Section VI: Title IV Vocational Rehabilitation (Blind)

February 26, 2026
Washington State Department of Services for the Blind

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Federal prompts and questions are *italicized*.

Public comment period. The draft WIOA Combined Plan is open for public comment from March 3 through April 3, 2026. Community members, partners, and stakeholders are invited to share feedback using a public comment form. All submitted comments will be reviewed by staff and considered in the finalization of the plan.

- Link to public comment form.
- Learn more about Washington's WIOA Combined Program Plan.
- Learn more about the public comment period.

Program-Specific Requirements for State 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 sections 101(a) and 606 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended by title IV of WIOA.

a. State Rehabilitation Council

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

Select A or B:

- *(A) is an independent State commission*
- ***(B) has established a State Rehabilitation Council (selected option)***

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

Position	Council Representative	Current Term Number/ Vacant	Beginning Date of Term Mo./Yr.
	VR Agency Director (Ex Officio)	n/a	1/2020
1	Business, Industry, and Labor	2nd	2/2026
2	Business, Industry, and Labor (Business Enterprise Program)	Appointment pending	
3	Community Rehabilitation Program Service Provider	Vacant	
4	Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC)	1st	2/2026
5	Business, Industry, and Labor	Vacant	
6	Qualified Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Counselor (Ex Officio if Employed by the VR Agency)	1st	10/2023
7	Parent Training and Information Center	1st	11/2023
8	Client Assistance Program	2nd	10/2023
9	Current or Former Applicants for, or Recipients of, VR services	2nd	9/2025
10	Disability Advocacy Groups	2nd	11/2025
11	State Educational Agency Responsible for Students with Disabilities Eligible to Receive Services under Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)	1st	11/2023
12	Section 121 Project Directors in the State (as applicable)	2nd	10/2023
13	Current or Former Applicants for, or Recipients of, VR services	1st	2/2026
14	Representative of Blind and Multiple Disabilities	2nd	2/2026
15	Business, Industry, and Labor	Appointment pending	
16	State Workforce Development Board	1st	9/2024

3. IF THE SRC IS NOT MEETING THE COMPOSITION REQUIREMENTS IN SECTION 105(B) OF THE REHABILITATION ACT AND/OR IS NOT MEETING QUARTERLY AS REQUIRED IN SECTION 105(F) OF THE REHABILITATION ACT, PROVIDE THE STEPS THAT THE VR AGENCY IS TAKING TO ENSURE IT MEETS THOSE REQUIREMENTS.

The SRCB had been fully staffed with appropriate community representation until the last half of 2025. There were a number of

unexpected exits due to health reasons. The State Rehabilitation Council – Blind Membership Committee has been active in recruiting and facilitating applications through the Governor's Office for approval. We filled all but four vacancies by February 2026 and have applicants pending for two of those four vacant seats. We anticipate all vacant positions to be filled in early 2026, as the Membership Committee Chair has developed and is following up on strong leads to fill the remaining two vacancies.

The State Rehabilitation Council – Blind has consistently achieved quorum requirements for all quarterly meetings.

The State Rehabilitation Council - Blind meets quarterly, and it has been meeting remotely to better accommodate both member and public access needs.

4. IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE REQUIREMENTS IN SECTION 101(A)(21)(A)(II)(III) OF THE REHABILITATION ACT, INCLUDE A SUMMARY OF THE COUNCIL'S INPUT (INCLUDING HOW IT WAS OBTAINED) INTO THE STATE PLAN AND ANY STATE PLAN REVISIONS, INCLUDING RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE COUNCIL'S ANNUAL REPORTS, THE REVIEW AND ANALYSIS OF CONSUMER SATISFACTION AND OTHER COUNCIL REPORTS.

The Washington State Rehabilitation Council for the Blind (WSRCB) input to The Washington State Department of Services for the Blind (DSB) State Plan – August 2025.

The SRCB had selected three categories of focus in the DSB vocational rehabilitation process to include in the 2024 - 2027 Combined State Plan.

The SRCB wants to maintain the original suggestions under each category for the remainder of the state plan period 2024-2027 to improve services to blind consumers at DSB. We are aware that changes in these areas are already underway and appreciate DSB's strong commitment to continuous improvement in service provision.

Category One

A large percentage of DSB customers (approximately 70%) are leaving DSB services without employment. The following suggestions are submitted to increase the percentage of those customers exiting DSB services with their career goal achieved, and reduce the percentage of those who exit services without achieving their career goal:

- It would be helpful if customers were provided with clarification at the beginning of the VR process as to what to expect of DSB. Many customers think DSB is an employment agency. Clarification re: this should be made up front in the process
- Prior to plan development customers should understand exactly what is in the document and be aware of services available to them.
- Onboarding new customers should be more manageable. It is suggested that initial paperwork be presented in "chunks" and streamlined
- A group orientation should be considered for individuals considering services at DSB. Services are explained. Questions are answered. Emphasis is put on employment and vocational rehabilitation services from the start
- Create a standard orientation that can be recorded for the DSB website or be held in person
- Review policies and procedures prior to application. Read the Rights and Remedies document to customers and make sure they understand the information
- Customers should clearly understand the expectations of participation in the OTC day one
- The SRCB applauds the new intake system developed at DSB which will significantly decrease the number of days between application and intake
- Improve job readiness and assessments for best career matching.
- Provide intense blindness skills training that is applicable to career choice either through DSB resources or contracted training resources
- Training for providers has been a valuable tool to improve contracted services for customers. The preferred provider training offered by

DSB strengthens the skill base of providers and benefits customers. If this could be offered more frequently, this might positively impact employment outcomes

- Some customers complete college and do not understand how their degree relates to entering the workforce. To prevent them from dropping out of services after graduation, intensive communication is necessary with their VRC
- A strong community awareness program would help employers and community partners understand some of the unique features of working with blind employees
- Internships are very important. Connect with other agencies to help DSB customers access internships that may lead to work. No need to reinvent the wheel, consult with other agencies who have resources in this area. The DSB Business Engagement and Workforce Manager is a valuable resource, and the SRCB applauds the future hiring of business relations specialists.

Category Two

Over the last few years DSB, like so many agencies, has experienced staff turnover at a high rate. A strong training program is essential to ensuring superior service to DSB customers. The following suggestions are offered to enhance professional development for all DSB staff

- Ensure that staff training is provided by qualified trainers, specific areas of focus include:
    - Major eye conditions, how vision is impacted, and recommendations for low vision items
    - Blindness Awareness Training, preferably from a person who is blind and knowledgeable
    - Medical Aspects of disabilities training to ensure understanding and consideration of secondary disabilities on the customer's VR process
    - Learning disabilities and styles, especially common secondary conditions of genetic vision impairments that can impact vocational goals and progress

    - Explaining the VR process, customer rights and customer options for when there are disagreements about services, job goals, etc.
- Broader support for working with customers with mental health disabilities, including staff training, list of providers that are willing to work with DSB, are covered by Medicaid and/or Medicare, and community resources and partner agencies.
- Clarify the what and why behind obtaining medical documentation needed for Eligibility and explain options for customers so they can choose which method is most efficient and effective for their situation.
- Best practice should include Deaf VRC's notifying their customers they are deaf and will be communicating through an interpreter.

Category Three

Historically, deaf-blind customers have not been satisfied with services at DSB. The following suggestions are offered to improve services to the deaf-blind community

- Include representation and content for staff training from individuals with lived experience
- Best practice should include understanding and utilizing communication methods that work best for individual customers
- Strengthened relationships with the Deaf Blind Services Center, Helen Keller Center and DSB Orientation and Training Center at DSB could help coordinate and streamline training services to ensure focus on deaf, blind and deaf/blind issues and needs, including an emphasis on social engagement skills
- Include/expand self-advocacy skills training for Deaf-blind transition students to support youth/students with understanding their needs and advocating for services to help them obtain their employment goals.

5. PROVIDE THE VR AGENCY'S RESPONSE TO THE COUNCIL'S INPUT AND RECOMMENDATIONS, INCLUDING AN EXPLANATION FOR THE REJECTION OF ANY INPUT AND RECOMMENDATIONS.

List each recommendation/input followed by the VR agency response

Agency Response to SRC-B Input

The agency is in full agreement with the recommendations made by the State Rehabilitation Council – Blind (SRC-B), and as noted, the agency has begun to take steps towards process and service provision improvement that align with the SRC recommended goals. Most of the SRC recommendations are reflected in the agency's strategic goals within this plan.

The SRC-B recommendations are relatively unchanged in this midterm review. The agency agrees that the goals and suggestions set by the SRC-B at the start of this state plan period continue to be the main focus of agency work through the life of this state plan. While the agency has made much effort and progress towards the strategies set forward, there is broad agreement that the next two years will be focused on refining and maturing new processes rather than adding new goals. The goals the SRC-B forwarded in 2024 continue to be at the heart of the agency's process improvement efforts.

The Category One set of SRCB recommendations relate to improving employment results. The agency has recognized and shared with the SRCB that DSB customers are exiting from services without their career goal achieved too regularly. A 70% exit rate without employment had been consistent since the beginning of the pandemic, and our target is to instead achieve a 70% exit rate with career achievement. We have increased our rate in the past two years from the five-year trend of 30% to a 2025 achievement of 42% exit with career. We intend in the next two years to get much closer to the 70% exit with a career goal.

The agency is aligned with the SRC around clear communications and expectation-setting with customers and are incorporating their recommendations for ensuring that DSB customers clearly understand the expectations of career preparation at the initial stages of interaction with the program and throughout services.

We are aligned with a need to revise processes to ensure that the customer experience is streamlined, expedited, and meaningful. We are aligned with the need to ensure career preparedness is the main focus of every conversation, that the preparedness is in line with the current labor market, and that vendors are trained to understand and support and raise expectations around visual disability.

The Category Two set of recommendations refer to the agency's need to manage the skillsets of a predominantly new internal workforce, and to provide new systems of training to ensure all DSB team members – no matter their job class - understand, support and raise expectations around visual disability, and have the technical skills to provide the highest quality services to each DSB customer. We have since added a Training Team and developed processes for identifying and meeting training needs. The

The Category Three set of recommendations relate to the agency's shared understanding that our DeafBlind customers are the identified and target underserved community for this state plan period. The DeafBlind community is identified through the CSNA and other data as our target underserved community, and we will be working to improve the customer experience and assure equitable services for the DeafBlind community during this state plan four-year period. We have made significant progress in gathering community DeafBlind service providers together as a coalition and have supported the SRC-B in their listening sessions and survey of current Deaf Blind customers to understand their experience and service gaps. We expect recommendations to be finalized through the last two years of this state plan.

b. COMPREHENSIVE STATEWIDE NEEDS ASSESSMENT (CSNA)

Section 101(a)(15), (17), and (23) of the Rehabilitation Act require VR agencies to provide an assessment of:

1. THE VR SERVICES NEEDS OF INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES RESIDING WITHIN THE STATE, INCLUDING:

A. INDIVIDUALS WITH THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES AND THEIR NEED FOR SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT;

The Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA) is conducted by the agency every three years and was most recently completed in November 2023.

Most information in this section for the state plan midterm refresh is unchanged as a new CSNA effort is scheduled to be completed in late 2026.

In analyzing the collected information in the most recent CSNA, four themes emerged regarding barriers to employment for individuals with significant visual disabilities.

- The community barriers most identified by respondents included physical environment that included lack of accessibility, limited digital and assistive technology, and limited transportation especially in rural areas.
- The second barrier theme presented were agency issues that included challenges with insufficient Information about WA DSB services and insufficient time and communication with WA DSB counselors.
- Another barrier theme described were personal issues and included lack of self-confidence, low motivation and/or limited belief in one's ability.
- The fourth major barrier theme identified were lack of job preparedness and job placement services.

Many respondents also reported employment barriers such as lack of openness to hiring persons with vision loss, refusal to adjust or modify practices, and denial of accommodations.

Another employment barrier identified included participants who struggle with orientation and mobility within the community and in job sites.

The CSNA report noted that most participant comments were positive towards WA DSB and several extended their appreciation to WA DSB

counselors and team members. They also opined that WA DSB counselors listen to them and are often supportive and encouraging.

Services and Service Provision in Addressing the Needs of Persons who are Blind or have Low Vision

According to data sources and responses analyzed, the most critical service needs of WA DSB participants were identified. The following service categories emerged across respondent groups as important for participants to be successful in employment:

- Assistive technology and understanding its use (greatest need),
- Adaptive equipment,
- Access to effective communication (including Braille when appropriate),
- Improved and more frequent WA DSB communication,
- Mental health services, and
- Job search/placement support services.

