



Indiana's Commission on Rehabilitation Services

2015 Annual Report



Federal Fiscal Year 2015
October 1, 2014 to
September 30, 2015

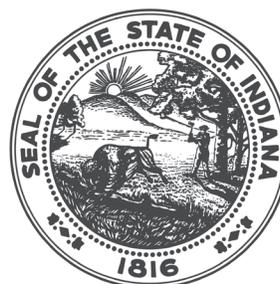


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GREETINGS FROM THE CHAIRPERSON

On July 22, 2014, President Obama signed into law the long overdue Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act (WIOA), which reauthorizes and replaces the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA). WIOA reauthorizes and updates the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (the law providing oversight of the public vocational rehabilitation (VR) system), while also updating the structure of the United States workforce development system, used by the general public and businesses to assist with their employment and training needs. Title IV of WIOA, which covers the public VR system, with a few notable exceptions, went into effect immediately upon the signing of the bill.

In this concern, it continues to be the Indiana Commission on Rehabilitation Services (CRS) responsibility to inform Indiana citizens, the Governor, and the Rehabilitation Services Administration about the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS) and Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VRS), and to encourage feedback from consumers, employers and service providers in order to ensure VRS strives for continuous improvement and customer satisfaction in its provision of services to eligible Hoosiers with disabilities seeking employment. The services provided by VRS must be considered necessary for a consumer to achieve his/her goal of employment. Such services could include assistance with education, training, vehicle modification, prostheses fitting, or sensory aids and devices, if appropriate. VRS has successfully worked to promote increased collaborative efforts with service providers, employers, and other state agencies to provide the most comprehensive services to Hoosiers with disabilities. In evaluating the effectiveness of the VRS program, the Commission is pleased to formally recognize Kylee B. Hope, BRS Director, for her outstanding leadership. In addition, the Commission applauds all employees of the Bureau for a successful year with prestigious outcomes. VRS continues to provide employment opportunities which foster personal growth and enhance independence. Each year, hundreds of Hoosiers with disabilities become tax-paying members of our society by achieving employment through assistance provided by VRS.

The Commission members are a valuable asset to VRS due to the fact that the Commission is comprised of a statewide culturally diverse group of individuals with various areas of interest and expertise. Commissioners are individuals with a broad range of disabilities; family member or emissary of individuals with disabilities; and former VRS consumers. Other members are advocates, employers, business, industry, labor representatives and representatives from a variety of organizations seeking to promote independence and full employment of Hoosiers with disabilities.

As Commissioners, appointed by the Governor, we take our responsibilities seriously to review, analyze, advise and monitor the transition--school to work process and the performance of the

BRS VRS program. We have a significant role in reviewing Policy and Procedure Manual updates, the Indiana State Plan for VRS, client appeals, customer satisfaction survey data, and needs assessment reports. We represent the Commission at federal, state, and regional conferences, meetings, and events to promote positive perspectives about Hoosiers with disabilities who are seeking employment. Our responsibility also includes attending public hearings and forums to listen to public needs and concerns. Commissioners advise VRS to ensure the highest level of service and satisfaction for VRS consumers and for the businesses/employers that employ them.

Every day of each year, the State Rehabilitation Councils and the public vocational rehabilitation programs promote employment awareness; invest in the community of people with disabilities and their employers. In this report you will find evidence of admirable leadership; solid program management; constant enhancements in delivery of services; and influence on still unserved/underserved populations of people with disabilities. With your help, BRS/VRS and this Commission can achieve great things and help Hoosiers with disabilities seek, find and obtain employment.

Please take time to review this annual report to learn more about the impressive outcomes of the VRS program and the assurance of change that WIOA will have on the VR system!

Respectfully,

Dee Ann Hart

Message from the Director

As another year comes to a close, I find myself reflecting on this past year with a strong awareness of the vital role played by everyone in supporting this continued time of transition for the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS) and Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Services. Collectively, much has been accomplished through the creative energy and steadfast commitment of everyone in the field of vocational rehabilitation. As I think about the accomplishments, my mind swiftly moves to the year ahead and how we will continue to build on these accomplishments as the foundation for the future of BRS. The ongoing focus on shifting VR from a system-centric process to a consumer-centric process has continued to be both challenging and extremely rewarding as we continue to see the impact of these efforts with the implementation of several newly established initiatives.

First, staff shortages were addressed through restructuring the Field offices in the fall of 2014, which included adding fifty-three new field staff and developing new Case Coordinators positions to assist VR Counselors with many case management functions. The newly hired Case Coordinators have now been in place for about a year and more recently, additional VR Counselors and Case Coordinators in high-volume local offices have been hired. Also, VR added Itinerant Counselors this fall to assist with caseloads in offices experiencing staff vacancies. All of these staffing initiatives are designed to build greater capacity to better serve consumers.

Another accomplishment this past year has been the promulgation of rules for the VR program. This initiative has also enhanced customer services by recognizing the need to clearly define policy application by standardizing policies through the promulgation of rules. BRS will continue ongoing review of policies that affect consumers to ensure consistent application throughout the state.

In addition, education and outreach Initiatives continue to re-energize partnerships to better educate potential consumers and their families. The BRS Business and Community Engagement team launched the #work4life campaign in 2014 to more effectively reach transition age students and educate the public by utilizing social media. This year, a VR Facebook account was created in order to enhance outreach and education efforts and reach more consumers, including transition-aged students and youth. The results have been very positive in getting young people to think about the value of employment and to become more aware of the VR program and the services and supports available to assist individuals in achieving their employment goals.

