**DRAFT**

**Department of Rehabilitation Services (DORS)**

**Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind (BESB)**

**Vocational Rehabilitation Program (VR)**

**Program-Specific Requirements for Vocational Rehabilitation (Blind)**

**The Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Services Portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan must include the following descriptions and estimates, as required by section 101(a) of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended by WIOA:

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

 Sec. 102(b)(D)(iii) of WIOA**

# a. Input of State Rehabilitation Council (Blind)

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

**1. input provided by the State Rehabilitation Council, including input and recommendations on the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan, recommendations from the Council's report, the review and analysis of consumer satisfaction, and other Council reports that may have been developed as part of the Council’s functions; (Blind)**

**Bureau Update: Input of the State Rehabilitation Council: The State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) for the Vocational Rehabilitation Program at the Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind continues to be a valuable and active contributing partner to the Vocational Rehabilitation Program and the organization as a whole. Over the course of the past fiscal year, the Council members have participated in many activities on behalf of the Program, as well as continuing their existing responsibilities as identified in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. The following information summarizes the recommendations and initiatives of the State Rehabilitation Council and incorporates the Bureau’s response to each item.**

**SRC Recommendation: Have the Consumer Satisfaction Survey conducted by an entity experienced in performing consumer–based surveys and statistically analyzing outcome data.**

**Bureau Response: The Bureau agreed with this recommendation. The SRC commissioned the Center for Public Policy and Social Research (CPPSR) at Central Connecticut State University (CCSU) to conduct a consumer satisfaction survey of VR service recipients for fiscal year 2017. The purpose of the survey was to evaluate the services that clients received from the Vocational Rehabilitation Program at BESB. Results of the survey found that 96 percent of survey respondents would recommend BESB Vocational Rehabilitation Services to a friend, representing the second-highest rating for this category in the history of the survey. Reported satisfaction with BESB services increased in all of the areas surveyed in 2017. The most significant improvement was seen in the extent to which clients felt that their expectations were met (8.54, up 0.97 in rating), an all-time high. Overall satisfaction with BESB services also increased substantially over the past year, setting a new record high (8.78, up 0.43 in mean rating). This replaces the previous record of 8.6 set in 2010. The completed report was posted on the Bureau’s section of the agency website (www.ct.gov/besb).**

**SRC Recommendation: Based on the results of the Consumer Satisfaction Survey, implement strategies for improving on the delivery of services for clients of the Program.**

**Bureau Response: The Bureau agreed with this recommendation. Based upon the results of the FY 2016 Consumer Satisfaction Survey, the SRC utilized these results to carry forward priorities for FY2017. Two major focus areas were transportation options and developing a clearer approach toward assisting clients in the development of business plans.**

**It was recognized that satisfaction levels associated with transportation services are reliant upon clients having transportation options. Two relatively new options are LYFT and Uber. The members of the Council requested more information on these services. Toward that end, the Vice-Chair of the Council coordinated for Uber representatives to present at the March, 2017 meeting. The representatives discussed approaches that could be used to increase access to their services. The Council learned about services available through LYFT at their December, 2017 meeting.**

**The Council also recognized the difficulty that creating a business plan has been for clients and the resulting dissatisfaction with the process. The Council membership recommended that the Bureau develop a guide for clients to follow, along with a business plan template. An initial draft was presented to the Council members at the September, 2017 meeting for review and comment and it was approved for use at the Council’s December, 2017 meeting. It is now posted on the agency website for clients to utilize.**

**SRC Recommendation: Include a Vocational Rehabilitation Client Success Story into each meeting of the Council.**

**Bureau Response: The Bureau agreed with this recommendation. During FY 2017, the State Rehabilitation Council continued its initiative for the Vocational Rehabilitation Program whereby a standing agenda item for Council meetings consists of a “VR Success Story”, in the form of a presentation by a BESB client who has achieved an employment outcome.  Typically explaining the type of work they are involved in and how BESB supports helped them with that work, both the Bureau and SRC members continue to respond positively to this initiative, as it provides the SRC with an opportunity to hear value-added and diverse perspectives on BESB’s ability to support clients and employers in the workplace.**

**SRC Recommendation: Support initiatives that develop leadership qualities in transition–age youth who are blind.**

**Bureau Response: The Bureau supported this important recommendation. The State Rehabilitation Council continued its support and sponsorship of the Youth Leadership Forum (YLF), an annual week-long leadership training program for transition-age youth with disabilities. The SRC is an ongoing co-sponsor of this program and considers its co-sponsorship to be very important and worthwhile.**

**SRC Recommendation: Identify strategies to address the fiscal constraints of the Vocational Rehabilitation Program.**

**Bureau Response: The Bureau agreed with this recommendation. Recognizing the fiscal challenges experienced in the state, as well as the relatively small amount of funds received through reallotment in FY 2017, the membership formed a workgroup, to join with designated members from the Bureau’s Advisory Board in order to begin discussions on the implementation of an Order of Selection, if it were to become necessary. The workgroup was charged with making recommendations to the membership of the Council and the Advisory Board on strategies that could be utilized in an effort to stay out of an Order of Selection. The work of this group generated recommendations for modifications in policy in areas where costs of purchased services have been increasing to levels that cannot be sustained within available funding. These proposed policy revisions will be the subject of a public comment period in 2018.**

**SRC Recommendation: Update Bureau policies to align with changes in state and federal regulations.**

**Bureau Response: The Bureau agreed with this recommendation. The State Rehabilitation Council, in collaboration with the Advisory Board dedicated significant time during the year in finalizing the policies that govern the administration of the Vocational Rehabilitation and Children’s Services Programs at the Bureau. For the Vocational Rehabilitation policies, the primary focus was to update the language to reflect the changes that occurred at the federal level through the passage of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act and its accompanying regulations. Several new policies were required, included Pre-Employment Transition Services and Customized Employment. The Children’s Services policies required updating to reflect recent changes in state statutes as well as updating of policies related to services for transition age youth. Both policy manuals underwent a public comment period with public hearings. The State Rehabilitation Council held a special meeting to review and deliberate on the public comments received and to finalize the policies that became effective on July 1, 2017 for both Programs.**

**SRC Recommendation: Reserved for completion subsequent to the public comment period for updating of this document.**

**Bureau Response: The Bureau will comment after this process is completed.**

**2. the Designated State unit's response to the Council’s input and recommendations; and (Blind)**

**Bureau Response: The Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind agreed with all of the recommendations made by the State Rehabilitation Council as detailed in the above section.**

**3. the designated State unit’s explanations for rejecting any of the Council’s input or recommendations. (Blind)**

**Bureau Response: The Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind did not reject any of the State Rehabilitation Council’s recommendations.**

## i. Comprehensive System of Personnel Development; Data System on Personnel and Personnel Development (Blind)

**(Formerly known as Attachment 4.10)). Describe the designated State agency's procedures and activities to establish and maintain a comprehensive system of personnel development designed to ensure an adequate supply of qualified State rehabilitation professional and paraprofessional personnel for the designated State unit, including the following:**

**1. Data System on Personnel and Personnel Development (Blind)**

**A. Qualified Personnel Needs. (Blind)**

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

**i. the number of personnel who are employed by the State agency in the provision of VR services in relation to the number of individuals served, broken down by personnel category; (Blind)**

**Bureau Update: The current composition of the Vocational Rehabilitation Program includes one State Director, one Vocational Rehabilitation Supervisor, one Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Coordinator, one Quality Control Reviewer, one Education Project Coordinator, seven full–time Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors, two Vocational Rehabilitation Assistant Counselors, three Rehabilitation Teachers (two of these staff members are Rehabilitation Technologists), one Administrative Assistant, and one Secretary.**

**With this staffing level, the staff to client ratio breaks down as follows: Administrative Assistant 1/835; Education Projects Coordinator 1/835; State Director 1/835; Secretary 1/835; Quality Control Reviewer 1/835; Rehabilitation Teachers 1/278; VR Counselor/Assistant Counselor 1/92; VR Counselor Coordinator 1/835; and VR Supervisor 1/835.**

**In terms of years of service, the breakdown for staff is as follows: 1 – 4 years of service 3/19 or 16%; 5 – 9 years of service 2/19 or 10%; 10 – 14 years of service 5/19 or 26%; 15 – 19 years of service 3/19 or 16%; 20 – 29 years of service 3/19 or 16%, over 30 years of service 3/19 or 16%.**

**ii. the number of personnel currently needed by the State agency to provide VR services, broken down by personnel category; and (Blind)**

**Bureau Update: The service delivery to the clients is divided into five regions throughout the state. At least one Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor is assigned to each of the five regions. The state is divided in half (East and West) for rehabilitation technology services, with one technologist covering each region. The Rehabilitation Technologists each conduct assessments for clients who are in need of adaptive technology to participate in Vocational Rehabilitation services. There is also one Rehabilitation Teacher who serves the entire state, providing independent living skills training and adaptive technology training with screen readers.**

**There is one Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Coordinator that covers the entire state and works with the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors on case management strategies. This position also provides coordination of job development activities and employer engagement across the state.**

**The service delivery model also includes one Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor who works primarily with college students. This Counselor has established close working relationships with the offices of Disability Services at the institutions of Higher Education. Through this approach, consistent coordination of support services can be achieved. The assignment of a specific Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor to the college students also ensures consistency and timeliness with the financial aid application process.**

**The Education Project Coordinator serves as the Program’s Transition School–to–Work coordinator, overseeing the statewide provision of Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) in collaboration with two Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors whose primary responsibility is to serve a caseload that is comprised of students with disabilities. The Education Project Coordinator also is responsible for the development and implementation of programs that provide students with opportunities to work through summer employment and internships, as well as providing career exposure experiences through job shadowing, employer tours, and mentor activities.**

**iii. projections of the number of personnel, broken down by personnel category, who will be needed by the State agency to provide VR services in 5 years based on projections of the number of individuals to be served, including individuals with significant disabilities, the number of personnel expected to retire or leave the field, and other relevant factors. (Blind)**

**Bureau Update: Over the next 5 years, the Bureau anticipates there will be vacancies due to retirement in the category of Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor. The demographic of this need is illustrated by the following description, listing the job title, current number of positions within that job title, the current number of vacancies in the job category and the projected need over the next five years.**

**Job Title––Total positions––Current vacancies––Projected vacancies over next 5 years:**

**Administrative Assistant: 1 –– 0 –– 0**

**Education Projects Coordinator: 1 –– 0 –– 0**

**State Director: 1 –– 0 –– 0**

**Secretary: 1 –– 0 –– 0**

**Quality Control Reviewer: 1 –– 0 –– 0**

**Rehabilitation Teachers: 3 –– 0 –– 0**

**VR Counselor/Assistant Counselor: 9 ––1–– 2**

**VR Counselor Coordinator: 1 –– 0 –– 0**

**VR Supervisor: 1 ––0 –– 0**

**It is projected that within the next five years, there will be two Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors retiring. Due to funding constraints however, the Program is anticipating filling only one of these two projected vacancies.**

**With the relatively high starting salary for Master’s level Rehabilitation Counselors compared to the private rehabilitation sector within the state, it is anticipated that recruitment efforts would again result in a sufficient applicant pool of qualified individuals when a Counselor vacancy occurs. The Program recruits for individuals who meet the highest standard in the state (CRC eligibility) first. The competitive salary offered by this Bureau has resulted in the ability to hire individuals who possess this level of credentialing in most situations. If there are no qualified candidates from those recruitments, then recruitment will be made for a Vocational Rehabilitation Assistant Counselor level.**