The issue of high turnover of WA DSB staff across Washington State was reflected in the responses identifying timely counselor replies as a service need as well as rapid engagement with participants. Respondents also remarked that timely services such as plan decisions, approvals, and vocational rehabilitation services need improvement.

Increased visibility of WA DSB and was a subject mentioned by respondents, especially in rural areas of the state. Most respondents seem to understand that WA DSB has limited resources; however, in partnership with other service providers the agency might be able to increase its reach and visibility across the state. Respondent suggestions included more workforce engagement and business partnership, and marketing via social media platforms, presence at community events, and increasing connections with medical providers, especially eye doctors.

After comprehensive data collection and analysis, CCER has identified several areas of focus for WA DSB and SRC consideration as they move forward with strategic and state planning. These areas of focus include:

- WA DSB staff simplify rehabilitation and workflow processes to better focus on participants needs and outcomes.
- Strengthening the agency's focus on improving the responsiveness, quality, and frequency of counselor/participant communications
- Enhancing accessibility services that includes digital and assistive technology, and training participants to ensure technology solutions work
- Increased mental health services that address vision loss changes, health problems, addiction, and mental/behavioral health challenges
- Brainstorming ways to address limited transportation for those with vision loss, especially in rural areas
- Educating employers on biases regarding employment abilities of visually impaired as well as available supports, best practices, and benefits of employing individuals with vision loss
- The development of a system accessible by all staff to collect business engagement information
- Focus on staff training in how to best serve WA DSB populations including individuals with multiple disabilities
- Encourage staff to participate in diverse community events to represent WA DSB and cast a wider set of networking opportunities with businesses
- Advocating for inclusion of younger youth that includes career assessments and best practices within Pre-Employment Transition Services for blind services
- More direct support with participants job readiness, job placement, and communication with employers to support an individual's success on the job

Our on-going conversation with community, staff, and SRC-B, and our gathering of customer feedback continue to align with these CSNA conclusions, and our strategic goals for the second two years of this state plan will continue to work towards achieving improvements in these areas.

B. INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES WHO ARE MINORITIES AND INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES WHO HAVE BEEN UNSERVED OR UNDERSERVED BY THE VR PROGRAM;

CSNA: Unserved or Underserved populations

Data shows that the agency is serving communities in relation to the state's demographics and serving a similar percentage of those individuals with a visual disability within a community identity again in relation to state demographics.

Through the collected interviews conducted by the most recent CSNA, it appears that staff and community perception is less certain of adequate services for individuals with disabilities from various communities. Focus group participants, customers, and key informant interviewees identified unserved and underserved groups of individuals who could benefit from WA DSB services. The most common responses pointed to those living in remote areas, youth, and people of diverse backgrounds including Mexican/Latino/Hispanic, Asian, Middle Eastern, Tribal, and Black/Brown communities. Other unserved or underserved groups noted by WA DSB include individuals who are deaf blind and have significant mental health diagnoses.

The perception through interviews demonstrates some dissonance with the actual demographic data. While demographic data shows the agency is serving individuals from various communities in equal or greater proportion to the demographics of the state, there is a perception through the CSNA that individuals from those communities are not being served adequately. The provision of the services needs to be analyzed to determine if agency services and results meet everyone's needs to be able to achieve their career goals.

The demographic data appears to show that outreach efforts are adequate for application and entering into services. More research will be needed to determine if internal processes are causing any barriers to achievement of career goals.

The agency and SRC-B share a goal of understanding in particular if there are gaps in service provision for those customers who are DeafBlind. We continue to coordinate among partner organizations to coordinate services and listen to customer feedback to understand and address gaps that obstruct the achievement of career goals for customers who are DeafBlind.

C. INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES SERVED THROUGH OTHER COMPONENTS OF THE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM; AND

CSNA: Other Components of Workforce Development System

Comments were evenly mixed between those who had success using WorkSource Center services and those who did not. Those with positive responses indicated they had help with resumes and cover letters, attended job search classes such as interviewing skills, and had help using the website to search for jobs and upload documents. None of the respondents indicated that they were able to gain employment through these efforts, but the experience was generally positive. Others reported getting no help from WorkSource staff, and their efforts to use the services and software on their own were frustrating.

Many of the surveyed or interviewed respondents identified partnership barriers related to employer beliefs and attitudes about someone who is blind or has low vision or are deaf-blind. These biases impact the possibility of successful employment opportunities for WA DSB participants. Several respondents stated that they would like to see more employer engagement with businesses in smaller and more rural areas. Finally, another partnership need is additional education to employers to address their fears and biases about hiring and accommodating individuals who are blind, have low vision, and are deafblind.

Expectations of Individuals who are Blind.

At least 5 respondents described barriers caused by the low expectations placed on people who are blind, low vision or deaf/blind by others in their environment.

Ableism, Bias, Employer Attitudes, and Disability Stigma.

On a similar note, the second most often mentioned barrier is a bias or stigma among employers regarding the employment abilities of someone who is blind. Several respondents mentioned "ableism" as a barrier and indicated that many employers harbor negative beliefs about what people who are blind can do and are not well educated and informed about available accommodations, technology solutions, and support services. As one respondent put it, "sometimes the biggest barrier experienced by people who are blind is sighted people!"

Others mentioned the dearth of effective interpreters to work with individuals who are deafblind and the lack of adequate funding for technology access and solutions.

Overall

When questioned about the effectiveness of WorkSource service delivery for people individuals who are blind, low vision, and deafblind and their partnerships with WA DSB, key informants with experience in this area stated that the WorkSource system doesn't have the skills or necessary technology, adaptive equipment, or communication tools to adequately serve individuals, but that WA DSB has worked to establish partnerships with the system. Some indicated that it would be helpful if more WA DSB staff were able to be present and/or co-located at WorkSource offices but also acknowledged that this would be difficult for a small agency like WA DSB. One WorkSource representative who participated in an interview stated, "It has been a pleasure to work with <the representative> from WA DSB. She is awesome and one of my favorite WDC partners. We have well planned memoranda of understanding (MOUs) and Infrastructure Funding Agreements, smoothly facilitated by DSB. She is very responsive to agreed-upon tasks, has exceptional communication with our agency, prepares important letters of support, and completes needed paperwork in a timely manner."

Key informant respondents were asked if they had any observations and recommendations about how WA DSB could better engage with area employers to recruit and hire individuals who are blind, low vision, and deafblind. Most respondents shared their impression that WA DSB does a

nice job of building relationships with area businesses and employers and that they effectively share those resources with their partners. One respondent stated, "While still a work in progress, DSB is making a lot of effort and inroads with business partners." Several respondents stated that they would like to see this employer engagement continue and focus even more on businesses in smaller and more rural areas. Finally, interviewees also noted that there is always the need for additional education to employers to address their fears and biases about hiring and accommodating individuals who are blind, low vision, and deafblind.

In the first two years of this state plan, the Workforce Initiatives and Business Relations teams have made strong progress in accommodating existing job readiness training and successfully integrating agency customers into workshops that provide the job readiness skills available to everyone. We have more to accomplish in helping create American Job Centers or WorkSource Centers that provide universal accessibility and will maintain a focus on this in the next two years of the state plan.

D. YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES, INCLUDING STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES AND THEIR NEED FOR PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION SERVICES. INCLUDE AN ASSESSMENT OF THE NEEDS OF INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES FOR TRANSITION CAREER SERVICES AND PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION SERVICES, AND THE EXTENT TO WHICH SUCH SERVICES ARE COORDINATED WITH TRANSITION SERVICES PROVIDED UNDER IDEA.

CSNA: Youth with Disabilities

An identified 2023 barrier for WA DSB youth was lacking early access (younger than age 14) to programming that address self and societal expectations. Vocational assessment for students should be identified as early as possible. While the federal Pre-Employment Transition funding is limited to students 14 years of age and older, since 2023 the agency has secured local funding to support age-appropriate vocational and family services to youth ages 13 and younger.

Several participant survey respondents in this age group recognized WA DSB's youth programs as the most helpful WA DSB services. Specific examples given were YES I, YES II, and Good Vibe Friday. YES (or Youth Employment Solutions) are summer programs that assist students who are blind or have low vision with career preparation. YES is sponsored by WA DSB and the Washington State School for the Blind. Good Vibe Friday is a space for teenagers who are blind or have low vision to form a community, talk about important topics, play fun games, and practice skills. Topics covered have included ableism, healthy relationship-building including self-love, self-worth, and self-value. Pre-ETS skills practiced during the Good Vibe Friday sessions have included active listening, self-advocacy, and peer mentoring.

When asked if there were other services that youth feel they need to achieve their employment goals, participant survey respondents in this age group identified the following five services:

- Entrepreneurship experience and preparation,
- More assistance in attaining the first job,
- More career assessment and exploration,
- More counseling and guidance, especially after graduation, and
- Referral to services besides blindness-related services.

Barriers listed included meaningful time & access to DSB counselors; information about the agency, and public transportation.

Most respondents indicated that WA DSB's current Pre-ETS were effective and that they would like to have more of these services, a greater variety of these services, or would like services to start before age 14.

In the first two years of this state plan, the agency was successful in securing state and local dollars to support services for youth under age 14. We have been successful in developing statewide programming that works as a bridge to Pre-ETS and VR services.

2. IDENTIFY THE NEED TO ESTABLISH, DEVELOP, OR IMPROVE COMMUNITY REHABILITATION PROGRAMS WITHIN THE STATE.

CSNA: Community Rehab Programs

Partnerships with Community Rehabilitation Programs and Other Agencies/ Organizations that Serve Individuals with Disabilities

When responding to questions about Community Rehabilitation Programs (CRPs) and other service partners in Washington, respondents identified as a concerning barrier the low expectations placed upon individuals who are blind, have low vision or are deafblind. This negatively impacts the possibility of participant's achieving successful employment.

Additionally, several commenters pointed out that it is difficult to cultivate the low vision or vision loss specialty area within a CRP because blindness and low vision are perceived as "low incidence" disabilities by the provider community.

In the second half of the state plan, extensive CRP provider trainings are planned to address the gaps in expertise we experience with the rapid turnover among CRP providers. We are coordinating with Centers for Independence to provide key skills in job readiness.

c. GOALS, PRIORITIES, AND STRATEGIES

Section 101(a)(15) and (23) of the Rehabilitation Act require VR agencies to describe the goals and priorities of the State in carrying out the VR and Supported Employment programs. The goals and priorities are based on (1) the most recent CSNA, including any updates; (2) the State's performance under the performance accountability measures of Section 116 of WIOA; and (3) other available information on the operation and effectiveness of the VR program, including any reports received from the SRC and findings and recommendations from monitoring activities conducted under Section 107 of the Rehabilitation Act. VR agencies must—

1. DESCRIBE HOW THE SRC AND THE VR AGENCY JOINTLY DEVELOPED AND AGREED TO THE GOALS AND PRIORITIES AND ANY REVISIONS; AND

The agency and SRC actively and on-going discuss the challenges facing the agency and strategize goals for addressing issues of low exit-with-employment rates, staffing issues, and customer experience. We have reviewed together customer feedback, RSA monitoring feedback, CSNA data, Community Forum discussions, performance measures, analysis of impact of process changes, and other data gathering including agency culture and benchmarking research. The agency's strategic goals closely align with the recommendations put forward by the SRC.

2. IDENTIFY MEASURABLE GOALS AND PRIORITIES IN CARRYING OUT THE VR AND SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMS AND THE BASIS FOR SELECTING THE GOALS AND PRIORITIES (E.G., CSNA, PERFORMANCE ACCOUNTABILITY MEASURES, SRC RECOMMENDATIONS, MONITORING, OTHER INFORMATION). AS REQUIRED IN SECTION 101(A)(15)(D), (18), AND (23), DESCRIBE UNDER EACH GOAL OR PRIORITY, THE STRATEGIES OR METHODS USED TO ACHIEVE THE GOAL OR PRIORITY, INCLUDING AS APPLICABLE, DESCRIPTION OF STRATEGIES OR METHODS THAT—

A. SUPPORT INNOVATION AND EXPANSION ACTIVITIES;

B. OVERCOME BARRIERS TO ACCESSING VR AND SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES;

C. IMPROVE AND EXPAND VR SERVICES FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES, INCLUDING THE COORDINATION OF SERVICES DESIGNED TO FACILITATE THE TRANSITION OF SUCH STUDENTS FROM SCHOOL TO POSTSECONDARY LIFE (INCLUDING THE RECEIPT OF VR SERVICES, POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT, AND PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION SERVICES); AND

D. IMPROVE THE PERFORMANCE OF THE VR AND SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMS IN ASSISTING INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES TO ACHIEVE QUALITY EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES.