In 2014, rate reform for employment services underwent a critical analysis through the assistance of a workgroup comprised of employment services stakeholders. This process emphasized a need for appropriate quality employment services, with the goal of moving employment services from a system-centric approach to a consumer-centric approach. The

dedicated commitment of this workgroup resulted in BRS establishing a new rate structure for employment services that was implemented in July 2015. Along with revised rates came revised expectations for service provision and an expanded menu of services, especially Discovery activities. These revisions will ensure better access to supported employment services for those with the most significant disabilities, as well as increased access to purposeful discovery activities to define individualized employment goals for each consumer. These revisions allow more flexibility than the previous Results Based Funding (RBF) structure, to ensure true individualization of services based on each consumer's need. The new system represents a 'hybrid' approach by maintaining milestone payments that focus on outcomes, blended with hourly services and supports for the Discovery process as well as supports needed to achieve stabilization.

Throughout 2015, I have greatly appreciated the enthusiasm and positive feedback in defining programmatic and operational initiatives to most effectively meet the complex service needs of our consumers to ensure their long term employment success. As we look to 2016, BRS is very excited to embark upon the new landscape of implementing VR services in coordination and collaboration under the Workforce Investment and Opportunity Act (WIOA). We are working with the Department of Workforce Development and their local Workforce investment Boards to better utilize employment resources and define best practices to support and strengthen a partnership of working together to best meet the employment needs of mutual consumers in work-related programs.

I wish to extend my sincere thanks to everyone for your on-going support. I am very pleased with the good work being done by the Commission on Rehabilitation Services, and wish to assure the Commission that BRS will continue in its partnerships with business leaders, educators, state agencies, and community organizations to best meet the needs of VR consumers in 2016. The role played by the Commission will continue to be vitally important.

Thank you for your on-going support. I look forward to working with everyone in 2016.

Sincerely,

Kylee B. Hope, Director

Bureau of Rehabilitation Services

THE COMMISSION ON REHABILITATION SERVICES AND VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SERVICES

MISSION STATEMENT

TO ASSIST PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES
IN ACHIEVING EMPLOYMENT AND INDEPENDENCE

VALUES

VALUE 1 - We value persons with disabilities and their equal opportunity to maximize employment, independence, and, to fully participate in their rehabilitation program.

VALUE 2 - We value quality services for persons with disabilities to achieve employment and independence.

VALUE 3 - We value staff as Vocational Rehabilitation Services' greatest resource.

OVERVIEW

The Rehabilitation Act requires the State Vocational Rehabilitation Agency to establish a State Rehabilitation Council (SRC). In Indiana, the required State Rehabilitation Council was established under the preexisting Indiana Rehabilitation Commission and is named the Commission on Rehabilitation Services, as stated in Indiana Code, IC 12-12-2-1. References to the "Council" in this report are applicable to the Commission on Rehabilitation Services. Council members are appointed by the governor and serve no more than two consecutive full terms. No terms can exceed three years.

As required by the Rehabilitation Act, the Commission is composed of individuals representing the following categories.

*Statewide Independent Living Council

*Parent Training and Information Center

*Client Assistance Program

*Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor

*Community Rehabilitation Program

*Business, Industry and Labor

*Disability Advocacy Groups

*Current or former applicants or recipients of Vocational Rehabilitation Services

*IN Department of Workforce Development

*IN Department of Education

MEMBERS

Indiana's Commission on Rehabilitation Services is comprised of the following individuals representing specific categories, identified below, as outlined in the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Section 361.17.

Commission Officers:

Dee Ann Hart, Chairperson, Muncie, IN
Representing Business, Industry, or Labor

Tim Kirk, Vice-Chairperson, Vincennes, IN
Representing a Community Rehabilitation Program

Scott Beauchamp, Indianapolis, IN
Representing Business, Industry, or Labor

Other Members:

Tony Cross, Greenfield, IN
Representing Business, Industry, and Labor

Nancy Davisson, Vincennes, IN
Representing the IN Department of Workforce Development

Leslie L. Hawker, Farmersburg, IN
Representing the Independent Living Council

James Michaels, Indianapolis, IN
Representing disability groups that include a cross-section of individuals with various disabilities, representatives of individuals with disabilities, current and/or former applicants for, and/or recipients of Vocational Rehabilitation Services

Rebecca Reed, Indianapolis, IN
Representing the IN Department of Education

Karen Rusk, Brownsburg, IN
Representing a parent training and information center established pursuant to section 682(a) of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

Dan Stewart, Richmond, IN
Representing disability groups that include a cross section of individuals with disabilities who have difficulty representing themselves or are unable due to their disabilities to represent themselves

Traci Anne Taylor, Richmond, IN

Representing disability groups that include a cross-section of individuals with various disabilities, representatives of individuals with disabilities, current and/or former applicants for, and/or recipients of, Vocational Rehabilitation Services

Cathy Wingard, Indianapolis, IN

Representing the Client Assistance Program

Ex-Officio Non-Voting Members:

Kylee B. Hope, Director of the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services, Indianapolis, IN

