

## **O. STATE'S STRATEGIES**

Describe the required strategies and how the agency will use these strategies to achieve its goals and priorities, support innovation and expansion activities, and overcome any barriers to accessing the VR and the Supported Employment programs (See sections 101(a)(15)(D) and (18)(B) of the Rehabilitation Act and section 427 of the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA)):

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

In order to provide some context to our analysis of the needs of individuals with disabilities, OVR followed the guidelines established for a Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment and the Vocational Rehabilitation Needs Assessment Guide established by the Rehabilitation Services Administration and The Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, signed into law on July 22, 2014.

The goals and strategies listed in this plan were developed for the established goals and priorities with the input of the State Vocational Rehabilitation Council. The focus areas and goals are as follows:

#### **Sound Fiscal Management**

Goal 1: Implement sound fiscal management that aligns with federal and state regulations for accurate and consistent reporting and operations.

#### **Quality Assurance**

Goal 2: Compliance with federal and state regulations in all areas to ensure continuous improvement and quality outcomes for consumers.

#### **Staff Resources**

Goal 3: Maximize technology and business processes to effectively support accessibility and the evolving needs of all stakeholders.

#### **Center Operations**

Goal 4: Improve facilities and expand programs to increase competitive, integrated employment outcomes.

#### **Consumer Services**

Goal 5: Implement innovative practices to improve quality outcomes.

#### **Public Awareness**

Goal 6: Implement an ongoing, flexible marketing plan and process to improve public awareness of VR programs, services, and agency employment.

## **Supported Employment**

Goal 1: Increase the number of CRP's providing Supported Employment Services Goal 2: Monitor Service Quality of Providers

Goal 3: Seek alternative strategies for providing and funding Extended Services

Additionally, through quality assurance processes OVR provides internal and external methods and examinations to identify areas where improvement and training are needed. Internal and external methods utilized are WEBI, Crystal Reports, Case Reviews, Satisfaction Surveys,

Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment, the State's performance under the performance accountability measures of section 116 of WIOA and the Strategic Planning Process.

Real time data is pulled and evaluated from the Web Intelligence system (WEBI) and Crystal Reports monthly or as needed (daily, weekly). The data is reviewed for positive or negative issues and trends in services, data integrity. Any issues that arise are addressed with staff as soon as possible.

Retain Kentucky is a U.S. Department of Labor grant focused on assisting individuals who have a non-work-related injury or illness continue to work. The Department of Workforce, Vocational Rehabilitation and other workforce partners administer the grant. Through immediate customized intervention and supports, RETAIN KY helps employers keep valuable staff, and helps employees keep their worker identify. OVR staff refer individuals to RETAIN and RETAIN staff refer individuals to OVR. All enrolled participants in RETAIN have support of a Return-to- Work Coordinator. This is a strategy OVR will use for individuals in work re-entry.

## **2. HOW A BROAD RANGE OF ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY SERVICES AND DEVICES WILL BE PROVIDED TO INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES AT EACH STAGE OF THE REHABILITATION PROCESS AND ON A STATEWIDE BASIS**

The agency currently employs eleven Assistive Technology Specialists, one Vehicle Modification Specialist, one Accessibility Coordinator, two assistants, one branch manager who provide a full spectrum of Assistive Technology (AT) services throughout the Commonwealth. Six of the ten staff serve consumers who are blind and visually impaired. The agency is in the process of hiring one additional Assistive Technology Specialist. The AT Branch provides a comprehensive array of services including, but not limited to, the following: assessment, referral, and consultations on vehicle modifications, home modifications, workplace accommodations consultation, etc. The Accessibility Coordinator assists the agency with providing accessible documentation for employees, consumers, and the public. The availability of full- time staff allows the opportunity for the consumer to access these services during the assessment phase, during IPE development and implementation and in the job placement phase of the case.

The agency partners with the KATS Network, Kentucky AgrAbility and Protection and Advocacy to coordinate a statewide training on current best practices, emerging trends and issues related to the various aspects of assistive technology. The Summer Assistive Technology Workshops are attended by OVR staff, AT professionals, educators, Occupational Therapists, Physical Therapists and other professionals that have in interest in, or contact with AT.