**B. Personnel Development (Blind)**

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

**i. a list of the institutions of higher education in the State that are preparing VR professionals, by type of program; (Blind)**

**Bureau Update: Central Connecticut State University, Masters in Rehabilitation Counseling**

**ii. the number of students enrolled at each of those institutions, broken down by type of program; and (Blind)**

**Bureau Update: The Vocational Rehabilitation Program monitors the number of students enrolled in the Masters of Rehabilitation Counseling program at Central Connecticut State University in New Britain, Connecticut. This program has 88 students enrolled with 16 expected to graduate this year. The number of Masters of Rehabilitation Counseling degree candidates is sufficient to address the projected recruitment needs over the next fiscal year.**

**iii. the number of students who graduated during the prior year from each of those institutions with certification or licensure, or with the credentials for certification or licensure, broken down by the personnel category for which they have received, or have the credentials to receive, certification or licensure. (Blind)**

**Bureau Update: Central Connecticut State University graduated 9 students with Master’s Degrees in Rehabilitation Counseling in 2017.**

**2. Plan for Recruitment, Preparation and Retention of Qualified Personnel (Blind)**

**Describe the development and implementation of a plan to address the current and projected needs for qualified personnel including, the coordination and facilitation of efforts between the designated State unit and institutions of higher education and professional associations to recruit, prepare, and retain personnel who are qualified, including personnel from minority backgrounds and personnel who are individuals with disabilities.**

**Bureau Update: The Vocational Rehabilitation Program remains in contact with the institution of higher education in this state that offers a Master’s Degree program in Rehabilitation Counseling to ensure that an adequate flow of graduates is anticipated for projected vacancies. When positions are available, recruitment efforts are conducted through job announcements that are placed on the Department of Administrative Services web site, news publications of minority–based organizations, and colleges in the area. The Program also distributes the job vacancy announcements to organizations of and for individuals who are blind within the state, as well as advertising nationally through Rehab Net, which is a list–serve that connects all 79 public vocational rehabilitation agencies. The list–serve for the National Council of State Agencies for the Blind (NCSAB) is also utilized to distribute job announcements to ensure the widest possible distribution.**

**3. Personnel Standards (Blind)**

**Describe the State agency's policies and procedures for the establishment and maintenance of personnel standards consistent with section 101(a)(7)(B) and 34 CFR 361.18(c) to ensure that designated State unit professional and paraprofessional personnel are adequately trained and prepared, including:**

**A. standards that are consistent with any national or State-approved or -recognized certification, licensing, registration, or other comparable requirements that apply to the profession or discipline in which such personnel are providing VR services; and (Blind)**

**Bureau Update: All staff members working as Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors and the Vocational Rehabilitation Supervisor at the Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind meet the Comprehensive System of Personnel Development. These staff members meet these requirements by having a Master’s Degree in Rehabilitation Counseling or a closely related field, as specified by the criteria for certification as a rehabilitation counselor by the Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification (CRCC). In addition, the State Director for the Vocational Rehabilitation Program also meets the CRCC standard and holds the credential of Certified Rehabilitation Counselor.**

**There are two staff members that do not meet the Comprehensive System of Personnel Development requirements of a Master’s Degree in Rehabilitation or a closely related field. As specified in Bureau policy, the Vocational Rehabilitation Supervisor, who meets this standard, approves all eligibility decisions, Individualized Plans for Employment, and case closures for these two staff who are both in the job title of Vocational Rehabilitation Assistant Counselor.**

**There is no requirement in the job specification of the Vocational Rehabilitation Assistant Counselor series to advance into the Counselor level. Staff hired into the job title of Vocational Rehabilitation Assistant Counselor may seek continuing education to meet the qualifications of the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor level, within available funding.**

**Working with the Department of Labor, the One Stop Centers and their regional partners, Vocational Rehabilitation staff participated in training seminars on the needs of employers within the state. This has included training in the use of occupational outlook data. Staff has also received training in the use of Career Index Plus through collaboration with the Job Driven Technical Assistance Center.**

**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. (Blind)**

**Bureau Update: With the passage of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), new opportunities for collaborative training with other partners of the workforce system have emerged within the state. The Bureau has worked in partnership with the State Department of Labor for training in occupational outlook and labor market projections. Additionally, the Bureau is now working closely with the One Stop partners, participating in regional team meetings with the business consultants from the partner agencies to identify employment opportunities for clients.**

**4. Staff Development. (Blind)**

**Describe the State agency's policies, procedures, and activities to ensure that, consistent with section 101(a)(7)(C) of the Rehabilitation Act, all personnel employed by the designated State unit receive appropriate and adequate training in terms of:**

**A. System of staff development (Blind)**

**a system of staff development for professionals and paraprofessionals within the designated State unit, particularly with respect to assessment, vocational counseling, job placement, and rehabilitation technology, including training implemented in coordination with entities carrying out State programs under section 4 of the Assistive Technology Act of 1998; and**

**Bureau Update: The Vocational Rehabilitation Program makes available a full range of training programs offered through public and private entities. Program staff members are encouraged to identify training areas of particular interest for their individualized professional development in addition to the Bureau identifying programmatic training categories for staff to participate in.**

**Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors work directly with their supervisor to identify areas for professional growth and development each year. Each employee of the Program receives at least one written evaluation per year, which is consistent with collective bargaining agreements. The Supervisor of the Vocational Rehabilitation Program meets with staff members regularly to assist with any areas of their job performance that could benefit from further development and to provide feedback on best practices that have proven to be effective in service delivery. Technical assistance on policies and procedures is also provided during individualized meetings and during staff meetings. If an employee is found to need additional assistance and training in order to meet the job requirements, then a plan for improvement is developed. This may include the use of weekly reviews, additional written performance evaluations, and increasing the opportunity for the employee to participate in formalized training programs to increase skills and competencies.**

**Assistive Technology continues to be among the highest training priorities for staff in Vocational Rehabilitation, particularly since adaptive equipment is so often a component of success on the job for clients served by the Program. One of the Rehabilitation Technologists attended and presented at a national conference on technology at California State University at Northridge (CSUN) in 2017. Additionally, staff have attended trainings in the use of the Braille Note Touch, Zoomtext, Microsoft Office with JAWS, Google Docs and Windows 10 with JAWS, along with online training on using JAWS for Windows with Career Index Plus.**

**Additional areas of staff training in the past year have included a seminar on the new ethics standards issued by the Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification, Supported Employment resources conference, Business Engagement, Apprenticeship opportunities, and Life Care Planning.**

**B. Acquisition and dissemination of significant knowledge (Blind)**

**procedures for the acquisition and dissemination of significant knowledge from research and other sources to designated State unit professionals and paraprofessionals.**

**Bureau Update: Information on best practices in other state vocational rehabilitation programs as well as evidenced based research and practices is disseminated to staff of the Vocational Rehabilitation Program to help them remain current with trends and strategies. The Vocational Rehabilitation Program staff participated in a technical assistance project with the Job Driven Technical Assistance Center, with a primary focus of utilizing labor market information to a greater extent in the career exploration process with clients. This technical assistance was very productive and has resulted in the rollout of Career Index Plus as a tool for both Counselors and clients to utilize. One of the Rehabilitation Teachers has been assigned to train clients in the use of the tool.**

**5. Personnel to Address Individual Communication Needs (Blind)**

**Describe how the designated State unit has personnel or obtains the services of other individuals who are able to communicate in appropriate modes of communication with or in the native language of applicants or eligible individuals who have limited English speaking ability.**

**Bureau Update: There are two Vocational Rehabilitation Assistant Counselors who are bicultural, one of whom is fluent in Spanish, and who serves Spanish–speaking clients throughout the State. Part of their duties includes outreach to community–based organizations to distribute information about services offered through BESB. The Bureau also provides information to clients in large–print, Braille, electronic, and audio formats to ensure that materials are accessible. Bureau staff can also utilize contracted translation services to communicate with clients in other languages. Interpreter services for individuals who are deaf are available on a fee for service basis, including tactile interpreters for clients of the Bureau who are deaf and blind and whose preferred mode of communication is through sign language.**

**6. Coordination of Personnel Development Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (Blind)**

**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.**

**Bureau Update: Collaboration through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) occurs on a continual basis through joint training programs and initiatives. Staff members from Vocational Rehabilitation participate in transition work groups including the Transition Taskforce that is facilitated by staff from the State Department of Education. There is also a Community of Practice group that focuses on best practices and emerging trends in transition services to youth with disabilities. This multi–agency initiative includes representatives from this Bureau as well as the State Department of Education, the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, the Department of Developmental Services and the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services.**

### j. Statewide Assessment (Blind)

**(Formerly known as Attachment 4.11(a)).**

**1. Provide an assessment of the rehabilitation needs of individuals with disabilities residing within the State, particularly the VR services needs of those: (Blind)**

**A. with the most significant disabilities, including their need for supported employment services; (Blind)**

**Bureau Update: The State Rehabilitation Council to the Vocational Rehabilitation Program for individuals who are blind commissioned the Center for Public Policy and Social Research (CPPSR) at Central Connecticut State University to conduct a comprehensive statewide needs assessment in fiscal year 2017 to assist the Bureau with establishing goals and priorities. The full report as issued by CPPSR appears immediately below. The Council will be utilizing the findings and recommendations within this document to assist with the development of goals, objectives, strategies and measures in the coming year.**

**I. Assessment Overview**

**In accord with the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind (BESB) is required to conduct a needs assessment of individuals with disabilities living within the state. This needs assessment complies with the evaluative objectives outlined in the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA) Guide dated November 30, 2009. As noted in the Guide, this analysis is valid for three years. In conducting this analysis, Central Connecticut State University's (CCSU) Center for Public Policy and Social Research (CPPSR) gathered information from consumers, the State Rehabilitation Counsel (SRC), the Internet, and Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) staff.**

**II. Methodology**

**In conducting the assessment, the Center for Public Policy and Social Research examined and/or conducted:**

* **An analysis of population statistics for Connecticut that describe disability and minority status;**
* **A description of VR participation rates of minority individuals in comparison to individuals in the overall population in Connecticut and to national VR statistics;**
* **An analysis of VR services to individuals with the most significant disabilities,**
* **An analysis of Bureau improvements since the previous VR assessment;**
* **The results of an in-person focus group held with the State Rehabilitation Council (conducted June 2017);**
* **The results of the consumer satisfaction survey for individuals served during Fiscal Year (FY) 2017;**
* **Comparative longitudinal data analysis based off of the consumer satisfaction survey from FY 2014-2017;**
* **The results of in-depth interviews with select BESB VR counselors and VR support staff members (conducted December 2017)**

**III. Clientele Summary**

**A. Overview**

**BESB’s registry has shown a steady increase over recent fiscal years. Data for FY 2013 showed a registry of 11,034, an increase of 2.7% from FY 2012. The registry in FY 2014 comprised of 11,367 individuals with visual impairment, an increase of 2.9% from the prior year. In FY 2015, 11,854 individuals were listed in the registry, the highest number observed for this assessment. Fiscal Year 2015 represented a 4.3% client increase from the prior year. No reliable state blind population statistics are available at this time. Therefore, it is difficult to ascertain whether this recent registry increase indicates growth within the visually impaired community or success on BESB’s behalf at identifying more of its potential clientele.**