List and number each goal/priority, noting the basis, and under each goal/priority, list and number the strategies to achieve the goal/priority

Based on a wide set of data, including the 2023 CSNA, and on-going input from the SRC, agency customers and community partners, the agency is continuing the major revisioning of the agency's VR program that we started in the first two years of this state plan.

We have been and will continue to revamp historical business processes; methods for staff training; systems of communications (internal and external) and increase resources to foster business relations and workforce partner services. The core revision areas are categorized as People; Process; Technology; Strategy; and Structure.

Overall Statement of Strategic Goals

Develop, prioritize, and embed a renewed operational vision for the Washington State Department of Services for the Blind (DSB) Vocational Rehabilitation services into the daily fabric of agency operations to better prepare and support people with visual disabilities to gain, retain and advance in meaningful employment.

We are revisioning our Vocational Rehabilitation Program to improve service provision, lessen the bureaucracy that our customers and staff face, build relationships with businesses and external partners, and improve our employee skill, morale and environment.

Through the revisioning, our leaders and staff will become more skilled at adaptability, accountability and teaming, which in turn will help our participants to become more skilled, marketable, and effective in their career readiness path.

Increased Results: Indicators

- 10% increase in percentage of participants who exit with career
    - 2025 benchmark: 42.3%
- Continued high quality employment outcomes
    - 2025 benchmark: 44% of employment outcomes earned above $25 per hour
- Improved VR process metrics

    - Continue to achieve negotiated VR program performance indicators in this state plan
- 5% More businesses served
    - 2025 benchmark: Average 60 per month services to businesses documented
- Improved employee satisfaction
    - 3% increase positive score on Employee Engagement Survey question: "Overall, I am satisfied with my agency/ institution as a place to work".
        - 2025 benchmark: 90%
- Increased employee empowerment
    - 5% increase in VR Counselor empowerment, measured through positive scores on Employee Engagement Survey questions: "Involved in decision making", and "Feels safe to take risks, make mistakes".
        - 2025 benchmark: Decision making 75%; Risks 86%
- Maintain or improve Customer Satisfaction Survey results that show agency staff are responsive and engage participants in meaningful activities and are not an obstacle to an individual's employment goal.
    - 2023 benchmark: Averaged 88% for staff respectfulness (87%) and staff accuracy (90%) of DSB staff (Customer satisfaction process was revised in 2025, and will receive data from new processes beginning the first quarter of 2026.)

The DSB strategic areas of focus for 2026 and 2027 continue to include:

1. Process Change: Radically improve employment outcomes for the communities we serve by deepening and maturing the VR process changes that have been implemented in the first two years of this state plan.
2. Workforce Initiatives: Deepen the new Workforce Initiatives Program that builds opportunities for career-seeking customers by providing direct services to businesses towards creating disability-friendly workplaces and policies; developing work-based

experiences; identify opportunities for increasing DSB customer integration into the American Jobs Center workshops and trainings;

3. Reorganization: Complete the re-balancing of responsibilities across the leadership team and relevant DSB roles. Support the newly formed Training, Quality Assurance, Business Relations and Accessibility programs that enables a culture of quality, effectiveness, and continuous learning.
4. Communications Refinement: Maintain website and communication systems implemented in the first two years of this state plan. Refine changes to SRC monthly reporting and develop systems for gathering and disseminating the agency impact story. Maintain newly established systems for website content review and upkeep.
5. Targeted Customer Improved Service Provision: Address and coordinate gaps in agency's service provision, knowledge base and environment to create a sense of belonging and achievement for DSB Deaf Blind customers.

Process Change Strategic Goals

By redefining how we have provided services, we are striving to make a better customer experience and increase achievement of career goals.

By maximizing responsiveness and individualization of customer experience, and reducing timelines and bolstering counselor judgment, we have had initial success in improving the customer's initial experience, with the long-term goal of full engagement to keep the customer in active services making progress towards achieving their career goal.

By getting customers more swiftly into planned services, and by providing meaningful, frequent interactions with the career path clear and central focus, we can provide an atmosphere of support and coaching that keeps the customer focused on their career goals.

We have begun this systemic process change, and will deepen integration of new processes, analyze and revise processes in this next two-year

period. The change has been a major one, and we need to nurture the changes into daily practice in order to positively impact the customer experience and results.

Process Change Strategy 1

- Process Change 1.a
    - Continue to address timelines for eligibility and plan. While excellent progress has been made in the first two years of the state plan, more work is needed to shorten the timeline and streamline the path to services

Process Change Strategy 2

- Process Change 2.a
    - Provide more frequent, meaningful and employment-based interactions with customers. Identify opportunities for shifting administrative tasks from VRCs to allow more engagement, coaching and counseling opportunities.
- Process Change 2.b
    - Embed new milestone plan processes that offer goals and services in shorter-term segments and are revised more frequently.
- Process Change 2.c
    - Utilize Business Relations and employment-based activities early and on-going in customer interactions.

Process Change Strategy 3

- Process Change 3.a
    - Expand mechanisms for gathering and utilizing the voice of the customer to identify areas for process improvement and decision making.

Workforce Initiatives Strategic Goals

Workforce Initiatives will continue to integrate the newly established workforce engagement and business relations services into DSB's VR program. Business Relations offer services throughout the lifespan of the career-seeking customer's case and works directly with businesses to meet

their unique needs in securing talent and developing disability-friendly workplaces. The goal of Workforce Initiatives in the second two year period of this state plan is to operationalize the structure that has been newly developed for ensuring customers have access to the Business Relations services they need, such as job readiness development programs, work-based learning, guidance into the Workforce System programming, and business relations activities leading to greater, more informed, competitive, and integrated employment for DSB customers.

The workforce initiative goals will be achieved through the following strategies:

Workforce Initiatives Strategy 1: Expanded Business Services and Engagement

- Work Initiatives 1.a
    - Increase the breadth, depth, and frequency of engagement with employers and workforce partners to create greater awareness and adoption of DSB services by:
- Work Initiatives 1.b
    - Onboarding business relations specialists that provide business relations and workforce development services to agency participants, partners, and employers.
- Work Initiatives 1.c
    - Enhanced internal and external communications and marketing through public relations, training, and community involvement.
- Work Initiatives 1.d
    - Serving businesses accessibility and accommodation needs through training, recruitment, and retention services.

Workforce Initiatives Strategy 2: Integrated Vocational Rehabilitation and Business Relations Processes

- Work Initiatives 2.a
    - Improve service delivery effectiveness through customized planning and integrating business relations activities from service application to acquisition of employment.
- Work Initiatives 2.b

    - Develop a Business Relations methodology for DSB staff and employers that is aligned and integrated with Vocational Rehabilitation processes.
- Work Initiatives 2.c
    - Enhanced agency policy and procedures that guide the VR program and processes to monitor and evaluate progress.
- Work Initiatives 2.d
    - Expand integrated VR team that responds rapidly to employment opportunities and business needs, with scheduled and consistent communication with timely delivery of services.
- Work Initiatives 2.e
    - An enhanced VR Process, to include business relations and workforce engagement activities early, starting with pre-employment transition services throughout their participation in the VR program.

Workforce Initiatives Strategy 3: Entrepreneurship for People with Visual Disabilities

- Work Initiatives 3.a
    - Develop innovative opportunities for people with visual disabilities to gain steady income and self-sufficiency, without the barriers that come with fluctuation of economy and employment.
- Work Initiatives 3.b
    - Build partnerships with Washington state agencies, community and technical colleges, and community partners to develop self-employment career pathways, targeting labor market industry sector growth.
- Work Initiatives 3.c
    - Establish a training function/service to support delivery of Business Enterprise Program (BEP) curriculum and self-employment training to individuals seeking self-employment opportunity within the BEP and in other industries.
- Work Initiatives 3.d

    - Utilize the Business Enterprise Program (BEP) for work-based and entrepreneurial learning for students with disabilities.

Workforce Initiatives Strategy 4: Expanded Knowledge of Labor Market and Career Pathways

- Work Initiatives 4.a
    - Embolden partnerships with the workforce sector and business to broaden employment opportunities and outcomes for DSB participants.
- Work Initiatives 4.b
    - Utilize labor market tools and guidance to inform DSB staff and participants about employment occupations, industries, and career pathways.
- Work Initiatives 4.c
    - Introduction of skills development programs, to include credentialed programs, pre-apprenticeships, and apprenticeships for DSB participants, including students with disabilities.
- Work Initiatives 4.d
    - Build skill training, work-based learning opportunities and pathways with workforce partners for students with disabilities in DSB regional territories across the state.
- Work Initiatives 4.e
    - Organized DSB participation and contribution to local workforce councils and boards.

Reorganization Strategic Goals

There was a radical reorganization of leadership and operational structure to expand capacity for maintaining quality assurance, robust and coordinated training of staff, and stronger vocational focus in the work. New Training, Workforce Initiatives, Quality Assurance and Digital Accessibility teams have been established and staff have been onboarded. Initial policy and procedures have been developed for each team.

The focus for the second two-year period is to operationalize the work of the new teams, and integrate the services they offer within the daily fabric of the traditional parts of the agency.

Reorg Strategy 1: Expand Quality Assurance Capacity

- Reorg 1.a
  - Continue to design and develop performance data that connects top-level measures to team and individual measures, metrics, and KPIs.
- Reorg 1.b
  - Use data in effective internal controls to increase performance measures.
- Reorg 1.c
  - Deepen the effectiveness and incorporate forecasting models into daily work of leadership in order to better identify capacity constraints, current throughput, staff capacity and fiscal limitations to ensure the agency can meet forecasted workload.

Reorg Strategy 2: Mature and Maintain New Training Program

- Reorg 2.a
  - Implement and refine processes for on-going needs assessment across agency units
- Reorg 2.b
  - Embed processes for requests for training development/design
- Reorg 2.c
  - Embed use of agency training calendar
- Reorg 2.d
  - Expand training strategies to effectively address attitudinal barriers that agency customers may face, such as addressing lack of belief in capability of individuals with a disability that might be held by community partners, business partners, family and customer social networks, agency staff, and the agency customer themselves.

Communications Strategic Goals

Revise agency web presence to improve communication and outreach with customers and among the community. Develop strategies for improving internal communications in order to increase staff clarity on purpose and through change.

Communications Strategy 1: Revise Agency Website

- Communications 1.a
  - The initial goal of establishing a new user-centric, accessible and easy to navigate website has been completed in first two years of this state plan
- Communications 1.b
  - Developing and stabilizing systems for maintenance of refreshed website content remains a goal for the second two years of the state plan.

Communications Strategy 2: Maintain and Improve Agency Communications

- Communications 2.a
  - Deepen new systems in use of alternate formats for conveying internal agency information clearly and broadly
- Communications 2.b
  - Maintain and build on collection and utilization of customer voice in story of agency impact
- Communications 2.c
- Develop stronger communication loops to communicate back to customers to confirm their voice has been considered in decision making

Targeted Customer Improved Experience Strategic Goals

Based on CSNA and SRC and customer feedback, the agency Deaf-Blind customer experience has gaps that need to be identified and addressed to fully meet the needs of that customer to achieve career goals.

Based on the expectations of the Centennial Accord for Washington State and Executive Order 25-10, the agency has a need to improve and expand services to eligible individuals who have tribal affiliation.

As a state VR program, there are Government-to-Government protocols we must keep in mind interacting with the Tribal Vocational Rehabilitation programs and other Tribal government agencies. For Washington State, there is guidance in the Centennial Accord and Executive Order 25-10.

State public Vocational Rehabilitation programs and Tribal Vocational Rehabilitation programs share a goal of providing the highest quality services to individuals who have disabilities and tribal affiliation, which is often achieved through sharing of expertise and resources. Understanding the central role of the cultural practices and services that the Tribal VR agencies are able to provide in a vocational rehabilitation context provides an urgency to connect those eligible for Tribal VR services with TVR programs.

While we interact most closely with the ten Tribal VR programs in the region, there are 29 federally recognized tribes in the regions of Washington State. We recognize a need to expand our presence to make services more widely available for individuals who are blind, deafblind or low vision and who have tribal affiliation in a tribe that does not have an active AIVRS program.