OVR administers the KATS Network, the Commonwealth's Assistive Technology program. The KATS

Network coordinates a statewide network of organizations to enhance the availability of AT devices to individuals with disabilities of any age. There are 5 Regional AT Resource Centers. These sites provide services related to: Device Demonstration, AT Loan, AT Reutilization, Training and Technical Assistance, Public Assistance. The Agency employs a KATS coordinator and continues to seek opportunities for increased collaboration and growth among the network and OVR. The KATS Network will continue to promote the reuse and reutilization of assistive technology and durable medical equipment through CARAT (Coordinating and Assistive the Reuse of Assistive Technology), a project first funded by a grant through the Health Resource Services Administration (HRSA). The project has been extended to include the entire state.

Partners include the Kentucky Appalachian Rural Rehabilitation Network, Appalachian Regional Healthcare, and The Center for Excellence in Hazard, the University of Kentucky Physical Therapy Program, the Kentucky Appalachian Rural Rehabilitation Network (KARRN), the Carl D Perkins Vocational Training Center, Spalding University in Louisville, HDICATS in Lexington, and Lourdes Hospital in Paducah. The agency will continue to seek to expand its services by adding additional staff, continuing to partner with existing AT stakeholders, and increasing professional awareness of assistive technology best practices through training and presentations.

Rehabilitation Counselors for the Blind (RCB) work with AT Specialists and the McDowell Center for the Blind's AT instructors to provide necessary assistive technology used by individuals who are blind or visually impaired, such as laptop computers, tablets, braille writers, pocket recorders for notetaking, closed-circuit televisions to magnify documents, hand-held magnifiers, and computer software including screen readers and magnification (ZoomText), speech (JAWS, Window Eyes) and Braille displays. AT Specialists work closely with employers to ensure that consumers have the tools and training necessary to perform jobs in a wide variety of settings, such as customer service call centers, law firms, universities, and utility companies.

The Office is also responsible for the administration of the Kentucky Assistive Technology Loan Corporation, as authorized by the AT Act. This program offers low interest loans for qualified applicants through its relationship with Fifth Third Bank. KATLC can provide loans for modified vehicles, hearing aids, adapted computers, mobility devices, augmentative communication devices or any other type of equipment or home modification that will improve the quality of life or increase the independence of Kentuckians with disabilities. The KATLC is available on a statewide basis to any qualified individual in need of AT services.

### **3. THE OUTREACH PROCEDURES THAT WILL BE USED TO IDENTIFY AND SERVE INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES WHO ARE MINORITIES, INCLUDING THOSE WITH THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES, AS WELL AS THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN UNSERVED OR UNDERSERVED BY THE VR PROGRAM**

OVR is committed in its effort to build the capacity to effectively serve individuals with most significant disabilities who are minorities. 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.

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. OEAS is taking the knowledge they are learning from OVR to bring back to their agency to replicate best practices. 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.

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. OVR will provide vocational rehabilitation services to all individuals who have visual disabilities who are eligible for services regardless of gender, race, national origin, religion, color, sexual orientation, disability or age. The Agency assures the provision of services to American Indians who are individuals with disabilities residing in the state to the same extent as it provides services to other significant populations or individuals residing in the state. 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 than 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.

**4. THE METHODS TO BE USED TO IMPROVE AND EXPAND VR SERVICES FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES, INCLUDING THE COORDINATION OF SERVICES DESIGNED TO FACILITATE THE TRANSITION OF SUCH STUDENTS FROM SCHOOL TO POSTSECONDARY LIFE (INCLUDING THE RECEIPT OF VR SERVICES, POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT, AND PRE- EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION SERVICES)**

In Kentucky there are 171 school districts consisting of 1,477 schools. There are a total number of approximately 26,000 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 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.