**Teresa Hudson, Vincennes, IN

Representing Vocational Rehabilitation Services Counselors

Theresa Kaplon, Elkhart, IN

Representing Vocational Rehabilitation Services Counselors

Other BRS Representation:

*Steve Etheridge, Fort Wayne, IN

Representing Vocational Rehabilitation Services Counselors

Mary Hamilton, Indianapolis, IN

Representing Vocational Rehabilitation Services Counselors

*Julie Miller, Bloomington, IN

Representing Vocational Rehabilitation Services Counselors

Stephen Upchurch

Representing Vocational Rehabilitation Services Counselors

**Former members due to completion of final term, change in employment, change in representation category, resignation, or death.*

*** Promoted to Area Supervisor so no longer serves in VR Counselor representative.*

FUNCTIONS

The Commission's responsibilities are outlined in Section 105 of the United States Rehabilitation Act.

In performing the following functions, the Commission must consult with the State Workforce Investment Board:

- Review, analyze, and advise the Vocational Rehabilitation Services program regarding their performance related to eligibility, order of selection, the extent, scope and effectiveness of Vocational Rehabilitation Services, and functions performed by Vocational Rehabilitation Services that affect the ability of individuals with disabilities to achieve an employment outcome.

In partnership with the Vocational Rehabilitation Services program:

- Develop, agree to, and review the state's goals and priorities;
- Evaluate the effectiveness of the Vocational Rehabilitation Services program and submit an annual report to the Commissioner of the Rehabilitation Services Administration;
- Assist with the comprehensive statewide needs assessment of individuals with disabilities living in the state, which is undertaken every three years;
- Advise Vocational Rehabilitation Services regarding its activities;
- Assist in the preparation of the State Plan, amendments to the Plan, applications, reports, needs assessments, and evaluations, including those necessary for the Vocational Rehabilitation Services program to satisfy the requirements of developing a comprehensive system of personnel development and establishing an order of selection;
- Review and analyze the effectiveness of and consumer satisfaction with Vocational Rehabilitation Services functions, services provided by Vocational Rehabilitation Services and others, and employment outcomes achieved by Vocational Rehabilitation Services consumers;
- Prepare and submit an annual report to the governor and the commissioner of the U. S. Department of Education's Rehabilitation Services Administration on the status of the Vocational Rehabilitation Program in the state, and make the report available to the public;
- Coordinate the activities of the State Rehabilitation Council with the activities of other councils, such as the State Independent Living Council (SILC), the advisory panel established under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the State Developmental Disabilities Council, the State Mental Health Planning Council, and the State Workforce Investment Board;
- Provide for the coordination and the establishment of working relationships between Vocational Rehabilitation Services and the State Independent Living Council and the Centers for Independent Living; and

- Perform other functions that are determined appropriate and comparable to the State Rehabilitation Council's other functions, provided they are consistent with the purpose of Title I of the Rehabilitation Act and its implementing regulations.

COMMITTEES

The Commission on Rehabilitation Services has developed the following committees to conduct their federally mandated functions:

POLICY AND OVERSIGHT AND PLANNING AND EVALUATION COMMITTEE

Policy & Oversight - consults with the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS) on the development, implementation, and revision of State policies and procedures pertaining to the provision of vocational rehabilitation services; reviews appeals; advises BRS on eligibility and the scope and effectiveness of vocational rehabilitation services and activities, and the functions that affect individual employment outcomes. The committee's purpose relates to the implementation of policies and procedures rather than the day-to-day management of the programs, and involves researching issues brought before the Commission.

Planning and Evaluation - functions in partnership with BRS to fulfill all planning, evaluating, and reporting responsibilities as defined in the Rehabilitation Act. This includes:

Needs Assessment - works with BRS in the development and evaluation of the BRS statewide needs assessment, which is required every three years.

Goals and Priorities - provides input into the development of State goals and priorities, and incorporates into recommendations consumer comments from public forums, satisfaction surveys, etc. in coordination with BRS.

State Plan - reviews and makes recommendations pertaining to State Plan amendments, ensuring compliance with Rehabilitation Act requirements in partnership with BRS.

Evaluation and Reporting - evaluates the effectiveness of the BRS program and the State Plan goals and priorities, and other requirements of the Rehabilitation Act to ensure that the annual report submitted to the Rehabilitation Services Administration complies with the federal requirements: and makes the report widely available to the public through the BRS website and the NCSRC website.

RECRUITMENT, PUBLIC OUTREACH, AND COMMISSION DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Recruitment - researches, recruits, and nominates candidates who are interested in serving on the Commission. Names and contact information of potential candidates are submitted to the governor for consideration. The committee also ensures that the nominations for Commission

chairperson, vice-chairperson, and secretary are solicited as warranted.

Public Outreach - coordinates public education, advocacy, publicity, and outreach efforts; develops the approach and strategies to enhance the image and vitality of the Commission; and distributes materials for effective communication with consumers, the public, and the Rehabilitation Services Administration, including reports, brochures, etc. The committee is responsible for making recommendations regarding information for the Commission's annual report.

Commission Development - collaborates with the National Coalition of State Rehabilitation Councils (NCSRC) to ensure that all Commission members are well informed and participate in national training initiatives and remain knowledgeable in matters related to the Commission's duties and the achievement of defined goals. The committee is responsible for the orientation of newly appointed Commission members through the development of presentations and training components.

