals to ensure the vendor is applying for appropriate services.
- 3.) The potential vendor completes the application and provides required supplemental documentation (dependent on types of services applying for) to OVRVendors@ky.gov.
- 4.) Central Office staff monitors the web box, and reviews submitted application and any documentation provided.
- 5.) Central Office staff provides the application, with all documentation provided, and all internal review completed to CRP branch.
- 6.) CRP branch reviews to ensure no additional documentation or clarification is needed.
- 7.) Application is approved, and the Vendor is notified.
- 8.) Vendor completes the Vendor Registration Process by a) Obtaining a vendor number by registering on our vendor self-service platform, or by completing an EZ Registration form and provide it to finance cabinet, along with a W9, for finance to establish a vendor number; b) Reviewing and signing a Vendor Agreement; and c) Reviewing and signing a CRP Agreement.
- 9.) CRP Branch assists the Vendor with training and other information.

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- 10.) All CRP vendors are required to participate in the Supported Employment Training Project provided through the University of Kentucky Human Development Institute.
- 11.) All CRP vendors are monitored by the CRP Branch Staff for programmatic review.
- 12.) All CRP vendors are monitored by Central Office staff for financial review.
- 13.) All CRPs are subject to audits at least once every three years, or more frequently, if necessary.
- 14.) CRP Branch ensures all Employment Specialist have the mandated 15 hours of continuing education units (CEUs) annually, with at least 4 of the hours consisting specifically to servicing individuals who are blind, deaf, or DeafBlind.
- 15.) CRPs are required to review and sign a CRP agreement every two (2) years.

Note: Current ones are good through 06/30/2024.

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Vocational Rehabilitation Program Performance Indicators

Performance Indicators	PY 2024 Expected Level	PY 2024 Negotiated Level	PY 2025 Expected Level	PY 2025 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	61.0%	--	63.0%	--
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	49.0%	--	51.0%	--
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	\$7,923.00	--	\$8,081.00	--
Credential Attainment Rate	29.0%	--	31.0%	--
Measurable Skill Gains	32.0%	--	34.0%	--
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not Applicable 1	Not Applicable 1	Not Applicable 1	Not Applicable 1