This Branch will be responsible for:

- 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.
- 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. Launch Pre-VR data system to facilitate referral and monitoring process.
4. Develop a process to implement a data sharing agreement with partner agencies.
5. Identify underserved populations by partnering with community agencies and KDE.
6. Evaluate service efficacy through SWOT analyses.
7. Seek feedback from providers and OVR staff to facilitate continuous improvement.
8. 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: 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 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 developed 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 a draft agreement with the KDE for transition planning and service delivery for secondary students with disabilities.

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

OVR continues to encourage CRP involvement as it relates to student and youth services through the implementation of Pre-Employment Transition Services, with a primary focus of Work Based Learning Experience services. In 2020, OVR had agreements with 32 CRPs for the implementation and provision of Pre-employment transition services.

OVR has a goal to create establishment projects for expansion of the IPS and Customized employment models to increase a network of services providers in the next two years. (2022-2023).



OVR has set the following goal area:

Goal 1: Increase the number of CRP's providing Supported Employment Services

Objective 1.1: Recruit more providers for supported employment for unserved and underserved areas.

**Strategies:**

1. Create a strategic planning team to analyze and develop a viable and comprehensive payment system to community rehabilitation providers. (2022)
2. Create Establishment Projects that replicate the UPS Transitional Learning Center model and for expansion of the IPS and Customized employment models to increase a network of services providers. (2022-2023)
3. Increase Capacity in customized employment through participation in the Leadership Series through the University of Kentucky's Human Development Institute. (2023)
4. Hold outreach opportunities for potential providers. (2023)
5. Provide training on new polices related to customized employment, ISP and person-centered planning (2022-2023).

In 2019, the OVR implemented agreements with four CRPs to improve capacity and quality of Customized Supported Employment (CSE) services in Kentucky. This was a direct result of a needs assessment conducted by the OVR that indicated a need for customized employment services for individuals requiring supporting employment. There were only four CRPs in the state that had at least one Employment Specialist who had completed the required Certification process by the KY OVR to effectively provide Customized Supported Employment services. As a result, OVR increased CRP participation and the number of employment services provided CSE by 200%. Ongoing efforts continue in effort to assist in building capacity for this much needed service centered around customized employment.

A needs assessment survey was sent to OVR field staff in fall of 2021 in effort to identify current need for customized SE services throughout the state. As expected, the results illustrate an extensive need for CSE throughout the state. Eighty-five percent (85%) of the counselors polled, stated that they have a need for CSE in their area. Forty-six percent (46%) have identified at least 4 or more individuals on their caseload that could benefit from this service. Sixty-two percent (62%) state that CSE is not readily available to their consumers. Overall, this clearly illustrates that there are many job seekers throughout the state that need CSE services but do not have unrestricted access to it. In some areas, CSE may be available, but job seekers may spend long periods of time on a waiting list. In fall of 2021 there were only 11 CRPs statewide who participated in and completed some Marc Gold & Associates training gateways which allows a CRP to provide CSE in KY. CRPs across the state have provided feedback that training, and start-up costs are barriers to participation in this type of service.

All CRPs who specialize in customized employment must complete the Marc Gold & Associates training as provided by the University of Kentucky's Human Development Institute. This training is made available through a long-standing contract between OVR and UK-HDI. Participants must complete 4 gateways: Social Role Valorization, Discovery, Job Development, and Systematic

Instruction. All, but Social Role Valorization, offer certification opportunities.

OVR has a goal to create establishment projects for expansion of the IPS and Customized employment models to increase a network of services providers in the next two years. (2022-2023).

KY OVR works closely with the Department of Behavioral Health for the implementation and provision of Individual Placement and Support (IPS), an evidenced based model of supported employment for individuals with Serious Mental Illness (SMI) and substance abuse conditions. Currently, there are 18 CRP's that are credentialed to provide IPS, with at least 77 counties having access to this service. This is an increase of 3 counties over the prior year. The CRP Branch of the KY OVR continues to meet regularly with partners to ensure quality IPS services are readily available.