CUSTOMER SATISFACTION COMMITTEE

Customer Satisfaction - reviews and analyzes customer input and/or satisfaction with the State BRS Program including vocational rehabilitation services and employment outcomes, and conducts activities necessary to assess satisfaction and obtain feedback.

TRANSITION COMMITTEE

Transition - ensures clarity in implementation of statewide transition services, and specifically pre-employment transition services as defined within WIOA; promotes pre-employment transition coordination activities, including working with schools and the workforce development system to engage others in transition activities; and raises awareness of gaps in transition and pre-transition services.

MEETINGS

The Commission conducted business meetings on November 14, 2014, January 16, 2015, March 13, 2015, May 8, 2015, July 10, 2015, and September 11, 2015. A Bureau of Rehabilitation Services State Plan Development meeting was held on January 15, 2015.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

The following accomplishments were achieved by the Commission during FFY 2015:

- Provided input into BRS policies to include the Rule Promulgation of all policies;
- Reviewed and evaluated BRS Rate Reform;

- Attended the Rule Promulgation public hearing and Rate Reform public hearings;
- Represented the Commission at the National Coalition of State Rehabilitation Councils (NCSRC) Spring Training held in Bethesda, Maryland on April 18-19, 2015;
- Represented the Commission at the 8th Annual Summit, Performance Management in Vocational Rehabilitation, held in San Diego, California on September 10-11, 2015;
- Reviewed committee descriptions and re-aligned committee responsibilities and membership to be more effective;
- Expanded committee work to include the development of a transition committee;
- Evaluated VRS appeal decisions and made recommendations for changes when systemic issues were identified;
- Participated in BRS Policy and Procedure Manual (PPM) work groups developed to assist in the promulgation of rules for the BRS Policy and Procedures Manual (PPM).
- Provided insight to VR Area Secretaries during a two-day training in which two Commission members served on a panel.
- Attended the VR Symposium held on September 28-29, 2015;
- Achieved the goal of networking with other governor-appointed boards, councils, and commissions, as well as agencies and organizations, to enhance the visibility of the Commission and to provide linkages by participating in related events throughout the year;
- Identified guest presentations for each meeting as a mechanism for collaboration and outreach to expand statewide awareness of the Commission;
- Worked with state government leaders in an effort to ensure that the Commission's membership was in compliance with federal mandates;
- Established goals for 2016.

RECOMMENDATIONS

State Plan Development and Policy Revisions

Indiana's BRS has been actively responsive and supportive of the Commission on Rehabilitation Services' suggestions and recommendations. The Commission is federally required to provide input into BRS policy revisions and State Plan development.

The Commission participates in a State Plan development meeting at the beginning of each year to work with key BRS staff that is developing the State Plan, which includes review of the Federal Performance Standards and Indicators and the Goals and Priorities. The Commission also took an active role in working with the BRS throughout the process of the BRS Policy and Procedure Manual (PPM) rule promulgation and the Rate Reform initiative.

As the state plan undergoes various stages of revision, it continues to be shared with the Commission as well as BRS staff. Prior to public hearings, each Commission member receives the draft state plan and is asked to provide feedback.

The Commission attended the State Plan development meeting on January 15, 2015, which was prior to the Rehabilitation Services Administration announcement that informed states that there would not be a required submittal of State Plan updates for 2016 due to the Reauthorization of the Rehabilitation Act and the implementation of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA).

BRS considers the Commission's comments most valuable and an essential element of the annual report for 2015. The comments will be thoughtfully considered as the state plan, goals and priorities and other activities unfold in 2016 and 2017.

Federal Performance Standards and Indicators

Federal Performance Indicator 1.1: Change in Employment Outcomes

The difference between the number of individuals exiting the VR program who achieved an employment outcome during the current performance period and the number of individuals exiting the VR program who achieved an employment outcome during the previous performance period.

Federal Performance Level: Equal or Exceed Previous Year

BRS Goal 1.1 – Total persons with employment (rehabilitation) outcomes (target: increase over previous year).

Outcome: FFY 2011 - 4,404, FFY 2012 - 4,714, FFY 2013 - 4,652, FFY 2014 - 4,377, FFY 2015 - 4,103

Federal Performance Indicator 1.2: – Percent of Employment Outcomes

The percentage of individuals exiting the program during the performance period who have achieved an employment outcome after receiving services.

Federal Performance Level: 55.8%

BRS Goal 1.2 – Percent of persons achieving an employment outcome (target: 55.8%).

Outcome: FFY 2011 - 53.43%, FFY 2012 - 57.06%, FFY 2013 - 60.69%, FFY 2014 – 59.50%, FFY 2015 – 58.59%

Federal Performance Indicator 1.3: – (Primary Indicator) Competitive Employment Outcomes

The percentage who exit the VR program in employment in integrated settings with or without ongoing support services, self-employment, or BEP (Business Enterprise Program) employment, with an hourly rate of earnings equivalent to at least the federal or state minimum wage rate, whichever is higher, based on all the individuals exiting the program who have achieved an employment outcome after receiving services.

Federal Performance Level: 72.6%

BRS Goal 1.3 - Percent of persons achieving competitive employment (target: 72.69%)

Outcome: FFY 2011 - 97.55%, FFY 2012 - 97.35%, FFY 2013 -96.54%, FFY 2014 – 97.01%, FFY 2015 – 97.39%

Federal Performance Indicator 1.4: – (Primary Indicator) Significance of Disability

The percentage of those individuals identified in Indicator 1.3 who have significant disabilities.