Deaf-Blind Strategy 1: Create a welcoming environment that meets the needs of Deaf Blind customers

- Deaf-Blind 1.a
  - Compile easy-to-access Deaf Blind resource lists and tools
- Deaf-Blind 1.b
  - Collaborate with other partner service provider agencies and community organizations through the newly formed DeafBlind Consortium to streamline and better coordinate shared service provision processes
- Deaf-Blind 1.c
  - Continue to find opportunity to provide awareness training for DSB staff through community partners with lived experience, such as HKNC and/or DBSC, to build on the foundational training through HKNC
- Deaf-Blind 1.d

    - Ensure Pre-Employment and Transition services for Deaf Blind students and youth are fully accessible and welcoming

Deepen Work with Tribal Vocational Rehabilitation Programs Strategic Goals

Tribal VR Strategy 1

- Tribal VR 1.a
    - Ensure all Executive leadership and tribal liaisons have attended Government-to-Government training
- Tribal VR 1.b
    - Encourage staff to engage more in-person and on-site interactions to build relationship locally with Tribal VR staff and other potential tribal partners
- Tribal VR 1.c
    - Expand DSB presence, particularly in expanding information and access to Pre-ETS, Independent Living and vocational rehabilitation services among tribes that don't have an active Tribal VR program.

Support Innovation and Expansion Activities

The agency will continue to use Innovation and Expansion funds to support all State Rehab Council activities, including funds required to conduct and analyze on-going customer satisfaction survey data, customer listening sessions, and on-going Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment information. The data gathered informs the agency of customer needs and identifies areas for service improvement.

d. Evaluation and Reports of Progress: VR and Supported Employment Goals

For the most recently completed program year, provide an evaluation and report of progress for the goals or priorities, including progress on the strategies under each goal or priority, applicable to that program year.

Sections 101(a)(15) and 101(a)(23) of the Rehabilitation Act require VR agencies to describe—

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

List the goals/priorities and discuss the progress or completion of each goal/priority and related strategies

The agency's goals and priorities for the first two years of the PY 2024-2027 VR State Plan were to refine processes to improve the customer experience and engage more frequently and meaningfully to support the customer achieving their career goal. We addressed staff expertise and capacity to better serve the range of customer needs. We improved clarity of communication to customers. We initiated projects to identify service gaps and recommended improvements for DeafBlind customer success in achieving career goals. The goals and subgoals are in process for the second half of the four-year plan, but much success was achieved in the first two years. Each goal and sub-goal is evaluated below:

We successfully increased results in PY 2024:

- Engage customers so more who exit have achieved their career goals
    - Our goal was a 10% increase in the percentage of participants who exit with their career goal. In 2023 the benchmark was 31.9% of those who exited services had achieved their career goal.
    - In PY 2024 we achieved a 32.5% gain, where 42.3% of customers who exited services had achieved their career goal.
- Continued high quality employment outcomes
    - Our goal was to maintain or improve the 2023 benchmark of 44% of employment outcomes earning above $25 per hour
    - In PY24 we achieved
- Increase in number of referrals

    - In 2023 we took 288 applications for services. During PY24 we received 410 applications for services, a 42% increase. The goal was a 5% increase.
- Improved VR process metrics
    - We exceeded all negotiated VR program performance indicators in this period
- More businesses served
    - Our goal was a 5% increase in the number of business engagement services documented. In 2023 we averaged 30 business services per month, and in 2025 60 business services per month, an increase of 200%
- Improved employee satisfaction
    - While our goal was a 3% increase in positive score on the Employee Engagement Survey question: "Overall, I am satisfied with my agency/ institution as a place to work", we achieved a 7% increase in overall satisfaction. The 2025 rating, with 80% of staff responding, was 90% overall satisfaction.
    - 2023 benchmark: 83%; 2025 benchmark 90%
- Increased employee empowerment
    - Our goal was a 5% increase in VR Counselor empowerment, measured through an averaged positive score on Employee Engagement Survey questions: "Involved in decision making", and "Feels safe to take risks, make mistakes". We achieved an almost 10% increase in 2025, with 80% of staff responding.
    - 2023 benchmark: Decision making 64%; Risks 78%;
    - 2025 benchmark: Decision making 75%; Risks 86%
- Maintain or improve Customer Satisfaction Survey results that show agency staff are responsive and engage participants in meaningful activities, and are not an obstacle to an individual's employment goal.
    - We were in process for revision of the customer satisfaction survey in 2025, and expect to have full survey results starting Q2 PY25.

Process Change Strategic Goals

Strategy 1: Address timelines for eligibility and plan – shorten the time to start of planned services by addressing processes for intake, eligibility, and assessment for developing plan for vocational goals and services

We made progress to this strategy.

- In 2025 we achieved 100% timeliness on time to eligibility and time to plan measures.
- We reduced the time from referral to application from 13 days average to one day average.
- We reduced time from application to eligibility from an average of 28 days to 21 days.
- We reduced time from eligibility to plan from an average of 70 days to 45 days.

We intend to reduce times even more as our new processes mature and are refined.

Strategy 2: Provide more frequent, meaningful and employment-based interactions with customers. Identify opportunities for shifting administrative tasks to allow more coaching and counseling opportunities. Address plans in shorter segments and revise more frequently. Utilize Business Relations and employment-based activities early and on-going in customer interactions.

We have made progress towards this strategy.

We implemented a new form of milestone planning, which reduces the scope of planned services to those the customer reports they are committed to achieving in the short-term, with the long term view of career goal in mind.

By shortening the scope of plan goals, there is naturally more frequent and meaningful interaction among staff and customers, and more frequent review and refresh of plan services. Customers report more clarity in their activity with the agency and towards their goals, Activity is more concrete, and next steps are developed upon completion of short-term goals. All

plans have transitioned to the milestone format over 2025. We will continue to refine the process and success of the new format. The increase in percentage of customers who exit services with their career goal achieved is an early indicator of the success of this change.

Strategy 3: Utilize mechanisms for gathering the voice of the customer to identify other areas for process improvement. Develop processes, tools, and techniques for project management, change management, and process improvement for all areas of the agency.

We have made progress with this strategy.

We collaborated with the SRC-B to revise the customer satisfaction survey process and questions. We will now survey customers at all stages of their VR process, not just at exit. We are utilizing services of Eastern Washington State University to conduct quarterly reviews through email, and by phone. We expect to receive our initial quarter data Q2 PY25.

Workforce Initiatives Strategic Goals

Workforce Initiatives STRATEGY 1: Increase the breadth, depth, and frequency of engagement with business and workforce partners to create greater opportunities for DSB customers.

We made progress towards this strategy.

- We created a new Assistant Director for Workforce Initiatives position, which oversees the Business Relations, Pre-ETS and Business Enterprise Programs
- We created a new Business Relations program and onboarded three new FTE business relations specialists, expanding our ability to serve the business customer.
- We enhanced internal and external communications through development of Business Relations service menus, marketing the services that Business Relations Specialists can provide to DSB career-seeking customers, staff and to businesses.

- We increased services to businesses around digital accessibility and accommodation needs. The Business Relations Specialists provided over 600 services to businesses in 2025.
- Additionally, a new FTE of an Accessibility Coordinator has been highly effective in guiding businesses and state agencies towards self-sufficient digital accessibility.

Workforce Initiatives STRATEGY 2: Improve service delivery effectiveness through customized planning and integrating business relations activities from service application to acquisition of employment.

We made progress towards this strategy.

- We developed a Business Relations methodology for DSB staff and businesses that is aligned and integrated with Vocational Rehabilitation processes with potential involvement at all stages of the VR process.
- We enhanced agency policy and procedures for the new Business Relations program.
- We enhanced the VR process to include business relations and workforce engagement activities early in a customer's VR activity. Service menus have been developed and disseminated to clearly identify the range of services available to customers.

More work will be done in the next two years to mature, stabilize and refine this new Business Relations program

Workforce Initiatives STRATEGY 3: Develop innovative opportunities for people with visual disabilities to gain steady income and self-sufficiency in self-employment.

We have made initial progress towards this strategy, with more effort towards it in the third and fourth year of this plan.

- We have utilized the Business Enterprise Program (BEP) facilities for work-based and entrepreneurial learning for students with disabilities.
- For PY2024 8% of career outcomes represented individuals who were self-employed.

- We have secured new vendor support for developing self-employment plans

Workforce Initiatives STRATEGY 4: Expanded Knowledge of Labor Market and Career Pathways

We made progress towards this strategy.

- We tried two different Labor Market Information systems: LightCast and JobsEQ. We have folded these tools into the work of VRCs and offered LMI consultation as one of the Business Relations services.
- We have organized DSB participation and contribution to local workforce councils and boards.

Reorganization Strategic Goals

Reorg STRATEGY 1: Expand Quality Assurance Capacity

We have made progress towards this strategy.

- We added a new FTE staff position and elevated a program manager position for a new Quality Assurance program
- We have increased capability for designing and developing performance data connecting top-level measures to team and individual measures through new PowerBI capability.
- We have designed and developed forecasting models for leadership to identify capacity constraints, throughput, contractor capacity and fiscal limitations to ensure the agency can meet forecasted workload. We have new PowerBI data tools that managers regularly access through Teams folders. Through this capacity we have increased and matured our capability for effective internal controls.

Reorg STRATEGY 2: Design and Develop Training Program

We have made progress towards this strategy.

We added three new FTE staff positions to create a new Training Program

- We developed processes for training needs assessment across agency units, and established an initial annual training plan for the agency – a first.

- The new Annual Training Plan is organized by job class and lists the required and offered trainings relevant to the job class.
- Through the new training team we have offered trainings that support staff understanding of policy and procedure and trainings that expand and deepen staff skillsets. We have had trainings on ethics; DeafBlind awareness; addressing multiple disabilities (including mental health); Adobe Sign accessible electronic signature processes for customers; case documentation; employee safety in the field; Government-to-Government for Tribal relations; purchasing and procurement, among others.

Reorg STRATEGY 3: Address Other Staffing Capacity Gaps

We made progress towards this strategy.

- We added a new FTE Accessibility Coordinator as part of the Information Technology Department.
- The Accessibility Coordinator has increased our agency reputation and increased digital accessibility among partner state agencies through review and assessment of digital materials and detailed instruction towards self-sufficiency in analyzing and ensuring future accessibility.

Communications Strategic Goals

Communications Strategy 1: Revise Agency Website

We achieved great success towards this strategy.

- We completely revamped our agency website. The method was to incorporate user-centric design. We created four customer personas and considered all design elements through the feedback and perspectives of those customer types.
- Customer feedback for the new design has been positive, that they have been able to accomplish their tasks effectively, efficiently and with satisfaction
- The design is highly accessible, usable by people with disabilities and meeting the latest WCAG standards

- We are in process of revising website content. We are utilizing plain language principles and measures to ensure readability. We have organized on-going review of content to ensure information is up-to-date.

Communications Strategy 2: Maintain and Improve Agency Communications

We have made much progress towards this strategy.

- We have implemented alternate formats for conveying internal agency information. We added:
  - A new monthly DSB internal newsletter
  - Quarterly "fireside chats" for conveying information and responding to staff questions
  - Director facilitated video interviews to share staff reactions and program activities
- External communications have been robust through:
  - Continued quarterly Community forum/Town Halls
  - Presentations at consumer organizations
  - Joining national effort for 100 days/100 stories
  - Changing format of quarterly State Rehab Council reports to a monthly focus of a single program, with customer-focused stories in customer voice to highlight impact of VR services. These reports have been useful for sharing more broadly to community partner organizations and stakeholders

Deaf Blind Customer Experience Strategic Goals

Deaf-Blind Customer STRATEGY 1: Create a welcoming environment that meets the needs of a Deaf Blind individual

We have made some preliminary success towards this strategy, and will continue to refine progress over the next two years.

- We have coordinated support for SRC-B to conduct a survey of active DeafBlind customers, and assisted in SRC-B initial listening sessions

to understand gaps and develop recommendations for improving services.

- We have gathered a wide range of service providers into a DeafBlind Consortium. The initial work of the Coalition in 2025 has been to share scope and process for service provision of each attendee. Continued work will examine how services can be streamlined and more coordinated for DeafBlind customers.
- We implemented intensive awareness training for DSB staff through the Helen Keller National Center (HKNC) for all counselors, and less intensive training for all DSB staff.