The OVR is an active partner of the statewide IPS Implementation Team that provides oversight of the development and implementation of IPS programs throughout the state. KY has been an active member of the International IPS Learning Community since 2010 and provides information to the community regarding effective strategies being utilized in KY that aides in the expansion and effectiveness of IPS. KY seeks to initiate innovative ideas, such as utilizing IPS for individuals with intellectual disabilities. This is not a common practice but has been utilized by other states. KY seeks to utilize this evidenced based model for individuals with intellectual disabilities and provide comparative data specific to other models to members of the learning collaborative. The DBH has been the primary partner in the development and implementation of IPS programs throughout the state. Additional funds to CRPs from this partner are limited, which has stifled the growth of IPS SE in KY. Therefore, the OVR seeks parallel DBHs long standing commitment by implementing Establishment Projects to further IPS expansion efforts.

A thorough review of existing and prospective agencies was conducted by OVR. OVR conducted several meetings with Department of Behavioral Health 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. Voices of Hope was an agency that was mentioned by multiple experts, on separate occasions, for the expansion of IPS to single mothers with serious mental illness and/or substance use concerns. Life Skills was identified as a high-quality provider that could be used to expand IPS in to unserved or underserved areas. Communicare, Inc. and Build Inclusion are providers that were identified as high-quality providers that serve individuals with intellectual disabilities. The agencies successes in serving the ID population are the basis for their selection. The OVR followed up with the KY IPS Implementation Team for discussion and approval. Finals steps included presenting information the OVR Executive Leadership Team for discussion and approval.

It is intended to discontinue contractual agreements specific to IPS expansion after year 4, with the expectation that each CRP will be sustainable. Year one of the agreement would be July 2022 to June 2023, with plans to continue yearly until completion of the project which would be June 2026.

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. Currently, IPS is in 70 of the 120 counties in KY and it's the goal of VR and the IPS Implementation Team to strive to make IPS SE available in all 120 counties as well as other

disability groups. Information gathered will be compiled and shared nationally with members of the IPS International Learning Community. Specifically, the goal of implementing IPS SE to individuals with intellectual disabilities is of great importance.

The KY OVR revamped the Supported Employment Service Fee Memorandum (SFM) payment structure to CRP's, which included outcome payments that extended to 90 days. More specifically, it included increased payments to CRP's when outcomes of stable employment were achieved for 30, 60 and 90 days. This change was implemented for all models of supported employment. OVR also made changes to the SFM to incorporate specific processes related to customized employment.

Another potential area for expansion would be the establishment of pilot projects in other areas of the staff that replicate the transitional learning center at UPS Worldport to expand competitive integrated employment opportunities for individuals. UPS Worldport is the worldwide air hub for the United Parcel Service.

### **State Owned Rehabilitation Centers**

The Charles W. McDowell and Carl D. Perkins Vocational Training Centers are the State-owned and operated comprehensive rehabilitation centers in Kentucky, a community rehabilitation program providing necessary vocational rehabilitation services to individuals with disabilities. In order to keep the center 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 Carl D. Perkins Vocational Center, located in the rural Eastern Appalachian region, and the Charles W. McDowell Center for the Blind, in Louisville are the State-owned and operated comprehensive rehabilitation centers in Kentucky 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.

OVR has put in place the following Goal areas for Center Operations to address the needs identified in the CSNA.

Goal 4: Improve facilities and expand programs to increase competitive, integrated employment outcomes.

Objective: 4:1 Upgrade building facilities to provide a safe and accessible environment

Objective 4.2: Increase capacity to offer statewide services that increase competitive, integrated employment outcomes.

Objective 4.3: Maximize job readiness training and work experience opportunities.

## **6. STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE THE PERFORMANCE OF THE STATE WITH RESPECT TO**

## **THE PERFORMANCE ACCOUNTABILITY MEASURES UNDER SECTION 116 OF WIOA**

Kentucky is committed to gathering the collective data required under section 116 of WIOA for all the core partners. 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:

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

Kentucky Center for Statistics (KYSTATS) and state agencies work with the Kentucky Workforce Investment board to ensure required reports for the performance accountability are completed to the best of the state's ability. KYSTATS collects and integrates education and workforce data so that policymakers, practitioners and the public can make the best-informed decisions possible.

