

Program-Specific Requirements for Vocational Rehabilitation (General)

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

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

a. Input of State Rehabilitation Council (General)

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

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

The mission of the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) is to provide assessment, advice and recommendations to the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS or the bureau) and others regarding coordination and effectiveness of programs and strategies that promote community-based competitive employment for persons with disabilities. The SRC maintains an ongoing collaboration with BRS. The SRC is comprised of volunteers, many of whom are current or former vocational rehabilitation (VR) consumers or family members of VR consumers. They are appointed by the Governor to review and assess the effectiveness and delivery of vocational rehabilitation services provided for individuals with disabilities who are seeking employment.

The SRC has participated in the following endeavors in FY 2015:

1. Development of the BRS 2017 State Plan;
2. Community Rehabilitation Providers (CRP) Annual Meeting;
3. National Council of State Rehabilitation Councils (NCSRC) Conferences in Bethesda, MD and Miami, FL and Teleconferences (six);
4. The Council of State Administrators for Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR) Conferences in Bethesda, MD and Miami, FL;

5. SRC Meetings (six per year);
6. Review of the 722 Report regarding Administrative Hearing Outcomes; and
7. Updates of Corrective Action Plans resulting from the Rehabilitation Services Administration 2013 Monitoring.

WIOA

In July, 2014, Congress passed the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) to unify the state programs that provide employment services. This bill established some significant changes to the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program. At the May 2015 SRC meeting, Acting BRS Director, Amy Porter, reviewed the changes that will impact the VR program and plans the agency has undertaken to prepare to adapt to these new requirements and partner with new entities to provide cohesive employment and training programs for all of Connecticut's residents. These changes will be reported in the upcoming Unified State Plan due March 3, 2016. The SRC worked to better understand WIOA requirements and the desired outcomes that would improve employment services for people with disabilities. The SRC also began to assess how BRS could incorporate changes that would help the VR program successfully meet these new goals.

Agency Update

David Doukas became the new Director for BRS on August 21, 2015. He will attend SRC meetings and provide members with information and updates about the VR program. The SRC looks forward to working with Mr. Doukas to continue to improve the quality of services for people in the program.

BRS Public Meetings

Due to WIOA, the deadline for the submission of the next State Plan was changed to March, 2016. As part of the focus for the public meeting is to review the State Plan, BRS and the SRC will host public meetings in January/February. Consumers, their families, and others interested in the VR program will be invited to review the draft of the 2017 Unified State Plan that features VR program specific information and employment information and goals among the state partners, as established by WIOA. Their feedback will inform the final version of the Unified State Plan.

Consumer Survey

In response to the SRC's goal to assess the effectiveness and delivery of VR services provided by BRS, the SRC collaborated with BRS to commission the Center for Public Policy and Social Research (CPPSR) at Central Connecticut State University (CCSU) to conduct a consumer satisfaction survey of VR recipients for fiscal year 2015. The purpose of this survey is to evaluate the job search services that consumers/participants received from the VR program at BRS.

Two hundred and three consumer interviews were conducted from August 10th through September 24th, 2015. The construction of the survey instrument was a collaborative effort between the SRC, BRS and CPPSR. The list of consumers from which this survey data is drawn was provided by BRS. That list of 600 individuals represents a small sampling of the 8,672 current and former VR consumers that BRS served in fiscal year 2015. Consumer names were pulled from all regions.

Of the 600 consumer names provided for the survey, 75 individuals chose not to respond to the survey and 88 individuals could not be reached due to an out-of-service number, an inaccurate number, or use of a privacy device. Three individuals were either deceased or incarcerated, while six others had language barriers. The remaining 225 consumers did not answer the phone following numerous attempts, throughout multiple days and evenings. CPPSR called each consumer a minimum of seven times, though in most cases, attempts reached upwards of ten calls.

Out of the respondents who CPPSR was able to reach, this survey has a 6% margin of error at the 95% confidence interval. This means that statistical differences outside of the +/- 6% margin of error will only exist approximately 5% of the time.

SRC Recommendations to BRS

The Designated State unit's response to the Council's input and recommendations. Several of these recommendations appeared last year, but the SRC believes they are ongoing issues that warrant continued attention this year.

Recommendation 1 – We support BRS as it seeks new locations to better serve VR consumers. We applaud efforts to insure better visibility of BRS offices. We continue to recommend that signage to enable optimum visibility be a priority of all offices. The SRC is requesting that updates on signage and access to all buildings continue to be provided at SRC meetings. BRS Response: The bureau continues to be very active in its endeavor to improve the physical locations of our offices. We have completed two critical re-location projects in the first quarter of FFY 2016 and are planning additional moves within this year. We agree that both exterior and interior signage at our offices could be improved and have been systematically working toward

addressing this. In many locations municipal building codes, landlord issues and physical space itself limits our signage options, but efforts to maximize our visibility are to be made wherever possible.