Performance Accountability Measures

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

As an agency, DSB exceeded all negotiated PY24 performance measure criteria. As a state, we under-performed in the negotiated measure for Measurable Skills Gains and Median Earnings. Both agency-only and combined state results are listed below to illustrate.

Agency and State performance:

WA Performance Data PY24	DSB Only	Above/Below Negotiated	DSB/DVR Joint	Above/Below Negotiated
2nd Quarter after Exit	47.5%	1.5%	53.1%	7.1%
4th Quarter after Exit	43.3%	6.3%	50.4%	13.4%
Credential Attained	55.7%	25.7%	34.5%	9.5%
Measurable Skill Gains	61.3%	9.3%	46.6%	-6.6%
Median Earnings	N/A	N/A	$4,309	-$91

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

Use of funds reserved for innovation and expansion activities

The agency utilized Vocational Rehabilitation grant funding and the associated state funded match for Innovation and Expansion funds to support all State Rehab Council activities, including funds required to conduct and analyze on-going customer satisfaction survey data, and on-going Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment information.

e. Supported Employment Services

e. Supported Employment Services Distribution of Title VI Funds, and Arrangements and Cooperative Agreements for the Provision of Supported Employment Services.

1. Acceptance of title VI funds:

VR agency does NOT elect to receive title VI funds and understands that supported employment services must still be provided

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

N/A

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

most significant disabilities, including youth with the most significant disabilities; and the timing of transition to extended services.

The agency adhered to the requirements for public comment and SRC input. The Supported Employment Grant Title VI funds will be utilized by the WA General VR agency, and we have communicated with them our intent to continue to have the Title VI funds for the state transferred to their exclusive use.

Vocational Rehabilitation staff are well versed in the provision of supported employment services and understand the issues related to eligibility, vocational assessment, and creating vocational plans that address the need for on-going long-term support services. The quality of services is equal to any customer served, and are individualized and comprehensive. We work with each individual's unique needs, strengths and aptitudes towards a career goal that meets the individual's goals in competitive and integrated employment. We typically partner with the general VR agency to take full advantage of the specialized resources DVR has developed to achieve the long-term supports the individual requires to maintain their career goals. When long-term supports are not immediately available, the agency will support up to 24 months for the necessary extended services, and up to 48 months for a customer who is a youth.

Supported employment is provided to participants with the most significant disabilities who need intensive, ongoing support to perform in a work setting. Supported employment presents opportunities for advancement for individuals with disabilities that are similar to those available to employees without disabilities in similar positions. Supported employment is competitive integrated employment with the maximum hours possible, consistent with the unique strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities, interests and informed choice of the individual.

WIOA defines competitive integrated work as performed on a full-time or part-time basis for which an individual is:

a) compensated at or above minimum wage and comparable to the customary rate paid by the employer to employees without disabilities performing similar duties and with similar training and experience;
b) receiving the same level of benefits provided to other employees without disabilities in similar positions;
c) at a location where the employee interacts with other individuals without disabilities; and
d) presented opportunities for advancement similar to other employees without disabilities in similar positions.

In order to receive Supported Employment services, the DSB participant must:

- Be eligible for vocational rehabilitation (VR) services in accordance with WAC 67-25-125;
- Have completed a comprehensive assessment of rehabilitation needs in accordance with WAC 67-25-205;

AND

- Need intensive supported employment services from DSB and ongoing services from other resources to perform competitive work due to the nature and significance of their disabilities.

The need for supported employment is based on counselor judgement and/or in collaboration with an external entity that has additional knowledge of the participant's needs and abilities.

The supported employment services provided can include:

- An ongoing assessment of the participant's employment situation to determine what is needed to maintain job stability and to coordinate services that are needed at or away from the job site to maintain job stability
- Intensive job skill training at the job site
- Job development, job placement and job retention services
- Social skills training

- Regular observations or supervision
- Regular contacts with the participant or participant's representative, the employer, and any other support service agencies
- Facilitation of natural supports at the job site
- Any other vocational services needed to maintain job stability

A participant transitions into extended services after supported employment services from DSB have ended. Extended services are the services that are necessary to occur after a case has closed to support the job. Extended services include ongoing natural or contracted support services from other appropriate resources. Long-term funding may be found through public agencies, non-profit agencies, employers, natural supports and any other resource other than federal VR funds. Specific examples of long-term supports might include: Developmental Disabilities Administration, Social Security, and Washington Behavioral Health.

A participant achieves a supported employment outcome when:

- The individual has transitioned to extended services provided by either Washington state's designated agency for individuals with the most significant disabilities (Developmental Disabilities Administration), or another Community Rehabilitation Provider; and
- The individual has maintained employment and achieved stability in the work setting for at least 90 days after transitioning to extended services;

AND

- The employment is competitive and integrated.

If a job is secured and extended supports to maintain the position are not yet identified, DSB ensures supported employment services that are reasonable and necessary for the participant to maintain stability on the job for up to 24 months for adults, and up to 48 months for a youth with a disability. If extended support services are not identified within these timeframes, DSB must close the case.

In keeping with averages over time, we expect that five (5) to ten (10) customers that require long term supports per year will achieve competitive & integrated employment outcomes.

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

Cooperative Agreements

The agency collaborates with the general VR agency, DVR, in order to provide the best supports for co-occurring disabilities. Through the DVR agreement with the Developmental Disabilities Community Services (DDCS), priority for county long-term support funds are secured for those individuals eligible for DDCS services who gain employment. Until those long-term supports are in place, DSB and the agency collaborates with the general VR agency, DVR, in order to provide the best supports for co-occurring disabilities. Through the DVR agreement with the DDCS, priority for county long-term support funds are secured for those individuals eligible for DDCS services who gain employment. Until those long-term supports are in place, DSB and DVR will negotiate costs, mindful that all individuals with the most significant disabilities, including youth, may receive up to 24 months of supported employment services after placement on a job until the transition to extended services - or longer if necessary to meet an individual's needs. In addition to the 24 months of supported employment services, DSB, in coordination with DVR, may fund up to four years of extended services following transition to extended services until a youth reaches age 25.

Agency staff seek other natural or other supports in case the individual is not eligible for Developmental Disabilities Community Services (DDCS)

long-term job support funds. DVR will negotiate costs, mindful that all individuals with the most significant disabilities, including youth may receive up to 24 months of supported employment services after placement on a job until the transition to extended services - or longer if necessary to meet an individual's needs. In addition to the 24 months of supported employment services, DSB in coordination with DVR may fund up to four years of extended services following transition to extended services until a youth reaches age 25.

Agency staff seek other natural or other supports in case the individual is not eligible for DDCS long-term job support funds.

f. Annual Estimates

Sections 101(a)(15) and 101(a)(23) of the Rehabilitation Act require all VR agencies to annually conduct a full assessment of their resources and ability to serve all eligible individuals before the start of the Federal fiscal year. In accordance with 34 C.F.R. § 361.29(b), annual estimates must include the following projections:

1. Estimates for next Federal fiscal year—

A. VR Program

Priority Category (if applicable)	No. of Individuals Eligible for Services	No. of Eligible Individuals Expected to Receive Services under VR Program	Costs of Services using Title I Funds	No. of Eligible Individuals Not Receiving Services (if applicable)
Category 1	960	935	$17.3m	25
Category 2	240	120	$1.4m	120
Category 3	10	0	0	10

B. Supported Employment Program

Priority Category (if applicable)	No. of Individuals Eligible for Services	No. of Eligible Individuals Expected to Receive Services under Supported Employment Program	Costs of Services using Title I and Title VI Funds	No. of Eligible Individuals Not Receiving Services (if applicable)
Category 1	25	25	$100k	0
Category 2				0
Category 3				0

g. Order of Selection

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

** VR agencies may maintain an order of selection policy and priority of eligible individuals without implementing or continuing to implement an order of selection.*

DSB conducted a financial review and has concluded that implementing an order of selection is necessary to ensure funding is available to continue to support existing Individual Plans for Employment.

The Agency will be implementing an order of selection May 2026 and closing all three priority categories to ensure funding is available to fully support eligible individuals.

We have engaged with SRCB, tribal partners, Washington's general VR agency and community partners in anticipation of enacting an OOS. There will be impact in implementing a waitlist for our partners and shared customer base, and we are working to minimize impact by developing robust systems for information and referral services and ensuring eligible customers who are placed in a waitlist status have options to progress while awaiting DSB planned services.

There will be a fiscal cliff in May 2028, where we are forecasted to run out of funds at current fiscal trending. By implementing an order of selection in May 2026, we can gradually decrease numbers served, extending our funding through October 2028 and mitigating the impact felt by customers and community partners from delaying services. Waiting later will increase the negative impact and more sudden restriction of customers into planned services.

We will maximize efforts to provide robust information and referral services, particularly for category 2 and category 3 customers, that can connect them with consumer organizations; American Jobs Centers that have addressed accessibility issues through DSB Business Relations efforts; community resources; and partner vocational rehabilitation programs such as the Tribal VR programs in the region. We will offer information and referral services to businesses and other organizations to support their ability to offer accessible workspaces and services for individuals with visual disabilities.

2. For VR agencies that have defined priority categories describe—

A. The justification for the order

B. The order (priority categories) to be followed in selecting eligible individuals to be provided VR services ensuring that individuals with the

most significant disabilities are selected for services before all other individuals with disabilities; and

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

The Justification for the Order

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) of 2014 requires 15% of the vocational rehabilitation grant to be set aside to provide pre-employment transition career exploration services for students with a disability. The remaining 85% of the vocational rehabilitation grant and the associated State match will no longer be adequate to cover the costs of individualized and comprehensive vocational rehabilitation services commencing in May 2026.

DSB has been experiencing rising costs since 2022 with average monthly VR costs (excluding Pre-ETS costs) climbing 42% from $1,126K per month to $1,599K in FY 2025. The number of customers has also grown from 1,005 to 1,104 during the same period. Costs for services, training, and equipment that directly benefit the customer have increased from $3,956 to $5,715 per customer. An increase of 44.5%.

This rate of increase is expected to continue, and overall VR costs are forecasted to increase 10% per year over the next several years.

To minimize the impact of these escalating costs, the agency has adopted multiple cost containment strategies. These strategies include eliminating non-essential travel, not filling non-VR related positions, reduction of contracted services, and renewed emphasis on comparable benefits among other initiatives. The agency will also be adopting Ticket Tracker to

ensure all available VR reimbursement funding from the Social Security Agency is received. These strategies have reduced costs and have not affected customer services or benefits.

Historically, DSB has had up to 12 months of "carryover" of prior year grant funding to support operations in the following fiscal year. However, the amount of carryover funding has been eroding as costs and the number of customers increase. An additional $8,728K in reallotment funding was received in FY 25 funding which will provide 9 months of funding in FY 26. However, this amount of carryover will erode as our State funding is expected to remain flat and federal funding is expected to increase 3% each fiscal year.

Increasing costs with no significant increase in funding will result in no prior year funding being available at the start of FY 2028. With VR expenditure forecasted to be greater than $2M per month in FY 2028, the forecasted $16M in FY 28 funding will only support 8 months of operations as outlined in the table below.

	Months of Operations Funding will Support				
	FY 24	FY 25	FY 26	FY 27	FY 28
Months	8.4	14.6	8.9	8.6	7.6
Funding	$12,571,991	$22,733,220	$15,289,298	$15,747,977	$16,078,916

The absence of carry-over funding in FY 28 also presents a significant challenge under a continuing resolution scenario since there will be no prior year funding available to support operations under a continuing resolution and a temporary lapse in funding commencing in Oct 2027 (FY 28) will be experienced while the Federal budget is being passed.

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

Priority Categories

2. For VR agencies that have defined priority categories describe—

Criteria for categorization of significance of disability.

- An individual with a Most Significant Disability is an individual who:
    - Experiences three or more significant functional limitations (such as mobility, communication, self-care, self-direction, interpersonal skills, work tolerance, or work skills) in terms of a career outcome; and
    - Whose vocational rehabilitation can be expected to require multiple and substantial vocational rehabilitation services over an extended period of time

- An individual with a Significant Disability is an individual who:
    - Experiences two or more significant functional limitations (such as mobility, communication, self-care, self-direction, interpersonal skills, work tolerance, or work skills) in terms of a career outcome; and
    - Whose vocational rehabilitation can be expected to require multiple and substantial vocational rehabilitation services over an extended period of time.
    -
- An individual with a Least Significant Disability is an individual who:
    - Experiences at least one significant functional limitation (such as mobility, communication, self-care, self-direction, interpersonal skills, work tolerance, or work skills) in terms of a career outcome; and
    - Whose vocational rehabilitation can be expected to require at least one vocational rehabilitation service but not necessarily over an extended period of time.