Kentucky assesses the overall effectiveness of the workforce investment system in relation to the strategic vision and goals of the KWIB and information from all the core programs. The ultimate goal is to increase the long—term employment outcomes for individuals seeking services, especially those with barriers to employment, to improve services to employers and demonstrate continuous improvement. Kentucky will assess the effectiveness, physical and programmatic accessibility in accordance with Section 188 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (42U.S.C. 12101 et seq.), and continuous improvement of the career center.

Kentucky has a certification process in place to ensure that KCC offices are ready to serve all qualified persons in the regional and local areas as expected. The certification policy is fundamental to aligning programs, policies and activities in the workforce system. Workforce agencies and partners are engaged in this assessment and continuous high—quality improvements to ensure that all related activities are being coordinated in a way that allows partners to review relevant information and take action to improve the system.

KYSTATS works with all relevant state agencies to integrate data storage activities which, hitherto, were being carried out separately. This ensures that data about all persons seeking services from any of the core programs are captured and matched so as to avoid duplication of service delivery.

Storing all WIOA—related data in a common data warehouse will enhance data retrieval and analysis, which will help KCC to efficiently assess the quality of our workforce service providers. Kentucky will review data to track provider success in meeting the targets in the following areas:

- learning gains;
- entry into employment in required quarters;
- obtaining a secondary credential and enrollment into post—secondary or training;

obtaining a secondary credential and gaining employment; and

- gaining a post-secondary credential.

Having all core programs' data integrated will enable service providers to conduct regular audits to determine which program service providers are challenged in meeting targets and in need of technical assistance beyond the standard leadership activities that are provided. Technical assistance will be targeted to the area of need; it will be individualized and focused.

KYSTATS and state agencies will continue to work with KWIB to ensure required reports for the performance accountability are completed to the best of the state's ability. KYSTATS has a variety of tools on their website to access. OVR staff had a training on the various tools surrounding Labor Market information, Career explorer and the Family Resource Simulator.

Currently, in Kentucky the work continues to identify a plan for collecting, tracking, measuring and reporting data from the workforce partners. This requires substantial work on several levels prior to the development and implementation of a system to capture the data. Changes under WIOA have required significant modifications in the current manner that data is collected. This is further complicated by the fact that the workforce partners use different systems and tracking mechanisms.

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 is approaching its useful life expectancy and upgrades to the current system as well as the purchase or licensing of other systems that would meet both the needs of the agency and those of common measure reporting. OVR is in process of procurement of a new system. OVR and the partners access to a Customer Relationship Management system via the Salesforce application.

As already stated, Kentucky is committed to acquiring systems that gathers the collective data required under section 116 of WIOA for all the core partners. Currently, Kentucky is in process of the procurement of a system that will collect, track, measure and report data needed under section 116 of WIOA. Currently, the workforce partners use different systems and tracking mechanisms. OVR is in process of procuring a new system. The new system(s) should allow OVR to have paperless cases, electronic signatures, improved reporting access, increased electronic communication and corroboration among Department partners, and system generated notifications and reminders to increase productivity.

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 for the Rehabilitation Services Administration and common measures reporting.

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 as well the comparative Performance for PY 2020. For the Median Earnings PY 20 OVR is in the 1st Quartile at \$5,540. OVR is in the 4th Quartile for the 2nd Quarter Employment rate at 25.8% the 4th quarter Employment Rate at 23.0% and Credential Attainment Rate at 13.2%. For Measurable Skill Gains for PY20, OVR is in the 3rd Quartile at 35.6%.

### **Quality Assurance**

Goal 2: Compliance with federal and state regulations in all areas to ensure continuous improvement and quality outcomes for consumers.

### **Center Operations**

Goal 4: Improve facilities and expand programs to increase competitive, integrated employment outcomes.

### **Consumer Services**

Goal 5: Implement innovative practices to improve quality outcomes.

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

The Kentucky Workforce Investment Board 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 to adopt a plan to move Kentucky forward through workforce and training and development.

The OVR Executive Director is appointed to serve on the KWIB representing vocational rehabilitation. By serving on the board the Executive Director can work collaboratively with other workforce partners in ensuring Kentucky's Workforce system is inclusive and accessible to individuals with disabilities in the Commonwealth.