Federal Performance Level: 62.4%

BRS Goal 1.4 - Percent of persons in competitive employment with significant disabilities (target: 62.4%).

Outcome: FFY 2011 - 73.77%, FFY 2012 - 76.07%, FFY2013 - 78.91%, FFY 2014 – 82.57%, FFY 2015 – 83.40%

Federal Performance Indicator 1.5 (Primary Indicator) Earnings Ratio

The ratio of the average hourly earnings of all individuals in competitive employment to the average hourly earnings of all employed individuals in the state.

Federal Performance Level: .52

BRS Goal 1.5 - Average hourly earnings of persons in competitive employment, divided by the State, all workers, and average hourly earnings (target: 0.52).

Outcome: FFY 2011 - 0.61, FFY2012 - 0.60, FFY2013 - 0.58, FFY 2014 - .59, FFY 2015 - .59

Federal Performance Indicator 1.6: Self Support

For those identified in Performance Indicator 1.3, the difference in the percentage of individuals who at program entry reported their income as the largest single source of support, and the percentage that reported their personal income as the largest single source of support at program exit.

Federal Performance Level: ≥ 53.0

BRS Goal 1.6 - Application to closure change in percent of persons in competitive employment with own income as primary source of support (target: ≥ 53.0).

Outcome: FFY 2011- 48.42%, FFY 2012 - 51.12%, FFY 2013 - 50.66, FFY 2014 – 49.81, FFY 2015 – 47.65

Federal Performance Indicator 2.1: Minority Background Service Rate

The ratio of the percent of individuals with a minority background to the percent of individuals without a minority background exiting the program who received VR services.

Federal Performance Level: .80

BRS Goal 2.1 - Service rate for minorities divided by service rate for non-minorities (target: 0.80).

Outcome: FFY 2011 - 0.77, FFY 2012 - 0.81, FFY 2013 - .83, FFY 2014 - .88, FFY 2015 - .90

Overall Performance

COMMISSION' COMMENTS

Several members made comments about the good work being done by BRS and its leadership.

The State should allocate funds to be able to draw down on the additional \$14 million that Indiana returned to the Rehabilitation Services Administration. Some of this funding could be allocated to marketing as well as new and innovative programs to serve people with disabilities.

People with disabilities need to have more opportunities to pursue postsecondary education or enhanced training tracks to ensure positive employment outcomes. BRS should enhance its marketing and outreach. BRS should market higher education goals as an option.

BRS should focus on Human Resource issues resulting from staff retirements this past year. BRS' decision to establish Case Coordinators to assist VR Counselors is an excellent approach. The recent hiring of 53 Case Coordinators should be beneficial.

BRS is encouraged to have their Area Supervisors talk with the community rehabilitation programs to increase referrals.

BRS should also make staff aware that the independent living centers are partnering with BRS

to increase referrals.

As people with disabilities leave sheltered employment to enter the community, BRS needs to make sure that they get served.

There is the concern that consumers are being left behind due to staff shortages. In addition to VR Counselor shortages resulting from retirements and promotions, BRS must address how to best retain new VR Counselors. Although having Case Coordinators will help, BRS needs to look at caseloads, work environment, and other factors that may be impacting retention.

The VR Counselor salaries are too low.

Concern was expressed about the Masters Degree requirement for VR Counselors. The Commission reported they are supportive of a requirement of a Bachelor degree with experience change under WIOA.

People with disabilities need to know that there is hope. They cannot be allowed to become discouraged due to staff shortages and delays

Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) and Supported Employment (SE) Goals

The goals and priorities are based on the comprehensive statewide assessment, on requirements related to the performance standards and indicators, and on other information about the state agency. As a part of the State Plan, this information should be updated when there are material changes in the information that require the information to be amended.

As outlined in section 101(a)(15)(C) of the Act, the goals and priorities:

- Identify if the state VR agency and the State Rehabilitation Council, if the state has such a council, jointly reviewed the goals and priorities and jointly agreed to any revisions;
- Identify the goals and priorities in carrying out the vocational rehabilitation and supported employment programs; and
- Ensure that the goals and priorities are based on an analysis of the following areas: the most recent comprehensive statewide assessment, including any updates; the performance of the state on standards and indicators; and other available information on the operation and effectiveness of the VR program, including any reports received from the State Rehabilitation Council and findings and recommendations from monitoring activities conducted under section 107.

AGENCY GOAL: TO INCREASE THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES IN INTEGRATED, COMPETITIVE EMPLOYMENT

OBJECTIVE A: BRS will collaborate with state and local partners that also serve individuals with disabilities to increase appropriate VRS applicants.

Priority 1. Conduct outreach activities to increase knowledge and awareness of VRS and ensure that VR services are available to all eligible individuals who require them.

