

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

Describe:

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

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

Priority I: Develop and implement strategies to improve OVR's performance on the required accountability measures under section 116 of WIOA.

Priority II: Provide excellent customer service and maintain collaborative working relationships with the WIOA partners in the Career Centers.

Priority III: Provide supported employment services that lead to competitive integrated employment and improve the number of successful outcomes for supported employment cases across the state.

Goal 1: Recruit, employ, retain the most qualified and highly skilled rehabilitation staff which reflects employment focused, job driven outcomes.

Objective 1.1: Examine staff patterns and service capacity in order to effectively deliver quality vocational rehabilitation services.

Strategies: Identify crucial positions to be filled with qualified candidates Strategies: Staff Utilize sector strategies regional, industry—focused approaches to building skilled workforces that result in job opportunities for all workers across a range of industries

Measure: Increase staff retention rates

Measure: Crucial positions identified are filled with qualified candidates

Objective 1.2: Training and mentorship opportunities to facilitate advancement to prevent gaps in services.

Measure: Programs are developed for all class specifications.

Objective: 1.3 Increase salaries as a method to address employee retention

Measure: Increase staff retention rates by 5%

Progress:

A process is in place to review all requests to fill positions and a tracking mechanism is utilized to track the position request from its initial posting through the entire personnel position. Executive Leadership members along the with Human Resources at a Cabinet Level submitted a plan to State

Personnel for salary increases. At the writing of this plan, there is no formal approval of the plan. OVR staff are reviewing job classifications for the VR series and request an increase in the in-range hiring for applicants. The job specifications were changed to broaden the scope of allowable degrees given that many candidates that apply do not qualify for positions given how stringent the specifications of the job are written.

Turnover rates for all organizational units within OVR in 2020 ranged from 15.38% to 44.44% and we expect turnover rates for 2021 to be equal to the 2020 rates or higher. OVR has found it increasingly difficult to retain current employees, the majority of whom are in positions that have specialized education and skill requirements, due to significantly higher recruitment salaries offered by other employers. The higher recruitment salaries offered by other employers have also resulted in OVR being unable to attract new talent. Due to the resulting low staffing level, caseload weights are exceptionally high, which impacts services to consumers.

There were changes made to the entry level salary managers can offer candidates. Currently, there is consistency in candidates turning down the entry level wage as well as an offer of 10% above the entry level refusing the offer of employment. This has however created inequity in salaries across the agency.

The Kentucky Center for Economic Policy recently released a report regarding the state workforce crisis. OVR is struggling to hire and retain employees and the COVID -19 Pandemic has contributed to the severity of the issue.

Goal 2: Develop and implement training that adequately address the needs of staff under WIOA and changes to policies and procedures under the combined agency.

Objective 2.1: Assess the training needs of staff as they apply to combined policies and procedures and WIOA.

Measure: Needs Assessment completed

Objective 2.2: Develop and deliver identified training to staff that aligns with a shared vision and mission of the combined agency.

Strategies: Assess the training needs of staff as they apply to combined policies and procedures and WIOA. Measures: needs assessment completed of staff training delivered on WIOA of staff training delivered relating to policies and procedures

Measure: Staff trained on WIOA

Measure: Staff training on policies and procedures

Progress:

A training needs assessment survey was conducted in June of 2019 and the results were analyzed for trends. Staff receive resources on an ongoing basis regarding training opportunities weekly. As a result of the reorganization a new employee training was held to address concerns of the Rehabilitation Counselors for the Blind. A statewide common measures training was held in October of 2019 that included policies established for common measures.

Ethics and social media training were conducted as well as a variety of zoom trainings on policy.