The Executive Director and management staff participated in stakeholder State Plan meetings across the state to develop strategies for the combined section of the 2022 Kentucky State Plan.

The Department of Workforce Investment has established reciprocal referral services which allow for more efficient services to individuals with disabilities.

The Central Office administrative functions for workforce programs are centrally located in Frankfort to assure collaboration among the workforce partners. The Workforce Development Leadership team meets bimonthly to cover pertinent issues within the department.

The office participates in the ten Workforce local boards throughout the state as well as serving on different committees of those boards. All five of the core partners are represented on the team. Kentucky strategies have and will continue to support WIOA's focus on low-income adults and youth who have limited skills, lack work experience, and face other barriers to economic success. Vocational Rehabilitation is a full and actively engaged partner in Kentucky in the workforce system. OVR is actively engaged in the planning process, on committees and staff serves as project

directors on some of the KWIB initiatives. They are advocates in the workforce system for individuals with disabilities.

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

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

OVR followed the guidelines established for a Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment and the Vocational Rehabilitation Needs Assessment Guide established by the Rehabilitation Services Administration and The Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, signed into law on July 22, 2014. As specified by the guidelines, a number of data sources were used for this report. In order to provide some context to our analysis of the needs of blind and visually impaired Kentucky residents, this CSNA also examines a number of statistics and estimates provided at the state and national levels.

Based on the information gathered and analyzed from the comprehensive statewide needs assessment conducted in FFY 2021, the Agency's performance, the monitoring offsite visit and draft report, stakeholder meetings with workforce partners, RSA data dashboards and comparative studies, real time data from the case management system, the Strategic Planning process and other sources of information. OVR set specific strategies for the priority areas of 1) Financial Management, 2) Quality Assurance, 3) Consumer, 4) Center Operations, 5) Staff Resources, 6) Public Awareness and for the area of Supported Employment.

OVR will follow the process as outlined in this section in monitoring the progress of carrying out the strategies set for the state goals and priorities in this state plan. Goals are assigned to an OVR Administrator or work group to assure that each strategy action step is carried out and goals are met. The designated staff person or work group will report quarterly on a grid for each goal strategy. A quarterly report will be compiled of the results of the steps taken in meeting the set goals and reviewed by the OVR Executive Leadership Team and State Rehabilitation Council. The Council through its committees and the Executive Leadership Team will quarterly review the summarized reports monitoring the agencies performance in meeting the State Plan Goals and Priorities.

Additionally, through quality assurance processes OVR provides internal and external methods and examinations to identify areas where improvement and training are needed. Internal and external methods utilized are WEBI, Crystal Reports, Case Reviews, Satisfaction Surveys,

Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment, the State's performance under the performance accountability measures of section 116 of WIOA and the Strategic Planning Process.

Real time data is pulled and evaluated from the Web Intelligence system (WEBI) and Crystal Reports monthly or as needed (daily, weekly). The data is reviewed for positive or negative issues and trends in services, data integrity. Any issues that arise are addressed with staff as soon as possible.

The strategies are outlined below:

Conduct a risk analysis and identify needed procedures for internal controls. (2022)

OVR staff work 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. (2022)

Develop needed policies and procedures. (2022)

Initial training of staff on established policies and procedures (2022-2023)

Dedicated staff are assigned to quality assurance monitoring over the internal control processes. (2022-2023)

Development of a quality assurance plan. (2022)

Metrics are established for internal control processes (2022) Identify an agency standard of accessibility. (2022)

Develop a structure to maintain, update, and review policy and procedures. (2022) Train staff on process for policy and procedure. (2022-2023)

Implement a consistent development and review process to inform management and performance. (2022-2023)

Obtain input of leadership and management to identify outcome data needs. (2022-2023) Designate staff to develop a strong data process. (2022)

Partner with internal and external stakeholders in education and workforce data sources. (2022-2023).

Acquire updated technology. (2022)

Purchase and implementation of a new case management system (2022- 2024) Provide staff training in the latest technology (2023).