Measure. BRS will experience at least a 2% increase in VRS applicants from the prior year. (FFY13: 13,042)

2015 OUTCOME: Not achieved. There were 12,044 VR applicants in FFY15, a 7.6% decrease in applicants. Factors impeded the achievement of the goals and priorities were largely related to substantial staff shortages, as well as a need for an increased number of VR Counselors. Indiana VR experienced a larger than average turnover rate of VR Counselors in the last year due to retirements, resignations, and staff promotions. This has resulted in a longer timeframe for meeting with new referrals. It should be noted that referrals to VR have not decreased, in fact referrals have increased, however VR staff shortages have prevented VR from processing new referrals as expeditiously as needed. VR received approval in October 2015 to hire 9 additional VR Counselors and 7 itinerant VR Counselors to help mitigate this and decrease the length of time it takes to process a new referral. VR is also working with the Indiana State Personnel department on strategies for staff retention.

Priority 2. BRS, in cooperation with the Bureau of Developmental Disabilities Services (BDDS), will continue to provide and enhance a seamless service delivery system for consumers transitioning into BRS services, then from BRS Services to Extended services.

Measure: BRS will see a 2% increase in employment outcomes for individuals with a primary impairment of a cognitive disability from the prior FFY. (FFY13: 1,666)

2015 OUTCOME: Not achieved. 1463 individuals with a primary impairment of cognitive impairment achieved a successful VR outcome in FFY15, which is a decrease of 12%. The primary reason for the decrease is that there was a decrease in overall successful outcomes in FFY15 when compared to FFY13 due to an overall decrease in the number of consumers served. The number of successful outcomes dropped by 11.8% from FFY13 (4,652) to FFY15 (4,103). The number of consumers served in FFY13 was 28,889 compared to 26,632 in FFY15, reflecting a 7.8% decrease in consumers served. An additional factor that impeded achievement of this priority is the staff shortages mentioned above. Due to staff shortages, caseloads have also increased.

Priority 3: Identify 2-4 specific partners for collaboration and targeted outreach to populations who may benefit from VR services.

Measure: BRS will conduct or participate in 20 or more targeted education and outreach activities in FFY15 (i.e. agency/bureau cross training event, outreach to parent advocacy organizations).

2015 OUTCOME: Achieved. BRS has completed well over 20 targeted outreach activities across the state. Activities that focused on educating the public on Transition services began with the BRS Transition Specialist visiting all the BRS Area offices. First priority was focused on ensuring that all counselors were equipped with a comprehensive overview of Indiana's initiatives surrounding transition. After every counselor received a transition specific overview, counselors were encouraged to enter the communities and schools in their areas with this message. Ongoing and targeted outreach to parent organizations like INSOURCE (Indiana Resource Center for Families with Special Needs) and ICASE (Indiana Council of Administrators of Special Education), for the purpose of maintaining a consistent message regarding our services ensued. The Transition Specialist attended career and resource fairs across the state to raise the profile of the BRS. Many counselors continued this effort in each area across the state in order to provide a consistent message on transition services provided by VR in the schools. The Department of Education and Statewide Transition Council and the Indiana Institute on Community also came together to help ensure the BRS transition priorities and initiatives were communicated to potential consumers, parents of consumers, and educators.

There are other education and outreach partners focused on minority populations across the state that include: the Haitian American Association, the Burmese American Association, the Native American Commission and the Indiana Latino Institute. Targeted outreach to these populations included visits to their resource fairs, individual meetings with the Directors of these organizations and continued contact over the year.

OBJECTIVE B: Indiana BRS will increase the quantity and quality of job placements.

Priority 1. BRS will develop state and local strategies to improve services provided to transition aged youth, e.g. internships/work experiences while still in high school.

Measure: BRS will experience at least a 2% increase in transition aged applicants to VRS compared to the prior year. (FFY13: 4,063).

2015 OUTCOME: Not achieved. There were 4,027 Transition applicants to the VR program in FFY15 which was a small decrease (<1%) from FFY13. It should be noted that while total applicants to VR decreased by 7.6% due to reasons mentioned above, transition applications decreased less than 1%. This indicates that outreach efforts to this population continue to be effective and it is anticipated that transition applicants will increase as VR staff capacity issues are further addressed with the recent hiring of additional staff including itinerant VR Counselors.

Priority 2. BRS will implement a process for increasing accountability of CRPs to improve the quality of employment services and outcomes.

Measure: A process for increasing CRP accountability will be implemented by July 2015.

2015 OUTCOME: Achieved. A VR employment provider application was released in FFY15 resulting in the development of 87 provider agreements. This process better allows for VR to ensure appropriate accreditation requirements are met. Information collected through the application process has also enabled VR to develop a tool for VR Counselors and consumers to quickly identify appropriate service providers in each geographic area across the state. Additionally, VR rolled out substantial changes to the VR employment service model in July 2015 which increases provider accountability for providing individualized services and supports by strengthening the requirements about identification and changing the funding structure for services to reduce the financial incentive for quick stabilization and closure.

Priority 3. BRS, with input from CRPs and other stakeholders, will conduct a review of VRS employment services rates. Necessary modifications will be made to ensure that the employment services model and rate structure supports the provision of quality services and employment outcomes.

Measure: Recommendations for employment services rate restructuring will be implemented on or before July 2015.

2015 OUTCOME: Achieved. VR employment service revisions including rate changes, were implemented July 2015. These changes are designed to move the employment service model to a more individualized, consumer-centric approach. The Employment Services workgroup and other stakeholders played a major role in the design of the new model.

Priority 4. BRS will continue to work closely with the Blind and Visually Impaired Services (BVIS) through the Business Enterprise Program (BEP) to expand employment opportunities.