**B.  Minorities**

**According to the U.S. Census Bureau’s 2015 estimate data, predictions based on 2010 Census findings, Connecticut’s minority population is slightly less representative than that of the national population. Approximately two-fifths of all Americans (38.4%) self-identified their ethnicity in a minority group. Of those individuals who associated with one ethnicity, 17.6% were Hispanic or Latino, 13.3% were African American, 5.6% were Asian, 1.2% were Native American, and 0.2% were Pacific Islander. Deviating slightly from national statistics, approximately one-third (31.8%) of Connecticut residents identified themselves as a minority. In order of frequency, ethnic groups within Connecticut are accounted for as follows: 15.4% Hispanic/Latino, 11.6% African American, 4.6% Asian, 0.5% Native American, and 0.1% Hawaiian/Pacific Islander.**

**Comparing BESB, state, and national statistics, we find that the Bureau’s Vocational Rehabilitation program appears to be successful at engaging Connecticut’s visually impaired minority community. Overall, Bureau clientele enrolled in the VR program who self-identify their ethnicity reasonably reflect both the state and national minority population at approximately 33.5%. Sub-groups are similarly represented. For FY 2013, BESB reported the following program enrollment: 17.1% African American, 13.1% Hispanic/Latino, 2.3% Asian, and less than 1% Native American/Pacific Islander. Currently, there is no reliable data that measures the incidence of blindness in minority communities within Connecticut. For this reason, the needs assessment approximates information based on general minority population statistics.**

**Since the last VR assessment was issued, BESB has continued to take numerous steps to improve its outreach to the minority community. BESB employs three VR counselors that are bicultural, two of whom are fluent in Spanish. The Bureau also employs two African American counselors, one of whom serves a caseload in traditionally underserved communities. BESB pays for interpreters on an "as needed" basis, continuing outreach to specific minority groups through local meetings and events. Such outreach efforts include attending the Hispanic Alliance of Greater Stamford (HAGS) committee meetings and attending career fairs that cater to Spanish speakers. As another example of a successful outreach effort, a VR counselor was interviewed on the program “Analeh,” a Spanish-speaking program that aired on cable access channel 18 and was subsequently posted on YouTube. The interview focused on services available through BESB and various conditions associated with visual impairment. CPPSR concludes that BESB has made successful efforts in reaching out to underserved populations.**

**C. Youth**

**Reporting practices vary, so it is difficult to compare BESB’s success at reaching minority and child populations with other states. For example, many agency/bureau websites do not divulge statistics for race, ethnicity, or age. Despite the lack of comparative data, it is possible to assess how BESB is doing within its own state. CPPSR concludes that BESB is actively engaging blind youth in the State of Connecticut. In FY 2014, the BESB client registry was 11,367, with children accounting for 1,092 of these individuals. In FY 2015, 1,088 of the 11,854 individuals registered were children, representing a drop of less than half of one percent (.36%). Once in the registry, BESB has an extremely efficient process for identifying clients from Children’s Services and referring them to the VR program.**

**IV. Vocational Rehabilitation Program Challenges**

 **Three key environmental challenges impacting BESB’s VR program have emerged since the last needs assessment. This section outlines these three challenges: (1) the implementation of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), (2) agency consolidation within Connecticut, and (3) the deteriorating economic climate. The purpose of identifying these challenges is to more fully contextualize the climate in which BESB is currently operating. With this understanding serving as a foundation, more realistic suggestions can be made concerning ways to improve the VR program.**

**A. The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)**

**The following is an overview of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, as described by the United States Department of Labor:**

**President Barack Obama signed the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) into law on July 22, 2014. WIOA is designed to help job seekers access employment, education, training, and support services to succeed in the labor market and to match employers with the skilled workers they need to compete in the global economy. Congress passed the Act by a wide bipartisan majority; it is the first legislative reform in 15 years of the public workforce system.[[1]](#footnote-1)**

**The highlights of WIOA, as identified by the United States Department of Labor, include:**

1. **Requiring states to strategically align workforce development programs.**
2. **Promoting accountability and transparency.**
3. **Fostering regional collaboration.**
4. **Improving the American Job Center System.**
5. **Improving services to employers and promoting work-based training.**
6. **Providing access to high quality training.**
7. **Enhancing workforce services for the unemployed and other job seekers.**
8. **Enhancing the Job Corps Program**
9. **Streamlining and strengthening the strategic roles of workforce development boards.**

**Notable to BESB, WIOA:**

**Improves Services to Individuals with Disabilities: WIOA increases individuals with disabilities' access to high quality workforce services and prepares them for competitive integrated employment.**

* **AJCs will provide physical and programmatic accessibility to employment and training services for individuals with disabilities.**
* **Youth with disabilities will receive extensive pre-employment transition services so they can successfully obtain competitive integrated employment.**
* **State vocational rehabilitation agencies will set aside at least 15 percent of their funding to provide transition services to youth with disabilities.**
* **A committee will advise the Secretary of Labor on strategies to increase competitive integrated employment for individuals with disabilities.**
* **VR state grant programs will engage employers to improve participant employment outcomes.**

**Ramifications: Critical to BESB is the fact that the Bureau is being asked to provide pre-employment transition services without additional funding, drawing upon critical funds from the overall budget to meet this requirement. BESB has had to reallocate valuable resources to meet this requirement, including dedicating two VR counselors who previously served adults to the pre-employment transition population. A further impediment to BESB is limitations on what is currently classified as “pre-employment” expenditures. Key budgetary areas, such as transportation and higher education expenditures such as tuition and fees, are not included in the 15% of funds that must be spent on pre-employment transition.**

**B. Agency Consolidation**

**In 2011, the Connecticut Legislature passed a law that consolidated BESB into a newly created state agency along with other agencies and programs that serve individuals with disabilities.**

**Ramifications: By being a part of a larger structure, BESB no longer has its own unique budget, as well as the autonomy that comes with being a separate state entity. With that said, the merger did bring about valuable cost efficiencies. Centralized human resources, contracting, and business services (such as asset management) are key examples. Beyond cost savings, this also creates a positive experience for those interacting with DORS. For example, where contracts may have been different across state agencies prior to the merger, vendors now experience consistency in such documents.**

**C. The Deteriorating Economic Climate**

**The declining economic climate, on both the federal and state levels, poses the most significant challenge to BESB. This is because the demands on BESB services remain high, yet the Bureau’s financial resources are significantly reduced. BESB relies heavily on federal reallotment dollars, money that has dwindled since the last assessment. In Fiscal Year 2016, $2.5 million was requested in reallotment, while $982,485 was received. In Fiscal Year 2017, $2.5 million was requested, while $238,433 was received. In his 2016 Reallotment Results Notice sent to VR State Directors, RSA Fiscal Unit Chief David Steele writes:**

**“Thirty-three (33) VR agencies requested a total of $166,780,457 in additional VR funds through reallotment. This leaves a shortage in additional funds available for reallotment of $31,170,276, when comparing the total amount of additional funds requested to the total amount of funds available for reallotment under the VR program. This is the first time since FFY 2008 that more VR funds were requested than relinquished by States” (e-mail dated August 30, 2016).**

**The final sentence aptly contextualizes the fiscal challenge posed to VR programs around the country. The demand for financial assistance now outpaces supply, forcing bureaus like BESB to make extremely difficult cuts to services.**

**On a more local level, Connecticut’s economic climate is also in decline. In a memo dated November 20, 2017, the Connecticut Office of Policy and Management provided an update on the state’s General Fund for Fiscal Year 2018. The memo revealed a projected deficit of $202.8 million, which represents “slightly more than one percent of net General Fund appropriations.” In accord with CGS 4-85, the state is now mandated to pursue a deficit mitigation plan. The memo details sources of the state’s financial decline:**

**These changes result in General Fund revenues being revised downward by $227.0 million compared to the recently adopted budget for FY 2018. The largest decline was in federal grants, down $142.1 million due largely to final reconciliation of federal funds received to those earned for medical services during the second half of FY 2017 as well as a $48.6 million technical update to reflect the revenue impact of net (rather than gross) appropriations for Medicaid rate increases in SB 1503. The Income Tax has been revised downward by $89.4 million, but $55.3 million of that change is due simply to a reallocation of some of the tax changes in Public Act 17-2, June Spec. Sess., to the Refunds of Taxes line item. Therefore, the actual reduction in the Income Tax forecast was $34.1 million. The Sales Tax has been revised downward $69.6 million as its growth has remained below target. The largest positive change is in the Inheritance and Estate Tax, up $30.0 million. All other changes net to a negative $11.2 million.**

**Ramifications: The significant decline in reallotment dollars poses a difficult challenge to BESB – how to do more with less, all while continuing to offer the quality services that the Bureau is accustom to delivering. BESB has taken a very proactive approach to keep out of an order of selection, such as identifying strategies to reduce purchase service and administrative costs. The State Rehab Council has worked closely with the Bureau to help keep BESB out of an order of selection thus far, an effort that is commended by CPPSR.**

**V. Vocational Rehabilitation Program Client Satisfaction Measurements**

**In Fiscal Year 2017, the BESB Vocational Rehabilitation Division had 114 clients who achieved employment outcomes, an uptick of 23 individuals from FY 2016. VR program satisfaction amongst these clients, as measured by Central Connecticut State University via a quantitative survey, remains high. Started in 2003, this survey provides valuable longitudinal data on client satisfaction regarding both VR services and counselors. The most recent survey was conducted in the summer of 2017, with CCSU’s Center for Public Policy and Social Research completing telephone interviews with 49 VR clients who achieved employment outcomes that fiscal year.**

**BESB continues to receive high marks for their Vocational Rehabilitation services and counselors. Similar to 2016, almost all of the clients surveyed (96%, down 2 percentage points) reported that they would recommend BESB VR services to a friend. This figure ties the second-highest rating for this question in the history of the survey, bettered only by the all-time high (98%) set last fiscal year. Reported satisfaction regarding overall experiences with BESB services, as rated on a scale from 1 to 10-point scale, remains strong.**

**Reported satisfaction with BESB services increased in all of the areas surveyed in 2017. The most significant improvement was seen in the extent to which clients felt that their expectations were met (8.54, up 0.97 in rating), an all-time high. Overall satisfaction with BESB services also increased substantially over the past year, setting a new record high (8.78, up 0.43 in mean rating). This replaces the previous record of 8.6 set in 2010.**

**Ratings of counselors rebounded from the dips in satisfaction observed last year, with average ratings improving in all but one area. The remaining area remained unchanged from last year. In 2016, two dimensions of counselors improved, while the remaining seven dimensions declined in mean ratings. Two dimensions of counselors that saw particularly large increases in 2017 were identifying career goals (setting an all-time high of 8.96, up 1.51 in mean rating) and understanding the process for complaint resolution (7.92, up 1.21 in mean rating). Counselors’ ability to provide information in a format that clients can use remained unchanged from last year (8.51 in mean rating).**