C. The VR agency's goals for serving individuals in each priority category, including how the agency will assist eligible individuals assigned to closed

priority categories with information and referral, the method in which the VR agency will manage waiting lists, and the projected timelines for opening priority categories. NOTE: Priority categories are considered open when all individuals in the priority category may be served.

Those determined to be in a closed category are informed of their eligibility, and that DSB is not currently serving their Priority of Service Category, and that they have been placed on a wait list for services.

Applicants will be notified in writing of their Order of Selection category when they are notified of their eligibility. They will also be notified of the right to appeal the category decision and their responsibility to notify the agency if their condition changes so they can be re-classified if appropriate.

Customers are also informed they can discuss the decision and possible redetermination of the category with their counselor. Information on customer rights and frequently asked questions about Order of Selection will also be provided to the individual.

In addition to resources discussed with customers during their initial meeting with the intake specialist, those placed on the waiting list receive Information and Referral services listing specific organizations and resources which may help meet an individual's vocational rehabilitation needs while they wait for DSB services to become available. This includes programs carried out by partners in Washington's workforce development system, as well as other federal, tribal, and state programs.

Regional offices also maintain a comprehensive list of organizations, including other workforce development programs, to which customers can be referred. Staff use these resource lists to explore options that meet the customer's needs. To the extent possible, the list includes specific points of contact within the organization.

A letter is sent every six months to all individuals on the waiting list to notify them of the status of their service category, provide referrals to other resources for training and employment, and remind them to keep their contact information up to date. Individuals on the waiting list may choose to

be removed or provide information for redetermination of their category placement.

Wait List Management

Priority will be given to providing services to existing customers before new customers are removed from the waiting list. Order of Selection will not affect the provision or authorization of diagnostic and evaluation services needed to determine the eligibility of new applicants.

On a monthly basis, DSB's Executive Leadership Team will review:

- Projected and actual revenues and expenditures
- Projected and actual number of customers in each priority category
- Number of individuals on the waiting list for services
- Number of potentially eligible students with disabilities receiving Pre-ETS services
- Pre-ETS expenditures
- Staff capacity and caseloads

These discussions will inform decisions about changes in the open and closed service categories, including the timing of re-opening categories and releasing customers from the waiting list.

For closed categories, DSB will maintain a waiting list of individuals according to their date of application and priority of service category.

Customers will be served from the waiting list in order of date of application and category until the category is opened. Categories will be opened when resources are sufficient to serve all customers in the service category including all individuals assigned to the category upon eligibility determination and those individuals on that category's wait list. Once a closed category is opened, then individuals on the next category's waiting list may begin to be served in order of application date.

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

Serve outside of order of selection for job at risk

DSB will support eligible customers who require specific services and/or equipment to maintain their current employment regardless of their priority level assignment.

If, while receiving job retention services during Order of Selection, maintaining the current position ceases to be the customer's vocational goal for any reason, their case will no longer be considered job retention. At that point, they must be returned to the wait list for assistance with their career goals or to receive other vocational services.

Students with a disability can be impacted by an order of selection when they are applying for individualized services. Students with a disability have the potential to benefit from the career exploration services through funding for Pre-Employment Transition Services, which do not have a wait list. They may also simultaneously apply for individualized vocational rehabilitation services, where a case may be placed on a wait list.

The agency offers a progressive set of career exploration services. The agency is able to engage students in these pre-employment transition services before the student is determined eligible for individualized VR services, or while they are determined eligible for individualized VR services, but their case is placed on a waitlist. The agency will ensure that the pre-employment career exploration services are not interrupted even if a student's case is placed on a wait list for individualized services.

The agency's intent is that the OOS will not negatively impact the career exploration experience for students with visual disabilities.

h. Waiver of Statewideness

The State plan shall be in effect in all political subdivisions of the State, however, the Commissioner of the Rehabilitation Services Administration

(Commissioner) may waive compliance with this requirement in accordance with Section 101(a)(4) of the Rehabilitation Act and the implementing regulations in 34 C.F.R. § 361.26. If the VR agency is requesting a waiver of statewideness or has a previously approved waiver of statewideness, describe the types of services and the local entities providing such services under the waiver of statewideness and how the agency has complied with the requirements in 34 C.F.R. § 361.26. If the VR agency is not requesting or does not have an approved waiver of statewideness, please indicate "not applicable."

Not applicable

i. Comprehensive System of Personnel Development

In accordance with the requirements in Section 101(a)(7) of the Rehabilitation Act, the VR agency must develop and maintain annually a description (consistent with the purposes of the Rehabilitation Act) of the VR agency's comprehensive system of personnel development, which shall include a description of the procedures and activities the State VR agency will undertake to ensure it has an adequate supply of qualified State rehabilitation professionals and paraprofessionals that provides the following:

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

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

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

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

Personnel Category	No. of Personnel Employed	No. of Personnel Currently Needed	Projected No. of Personnel Needed in 5 Years
Accessibility Specialist	1	1	2
Adaptive Technology Specialist	7	8	8
Administrative Assistant	2	2	2
Assistant Directors (Includes CFO & CIO)	5	5	5
BEP Manager	1	1	1
BEP Self-Employment Training Coordinator	0	1	1
BEP-Program Specialists 3	1	2	2
Birth through 13	1	1	2
Business Relations Accessibility Technologist	0	0	1
Business Relations & Workforce Program Manager	1	1	1

Personnel Category	No. of Personnel Employed	No. of Personnel Currently Needed	Projected No. of Personnel Needed in 5 Years
Business Relations Specialists	3	3	5
Business System and Process Improvement Manager	1	1	1
Communications Manager	1	1	1
Communications Specialist	0	0	1
Contracts Manager	1	1	1
Contracts Specialist	1	1	1
Engagement and Learning Manager	1	1	1
Deputy Financial Officer	1	1	1
Deputy Operations Officer	0	0	1
Executive Director	1	1	1
Executive Assistant	1	1	1
Fiscal Analyst	3	3	3
HR Liaison	1	1	1
HR Manager	1	1	1

Personnel Category	No. of Personnel Employed	No. of Personnel Currently Needed	Projected No. of Personnel Needed in 5 Years
IT Support	2	2	3
CISO Network Management Role	1	1	1
IT Help Desk Manager	1	1	1
Learning Development Specialists	2	2	3
Management Analyst	1	1	1
Orientation and Training Center Vocational Rehab Specialists	8	8	8
OTC Manager	1	1	1
OTC Intern	1	1	1
Policy and Management Analyst	0	0	1
Pre-ETS Manager	1	1	5
Pre-ETS Program Specialists	5	5	5
VR Data & Assurance Analyst	1	1	1
Reader/Driver (part time community	8	8	8

Personnel Category	No. of Personnel Employed	No. of Personnel Currently Needed	Projected No. of Personnel Needed in 5 Years
workers for staff accommodation)			
Regional Area Managers	3	3	3
Rehabilitation Technicians	7	7	8
State Rehab Council Liaison	1	1	1
Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors	16	16	16
Vocational Rehabilitation Specialists - Field	6	9	9
North Program Specialist Lead	1	1	1

Ratio of qualified VR counselors to clients

DSB currently has 14 VR Counselor positions and 830 active customers. This is a ratio of approximately 59 participants per counselor. These caseloads reflect some capacity to accommodate the anticipated growth over the next 5 years, though likely one to three VRC positions may be needed if success of outreach and customer experience efforts increase customer interest.

Projected number of individuals to be served in 5 years

DSB is anticipating 5% growth each year in each category of participants that we serve. In PY2028 this increase would represent around 945 customers.

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

A. A list of the institutions of higher education in the State that are preparing VR professionals, by type of program; the number of students enrolled at each of those institutions, broken down by type of program; and the number of students who graduated during the prior year from each of those institutions with certification or licensure, or with the credentials for certification or licensure, broken down by the personnel category for which they have received, or have the credentials to receive, certification or licensure.

Higher Ed Preparation of VR Professionals

Institute of Higher Education	Type of Program	No. of Students Enrolled	No. of Prior Year Graduates
Idaho State University	Masters Counseling in Clinical Rehabilitation Counseling	20	5
Portland State University	MS in Clinical Rehabilitation Counseling	42	8
Portland State University	Graduate Certificate in Orientation and Mobility	52	17(includes 6 full MS and O&M certified)

Institute of Higher Education	Type of Program	No. of Students Enrolled	No. of Prior Year Graduates
Western Oregon University	MS in Rehabilitation Counseling	didn't report	didn't report
Western Washington University	MA in Rehabilitation Counseling	55	13

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

Recruitment, preparation and retention of Staff

Currently DSB is actively reviewing and revising its recruitment practices. DSB HR has expanded its use of social media in recruitment to include Linked-In, Indeed, Facebook, CSAVR website, Certified Rehabilitation Counselor Certification board, and ACVERP List serve, and CATIS certifying lists for recruitment in specialized areas that our Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors, Vision Rehabilitation Specialists, and our Assistive Technology Specialists require.

At the guidance and management of our Engagement and Learning Program Manager, we have been reviewing Job Descriptions including working directly with managers to identify and eliminate areas of requirements or tasks that limit or discourage diverse populations from applying. DSB has improved its initial onboarding processes to be inclusive, welcoming, and putting their best foot forward to support a sense of belonging and retention. Our next step is to adjust our performance development plans to work in tandem with the position description duties allowing staff to see the connection between their role and their

expectations while supporting DSB's mission. Below is a chart of our current workforce demographic data:

	People of Color	People With Disabilities	Veterans
DSB Employees August 2024	23%	26%	2%
All WA State Executive Branch Agencies	23.50%	5.3%	5.5%
WA State Available Workforce	22.70%	13.8%	7.3%

DSB has instituted a recruitment relocation bonus policy and procedure, to assist with expenses to move to Washington. This is to encourage more applicants from other areas throughout the United States. This has increased our applicant pool and negotiation ability to entice qualified applicants.

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

i. Particularly with respect to assessment, vocational counseling, job placement, and rehabilitation technology, including training implemented in coordination with entities carrying out State programs under section 4 of the Assistive Technology Act of 1998; and

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

Continuing Education for Staff

DSB has an active and current Training and Development Policy that supports employees' continued training and development. DSB has successfully created a training team for agency training needs. This includes two Learning and Development Specialists, one with focus on agency and statewide training needs, and one position focusing on Vocational Rehabilitation direct customer service training needs, and an Engagement and Learning Program Manager. This training team will continue to work with program managers and state-required training courses to put together a yearly training plan to meet the most important and priorities training needs of staff across the agency.

There are many opportunities provided throughout the year that are specific to job class and tasks relevant to specific roles and responsibilities. Each year every employee, through their performance and development review, can list areas of growth and training and the supervisor works with that employee throughout the year to acquire the training if available. Staff are encouraged to attend Conferences at the local and national level to gain knowledge and experience from other states and stakeholder groups. DSB Managers and staff provide in-service training for meeting internal control processes and any procedural changes and updates.

DSB is currently working with our Consumer Stakeholder Groups, National Federation of the Blind-Washington, and Washington Council of the Blind to provide an orientation to Blindness Awareness training for new and current staff. This will assist with increased knowledge for staff to provide necessary support and services to their participants.

Continuing Education and staff development are critical and DSB supports staff to attend trainings and events that provide continuing education credits for their certification needs. DSB has identified that with our turnover and retirement of senior staff, the onboarding and training for each classification has become difficult for the supporting managers as our historical practice of training and onboarding through verbal and shadowing experience is not sufficient. DSB HR with assistance from the Training Team are currently working on developing an onboarding program that will

provide managers with support to successfully onboard new employees. HR will be working in the next year to assist managers to develop training plans for each classification, as vacated, to support consistent and adequate training so that staff have clear expectations, and training objectives across disciplines and throughout the agency.

After the overhaul of DSB's Procedure Manual in 2021, monthly VR procedure trainings were established to continuously refresh and reinforce staff understanding of agency practices. These presentations are expected to continue as the agency reorganizes and revises the way we do business. Additionally, quarterly case reviews typically result in internal control relevant training for classifications of staff, depending on the review subject matter.

3. Description of VR agency policies and procedures for the establishment and maintenance of personnel standards consistent with section 101(a)(7)(B) to ensure that VR agency 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

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.