Measure: The employment rate for BEP trainees will at a minimum meet the federal rehabilitation rate indicator of 55.8%.

2015 OUTCOME: Achieved. The 2014 Business Enterprise Program training class had a graduating class of five (5) individuals. Three (3) were placed by year's end 2014 and the other two were placed in 2015, successfully completing the task. The BEP staff continue to build new vending relationships with businesses to assist licensed vendors in achieving their employment goals.

OBJECTIVE C: BRS will develop program initiatives and training that adequately supports staff in the provision of quality services.

Priority 1. BRS will make progress toward the development of a web-based VRS case management system to improve efficiency and enhance the mobile working environment of VR field staff.

Measure: Requirements will be gathered for a new, web-based case management system with targeted implementation during FFY15.

2015 OUTCOME: Not achieved. The timeline for the development of a new system has been readjusted in light of other priorities such as WIOA and the recent VR Employment Service Revisions. VR continues to work toward movement to a new system and is currently developing process flowcharts in preparation for requirements gathering. VR has hired a Project Manager to coordinate this effort.

Priority 2. BRS will identify an improved system for the provision and identification of professional development and training for staff, i.e. new VR Counselor training.

Measure: BRS will explore options for staff professional development and identify a proposed solution by May 2015.

2015 OUTCOME: Achieved. BRS continues to employ a full-time training coordinator dedicated primarily to identifying and coordinating training opportunities for VR Counselors and other VR field staff. This past year, training was further expanded to create additional training opportunities for VR Field Management and VR Field Support Staff. Curriculum was developed for these staff and trainings were conducted statewide and regionally. VR Counselors continue to have access to both class-room based training as well as web-based training through the online Leadership Academy, as well as local mentoring by Office Supervisors and seasoned VR Counselors.

Priority 3: BRS in collaboration with Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services (DHHS) and BVIS will provide necessary training and technical assistance to VR counselors who have a specialized caseload serving individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing, and individuals who are blind or visually impaired.

Measure: Quarterly meetings/trainings will be held with specialty VR Counselors, facilitated by DHHS and BVIS staff. The first meeting/training for FFY15 will be completed by fall 2014. Agenda's will be set based on training and discussion needs identified by VR Specialty Counselors and their Supervisors.

2015 OUTCOME: Achieved. BVIS staff provided quarterly training meetings to the VR Counselors that specialize in serving consumers with low vision. This training included adaptive aid updates, ophthalmologist and optometrist guest speakers, consumer feedback as well as field trips that would assist in furthering the education of the VR counselors in respects to blindness. The BVIS staff also provided web based training resources and developed an email list serve where questions can be posted and answered with all VI/VR Counselor's participation. DHHS staff also conducted quarterly meetings with VR Counselors that specialize in serving consumers who are Deaf or hard of hearing. These meetings included a training workshop with hearing aid manufacturers to ensure VR staff are well informed about the latest technological advances with hearing aids and assistive listening devices.

Priority 4. BRS, along with providers, INARF, other state agencies (i.e. Department of Mental Health and Addiction (DMHA)), and other stakeholders will facilitate cross training

opportunities for VRS and provider staff to clarify VRS policies and practices and enhance consistency in service delivery.

Measure: A minimum of three formal cross-training events will occur during FFY15.

2015 OUTCOME: Achieved. BRS conducted 15 joint training events throughout the state during May-July 2015 to ensure ample training opportunities for both VR and provider staff on the VR employment service revisions. Joint training on Discovery services was also conducted in several locations throughout the state during FFY15 and is continuing into FFY16. VR and DWD also participated in cross-training to increase knowledge about each program's services. Similarly, VR and BDDS participated in cross-training to increase knowledge and gain better understanding about the transfer from VR-funded supported employment services to BDDS-funded extended services.

COMMISSION COMMENTS – State Plan

- Address staff capacity.
- Include community rehabilitation programs in training.
- The promulgation of rules should be addressed.
- Transition information is great.
- The Client Assistance Program (CAP) should be included (page 33) (Independent Living Centers and CAP).
- Policies should keep up with technology to ensure that appropriate technology can be purchased for consumers in training or pursuing a postsecondary education (i.e., iPhones, iPads etc.)

Development of Public Hearings

The Commission members were asked to identify public hearing locations and develop strategies for outreach and public education about the State Plan. The following recommendations were made.

- Marketing – Consider placing a video on the website to help people understand the State Plan prior to attending the public hearings
- Consider having more than three public hearings. (Hearings have generally been held in the northern, central, and southern part of the state.)
- Some felt that the conference call public hearing option was ineffective for public input.
- There should be a document accompanying the State Plan to help the public understand it.

- The Commission members would like to develop talking points to address critical issues they consider paramount. This material will be developed to accompany the public hearing announcement sent to various listserves, and the information will be linked to the copy of the State Plan draft that is placed on the BRS website for public review.

Since the BRS State Plan was not revised in 2015, per the Rehabilitation Services Administration instructions, the Commission's recommendations were not implemented, but will be considered when public hearing activities are initiated in 2016.