**Since survey reporting began in 2003, Low Vision and Rehabilitation and Adaptive Equipment have been the most widely-used BESB services, with each respectively averaging over a three-in-four utilization rate. For the second year in a row, Low Vision takes the top spot as the most highly utilized service (84%, no percentage point change), maintaining its third-best utilization percentage in the history of this survey. On the other end of the usage spectrum, use of Reader Services was cut in half from last year (10%, down 10 percentage points). This represents the second-lowest utilization rate in the history of the survey, second only to the all-time low set in 2012 (8%) by 2 percentage points. Overall, of the eight services offered to VR clients, four of them experienced an increase in use, three reported declines in utilization rates, and one remained at the same level of use this fiscal year.**

**Of those services that saw an uptick in use, Transportation experienced the largest increase. One-quarter of all VR clients (25%, up 9 percentage points) reported using this service, notching the second-highest utilization rate in the history of the survey. Personal Care Attendant Services also enjoyed an uptick in use (8%, up 6 percentage points), matching the third-highest utilization rate. Small Business Services climbed (14%, up 3 percentage points), also matching its third-highest utilization rate. Finally, Skills Training Services experienced a modest increase (45%, up 1 percentage point), recording the third-highest utilization rate in the history of the survey.**

**The remaining three services all experienced a decline in use this year, with Higher Education Training being the most notable. This service plummeted to its lowest utilization rate in the history of the survey (4%, down 23 percentage points). Prior to this fiscal year, the lowest recorded use was 11%, a percentage found in both the 2004 and 2012 surveys. Also notable was the drop in the percentage of clients utilizing Rehabilitation Equipment Services (71%, down 12 percentage points). While rates still remain high, with Rehabilitation Equipment representing the second most widely-used service, the 2017 survey recorded the lowest rate since 2009 (67%).**

**Section IV of this document details three environmental challenges facing BESB – all of which were in play when this survey was conducted. When placed in context with the new demands of WIOA, agency consolidation, and the deteriorating economic climate (and rapidly diminishing reallotment dollars), findings from this survey become even more remarkable. It is CPPSR’s conclusion that BESB is extremely-forward thinking, anticipating and addressing future complexities with careful consideration before they become urgent. It is this type of consistently-applied operational paradigm that contributes to high client satisfaction rates in a difficult economic climate.**

**VI. Focus Group Summary**

 **As part of the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment, the Center for Public Policy and Social Research conducted a focus group with members of the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC). This focus group was conducted within the context of an SRC business meeting held in June of 2017. The purpose of this focus group was to understand how SRC members felt about BESB services, needs that should be addressed in the near future, and how BESB could increase outreach efforts to the unserved and underserved. Given that BESB’s Director was present at the meeting, Council members seeking greater confidentiality were encouraged to call the Principal Investigator at a later point in time. It is worth noting that these qualitative findings cannot be generalized beyond those individuals attending the June business meeting. Still, these findings provide valuable insight into how a group of select Bureau affiliates view BESB’s operations.**

 **Similar to the 2014 needs assessment, access to technology emerged as a focal point of the focus group. Questions were raised by numerous SRC members regarding the extent to which BESB is addressing VR clients’ technological needs, particularly as they relate to training. With continually-advancing technology, it is a perpetual challenge to keep clients on the cutting-edge. Fortunately, with the advancement of technology comes more sophisticated accessibility features. The SRC was pleased with the extent to which accessibility features are now built right into the products themselves. To the fullest extent possible, BESB should make sure that clients have access to upgraded units with these built-in specs, such as special readers.**

 **On the issue of training, BESB currently employs two rehabilitation technologists and one trainer. A concern is that there is still a wide range of clients coming into the VR program with no computer experience. This underscores both the importance of – and challenges associated with – providing such training. The point was raised that, with limited trainers, BESB should identify new and creative ways to deliver training, such as via Skype. It was concluded that BESB has already considered this, implementing Tandem, remote, and Skype-based training. Perhaps most critically, embracing new training mediums allows for BESB staff to be more efficient in their outreach efforts, as travel time around the state is significantly reduced. SRC members commended BESB for evolving its training programs.**

**A final point that emerged from the SRC focus group was regarding programming for individuals with multiple disabilities, such as having both visual and mobile impairment. The group concluded that BESB collaborates with other disability-centered agencies; additionally, the VR program does allow for modifications to be made on a case-by-case basis. Collaborative IPEs with VR plans represent a new area of engagement for BESB. These collaborative efforts are commendable and, to the fullest extent possible, should be expanded. Investigating new sources of collaboration would be a worthwhile endeavor.**

**VII. Targeted Actions Suggested by CPPSR**

**Informed by both the quantitative and qualitative data collected for this needs assessment, CPPSR makes the following recommendations:**

**1. Increased promotion of client self-resourcefulness to leverage staff time and improve service**

**VR clients should be encouraged to be their own best resource, an opportunity to save BESB both time and money. Strong evidence exists that this encouragement is underway; however, more can be done in this regard. Career Index Plus is a job search platform that is accessible to the visually-impaired. BESB sent a letter to VR clients encouraging them to search for jobs on this platform, with the Bureau providing technical training on how to use the Index. We suggest designing a positive incentive program to further encourage clients to be their own best advocate. In a positive incentive program, clients can earn a reward by reaching certain milestones and/or completing pre-determined tasks. Another option, albeit less desirable, is to create a negative reinforcement program where clients relinquish or delay something of value if they do not reach certain milestones or complete pre-determined tasks. To maintain a positive relationship with clients, the former suggestion is strongly preferred by CPPSR.**

**2. Re-examine volunteer and college intern opportunities to**

**leverage staff time**

**The 2014 needs assessment found “great merit” in what, at the time, was a newly-minted college mentorship program. This program has struggled in its effectiveness for a number of reasons, including the extensive training that is required to complete most tasks and the “time to productivity” being too long for short-term workers. CPPSR encourages BESB to revisit the utility of volunteers and college interns. Have all possible angles for these workers to contribute been exhausted? We suggest a brainstorming session where VR employees think outside of the box, reflecting upon tasks that could possibly be done with minimal training. For example, given the growing importance of things like Career Index Plus, business engagement activities, and WIOA compliance, might there be new opportunities for interns or volunteers to assist in these areas? BESB is encouraged to consider if college interns or volunteers can be used in new ways, which in turn could help paid VR staff to become more efficient.**

**3. Clearly vocalize Bureau initiatives to employees to spread**

**knowledge and boost morale**

**While conducting in-depth interviews with VR staff, CPPSR observed inconsistency regarding knowledge of the Bureau’s key initiatives. These initiatives should be shared widely across all facets of the VR program. As an example, not all employees were aware of the critical inroads that BESB has made with the American Job Centers (AJC). It should be widely communicated that the Bureau has had great success in furthering its relationship with the AJC, including having BESB representatives periodically stationed at these centers and educating AJC employees on topics related to visual impairment. CPPSR suggests designing an internal “success story,” similar to those that currently focus on VR clients. This internal “success story” can focus on new community partnerships that were developed or significantly expanded upon, boosting morale in the Bureau and helping to disseminate knowledge among VR staff.**

**4. Increase the use of recorded materials to leverage staff time and improve service**

**Availability of pre-recorded Internet-based materials (i.e. ScreenCasts) covering high-demand topics, such as how to use Career Index Plus, can potentially help cut down on the number of training sessions that need to be conducted. Recordings could be revisited by clients on an as-needed basis. CPPSR is sensitive to the fact that many clients have individual questions regarding the use of these programs; however, pre-recorded files can help address commonly-asked questions and/or introduce clients to a program for the first time.**

**5. Increase recruitment of client and community constituencies as Bureau advocates**

**Building on the reserves of goodwill, the Bureau should strategically enlist advocates and systematically build an inventory of positive profiles and stories for use in explaining the nature and impact of Bureau activities. The VR “Success Story” is one great example of such an inventory item. BESB should consider working with both clients and community partners to help shed light on what the Bureau does. CPPSR suggests the use of personal narrative, which can be quite compelling in underscoring the importance of BESB. Increasing the community awareness of what BESB does may help in a multitude of ways, including capturing the attention of employers, new collaborative partners, and more. To that end, sharing positive profiles via social media may be valuable in increasing community awareness of BESB.**

**6. Undertake a systematic review of undeveloped synergies with other state/community entities, both within and outside of DORS**

**The Bureau has already achieved significant cost savings through collaborations with other entities; however, there are likely to be additional opportunities for such efficiencies, especially if a broader range of constituencies are included. Speaking with directors of relevant graduate programs is one example. BESB may discover that graduate programs are hungry for collaborative opportunities, as many of these programs require cornerstone projects or service hours as a graduation requirement.**

**7. Strengthen the institutional memory of the Bureau by designing an employee-authored manual**

**BESB has an impressive number of long-serving employees. The knowledge and experience of these employees should be systematically captured. CPPSR suggests developing a manual where current employees can detail items such as insider tips on job effectiveness, things they wish they knew on their first day, valuable assets that took a while to discover, and other related items. BESB has a strong culture of collaboration between employees, but if not systematically captured, some valuable institutional memory may inadvertently be lost over time.**

**B. who are minorities; (Blind)**

**Bureau Update: Individuals from underserved populations are tracked in the Vocational Rehabilitation Program to ensure that they are engaged in services and fully understand the scope of available services that can be provided. Before any individual from a traditionally underserved population is inactivated from the Program with an unsuccessful outcome, a supervisory review process is required. The Vocational Rehabilitation Supervisor confirms that the individual was provided with information in his or her preferred language and accessible format. Additionally, the Supervisor reviews the case record of services to confirm documentation is present, substantiating that the individual was afforded the opportunity to make informed decisions in regards to participation in the Vocational Rehabilitation Program.**

**The Vocational Rehabilitation Program employs two Counselors that are bicultural, one of whom is fluent in Spanish. The Vocational Rehabilitation Program also employs two Counselors who are African–American. These four staff are available to provide outreach to community based organizations that can offer linkages to traditionally underserved communities.**

**C. who have been unserved or underserved by the VR program; (Blind)**

**Bureau Update: Approximately one-third of Connecticut residents identify themselves as have a minority background. This is further reflected statistically as 15.4% Hispanic/Latino, 11.6% African American, 4.6% Asian, 0.5% Native American, and 0.1% Hawaiian/Pacific Islander. Bureau clientele presently participating in the Vocational Rehabilitation Program favorably reflect the state’s demographic, with 24% of clients self-identifying as African American, 18% as Hispanic/Latino, 3% as Asian, and 1% as Native American/Pacific Islander.**

**D. who have been served through other components of the statewide workforce development system; and (Blind)**

**Bureau Update: BESB has been actively involved in referring Vocational Rehabilitation clients to other programs and services available through the statewide workforce development system. The level of commitment to facilitate client engagement in other components of the system is evident in the data that reflects 94 clients who have engaged in Adult Employment and Training Programs, 38 clients engaged in Adult Education programs, 7 clients engaged in Dislocated Worker Programs, 5 clients engaged in Job Corps, 35 clients enrolled in Wagner-Peyser and 23 clients enrolled in the Youth initiatives. BESB finds great value in these partnerships, particularly given the lean fiscal situation. Maximizing the resources and services available through other components of the statewide workforce development system is crucial for maximizing the limited funding available in the BESB Vocational Rehabilitation Program.**

**E. who are youth with disabilities and students with disabilities, including, as appropriate, their need for pre-employment transition services or other transition services. (Blind)**