New employees are mandated to attend a face-to-face training for onboarding. As part of the orientation process, the agency utilizes subject matter experts from within the agency to deliver the training. The subject matter experts include the Division of Field Services Director, Division of Field Services Assistant Directors, Division of Field Services Regional Managers, Employer Services Branch Manager, Assessment Technology Branch Manager, Social Security

Administrator and members of the counselor mentoring program. The topics covered are: the agency mission, philosophy, values, federal and state laws, appropriations, budget, eligibility, assessment, vocational goal development, plan development, pre-employment transition services, community based work transition services, confidentiality and ethics, supported employment, assistive technology (based on the Assistive Technology Act of 1998), diversity, disability awareness, Social Security Administration (SSA), Ticket to Work, Workforce Investment Opportunities Act (WIOA) specific disabilities. Training programs for all staff emphasize informed consumer choice and maximizing consumer direction of individualized rehabilitation plans. Information regarding to current research is disseminated to all staff via email and formal training opportunities. This training occurred during the calendar year for new hires. In June 2020 the agency was selected to participate in the Center for Innovative Training in Vocational Rehabilitation (CIT-VR) along with nine other state agencies. Through this program the staff have been participants in training developed through CIT-VR and their partnership programs such as VR Development Group and San Diego State University Interworks. In 2022 the Interworks program will have completed an individualized training program for Kentucky OVR. This development has been a work in progress for 5 months. OVR distributes available training resources that are applicable to partners in the workforce system.

Goal 3: Develop the policy and procedures manual, Service Fee Memorandums, and other written materials to be concise, accurate, and accessible in order to support staff, eliminate confusion, and improve the function of the combined agency.

Objective 3.1.: Ensure the provision of consistent and quality services for individuals with disabilities in the Commonwealth.

Strategies: Assign staff to specific work teams Strategies: Review and modify forms, printed materials and manuals in keeping with the combined policies and procedures.

Measure: Completion of the combined policies and procedures manual

Measure: Revision and Implementation of Service Fee Memorandums Review and modify forms, printed materials and manuals in keeping with the combined policies and procedures.

Measure: Review and modify forms, printed materials and manuals in keeping with the combined policies and procedures. All materials produced in accessible formats.

Objective 3.2: Develop operations manual.

Measure: Completed, staff trained and manual distributed.

Progress:

This goal was set as a result of the Reorganization and the combining of the blind and general agency in 2018. Completion of the manual occurred. All performance plans for Counselors have been updated to reflect goals for common measures. Service Fee Memorandum revisions and

updates have occurred to reflect the combined agency but there is still work to be done in this area. An administrative operations manual to assure OVR has sufficient internal controls has not been completed.

Goal 4: Effectively utilize staff and fiscal resources in order to provide statewide services to all eligible consumers and increase competitive integrated employment outcomes.

Objective 4.1: Effective and efficient fiscal operations Measure: Elimination of the waiting list by category Measure: Serve open categories keeping with the OOS policy Measure Open categories under Order of Selection

Measure: Operating budget

Measure: Accurate and timely reporting.

Objective 4.2: Maximize effectiveness of the Employer Services Branch Measure: Mission Clarification

Measure Implementation of Quality Controls

Measure: Services available in every county of the state Objective 4.3: Expedite services in order to increase outcomes

Strategies: Counselors will address and distribute a Benefits Planning Fact Sheet, developed by the SSA Coordinator for Vocational Rehabilitation, for eligible consumers, especially during discussion of the Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE).

Strategies: Provide instruction in self—advocacy, benefits planning, and financial readiness at Carl D. Perkins Vocational Training Center (CDPVTC) and Charles W. McDowell Center Strategies: Participate in the Kentucky Career Center Business Service Teams and make business contacts statewide.

Strategies: Collaborate with the Coalition for Workforce Diversity in Louisville and explore expanding the model statewide.

Measure: Average time between eligibility and plan reduction of 10%

Measure: All applicants who receive SSA benefits will receive information on benefits planning and at least 50% of them will receive a benefits analysis.