Input into Vocational Rehabilitation Services Policies, Rule Promulgation

In 2014, BRS drafted new rules for the Vocational Rehabilitation program. The rules underwent the promulgation process, which concluded in 2015. During the rules drafting phase, BRS established five workgroups – Post-Secondary, Vehicle Modification, Home Modification, Hearing Aids, and Small Business Enterprise – to review the information in the relevant sections of the Policy and Procedure Manual (PPM) and make recommendations to 1) improve current policies; and 2) provide guidance for the contents of the new rules. Some of the Commission members were able to participate in the workgroups and provided very useful guidance and recommendations. In addition, the recommendations from all the workgroups were submitted to the Commission, as a whole, for a full review before including any of the recommendations in the rules.

Commission members also participated in the public hearing process to provide additional comments. The Chairperson of the Commission presented the following comments at the public hearing on behalf of the entire Commission.

Indiana's Commission on Rehabilitation Services, an advisory board for Indiana's public Vocational Rehabilitation Services program was provided a link to the proposed rule on April 14, 2015. The policy and oversight committee discussed the rule at length at our last meeting on May 8, 2015. We offer the following comments:

In 2009, the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) came to Indiana and reviewed among other things, the Indiana VR policy and procedure manual (PPM). RSA identified at that time that the PPM contained prohibitive language for services which are allowed under federal law. Upon review of the proposed rules, some prohibited language continued to be included and such specific instances were outlined in comments.

Additionally, the Commission advised that appropriate changes be made to this rule that will lend to maximizing the potential of individuals with disabilities by doing away with arbitrary limits, both prohibitions and rigid timeframes, in its policies. The Commission also provided comment regarding WIOA changes to ensure such language was also incorporated into the rules.

Based on the comments, VR made many changes to the rules, specifically related to the prohibitive language.

FOCUS 2016

Throughout 2016 the Commission will continue to develop mechanisms to ensure public participation in meetings. The dates, times, and locations of the meetings are posted on the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services' website, and each meeting is also posted at the meeting location with 48 hours notice in accordance with the open door law. Each Commission agenda includes a standard time for open forum comments from the public.

In addition, the Commission will continue to develop guest presentations for each meeting. The scheduled presentations will provide a shared opportunity for greater collaboration between the Commission and other agencies and organizations. This will expand the Commission's knowledge and enhance awareness of the Commission.

Positive measures continue to be initiated by the Commission to ensure that the Commission's duties and functions are achieved, consistent with the reauthorization of the Rehabilitation Act and implementation of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. In 2015, various Commission members attended meetings and conferences. Conferences included the Governor's Council for People with Disabilities, the Indiana Association of Rehabilitation Facilities (INARF), the Arc of Indiana, Indiana Association for Higher Education and Disabilities, the IN Council for the Blind Conference, and the Brain Injury Association of Indiana conference. These events provided an opportunity to expand awareness of the Commission and the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services and, in some instances, included the distribution of information. The Commission will ensure wider general distribution of their brochure at conferences and in the community in 2016.

In addressing the status of the BRS program, the Commission recognizes that Indiana's BRS has undertaken many important initiatives during the past year and continues to build on these accomplishments. The Commission enjoys a very positive working relationship with BRS and supports their efforts to improve consumer services and the service delivery system.

Through the establishment of committees, the Commission members have been able to more clearly focus on specific issues in a timely manner. The Commission will annually examine the effectiveness of the current committees and will then determine the need for changes in committee functions and/or the inclusion or discontinuance of specific committees.

As the Commission looks to the future, its members will work in partnership with BRS to develop, agree to, and review the BRS goals and priorities. During federal fiscal year 2016, the Commission will focus its attention on the WIOA, with a greater emphasis on transition from school to work. Additionally, the Commission will continue to focus attention on consumer satisfaction and outreach efforts and an increased public awareness of the Commission and

opportunities for consumer participation on the Commission. Measures will be taken to enhance the visibility of the Commission and BRS and provide linkages to other agencies and programs, resulting in greater public awareness of BRS programs.

OUTREACH

The Commission on Rehabilitation Services recognizes the importance of outreach activities throughout the state, which have included networking with governor-appointed boards, councils, and commissions, as well as other agencies and organizations. Appropriate steps were taken to ensure Commission member representation at conferences throughout the year.

Each year the Commission develops a new work plan for outreach which includes the identification of major training events. For FFY 2016, the Commission members will attend the Indiana Governor's Conference for People with Disabilities, the Indiana Association of Rehabilitation Facilities Conference, and the Brain Injury Association of Indiana Conference. Additional events and conferences may be added to the work plan as information becomes available.

The Commission on Rehabilitation Services welcomes your opinion about how BRS is meeting your needs and employment goals. The information collected will help the Commission and BRS to improve services and expand employment opportunities for all Hoosier's with disabilities.

Please contact us if you would like to:

- Learn more about the Commission
- Share your ideas
- Attend a Commission meeting
- Be considered for appointment to the Commission

You may contact the Commission by telephone, mail, e-mail, or by visiting the Web site.

All contact information is on the back of this publication.

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SERVICES

• INDIANA COMMISSION •

The Commission is the advisory board for Indiana's Vocational Rehabilitation Services, which serves thousands of citizens with disabilities each year through vocational rehabilitation, employment, education and independent living in the community.

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Indiana's Commission on Rehabilitation Services is a member of the National Coalition of State Rehabilitation Councils (NCSRC).

The NCSRC is a national organization comprised of State Rehabilitation Councils (SRCs) throughout the United States that work in partnership with the public vocational rehabilitation program to represent the consumer voice in enhancing employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

NCSRC website: www.ncsrc.net