**Bureau Update: In addition to a Transition Coordinator, BESB has dedicated two Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors to work exclusively with Pre–Employment Transition–Age students. There are currently 94 clients who are recipients of Pre-Employment Transition Services. The Counselors participate in planning and placement team meetings to address the full range of services that are available. Real work experiences are coordinated in both after-school and summer jobs. Career exploration and job shadowing opportunities are further provided to many of these students as well. With the existence of a Children’s Services Program in the Bureau, Vocational Rehabilitation Program staff has a strong linkage for identifying referrals of new clients who are potentially eligible for Pre-Employment Transition Services. Education Consultants from the Children’s Services Program often coordinate with the Vocational Rehabilitation Transition Coordinator to develop expanded core curriculum activities that feature mentoring, career exposure and independent living skills training for clients served in that program as well as clients that are mutually served by both programs simultaneously.**

**2. Identify the need to establish, develop, or improve community rehabilitation programs within the State; and (Blind)**

**Bureau Update: Other than providing training to staff of community rehabilitation programs on blindness related technology and adaptations for accessing training and employment, no needs to establish, develop or improve upon these programs have been identified.**

**3. Include an assessment of the needs of individuals with disabilities for transition career services and pre-employment transition services, and the extent to which such services are coordinated with transition services provided under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act . (Blind)**

**Bureau Update: BESB organizes and conducts career exposure programs, mentoring programs, college days and skills acquisition events, and works with school district staff to incorporate these activities into the Individualized Education Program (IEP) or service plan of the students. The Vocational Rehabilitation Program also utilizes job shadowing and real work experiences for students with disabilities. In the past fiscal year, 45 students participated in paid work experiences. Through a collaboration with United Technologies facilitated by the Chair of the BESB State Rehabilitation Council, 9 students participating in National Mentoring Day, gaining insight and exposure to careers in the aerospace industry.**

#### k. Annual Estimates (Blind)

**(Formerly known as Attachment 4.11(b)). Describe:**

**1. The number of individuals in the State who are eligible for services; (Blind)**

**Bureau Update: The Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Program presently has 673 individuals who are eligible for services.**

**2. The number of eligible individuals who will receive services under: (Blind)**

**A. The VR Program; (Blind)**

**Bureau Update: Of the total number of eligible individuals, 664 are presently receiving services under an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE). There are 15 individuals in pre-service status, which includes 6 clients in applicant status, 5 clients in eligibility status and 4 clients in plan status, pending implementation. Based on projections of anticipated new referrals over the course of the fiscal year, it is anticipated that an additional 120 clients will enter the Vocational Rehabilitation Program.**

**B. The Supported Employment Program; and (Blind)**

**Bureau Update: Of the total number of eligible individuals in the Vocational Rehabilitation Program, 31 clients have been determined eligible for supported employment services, 13 of whom are youth with disabilities.**

**C. each priority category, if under an order of selection; (Blind)**

**Bureau Update: Not applicable.**

**3. The number of individuals who are eligible for VR services, but are not receiving such services due to an order of selection; and (Blind)**

**Bureau Update: Not applicable.**

**4. The cost of services for the number of individuals estimated to be eligible for services. If under an order of selection, identify the cost of services for each priority category. (Blind)**

**Bureau Update: In fiscal year 2017, there were a total of 921 participants in the Vocational Rehabilitation Program. The Vocational Rehabilitation Program expended $1.98 million in purchased client services during the fiscal year. Additionally, $115,000 was expended for the improvement and maintenance of Business Enterprise locations. Total Program costs, including all purchased services, staffing, and administrative operations were approximately $5.67 million for the year. For Fiscal Year (FY) 2018, budget projections indicate that approximately $5.22 million will be expended on combined Program costs, including an estimated $1.97 million in purchased services to serve approximately 975 clients, and $3.25 million in administrative and operational costs. This estimate includes inflationary adjustments, inclusion of indirect cost charges of 10.9 percent to the Vocational Rehabilitation Program, as well as projected costs to serve transition age students receiving Pre-Employment Transition Services.**

**With the availability of $3.07 million in Title I carry over funds from FY 2017 in addition to the federal Title I allotment of $3.15 million (representing 15 percent of the total Title I allotment received by Connecticut) and state matching funds of approximately $775,000, the Program does not anticipate the need to enter into an Order of Section in FY 2018 and is not projecting the need for an Order of Selection in FY 2019.**

##### m. Order of Selection (Blind)

**Describe:**

**1. Whether the designated State unit will implement and order of selection. If so, describe: (Blind)**

**A. The order to be followed in selecting eligible individuals to be provided VR services. (Blind)**

**Bureau Update: The Bureau is not operating under an order of selection and provides services to all eligible individuals.**

**B. The justification for the order. (Blind)**

**Bureau Update: Not applicable.**

**C. The service and outcome goals. (Blind)**

**Bureau Update: Not applicable.**

**D. The time within which these goals may be achieved for individuals in each priority category within the order. (Blind)**

**Bureau Update: Not applicable.**

**E. How individuals with the most significant disabilities are selected for services before all other individuals with disabilities; and (Blind)**

**Bureau Update: Not applicable.**

**2. If the designated State unit has elected to serve eligible individuals, regardless of any established order of selection, who require specific services or equipment to maintain employment. (Blind)**

**Bureau Update: Not applicable.**

###### o. State's Strategies (Blind)

**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. (Blind)**

**Bureau Update: The following strategies support the goals and objectives that have been identified with the participation of the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC), and reflect the commitment of the Bureau to increase employment opportunities for people who are legally blind or visually impaired through the provision of Vocational Rehabilitation and Supported Employment Services.**

**Methods To Be Used to Expand and Improve Services:**

**Utilizing the results and recommendations from the previous Comprehensive Needs Assessment, as well as the Section 107 Review conducted by Rehabilitation Services Administration, the Program identified areas that needed further expansion and revision to better serve clients. Shortening the timeframe for the development of the Individualized Plan for Employment was recommended in the Section 107 Review. This recommendation was implemented in Bureau policy subsequent to a public hearing process and prior to the passage of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. The Act prescribes a time frame of 90 days for plan development to occur. The Program is utilizing this requirement to ensure the timely movement of case services subsequent to determinations of eligibility.**

**To augment the capacity of maintaining adequate levels of contact with clients, the Program implemented the recommendation of the Center for Public Policy and Social Research to contact graduate level programs that offer Master’s Degrees in Rehabilitation Counseling and closely related fields to seek internship and practicum students who could assist the Program in contacting clients, following up on service requests and maintaining higher levels of contact than what is possible with the existing staffing levels. This approach had been initially successful, with students from Springfield College and Central Connecticut State University coming to the Bureau for their graduate field work in the Vocational Rehabilitation Program. However, as staffing within the Bureau has contracted in response to budgetary constraints, the time required to oversee internships has diminished considerably. The level of training required to familiarize interns with the Program in order for the interns to perform even the most basic of activities proved to be beyond the time capacity of the staff. While the Bureau acknowledges the importance and value of providing internship opportunities, these options must be implemented only when staffing resources are available to provide adequate training and supervision.**

**The Vocational Rehabilitation Program further addressed case management activities through the reestablishment of the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Coordinator position, which had been vacant for several years. A major focus of this position was to assist the Counselors with case management strategies. Utilizing the newly developed case management computerized dashboard, the Coordinator, Supervisor and the Counselors are able to track the timely movement of client services and timeframes for case status changes. The dashboard is capable of analyzing trends by caseload to further assist in identifying where additional activity is required. Over time however, it has been found that utilizing the Counselor Coordinator for case management reviews has created an overlap of duties with the Supervisor’s position. Diminishing staff resources in the Vocational Rehabilitation Program has necessitated a reexamination of the best use of this role. With the impending retirement of two counseling staff, the Program intends to shift some of the Coordinator’s responsibilities to align with the priorities of the program, with a primary focus on statewide employer engagement strategies, and a secondary role of managing a reduced caseload of clients while they are attending institutions of higher education in order to maintain a single point of contact with Disability Coordinators at these facilities.**

**The results of the Comprehensive Needs Assessment also found that while the Bureau’s website contained a considerable amount of important and useful information, it was organized in a way that made it difficult to search for information by topic. An extensive review of the website was subsequently conducted and substantial revisions were implemented. The Bureau’s website is now organized by type of service, with subcategories under each major service heading. Policy manuals are grouped by program type as well so visitors to the website can locate and search the applicable policies more conveniently than in the past.**

**The Comprehensive Needs Assessment also recommended that BESB develop a presence in social media, possibly uploading information on services to You Tube. This recommendation has been explored and has been conservatively implemented. To date, there have been 5 BESB mentor videos uploaded to You Tube for public viewing, but plans for greater expansion in the use of social media have become part of the larger discussion at the agency level. It is anticipated that the agency and the Bureau will expand further into social media in future years.**

**Results of the Consumer Satisfaction Survey illustrated how a lack of transportation options impacted on levels of satisfaction in that service category. The members of the Council requested more information on services offered through LYFT and Uber. Toward that end, the Vice-Chair of the Council coordinated for Uber representatives to present at the March, 2017 meeting. The representatives discussed approaches that could be used to increase access to their services. The Council learned about services available through LYFT at their December, 2017 meeting. The Bureau plans to pursue purchasing arrangements with these services in situations where short-term transportation solutions are needed as an interim step while clients and staff seek more long-term solutions that cannot be funded through the Vocational Rehabilitation Program.**

**The Bureau and the State Rehabilitation Council further recognized the difficulty that creating a business plan has been for clients and the resulting dissatisfaction for the process. The Council membership recommended that the Bureau develop a guide for clients to follow, along with a business plan template. This has been completed and is now posted on the agency website for clients to utilize.**

**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. (Blind)**

**Bureau Update: The Vocational Rehabilitation Program employs two full time Rehabilitation Teachers in the role of Technologists who are available to provide individualized assessments on adaptive technology options and solutions so that clients can make informed decisions as to the best option for their particular vocational training and employment situations. The Technologists are able to provide these assessments at the employer site, training facility or home of the client by utilizing a portable array of technology devices that are maintained by the Bureau. The Technologists are further available to offer short-term training in the use of adaptive technology that is needed for participation in vocational training or employment. A third Rehabilitation Teacher is available to provide training to clients in the use of Career Index Plus with adaptive technology so that clients can be more fully engaged in the career exploration and job seeking process.**

**Additionally, the Bureau maintains a fully equipped adaptive technology laboratory in Windsor that is available for both assessments and training sessions. These training sessions can be done in person or remotely with the use of tandem training through the internet. In collaboration with the Southeastern Connecticut Community Center of the Blind, an additional technology laboratory is located at their facility in New London.**

**The Bureau further utilizes fee for service vendors for training in the use of adaptive technology devices in circumstances where training is required over multiple sessions that stretch beyond the capacity of the on-staff Rehabilitation Teachers. Through the Assistive Technology Act, BESB works closely with the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services to provide outreach and referrals of clients who are deaf and blind so that clients who meet the eligibility requirements of the Deafblind Technology Grant can apply for and receive specialized adaptive equipment to increase their access to communication.**

**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. (Blind)**

**Bureau Update: The Vocational Rehabilitation Program will continue with the successful approach of utilizing specifically assigned staff to provide outreach to community based organizations that have linkages to individuals from underserved populations. As noted in subsection J (Statewide Assessment) of this section of the Unified State Plan, the percentage of individuals who self-identify a minority background reflects a demographic that is consistent with or greater than the demographic for the overall state. The individualized relationships the Counselors have established with the community based organizations has strengthened the outreach activities into the local communities.**