Ensure staff use accessible forms and documents (2022 – 2023)

Designate staff responsible for creating forms that meet accessibility standards. (2022) Policies and procedures are in place for compliance. (2023)

Train staff on accessibility and compliance. (2023)

Develop a formal plan for ongoing regular maintenance (2022).

Follow and adhere to all state and federal processes for prior approval and purchasing. (2022-2023).

Implement approved projects in the established Capital plan in a timely manner. (2022- 2024)

Conduct a cost benefit analysis to inform decisions (2023-2024).

Develop and implement a plan to ensure adequate resources for the learning format expansion. (2022)



Address hardware, software, and connectivity access barriers (2023)

Expand learning formats to include a variety of online and hybrid programs (2022- 2023). Centers will increase outreach efforts to all 120 counties in the state. (2023).

Establish relationships to provide work-based experiences at the Perkins Center. (2022-2023).

Expand job readiness training and work experience opportunities at the McDowell Center (2022-2023).

Incorporate vendor recruitment as a part of the marketing plan (2023) Train staff on new vendor processes for vetting and credentialing (2022) Recruit new vendors for increased consumer choice. (2022-2023)

Maintain a strong application/recruitment/retention vendor process (2022- 2023). Develop a list and expand the list of agency-approved vendors. (2022)

Develop a plan for consumers to have access to technology and virtual services. (2022)

Counselors will place an emphasis on informed choice in the guidance and counseling process. (2023)

Training of staff on informed choice (2023)

Employer Services Branch will develop and implement a plan to partner with employers who offer jobs in targeted sectors. (2023)

Increase work-based learning opportunities in targeted sectors. (2023) Train staff using career pathways strategy guides. (2022)

Expand types of employment placements into higher paying, lower turnover jobs. (2023)

Increase use of Labor Market Information in employment goal development through guidance and counseling. (2022)

Increase consumer engagement in the VR process through guidance and counseling. (2023)

Implement policies and procedures that guide the implementation of the career pathway approach through team-based, early intervention strategies. (2023)

Add measures to the counselor performance evaluation to reflect expectations. (2023) Create a marketing plan for consumers and vendors (2022)

Develop marketing materials that reflect current information and are engaging and in accessible formats. (2023-2024)

Marketing materials are made available to staff and consumers. (2023-2024).

Identify a staff liaison to work with Cabinet and Personnel Cabinet on issues related to talent recruitment. (2022)

Expand the quantity and types of internship programs with university programs. (2023) Develop and implement an internship agreement. (2022)

Leverage social media as a tool for recruitment. (2023)

Create a strategic planning team to analyze and develop a viable and comprehensive payment system to community rehabilitation providers. (2022)

Create Establishment Projects for expansion of the IPS and Customized employment models to increase a network of services providers. (2022-2023)

Increase Capacity in customized employment through participation in the Leadership Series through the University of Kentucky's Human Development Institute. (2023)

Hold outreach opportunities for potential providers. (2023)

Provide training on new policies related to customized employment, ISP and person-centered planning (2022-2023).

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

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

Seek input from staff and other stakeholders such as education, service providers and individuals with disabilities on extended services. (2022)

Identify potential strategies for the provision of services. (2023) Identify potential funding sources. (2023)

Update the Supported Employment Service Fee Memorandum to include extended services to youth. (2022).

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

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; the Annual Report of the council and the comprehensive statewide needs assessment. OVR currently provides funding in the amount of \$65,000 annually in support of the Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC). Currently there is proposed legislation that would appoint the Department of Workforce, Office of Vocational Rehabilitation as the administrator of the Employment First Initiative as well as the Advisory Council attached to that project.

Other activities are:

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.

The plan will also focus on innovation related to counselor training, staff recruitment, and quality

assurance.

**C. OVERCOME IDENTIFIED BARRIERS RELATING TO EQUITABLE ACCESS TO AND PARTICIPATION OF INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES IN THE STATE VR SERVICES PROGRAM AND THE STATE SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES PROGRAM.**

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.

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. OEAS is taking the knowledge they are learning from OVR to bring back to their agency to replicate best practices.

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 assistive technology and other available auxiliary aids and services.

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.

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.