Personnel Standards

DSB has three job classifications that require established personnel standards that are set forth by the OFM State Classification and Compensation system with collaboration from DSB and the general VR agency the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation. The standards are negotiated and adhered to by both agencies to have consistency and equity in all hiring practices of these classifications. Those include the

Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor and the Rehabilitation Technician series. The DSB has two classifications that are unique to our service provision and those include Vision Rehabilitation Specialists (VRS), and the Assistive Technology Specialists. All the noted positions do have educational requirements. The Vision Rehabilitation Specialist does have certification requirements required by professional standards set forth by the Academy of Certification of Vision Rehabilitation and Education Professional (ACVREP). DSB sets preference for qualifications for Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors (VRC) to obtain the Certification for Rehabilitation Counselor (CRC), and the Assistive Technology Specialists (ATS) that preference is for the Certified Assistive Technology Instructional Specialist for Individuals with Visual Impairments (CATIS). DSB has created an In-Training process for each classification. The purpose of the Classification of In-Training is to provide recruitment options and to open our positions to a diverse population to apply for our skilled positions. The in-training series takes advantage of our classification of VRC1-VRC4; our VRS Entry – Senior series; and our AT Specialists Entry – Expert IT Classification. Below are the required qualifications listed in our classifications:

Rehabilitation Technician 1 & 2: DSB aims to hire at the Rehabilitation Technician 2 classification. The RT1 level is used to move through an in-training plan. The qualifications for the Rehabilitation Technician 2 (RT2) require a bachelor's degree in rehabilitation counseling or bachelor's degree with 18-quarter credit hours vocational rehabilitation related subjects. Direct customer service experience in a vocational rehabilitation program will substitute year for year, for the bachelor's degree, but not for the 18-quarter credit of vocational rehabilitation related subjects. The Rehabilitation Technician 1 requires two years of college-level coursework and one year of experience providing direct services to clients in a non-retail environment.

Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor 4 (in-training): DSB aims to hire at the most senior level of the classification series of VRC4. The minimum qualification includes a bachelor's degree in a field of study reasonably related to vocational rehabilitation; and at least 1 year paid or unpaid

experience; or a master's degree in rehabilitation counseling, psychology, counseling, counseling, or a field related to vocational rehabilitation or Current CRCC, and up to 4 years paid experience to reach the VRC4 classification.

Vision Rehabilitation Specialist (VRS entry – Senior series): DSB attempts to hire at the senior level within this classification. Those qualifications include a master's degree from an accredited college or university with a major field of study in blind or vision rehabilitation, or a closely related program in rehabilitation. For those positions performing Orientation and Mobility functions, current certification, and a minimum of 30 semester or 45 quarter hours in an accredited orientation and mobility program is required.

The entry level requirements include a Bachelor's degree from an accredited college or university with a major field of study in blind or vision rehabilitation, or closely related program in rehabilitation. Two years of experience in social services or providing services to individuals who are blind, low vision or deaf blind will substitute for two years of the required education.

For those positions performing Orientation and Mobility functions, current certification, and a minimum of 30 semesters or 45 quarter hours in an accredited orientation and mobility program are required.

For Braille instruction Certification in the UEB braille code must be obtained.

Assistive Technology Specialist: A Bachelor's degree including 9 semester or 15 quarter hours of computer science courses and three years of consultative, administrative or supervisory experience in information technology analysis, system maintenance, or troubleshooting/problem resolution experience OR An Associate's degree or completion of an accredited vocational training program in information technology or related program and four years of consultative, administrative, or supervisory experience in information technology analysis, system maintenance, or troubleshooting/problem resolution OR One year as an Information

Technology System Specialist 2 or equivalent. Consultative, administrative, or supervisory experience in information technology analysis, system maintenance, or troubleshooting/problem resolution will substitute for education based on one year of experience for two years of education. A master's degree will substitute for the specified Information Technology Systems Specialist 3 requirement. AND two years paid work experience as an ITS3 with the Department of Services for the Blind. Preferred considered qualification is CATIS Certification.

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

Appropriate Modes of Communication

DSB utilizes several methods to ensure that participants receive accurate and understandable information regardless of their English comprehension. Agency brochures have been translated into the most frequently requested languages including Spanish and Korean. DSB also contracts with translation services to make materials available in other languages as needed. Both in-person and virtual interpreter services are available to VR personnel for meetings with participants.

In addition, the state of Washington has reaffirmed their commitment to "plain talk" with Executive Order 23-02 Plain Language. This order mandates that all state agency external communications be written for maximum understandability for those with limited English literacy.

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

Comprehensive System of Personnel Development

Staff responsible for the provision of services to students with disabilities for pre-employment transition services and transition services are oriented to the expectations of support and communication to students and families,

fostering positive collaboration with education, and effective methods of outreach. This guidance is provided through our state interagency agreement with the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction and our interagency agreement with Washington State School for the Blind, which inform who, what and how we provide services to students with disabilities and coordination efforts with educators through the Individual Education Plan team. In addition, the agency has procedures for transition and pre-employment transition services that provide guidance for staff on agency standards of personnel development and training needed to effectively serve students and families.

j. Coordination with Education Officials

In accordance with the requirements in Section 101(a)(11)(D) of the Rehabilitation Act—

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

DSB is a dedicated partner in Washington State supporting students with disabilities making successful transitions from school to post school activities, including participation in Competitive Integrated Employment. Through interagency agreements with Washington State School for the Blind (WSSB) and the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), that identify collaborative efforts and activities to provide coordinated services to students, DSB provides individualized transition services for those in secondary education and Pre-Employment Transition Services for students aged 14-22 years old.

2. Describe the current status and scope of the formal interagency agreement between the VR agency and the State educational agency. Consistent with the requirements of the formal interagency agreement

pursuant to 34 C.F.R. § 361.22(b), provide, at a minimum, the following information about the agreement:

- Consultation and technical assistance, which may be provided using alternative means for meeting participation (such as video conferences and conference calls), to assist educational agencies in planning for the transition of students with disabilities from school to post-school activities, including pre-employment transition services and other vocational rehabilitation services;
- Transition planning by personnel of the designated State agency and educational agency personnel for students with disabilities that facilitates the development and implementation of their individualized education programs (IEPs) under Section 614(d) of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act;
- The roles and responsibilities, including financial responsibilities, of each agency, including provisions for determining State lead agencies and qualified personnel responsible for transition services and pre-employment transition services;
- Procedures for outreach to and identification of students with disabilities who need transition services and pre-employment transition services. Outreach to these students should occur as early as possible during the transition planning process and must include, at a minimum, a description of the purpose of the vocational rehabilitation program, eligibility requirements, application procedures, and scope of services that may be provided to eligible individuals;

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

F. Assurance that, in accordance with 34 C.F.R. § 397.31, neither the SEA nor the local educational agency will enter into a contract or other arrangement with an entity, as defined in 34 C.F.R. § 397.5(d), for the purpose of operating a program under which youth with a disability are engaged in work compensated at a subminimum wage.

Consultation and technical assistance

Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) are offered to students with disabilities through dedicated staff service coordination, pre-employment transition service contractors, and through our state partner, Washington State School for the Blind. Technical assistance for pre-employment transition services is provided to DSB through our intensive services agreement with the National Technical Assistance Center on Transition – The Collaborative (NTACT-C), the Statewide Transition Collaborative, which includes transition partners throughout Washington State, national non-profit organizations focused on transition services, and national transition model projects shared through the Council on State Administrators Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR) and National Council of State Administrators for the Blind (NCSAB) annual conferences.

Transition planning

Transition planning and implementation is coordinated by agency staff and education professionals, with larger collaboration efforts developed through 'Round Tables' dedicated for teachers of the visually impaired (TVI) throughout the state and calendar year. In addition, the Washington State Transition Collaborative, a group of transition staff from both state and local agencies, and non-profits, meet regularly to guide and inform on developments and opportunities for students and provide needed and comprehensive transition services through the Individual Education Plan (IEP). Each partner is intended to participate and contribute to these IEP meetings, where the students' goals shape the progressive nature of the services through secondary school and beyond, in post-secondary training or Competitive Integrated Employment. Through participation in the Transition Collaborative, the partners created a transition map to clarify for students and parents the service partners available to them (see: Transition Map)

DSB develops an IPE with each eligible student when DSB staff, student and parent/guardian determine appropriate to ensure services and supports are fully in place as the student transitions from secondary school to post-secondary activities. Services provided under an IPE are

coordinated with the services in a student's IEP or 504 plan. Services on the IPE that are the responsibility of the LEA are identified as comparable services and benefits.

The roles and responsibilities of each agency

Fiscally, Local Education Agencies (LEA) are responsible for providing transition services for students eligible for special education within a results-oriented process that is focused on improving the academic and functional achievement of the student to their movement from school to post-school activities. Activities may include, but are not limited to, career exploration, community-based work experiences, activities providing knowledge about work habits and responsibilities. Services authorized by DSB while a student is in secondary school include outreach, pre-employment transition services, information and referral, and counseling and guidance and job readiness services that facilitate a progressive transition to post-secondary training or Competitive Integrated Employment. Pre-employment transition services are provided in collaboration with the Local Education Agencies, and are non-duplicative in nature.

There is no cost to the LEA, student, parent or guardian, for outreach, information and referral, and counseling and guidance provided by DSB for student's IEP and 504 plan consultation and planning. DSB is responsible for student's transition or accommodation services that are outside the scope of the IEP or 504 plan or are necessary for their participation in pre-employment transition services. In addition, DSB is responsible for any services needed to establish a student's eligibility for VR services, including assessment as appropriate for age and disability.

Procedures for outreach to and identification of students with disabilities

Through the interagency agreement between DSB and OSPI, the partners agree to coordinate individualized transition and pre-employment transition services outreach to Local Educational Agencies (LEAs), including special education directors and school staff, regarding by:

- With our new OSPI created 'shared consent' form to students, provided at IEP/504 meetings, we now are receiving the annual reports that identify students interested in learning more about transition services offered by DSB.
- Scheduled and informal communications and stakeholder connections to identify students as early as possible, including students who are receiving special education services, students receiving accommodations, aids, and services under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Communications might include joint webinars, teacher meetings (both virtual and in-person options) prerecorded modules, conference presentations, newsletters, etc. With our new OSPI created 'shared consent' form to students, provided at IEP/504 meetings, we now are receiving the annual reports that identify students interested in learning more about transition services offered by DSB.
- Communicate regularly during the calendar year, with scheduled meetings between partners including state and local agencies, to identify and address gaps in transition services.
- Explore and identify the transition needs of students who have been significantly impacted by trauma, have been identified as at-risk of drop out and have had interactions with the legal system.
- Integrate supports into existing state initiatives for students and youth when applicable to include training, partnering, and outreach.
- Support students to engage with the broadest transition team possible across state partners, to develop and coordinate comprehensive transition services with appropriate consultation and technical assistance.
- Promote pre-employment transition services, with employment and training goals consistent with student interests, strengths, preferences, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, and informed choice.

- Share training and outreach materials developed by the agencies, or their agents, and extend invitations to agency specific events and activities using these materials to LEAs and the Washington State Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) and DSB staff.
- Receive technical assistance and to identify and implement high quality pre-employment transition and transition services.
- Invite partner agencies to statewide meetings as needed for cross training or education.

Outreach to students occurs with regular communication output from DSB and collaboration efforts coordinated with the LEA and DVR. Conferences, 'Round Tables', and outreach events coordinated with the LEA's and DVR provide information to school staff, families and students regarding the transition services available by the VR agencies, statewide.

Recent enhancements at the agency include clarification of DSB staff expectations, procedures for pre-employment transition services program development, and strengthened managerial internal controls. Guidance was implemented to execute more diverse and collaborative outreach, targeting students and families with regular communications on eligibility for pre-employment transition services and additional individualized services, application for VR services, pre-employment transition services programming, and opportunities to participate in statewide pre-employment transition activities.

DSB has developed a birth-13 specialist position in 2023, which will be coordinating communication and consultation for potentially eligible transition students and families, providing outreach about available transition and Vocational Rehabilitation services as early as possible.

k. Coordination with Employers

In accordance with the requirements in Section 101(a)(11)(E) of the Rehabilitation Act, describe how the VR agency will work with employers to identify competitive integrated employment and career exploration opportunities in order to facilitate the provision of VR services; and

transition services for youth and students with disabilities, including pre-employment transition services for students with disabilities.