**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). (Blind)**

**Bureau Update: The two Pre-Employment Transition Counselors participate in Planning and Placement Team (PPT) meetings of students with disabilities and assist in the development of Individualized Education Programs (IEP’s) for these students. The services that are detailed in the IEP of each student are factored into the development of each client’s Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE), which must be developed within ninety (90) days of the determination of eligibility for vocational rehabilitation services, or by the time the client exits high school, whichever comes sooner. Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor involvement can begin as early as age 14, with Pre-Employment Transition Services commencing at age 16. Referrals to the Program are most commonly initiated by the Education Consultants of the Bureau’s Children’s Services Program and Teachers of Students with Visual Impairments that work directly for school districts.**

**Since BESB maintains a registry of all students who are legally blind or visually impaired within Connecticut, the process for identifying and referring clients from Children’s Services to the Vocational Rehabilitation Program is streamlined and efficient. The electronic case management system for the Bureau has a built in tracking system for identifying clients by age range to further facilitate the referral of clients who desire to participate in vocational rehabilitation services. The Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors work with the students, educators, parents or legal guardians and the Program’s Transition Coordinator to identify careers of interest, develop career exploration opportunities, work and job shadowing experiences, mentoring activities and leadership development programs.**

**In addition to serving on the statewide transition taskforce, the Vocational Rehabilitation Program’s Transition Coordinator is also an active member of the Board of Directors of the Youth Leadership Project that oversees the Youth Leadership Forum. The forum is a yearly event that teaches students with disabilities leadership and self–advocacy skills.**

**BESB continues to conduct career exposure camps for high school students who are visually impaired or legally blind. These programs include opportunities to interact with former recipients of vocational rehabilitation services who are successfully employed in a variety of careers. Some of these programs are held on college campuses, where the students gain a firsthand perspective of residential campus life in addition to gaining insight into a variety of careers that former clients are now engaged in.**

**Vocational Rehabilitation Program staff members continue to participate in and present information at in–service training programs organized by the Bureau for public school teachers and guidance counselors on issues affecting students who are blind or visually impaired. The Children’s Services Program of the Bureau provides a comprehensive training series every year for school district staff to learn about low vision aids, adaptive technology, braille instruction, expanded core curriculum activities and resources that are available to facilitate the education and transition of students served by BESB.**

**The Vocational Rehabilitation Program has also established a goal of participating in Planning and Placement Team meetings early in the transition process to identify the need for supported employment services, and to identify providers, both private and public, that may offer services while a student is preparing to transition from public or private education into employment.**

**5. If applicable, plans for establishing, developing, or improving community rehabilitation programs within the State. (Blind)**

**Bureau Update: Other than providing training to staff of community rehabilitation programs on blindness related technology and adaptations for accessing training and employment, no needs to establish, develop or improve upon these programs have been identified.**

**6. Strategies to improve the performance of the State with respect to the performance accountability measures under section 116 of WIOA. (Blind)**

**Bureau Update: The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act provided new opportunities for collaboration, coordination and participation of partners, with a shared goal and vision of connecting job seekers with relevant training and employment. Through these partnerships, BESB Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors are now part of regional business services teams, meeting regularly to discuss current employer needs within their regions, and to identify upcoming employment opportunities and skill requirements to be considered as a qualified candidate for these positions. Through the execution of Memorandums of Understanding and accompanying Infrastructure Agreements, the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors have also begun part-time co-location at the America’s Job Centers, encouraging clients to register for applicable services available through partner programs. Rehabilitation Technologists offer technical assistance on approaches to increase accessibility of the One Stop Centers and partner services. While this new system is still in the implementation stages, it is bringing collaboration and coordination to a new level that had not previously existed, with the shared goal of achieving the performance measures for the state.**

**7. Strategies for assisting other components of the statewide workforce development system in assisting individuals with disabilities. (Blind)**

**Bureau Update: The Vocational Rehabilitation Program staff’s expertise on blindness related topics, including how adaptive technology can be utilized to make core services of the One Stop Centers and training programs accessible is offered to the partner programs. The Rehabilitation Technologists have been reviewing testing materials, equipment and structural design at the America’s Job Centers, offering recommendations on how to make information and training materials accessible to job seekers who are blind. Further discussion is underway in regards to involving the Bureau in assessments on new curriculum materials in the initial planning stages so that decisions can be made with accessibility variables considered prior to the selection of materials in future training programs and workshops.**

**8. How the agency's strategies will be used to: (Blind)**

**A. achieve goals and priorities by the State, consistent with the comprehensive needs assessment; (Blind)**

**Bureau Update: Providing clients with the skills and training necessary to qualify for occupations that exist in the economy is essential. With diminishing financial resources, partnering with other components of the workforce system is a key component to achieving this goal. Being a part of regional business services teams ensures that Counselors of the Bureau are at the forefront of discussions with employers who are seeking to fill job vacancies as well as those employers who are considering expansion in this state. Dedicating staff resources to offer training to clients in the use of Career Index Plus is an important strategy employed by the Bureau to encourage clients to take a more immersive role in the career exploration and job seeking process. Career Index Plus is accessible to individuals that utilize adaptive technology. It contains a vocational interest inventory, economic forecasting by career cluster, and it also includes direct links to job openings by region, state and zip code. For the Vocational Rehabilitation Program to be effective in bringing together qualified job seekers with employers, all of these approaches must be utilized to the greatest extent possible.**

**The Bureau further recognizes the great potential that customized employment holds for individuals with multiple, significant impediments to employment. The Bureau explored the option of committing time for staff training in this model, but found the time commitment to be beyond the availability of the existing staff. The Bureau is looking forward to utilizing a fee for service model with community rehabilitation providers that can offer this service after staff in their organizations receive the training and credentialing to provide this service.**

**A coordinated approach to expand the reach of all partner programs in communicating the availability of services that are offered through each partner is an equally important strategy to achieve the overarching goal of employment for clients. Expanding the use of social media to educate the public about services was a recommendation contained in the Comprehensive Needs Assessment and through a coordinated effort across partner programs, this recommendation is likely to experience a greater level of growth than it may have experienced as a separate and distinct goal for this Bureau.**

**B. support innovation and expansion activities; and (Blind)**

**Bureau Update: Offering a robust approach to career information and job openings is a key component of the Innovation and Expansion activities that have been established as priorities for the Vocational Rehabilitation Program. In addition to using Career Index Plus as a tool in this regard, the Bureau provides access to the National Federation of the Blind’s (NFB) Newsline service to provide a lower-tech option through touch tone telephones for clients who may not have internet access or current skills in the use of computers. NFB Newsline also offers a web-based option for clients who have access to the internet.**

**Programs serving youth, including youth from underserved populations is another priority that has been identified in the Innovation and Expansion initiatives for this Bureau. Vocational Rehabilitation Program staff assists in the development of independent living, leadership and career exposure camps and initiatives. The State Rehabilitation Council and the Bureau offer co-sponsorship to the Youth Leadership Forum, a proven model for developing leadership skills and community involvement for youth with disabilities.**

**Expansion of the availability of adaptive technology in training programs, core services and apprenticeship programs is another category where there is considerable activity. Bureau staff brings their knowledge of blindness related technology accommodations into discussions with the partners so that solutions can be identified and implemented in the planning stages of new initiatives, ensuring equal access to services. The Bureau also provides support for the adaptive technology laboratory located at the Southeastern Connecticut Community Center of the Blind, making it possible for clients of the Bureau located in that region to receive training in the use of adaptive technology locally.**

**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. (Blind)**

**Bureau Update: Perhaps the most significant barrier is within the category of training materials that are utilized across a broad spectrum of vendors and service providers. Materials are often created in formats that do not readily lend toward conversion into accessible text to speech formats for those clients who are not able to access print. This is particularly seen in training materials that are distributed electronically, where PDF files are a common format of the documents being distributed. Being at the front end of discussions with partner programs on how to make training materials accessible from the onset is in its initial stages, but showing great promise. Bureau staff has also begun to explore training opportunities offered through the certificate programs at the state community colleges to better educate clients on these options.**

**The ability of the Vocational Rehabilitation Program to now provide for up to 4 years of extended services for youth with disabilities has also opened up new options for clients that may require long-term job supports to be successful. Prior to the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, if there was no available provider of long-term support, there were limited options for clients that required supported employment services. With the new provisions for extended services, it is now possible to explore job opportunities for youth who require long term supports, with the knowledge that the Vocational Rehabilitation Program can initiate the job placement supports directly and then pursue other sources for funding in the long-term.**

p. Evaluation and Reports of Progress: VR and Supported Employment Goals (Blind)

**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: (Blind)**

**A. Identify the strategies that contributed to the achievement of the goals. (Blind)**

**Bureau Update: The following goals, objectives, strategies and measures of performance were developed in collaboration with the State Rehabilitation Council. These goals reflect the vision of Governor Dannel P. Malloy and the accompanying priorities and strategies of the statewide workforce system and the regional partners to contribute towards the achievement of the Governor’s vision. Additionally, this document details the strategies that have been utilized by the Vocational Rehabilitation Program to date to contribute towards the achievement of these shared goals through the provision of services to individuals with significant visual impairments and to employers across the state.**

**Governor Dannel P. Malloy’s Vision: Connecticut will create and sustain the global economy’s best–educated, most–skilled, most–productive workforce.**

**Overarching Goals:**

**Promote Business Growth: Connecticut businesses in key sectors (economic drivers) must have the skilled, talented employees needed to compete effectively, prosper and create jobs for CT workers.**

**Strengthen Current Workforce: Workers must have the skills and credentials needed to prosper and advance in careers that support their families.**

**Develop Future Talent: Connecticut youth must be prepared and ready for career and post–secondary success as productive contributors to a competitive state economy.**

**System Transformation: Connecticut’s multi–faceted workforce system must align and integrate goals, strategies, policies, investments, services, infrastructure and accountability.**

**Objective 1. Analyze economic conditions, including existing and emerging in–demand industry sectors and occupations.**

**Strategy: Identify employment needs of employers – knowledge, skills, abilities in key industries and occupations.**

**Measure: Documentation of coordination with CTDOL, Office of Research to obtain data and information.**

**Bureau Update: Through ongoing collaboration with the Department of Labor’s Office of Research, a significant amount of economic and occupational outlook data has been identified and is readily available for staff and clients to access at:** [**http://www1.ctdol.state.ct.us/lmi/index.asp**](http://www1.ctdol.state.ct.us/lmi/index.asp) **. Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors have joined with partner agencies as members of the business services teams in their regions to learn of specific growth sectors and employment trends for the region.**

**Strategy: Analysis of current workforce unemployment data, labor market trends, workforce’s educational and skill levels (including individuals with barriers/disabilities).**

**Measure: Documentation of coordination with CTDOL, Office of Research to obtain data and information.**

**Bureau Update: As of December, 2017 Manufacturing had a 2.6 percent increase in growth, followed by financial activities with 1.7 percent growth. Professional and Business Services indicated 1.2 percent growth, with Educational and Health Services at 1.1 percent growth. In terms of actual job growth in specific numbers, the Manufacturing sector gained 4,100 jobs, followed by the Educational and Health Services professions that gained 3,600 jobs.**