Progress:

Fiscal staff assigned to OVR operations are new to their positions (length of service under six months). Technical support was requested from RSA, and this is ongoing as well technical assistance from the Quality Technical Assistance Center. The Quality Technical Assistance Center team provided a training for Executive Leadership and managers on documenting reasonable and allowable expenditures. DB101 (an online tool for Social Security and SSI Disability beneficiaries) has been purchased and staff as well as community partners have been trained in its use. This online resource can be utilized by anyone including the consumer's assists with benefits planning. The agency provides benefits and financial planning to consumers through a fee-for-service or in-house through statewide contracts. VR counselors can refer directly to their local WIPA or (if not

eligible) they can refer to the contracted in-house services. In-house services are highly encouraged or the fee-for-service since they are not held to any time constraints with a greater emphasis on financial planning and follow-up. OVR has conducted presentations to Community Rehabilitation Programs (CRPs) and non-profit providers to consider providing benefits planning services. The agency is encouraging the CRPs and non-profit providers to participate in "Introduction to Social Security Disability Benefits, Work Incentives, and Employment Support Programs" offered by Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) in hopes that some staff might become interested in pursuing certification to provide those services.

OVR has all four priority categories open.

The KATLC website offers online financial education and empowerment resources for consumers. The agency also seeks to partner with other entities to promote and expand financial empowerment activities for individuals with disabilities. The agency is partnering with Louisville Metro Government, Kentucky Coalition against Domestic Violence, and Bank on Louisville. The agency also collaborates with the Kentucky Career Centers to provide financial education as appropriate.

Core programs and partners gained access to a business customer relationship management system based on a Salesforce platform. 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 expand direct employer interaction statewide with the business services teams.

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

The following factors impeded the achievement of the Goals and priorities.

OVR had a decrease in the number of individuals applying for services. Over the past three years individuals determined eligible for OVR services often did not remain engaged through the entire VR process.

Issues related to inaccurate data reporting. Timely and accurate entry of the required data fields in the case management system by staff remains an ongoing training issue. OVR is in process of procuring and replacing its current legacy system. The new system although it won't solve the issue completely will assist with more efficient and accurate data reporting.

OVR faced challenges in the recruitment, hiring and retention of qualified professional staff. OVR is experiencing high turnover rates that effect VR service delivery. There is a lot of stress for hiring managers that are investing a lot of the time covering vacant positions and training new employees. This is an issue that impacts consumers receiving services as well.

The combining of the two agencies into a combined agency in 2018 had an impact on the achievement of the goals and priorities for the current state plan. As with any merger or reorganization there is major work associated with the combining of policies, procedural operations. The process is good in many respects because agencies must closely examine

operations, and this brings about change that often benefits the organization. Change on this level also brings resistance from staff and requires adjustment on the part of the organization's employees. Over the past two years, OVR made progress in this area; however, the impacts of COVID during the second half of 2020 until the present time have created other barriers that have impeded the accomplishment of goals.

Given there also two reorganizations of the fiscal operations in Kentucky in the past 3 years, turnover increased and this has had a major impact on OVR's ability to complete federal reports in a timely manner. Turnover created the loss of veteran knowledge creating an environment where staff have needed training on every aspect of the VR program.

In August of 2020, there was an additional reorganization for the Education and Workforce Development Cabinet that shifted the unemployment insurance and other workforce programs to the Labor Cabinet that had an affect on operations. At this time there is a planned reorganization of the Education and Workforce Development Cabinet and the Labor Cabinet that would combine the two Cabinets into the Labor and Education Cabinet.

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

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

Goal 1: Improve efficiency and effectiveness of CRP services

Objective 1.1 Increase the number of CRP's providing Supported Employment Services

Strategies: Recruit more providers for supported employment by holding outreach opportunities for potential providers and support providers for unserved and underserved areas.

Measure: Increase in the number of providers (5%)

Objective 2.1: Improve monitoring and exploration of additional strategies to improve CRP service quality and compliance.

Strategies: Involve job coaches with transition students by the last semester of school.