DSB's redesign of our business relations services involved creating a new business relations and workforce unit in 2024. The new Workforce Initiatives program offers specific services internally to career-seeking customers and externally to businesses. There are staff dedicated to developing competitive career opportunities for our career seekers while fulfilling businesses' need for greater accessibility and accommodation consultation. Some of the services to business include:

- Accommodation Consultation & Referral: DSB provides employers with consultation and training on accommodations for Blind, Deaf-Blind, and Low Vision employees, that lead to greater inclusion and accessibility in the workforce. DSB connects job seekers to employers, providing the necessary accommodations so there are no barriers to employment security and advancement.
- Dedicated Programs and Staff: Recently DSB has dedicated program administration to workforce opportunities, with dedicated leadership oversight to pre-employment transition services, business relations, workforce collaboration, and business enterprise development. In 2024, DSB hired three new Business Relations Specialists who will assist in developing opportunities for youth and students with disabilities by sitting on workforce development council priority population committees specifically targeting youth and students with disabilities, and develop business relationships with those employers who are offering work experiences to the workforce system partners. The Business Relations Specialists will also be joining business consortiums and networks, to develop skill development pathways, internships, and work-based experiences for our students with disabilities.
- Labor Market Analysis Utilization: DSB business relations staff explore labor market trends and opportunities in the state of Washington, including local area businesses. DSB is working towards acquiring a Labor Market data tool, that will assist DSB staff know in real-time what industry sectors are in demand, growing or restricting.

This analysis will assist employers through the development of industry specific career pathways training to job seekers, to create a pool of potential employees with skills and experience.

- Integrating Business Relations services into established VR processes: DSB is integrating business relations into the VR process early and often. Business relations staff will be a part of the itinerant field services team, supporting employers by vetting job seekers to fulfill employer recruitment needs while facilitating resources and support from other DSB staff for employer training needs. Business relations staff meet with Counselors and Pre-ETS Specialists to discuss students' progression of experiences, and to work collaboratively creating a succession of skills and experiences that informs the students' post-secondary training pathways and employment goals.
- Statewide Vocational Rehabilitation Collaboration: DSB has an interagency agreement and commitment to partnership with our vocational rehabilitation general agency, Washington State Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, and meet monthly to coordinate business relations activities and services for job ready vocational rehabilitation participants. Activities include job fairs, business outreach, collaboration of tools and resources that benefit job seekers at both agencies.
- Workforce Development Council Partnership: Through our Workforce Initiatives program, DSB staff will be better integrated into workforce development activities, including committee participation, to increase effectiveness of service delivery and sector strategy development. This will include developing community partnerships with employers across the State of Washington.
- Work-based Learning Development: When employers have specific workforce recruitment needs, DSB will introduce through training the opportunity to utilize on the job training and work-based learning experiences services. These specific skill development services are developed with the business itself which leads to specialized training, development, and knowledge of employer workplace culture, and

immersion in the business's mission and vision. This is especially valuable for Pre-employment transition students.

I. Interagency Cooperation

In accordance with the requirements in Section 101(a)(11)(C) and (K), describe interagency cooperation with and utilization of the services and facilities of agencies and programs that are not carrying out activities through the statewide workforce development system to develop opportunities for community-based employment in integrated settings, to the greatest extent practicable for the following:

1. State programs (designate lead agency(ies) and implementing entity(ies)) carried out under Section 4 of the Assistive Technology Act of 1998;

DSB believes that collaboration with stakeholders is essential to assist people with disabilities to access the most comprehensive services to prepare for, gain, advance and retain Competitive Integrated Employment.

Washington Assistive Technology Act Program (WATAP). DSB has an interagency agreement with WATAP to broaden access and services to adaptive technology for the agency participants. The agreement allows the agencies to facilitate equipment loans, technology assessment services and trainings.

DSB provides access to statewide adaptive technology labs for WATAP to conduct assessments, reducing WATAP's need to purchase or manage technologies for visual disability.

DSB collaborates with the Deaf Blind Equipment Program – I CAN CONNECT – through WATAP to coordinate technology assessment and training for DeafBlind participants.

2. Programs carried out by the Under Secretary for Rural Development of the Department of Agriculture;

We do not currently coordinate programs carried out by the Under Secretary for Rural Development of the Department of Agriculture.

3. Non-educational agencies serving out-of-school youth;

We are not currently coordinating with non-educational agencies serving out-of-school youth.

4. State use contracting programs;

We do not currently engage in any state use contracting programs.

5. State agency responsible for administering the State Medicaid plan under title XIX of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 1396 et seq.);

Health Care Authority (HCA): The Health Care Authority (HCA) administers Medicaid services to all eligible DSB customer recipients.

DSB typically works to share a VR case with DSHS/DVR when an individual with a visual disability also requires services to address mental health, long term supports, or behavioral health. We typically rely on the resources and agreements DSHS/DVR has developed with the HCA, the Developmental Disability Administration (DDA), and the Division of Behavioral Health and Recovery (HCA/DBHR).

HCA is the designated state mental health authority. For individuals with shared cases who require mental health supports and services, DSB coordinates through DSHS/DVR to access HCA resources and guidance to assure that individuals receive medical and behavioral health services necessary to achieve their employment goals.

In addition, when we work with individuals in a shared case, DSB coordinates through DSHS/DVR 's agreement with the Developmental Disability Administration that describes how Title 19 services under the State Medicaid Plan, including community-based waiver programs, will be utilized to develop and support integrated, community-based employment opportunities for customers.

HCA contracts with Amerigroup, a Third-Party Administrator, to administer Foundational Community Supports (FCS), a Medicaid Transformation Demonstration project that provides supported employment services for individuals with behavioral health conditions or long-term care needs. HCA Division of Behavioral Health and Recovery (HCA/DBHR) and the

Department of Social and Health Services Aging and Long-Term Support Administration (DSHS/ALTSA) support FCS network development and provider engagement.

6. State agency responsible for providing services for individuals with developmental disabilities;

- The Department of Social and Health Services Developmental Disabilities Administration (DDA). DSB has an interagency agreement in development with the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, and Developmental Disabilities Administration to support students with disabilities to make successful transitions from school to post school activities, including participation in Competitive Integrated Employment.
- The Department of Social and Health Services Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR). DSB has a memorandum of understanding with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation who assists people with disabilities, including individuals with developmental disabilities, prepare for, obtain, advance and retain Competitive Integrated Employment.

7. State agency responsible for providing mental health services; and

- The Department of Social and Health Services Behavioral Health Administration (BHA). DSB staff refer participants to BHA for participants with addiction and mental health conditions. BHA provides funding and effective prevention and intervention services for youth and families, including treatment and recovery support.

8. Other Federal, State, and local agencies and programs outside the workforce development system.

Tribal Governments and Programs: DSHS/DVR and DSB have a joint cooperative agreement with ten (10) Section 121 Tribal Vocational Rehabilitation (TVR) programs. Tribal VR programs are operated by tribal governments, a consortium of tribal governments, or are a tribal

organization that perform American Indian Vocational Rehabilitation Services.

This joint agreement is conducted through Government–to–Government protocols as delineated by Washington State's Centennial Accord. The agreement outlines how all partners will ensure effective communication, collaboration, coordination, and cooperation in serving individuals with disabilities who are tribal members in Washington. The agreement, updated on an annual basis, outlines procedures for referrals, joint cases, financial responsibility, shared training opportunities, information sharing, transition planning, and communication.

TVR directors meet quarterly with DSHS/DVR and DSB directors in a government-to-government collaboration to promote partnership, maximize coordination of resources, and ensure high service quality for American Indian and Alaska Native individuals with disabilities who want to work.

Office of the Deaf & Hard of Hearing (ODHH): ODHH is a state agency that provides resources for DSB's Deaf-Blind participants, including telecommunication—related services, reasonable accommodations to access services, and human services via regional service centers of the deaf and hard of hearing. ODHH contracts with the Deaf Blind Service Center (DBSC) to deliver crucial services, including Case Management, Support Service Providers (SSPs), and Communication Facilitator (CF) programs.

Helen Keller National Center (HKNC): The Helen Keller National Center is a resource for DSB on Deaf-Blind issues and can provide contracted services to DSB participants as well as trainings for DSB staff for working effectively with Deaf-Blind participants.

University of Washington Center for Continuing Education in Rehabilitation (CCER): DSB benefits from services provided from CCER on rehabilitation training, state planning, and program development. CCER facilitates information-sharing and forums for problem-solving among peer VR agencies among Oregon, Idaho, Alaska and Washington.

Northwest Access Fund: DSB informs agency participants of funding mechanisms for adaptive technology and financial planning through the and coordinates services to support small business ownership and self-employment.

Governor's Committee on Disability Issues and Employment (GCDE): The DSB Director participates as an associate member of the GCDE and partners with committee members on initiatives.

United States Department of Veterans Affairs (USDVA): DSHS/DVR and DSB have a cooperative agreement with the regional USDVA Vocational Rehabilitation & Employment (VR&E) and its regional offices to facilitate improved service delivery for customers receiving USDVA benefits by formalizing referral procedures, designating local referral liaisons, and coordinating services that contribute to the Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE).

Washington Sensory Disability Services (WSDS): DSB staff partner with the WSDS in providing referrals and services to children who are deaf or hard of hearing, blind or low vision, or Deaf-Blind, and provides training and other supports to families and service providers. The WSDS is a strong partner within the Blind Youth Consortium.

Washington State Board for Community & Technical Colleges: The State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC) oversees the operation of thirty-nine Community and Technical Colleges across the state. DSHS/DVR and DSB develops cooperative agreements with SBCTC programs authorized, and not authorized, by WIOA to jointly serve students with disabilities who require VR services to achieve competitive employment outcomes. DSHS/DVR and DSB work closely with SBCTC to implement an Interlocal Agreement between the Public Institutions of Higher Education (PIHE), DSHS/DVR and DSB to support the costs of specific academic accommodations for students who are attending school as part of their approved IPE.

9. Other private nonprofit organizations

Consumer Organizations NFB-W and WCB: The National Federation of the Blind - Washington and the Washington Council of the Blind are significant partners in the coordination of services, including Pre-ETS services, peer mentoring, and self-advocacy. Both organizations provide scholarships that DSB career-seeking customers are encouraged to apply for. The consumer organizations provide a feedback loop for the agency to better understand the customer experience and be alerted to potential process improvements. The Executive Leadership meets bi-annually with leadership from each consumer organization.

Centers for Independent Living: DSHS/DVR currently contracts Title VII, Part B funds to four independent living centers statewide. DSB holds a contract through DVR and the State Independent Living Council to provide Independent Living Services through Part B monies to adults under age 55 who cannot or don't intend to work. We also partner with the Centers for Independence who also utilize Part B funds to enhance and expand core independent living services with a focus on youth with significant disabilities. In addition to core services, independent living centers have been focusing on outreach to increase services in unserved or underserved geographic areas. Additional outreach efforts include targeted disability groups, minority groups, and urban or rural populations with the focus on youth with significant disabilities and 504 plans. The goal is to create a safe environment for youth with disabilities in which youth feel comfortable and confident when talking to allies. This goal will be accomplished by enhancing youth understanding of independent living philosophy, successful self-advocacy, and ways to engage with legislators about disability issues. The independent living centers' Title VII, Part B contracts are aligned with and can be amended to meet the goals set forth by the State Plan for Independent Living, the strategic plan developed by the Washington State Independent Living Council.

Disability Inclusion Network (DIN): The DIN is a business resource group for individuals with a disability and their allies in Washington State service. The DIN's mission is to engage in the experience, values, and knowledge of people with disabilities in state government, promote universal access, and create an environment where people with disabilities can fully

participate in all aspects of the workplace. THE DIN's vision is to see Washington State as an Employer of Choice ensuring people with disabilities have equitable access and resources through recruitment, hiring, training, development, retention, and promotion. The Executive Director of DSB is currently acting as the Executive Sponsor for this Business Resource Group.

Washington Workforce Association: The Washington Workforce Association (WWA) is a nonprofit, non-partisan membership organization comprised of Washington's twelve Workforce Development Councils (WDCs). The WWA partners with state, regional, and national organizations advocating for a coordinated and fully funded workforce development system focused on the needs of job seekers and businesses.

Change log

Updates made to this section during the public comment period will be documented below. Revisions may include corrections to data, clarifications of program descriptions, updates to terminology, and other adjustments made in response to stakeholder feedback. All changes will be reviewed and approved by agency staff prior to inclusion in the final plan.

Date	Page #	Type of change	Description of change	Reason / Source