**Strategy: Analysis (strengths, weaknesses, capacity) of CT’s workforce development activities (including education and training), to address identified education/skill needs and employment needs of employers.**

**Measure: Coordination with CTDOL, Office of Research to obtain data and information.**

**Bureau Update: Bureau staff are participating in meetings on both a statewide and regional basis to identify strategies to prepare program participants for the employment opportunities that exist and that will be available into the future. One particular strategy in use at this Bureau is the strong focus on engaging clients to utilize Career Index Plus as a tool for conducting research that is individualized to their unique circumstances and interests.**

**Objective 2. Implement strategies for workforce partners to prepare educated/skilled workforce.**

**Strategy: Establish performance accountability measures and align strategies across the workforce programs to support economic growth and self–sufficiency, and how Connecticut will assess workforce system effectiveness.**

**Measure: Performance measures established with each partner program’s anticipated contribution to the measures noted.**

**Bureau Update: This strategy is in progress.**

**Objective 3. Operationalize the Service Delivery System**

**Strategy: Review statewide policies, programs, and recommended actions to support comprehensive streamlined workforce system.**

**Measure: Vocational Rehabilitation provides policies to workforce partners for review.**

**Bureau Update: This has been achieved. The policies for the Vocational Rehabilitation Program have been updated to reflect changes brought about by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act and the policies have been made available to the partner programs. The policies may be viewed at** [**www.ct.gov/besb**](http://www.ct.gov/besb) **in the “Employment and Vocational Rehabilitation Section.”**

**Strategy: Develop/continuously improve workforce system: identify coordination/alignment barriers (avoid duplication); develop career pathways strategies; develop outreach/access strategies for individuals and employers; develop/expand industry/sector partnership strategies; identify regions/designate local areas; develop One Stop system continuous improvement strategy; develop staff training strategies.**

**Measure: Vocational Rehabilitation staff participate in regional and statewide workforce meetings that focus on implementation of a coordinated One Stop service delivery system.**

**Bureau Update: This strategy is in full operation with Vocational Rehabilitation staff participating in regional business service teams, and designated staff also participating in statewide, interagency coordination team meetings. Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors have begun part-time co-location at the primary One Stop Centers in their assigned territories, arranging for clients to register for services available through partner programs where applicable.**

**Strategy: Develop and update comprehensive State performance accountability measures.**

**Measure: Vocational Rehabilitation provides data on performance in identified accountability categories.**

**Bureau Update: This strategy is in progress.**

**Strategy: Identify/disseminate info on best practices for: effective operation of One Stop centers; development of effective local boards; effective training programs responsive to real–time labor market analysis.**

**Measure: Vocational Rehabilitation provides to the state and regional workforce system evidence based practice on successful job placement and retention strategies for individuals with significant disabilities.**

**Bureau Update: This strategy is in progress. This Bureau has provided assistance and recommendations pertaining to accessibility of One Stop Centers and training program services, reviewing materials in use as well as the adaptive devices that are available at these locations, with a goal of enabling clients of this Bureau to more fully participate in the services offered through partner programs.**

**Strategy: Develop and review statewide policies to coordinate services through One–Stop system: criteria and procedures for WIBs to assess effectiveness and continuous improvement; guidance to allocate One–Stop center infrastructure funds; policies on roles/contributions of One–Stop partners.**

**Measure: Documentation of Vocational Rehabilitation staff participation in the review and development of coordination of services to people with significant disabilities with One–Stop center staff and partners.**

**Bureau Update: Bureau staff were assigned to assist in the review and certification of the One Stop Centers and offered recommendations for accessibility enhancements, where applicable.**

**Strategy: Develop strategies for technological improvements to One–Stop system to: enhance digital literacy skills; accelerate acquisition of skills and credentials; strengthen staff professional development; ensure accessibility of technology.**

**Measure: Documentation of Vocational Rehabilitation adaptive technology consultations and recommendations for equipment to make the One Stop Centers accessible to individuals with significant disabilities.**

**Bureau Update: Consultations have been provided in regards to accessibility, offering both short-term and low tech solutions as well as recommendations for a future direction that will be a more pro-active approach to assessing training curriculum and materials in the initial stages of development so that accommodations can be identified and in place from the onset.**

**Strategy: Develop strategies to align technology and data systems across One–Stop partner programs.**

**Measure: Documentation of Vocational Rehabilitation staff participation in statewide meeting regarding the development of a common–front end data collection system.**

**Bureau Update: This strategy is in progress. Bureau staff have reviewed the CT Hires data collection system and identified strategies that could make certain data fields more accessible for staff of the Bureau to use. At this point however, there are no immediate plans to implement a “common-front end” data collection system for the partner agencies to use due to the uniqueness of each of the partner’s current data collection software and the cost that would be incurred across the programs to develop such a universal data collection system.**

**Strategy: Develop allocation formulas to distribute funds to local areas for adult and youth programs.**

**Measure: Documentation of Vocational Rehabilitation staff participation in cost allocation formula reviews that follow prescribed federal requirements.**

**Bureau Update: This strategy is in development.**

**Strategy: Prepare annual performance reports.**

**Measure: Vocational Rehabilitation report on performance measures distributed.**

**Bureau Update: This Bureau has provided performance data for inclusion in the Department’s report of activities and measures achieved. This document for the Department of Rehabilitation Services may be viewed at:** [**http://portal.ct.gov/das/Lists/Publications/Reports/Digest-of-Administrative-Reports**](http://portal.ct.gov/das/Lists/Publications/Reports/Digest-of-Administrative-Reports)

**Strategy: Develop statewide workforce and labor market information system.**

**Measure: Vocational Rehabilitation staff provide data on job placements for clients served by the program.**

**Bureau Update: This data is available for partner programs to utilize.**

**Strategy: Develop other policies to promote statewide objectives and enhance system performance.**

**Measure: Documentation of BESB participation in the development of state policies and objectives.**

**Bureau Update: This strategy is in progress. The Bureau has assigned staff to participate in interagency workgroups and committees to develop policy recommendations and strategies to coordinate activities across the partner programs and services. These groups feed information and recommendations to the Service Design and Delivery Committee that is chaired by two members of the Statewide Workforce Investment Board.**

**Strategy: Alignment of funded activities.**

**Measure: Vocational Rehabilitation clients gain access to core services offered by the One Stop Centers with information provided in accessible formats by the centers.**

**Bureau Update: This activity is underway and has increased with the recent development of part-time co-location of Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors in the One Stop Centers in each region.**

**Strategy: Alignment with activities not covered by Plan, to assure coordination, avoid duplication.**

**Measure: Independent Living services are offered and provided to eligible individuals with disabilities who are being served by the One–Stop centers.**

**Bureau Update: The Adult Services Program of the Bureau provides Orientation and Mobility instruction and Independent Living training to Vocational Rehabilitation clients whose Individualized Plans for Employment identify the need for these services as a component to achieve an employment outcome.**

**Strategy: Coordination of activities, comprehensive services, including support services.**

**Measure: Vocational Rehabilitation staff members participate in regional and statewide planning and implementation meetings to coordinate the provision of vocational rehabilitation services to eligible clients served by the One Stop delivery system.**

**Bureau Update: This strategy has been initiated but is still in the early stages. Through part-time co-location at the One Stop Centers, Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors are learning of individuals with blindness or visual impairment who may have accessed the programs and services offered by other partners without being aware of the public Vocational Rehabilitation Programs in this state. In these instances, meetings can be offered to these individuals to learn about the services that can be provided and coordinated through Vocational Rehabilitation, and when desired, referrals can be promptly processed to activate the clients in Vocational Rehabilitation.**

**Strategy: Engagement with community colleges, career/technical schools, to leverage resources.**

**Measure: Vocational Rehabilitation staff become participating members in regional teams that develop certificate and training programs at community colleges and career/technical schools to ensure curriculum accessibility for individuals with significant disabilities.**

**Bureau Update: This strategy is underway, with meetings at the statewide level to identify the certificate and training programs that are presently available at the community colleges and to further identify the criteria for entrance into these programs. Accessibility of the Programs will also be a component of this review so that the Bureau can begin to refer potential candidates to these programs.**

**In addition to the participation of the Vocational Rehabilitation Program in contributing to the aforementioned, comprehensive statewide goals for the Workforce system, the following, goals, objectives, strategies and measures specific to the Vocational Rehabilitation Program have been developed with the full participation and guidance of the State Rehabilitation Council. These goals, objectives and accompanying strategies reflect on the priority to provide comprehensive, timely and quality services to clients of the Vocational Rehabilitation Program, including those clients who are receiving supported employment services. Based on a review of the findings and recommendations in the Statewide Assessment and the Consumer Satisfaction Survey, as well as a review of the most recent Section 107 report and the performance achieved on established program measures in existence at the time of this plan’s development, these priorities have taken into account this information to shape the efforts of the Council in establishing focus areas for the coming year.**

**Goal A: Increase employment opportunities for eligible individuals of the Vocational Rehabilitation Program.**

**Objective: BESB will collaborate with BRS and at least one major employer with a statewide presence to implement a Disability Resource Team to assist the employer with job recruitment and retention services.**

**Strategy: BESB Job Developer will coordinate with BRS Job Development Team to identify and work with employer(s) to implement a Resource Team.**

**Measure: Team is developed and implements resource meetings with employer(s).**

**Bureau Update: Over the past year, a team comprised of staff from this Bureau and the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS) worked together in the capacity of a Disability Resource Team to assist Unilever, Travelers and Prudential with job recruitment, job retention services, disability awareness training and education to adaptive technology devices.  For Unilever, BESB and BRS presented at a Unilever DiversAbility event held in December, 2016.  Unilever staff were provided an overview about blindness and adaptive technology.  Unilever subsequently hired a BESB referred individual, accessing Vocational Rehabilitation services to facilitate a successful employment outcome.  Another resource team that formed consisted of BESB and BRS staff partnering with the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR) as a part of an 8 state pilot program to partner with Prudential to assist them with their recruitment efforts.  Regular meetings have been held with Prudential’s Human Resources staff and managers to educate them about the capabilities of individuals with disabilities as well as to discuss their recruitment needs. Candidates have been referred to both their Hartford and Shelton locations. Currently, Prudential Human Resources is reviewing the resumes of several clients.**

**Objective: BESB Counselors join job development teams implemented through the regional workforce boards to gain access to employers within the regions who are seeking job candidates.**

**Strategy: Counselors contact the Job Developers of the regional One Stop Center to become part of their employer outreach teams.**

**Measure: Each counselor serves as part of a regional job development team.**

**Bureau Update: This strategy is underway. Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors are active members of the regional business services teams.**

**Objective: Vocational Rehabilitation clients obtain proficiency to utilize web–based job search websites.**

**Strategy: Rehabilitation teachers and/or fee for service vendors teach no less than ten job seeking clients how to navigate and utilize at least one job search website on the internet.**

**Measure: Documentation of utilization by each client.**

**Bureau Update: This strategy is underway. The Vocational Rehabilitation Program worked very closely with the Job Driven Technical Assistance Center to test Career Index Plus for accessibility and the applicability of features and upon finding it to be a useful tool for clients to use, the Director of the Bureau sent written correspondence to all active Vocational Rehabilitation clients to notify them of this tool and how to access it. The letter also indicated that a Rehabilitation Teacher has been assigned to train clients in its use. Career Index Plus provides a searchable listing of job openings by region, state and zip code and can be tailored to individual client’s job search preferences.**