Strategies: Train staff on new policies related to customized employment and person—centered planning.

Strategies: Require notes to be submitted by Supported Employment Providers by the 5th day of each month.

Strategies: Continued monitoring by the Section 511 Implementation Team to ensure agency compliance to WIOA requirements related to OVR relationships with sheltered workshops.

Measure: Scorecard

Objective 3.1: Seek alternative strategies for providing and funding Long Term Support Services.

Strategies: Gather input from staff, education partners, and service providers, individuals with disabilities, their families and other stakeholders.

Measure: Two alternative strategies implemented by 2021.

Progress:

Four additional providers expanded services to include Customized Supported Employment via contract opportunities. There are now 93 CRPs throughout Kentucky that provide SE services. The increase in the number of SE providers, although small is still significant given the impact of COVID-19.

The team explored the development and implementation of a CRP Qualitative Assessment scale. The CRP Qualitative Survey was distributed in October of 2020. Staff conduct ongoing education and collaboration with the Department of Behavioral Health to access Medicaid Waiver Programs.

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

At the beginning of 2018, Kentucky went through a merger of the two VR agencies. As with any merger or reorganization there is major work associated with the combining of policies, procedural operations. The process was good in many respects because OVR has had to closely examine operations that benefited the organization. However, change on any level brings resistance from staff. During this time staff were required to make adjustments and this was difficult for many of them. The COVID -19 pandemic has impacted the delivery of services for this area. Many individuals chose to shelter at home during the early onset of the pandemic when vaccinations were not available and that has continued to be the mindset of some individuals. From March 17, 2020, until June 11, 2021, OVR staff worked remotely at home as an alternate location. At first, for some staff technology was an issue slowing processes for service delivery. OVR leadership and management worked hard to solve issues surrounding remote service delivery. Individuals with disabilities have historically been underrepresented in the workforce and the pandemic has exacerbated the issues surrounding employment. Community Rehabilitation Providers experienced staff shortages and high turnover during the time people. A lack of referrals for the providers impacted their line item budgets and funding. In Kentucky there were some providers that stopped providing supported employment due to budget issues.

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

- 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 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 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%.

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 procurement of a new system. 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.

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

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; 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 a grant total of \$130,000 for innovation and expansion activities from Basic Support Grant Funds for 2021 and 2022. The SILC will provide 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 housed under the Department of Aging and Independent Living (DAIL) in Kentucky.

Statewide Council for Vocational Rehabilitation Annual Report

The recommended theme for the 2021 Annual Report was Diligently Flexible signifying the amount of change and flexibility the COVID 19- Pandemic had imposed upon agency services, staff, partners and consumers. The council was supportive of the agency and the challenges we were facing during the pandemic. 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 part of the federal requirements, OVR collaborated with the University of Kentucky Human Development Institute (HDI) to conduct the most recent survey of closed cases between October 2019 and September 2020. Participants were randomly selected. The Evaluation Unit at HDI emailed and/or telephoned consumers to request participation in the survey between January 17 – May 8, 2021. 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 July 2021 quarterly meeting. A total of 539 individuals participated in the survey with responses received from each of the 17 regional districts. The overall statewide consumer satisfaction was 87.5% while the highest satisfaction was reported from the West Blind District (100% satisfaction). For access to the full report visit <https://bit.ly/3B62kLr>.

Highlights from the report include the following:

- Regardless of closure status, 87.3% of respondents indicated that services were good or very good.
- Overall rating was the highest for those who closed with a Positive Employment Outcome, 95.3% indicated good or very good.
- Almost three-fourths of respondents whose cases were closed successfully felt that OVR helped prepare them for their current job.
- 92% of consumers said they would return to OVR in the future.
- 91.2% of consumers who were employed indicated they are satisfied with the kind of work they do.
- 83.1% reported being satisfied with the salary they receive.
- 87.3% reported overall satisfaction with the quality of services as good to very good.