**Objective: Each BESB Counselor with job development responsibilities shall engage clients on their caseloads in job fair attendance.**

**Strategy: Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors will share information on job fairs within their regions with job seeking clients on their individual caseloads and facilitate the attendance of clients at job fairs.**

**Measure: Documentation of no less than 5 clients per Counselor caseload attending a job fair.**

**Bureau Update: Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors have been identifying job fairs and informing clients of these opportunities to network with employers. With the exception of one Counselor caseload, where so far 4 clients have attended job fairs, for the other Counselor caseloads, this measure was achieved.**

**Goal B: Provide coordinated services to students with disabilities to prepare for careers and post–secondary education after exit from high school.**

**Objective: The Vocational Rehabilitation Program shall designate two full–time Counselors to exclusively serve clients that are in the Pre–Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) category.**

**Strategy: Junior high and high school clients will be assigned to one of the counselor caseloads to receive specific, qualifying Pre-ETS services with dedicated Pre-ETS funding.**

**Measure: Documentation of caseload assignments.**

**Bureau Update: This strategy was achieved with two Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors assigned to serve clients who are students with disabilities, providing Pre-Employment Transition Services.**

**Objective: Pre-ETS eligible students and their parents/guardians shall receive a resource guide that explains all of the BESB services that can be provided to prepare for careers and post–secondary education.**

**Strategy: The Vocational Rehabilitation Program shall develop a transition resource guide to post on the Bureau’s webpage of the DORS website and to distribute to Pre-ETS eligible clients and their parents/guardians in their preferred format.**

**Measure: Case record documentation that the resource guide has been mailed or delivered to each Pre-ETS eligible client and their parents/guardians.**

**Bureau Update: This strategy is in progress. The resource guide is in development.**

**Objective: Pre-ETS eligible clients are provided timely notice of opportunities from the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors and/or the Transition Coordinator to participate in work exposure programs, paid employment, internships, college preparatory programs, technology training programs, life skills programs and related career development camps, seminars and initiatives, both in state and out of state.**

**Strategy: Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors and the Transition Coordinator working with the Pre-ETS clients provide timely information on available services and programs so that clients and their guardians can make informed decisions on attendance at programs, activities and related transition experiences of interest.**

**Measure: Case record documentation of the services being authorized.**

**Bureau Update: The Transition Coordinator provides information to the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors on programs and initiatives such as the Youth Leadership Forum, independent living programs and camps, paid internships and employment opportunities. For the summer of 2017, this resulted in over 40 clients experiencing paid work or internship opportunities. A college exploration day, in addition to a mentoring day at United Technologies also occurred. The Bureau offers experiential learning opportunities for older students, whereby students who have participated in these programs previously can become camp counselors or facilitators of these events for the new participants.**

**Objective: The Vocational Rehabilitation Program develops and implements outreach and public education programs for potentially Pre-ETS eligible clients and their parents/guardians.**

**Strategy: Vocational Rehabilitation Transition Coordinator designs and delivers outreach and public education programs to populations where Pre-ETS eligible clients are likely to be found, such as, but not limited to school districts.**

**Measure: Documentation of the programs being provided.**

**Bureau Update: The DORS-BESB Vocational Rehabilitation Program works with the several transition-related groups, focusing on outreach and public education for families about Pre-ETS opportunities and initiatives. These groups include the Transition Task Force, DORS Level Up, Community of Practice, CTAHEAD, Transition Alliance, the 5 Regional Education Service Centers, as well as the One Stop Centers and the workforce boards. These collaborations yield events such as the Transition Symposium, the CT Youth Leadership Forum, multiple Regional Transition Expos, an Adaptive Technology Conference, Disability Mentoring Day opportunities and Job Fairs. Many of these groups work diligently and collaboratively on updating educational materials for families as well as school district staff, specific to Pre-ETS related activities and opportunities for successful transition from school to work or post-secondary education.**

**Objective: The Vocational Rehabilitation Program and the State Rehabilitation Council co–sponsor leadership development activities and camps for groups of Pre-ETS eligible clients. Strategy: The State Rehabilitation Council and the Vocational Rehabilitation Program provide co–sponsorship funding for the Youth Leadership Forum, and similar programs if available.**

**Measure: Documentation of the funds committed.**

**Bureau Update: This has been achieved. The State Rehabilitation Council has continued its ongoing co-sponsorship of the Youth Leadership Forum annually.**

**Goal C: Utilize Innovation and Expansion authority to engage in continuous improvement initiatives, to increase access to services and activities that can benefit groups of individuals with visual impairment or legal blindness, to increase access to career information, adaptive technology, self–advocacy, and public awareness of the employment potential of individuals served by BESB.**

**Objective: The Vocational Rehabilitation Program shall provide funding for electronic access to career and news information.**

**Strategy: Funding provided to have NFB Newsline available to Vocational Rehabilitation clients.**

**Measure: Documentation of purchase order for NFB Newsline.**

**Bureau Update: This has been achieved. In partnership with the National Federation of the Blind of Connecticut, this Bureau has sponsored NFB’s Newsline so that clients can access this important service.**

**Objective: Provide access to the latest adaptive technology devices for clients to try out for assessment purposes.**

**Strategy: Purchase new adaptive technology devices for the BESB Technology Lab and the Technology Lab at the Southeastern Connecticut Community Center of the Blind.**

**Measure: Documentation of purchase order for technology devices.**

**Bureau Update: This strategy is in progress. A recent addition to the Adaptive Technology Lab in Windsor is a new, portable electronic magnification device that adds to the examples that are available for assessment purposes.**

**Objective: The State Rehabilitation Council utilizes an entity experienced in administering consumer satisfaction surveys to conduct the fiscal year 2016 Consumer Satisfaction Survey and the results are used to develop continuous improvement initiatives.**

**Strategy: The State Rehabilitation Council selects a vendor, reviews the results of the survey, and works with Program staff to implement strategies that address the results and trends identified in the survey.**

**Measure: Documentation of purchase of survey, Consumer Satisfaction Report received and reviewed with Program staff.**

**Bureau Update: This was achieved. The Center for Public Policy and Social Research at Central Connecticut State University was selected to conduct the Consumer Satisfaction Survey and to analyze the data in comparison to prior years. Results of the survey were utilized to identify areas that needed attention (transportation and business plan development). In conjunction with the Vocational Rehabilitation Program, strategies for improvement in both areas have been identified and implemented.**

**Objective: State Rehabilitation Council representatives participate in state, regional and national conferences and programs that provide opportunities to increase public awareness of the employment capabilities of BESB clients, increase the Council members knowledge and understanding of the public Vocational Rehabilitation Program, and create opportunities for learning best practices that can develop into new goals and strategies for the BESB Vocational Rehabilitation Program to explore and implement, if applicable.**

**Strategy: State Rehabilitation Council Chair is provided with information about upcoming conferences, seminars and activities from the Bureau Director and designates a Council member or members to participate and share information with the full membership.**

**Measure: State Rehabilitation Council members attend CSAVR, NCSAB and other national, regional or statewide conferences or seminars that address the components stated in the objective.**

**Bureau Update: This was achieved. The Chair of the State Rehabilitation Council attended and presented at a national Business Leadership Network conference and also attended the Spring, 2017 conferences of the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation and the National Council of State Agencies for the Blind. The Vice-Chair attended a national conference on technology at California State University at Northridge (CSUN) in 2017.**

**B. Describe the factors that impeded the achievement of the goals and priorities. (Blind)**

**Bureau Update: Diminishing financial resources have impacted significantly on the Program. Reductions in the availability of reallotment funds in combination with reductions in state matching funds has required the Program to make difficult staffing decisions in order to align budget projections with anticipated funding levels in future years. The State Rehabilitation Council has been working in collaboration with the Bureau to identify strategies for reducing administrative and purchased service costs with a goal of continuing to serve all eligible individuals in future years within available funding.**

**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: (Blind)**

**A. Identify the strategies that contributed to the achievement of the goals. (Blind)**

**Bureau Update: In addition to seeking out community rehabilitation providers who can financially assume the role of becoming the provider of extended services, the Vocational Rehabilitation Program established the goal to encourage employers to offer natural supports where feasible. The Program has also sought to utilize community rehabilitation providers who can access public and private funds for individuals with multiple disabilities in order to secure supported employment placements. In Fiscal Year (FY) 2017, there were 2 clients who achieved employment outcomes with supported employment services. The funding source for long–term support for both of these situations was the Department of Developmental Services. Community rehabilitation providers were utilized for onsite training in both situations.**

**The Vocational Rehabilitation Program has also established a goal of participating in Planning and Placement Team meetings early in the transition process to identify the need for supported employment services, and to identify providers, both private and public, that may offer services while a student is preparing to transition from public or private education into employment. The value of this approach is evident in the data that indicates 12 of the 31 clients who were eligible for supported employment services in fiscal year 2017 were youth with disabilities.**

**B. Describe the factors that impeded the achievement of the goals and priorities. (Blind)**

**Bureau Update: The challenging economy continues to impact on the scope and variety of job placement options available to clients, making these employment opportunities particularly difficult to secure. The availability of extended services for youth with disabilities with Vocational Rehabilitation funds has so far not opened up new opportunities for employment. However, it is hoped that as community rehabilitation providers become increasingly aware of this new option for up to 4 years of extended services through Vocational Rehabilitation funds that greater priority will be given to working with individuals who may require a more time-intensive job development and job carving approach to secure employment. The Bureau has sufficient supported employment funding available for this purpose.**

**3. The VR program's performance on the performance accountability indicators under section 116 of WIOA. (Blind)**

**Bureau Update: The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act established new measures of performance for the partner programs to collectively work towards achievement. The Vocational Rehabilitation Program is participating in discussions on the implementation of these new performance measures with the other partners at both the state and the regional level. However, as these are new measures of performance, they will be reported on after baseline measures have been established and each partner program’s contribution to those measures have been set. The Bureau assisted 91 individuals to achieve employment outcomes in fiscal year 2017. The average hourly earnings for these individuals was $19.50 per hour.**

**4. How the funds reserved for innovation and expansion (I&E) activities were utilized. (Blind)**

**Bureau Update: During the fiscal year, Innovation and Expansion funding was utilized to cover the cost of the NFB Newsline service. Innovation and Expansion funds were also utilized to cover the cost of the State Rehabilitation Council’s co–sponsorship of the Youth Leadership Forum. The Vocational Rehabilitation Program also was a separate co–sponsor of this leadership development camp for transition–age students. Co-sponsorship of a youth symposium for transition-age students was also coordinated with some funding from this reserve.**

 **Innovation and Expansion funding was also utilized to secure the Center for Public Policy and Social Research to conduct and analyze the 2017 consumer satisfaction survey and to report their findings to the State Rehabilitation Council for use in developing Program goals and priorities. Additionally, Innovation and Expansion funds were utilized to secure the Center for Public Policy and Social Research to initiate the Comprehensive Needs Assessment. Funding was also utilized to facilitate the participation of the State Rehabilitation Council, through its Chair and Vice-Chair to attend national activities, at the conferences of the National Council of State Agencies for the Blind, the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation and a national conference on technology at California State University at Northridge (CSUN). The Chair of the Council also attended and presented at a national conference of the Business Leadership Network.**

1. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)