Recommendation 2 – The accessible parking in the Waterbury office is on a grade that makes it difficult for consumers who use wheelchairs to transfer out of and into vehicles. The SRC recommends that when the parking lines are repainted, the accessible spaces be moved further right where the grade is not difficult to maneuver.

Recommendation 3 – Some consumers are still confused upon arrival at offices shared with DSS. It would be beneficial to consumers and families if BRS expands the website to include pictures of offices and perhaps a virtual tour of each office so consumers will know where to park and what to expect when entering into the building.

Recommendation 4 – The SRC recommends BRS strengthen communication between counselors and consumers, especially when consumer cases are being transferred to another counselor. We would like to know what BRS expects of staff regarding response time to consumer telephone calls and emails. We would also like to have reports on how staff is meeting that expectation. Also, what is the procedure to ensure consumer contact is not lost when cases are transferred to new counselors?

Recommendation 5 – The SRC has a continued interest in all of the state agency collaborative projects including the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS)/BRS Agency Collaborative regarding services and employment options for consumers with psychiatric issues, the Department of Developmental Services (DDS)/BRS agency collaborative and the Bureau of Education Services for the Blind (BESB) and BRS collaborative. Please provide updates at the SRC meetings about any achievements that have been attained, the strategies that have been developed to improve outcomes, the training that is available to staff, and any activity that will occur as a result of BRS' attendance at the CSAVR conference.

Recommendation 6 – The Business Committee will continue efforts to make presentations about BRS to businesses and chambers of commerce to help publicize the VR program. The committee would like to work closely with BRS to develop a brochure to distribute on these occasions. The SRC requests regular updates regarding new projects and initiatives that will benefit the business community.

Recommendation 7 – The SRC recommends that BRS increase engagement with businesses to increase hiring of VR consumers.

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

BRS Response 1: The bureau continues to be very active in its endeavor to improve the physical locations of our offices. We have completed two critical re-location projects in the first quarter of FFY 2016 and are planning additional moves within this year. We agree that both exterior and interior signage at our offices could be improved and have been systematically working toward addressing this. In many locations municipal building codes, landlord issues and physical space itself limits our signage options, but efforts to maximize our visibility are to be made wherever possible.

BRS Response 2: The bureau has been and will continue to work closely with the Connecticut Department of Administrative Services and the lessor of our Waterbury office related to the re-grading and expansion of the parking lot. We will continue to pursue improvement at this location, insure no issues are present at newly established locations and also address any additional issue that are identified at other existing office locations.

BRS Response 3: BRS continually updates website content, including information related to BRS offices. We will look into providing pictures of the locations. We will also update the directions to include parking and building entrance instructions. The state of Connecticut is implementing a new website portal that we hope will be functional in 2016. Once this website is implemented we plan to provide user friendly and accessible information for the general public, which will include BRS office information in detail. In addition, we will continue to utilize social media to provide outreach to consumers and the public to increase awareness of office locations and services.

BRS Response 4: The VR Supervisors oversee case transfers and will continue working on a resolution to this concern. Going forward, consumers can expect that within two weeks of requesting a transfer to another counselor and/or office they will be contacted by the new counselor, (or his/her designee) to schedule an appointment. In the case of case transfers happening due to a caseload vacancy, consumers receive a letter as soon as the vacancy occurs with contact information to be used until the position is filled. Mechanisms for formally tracking transfer cases and yielding metrics related to response times will be investigated and, to the extent possible, developed.

BRS Response 5: BRS continues to maintain Memoranda of Understanding/Agreement and active, robust partnerships with various state agencies.

We are committed to routinely sharing information about these collaborations and will continue to do so.

BRS Response 6: BRS supports the SRC in their reaching out to businesses and chambers of commerce to market our services. We have a variety of materials developed that are geared toward highlighting the benefits of employers working with the VR program. We would be interested in presenting these materials to the SRC and developing any additional brochures that are determined necessary. The bureau will also offer regular updates regarding initiatives and projects with the employment community at SRC meetings.

Response 7: BRS Response: BRS remains very committed to engaging with businesses. This is evident in BRS housing a business services unit, Connect–Ability Staffing, which is responsible for business outreach and development throughout Connecticut. BRS plans on expanding Connect–Ability Staffing’s capacity for outreach in order to facilitate more connections with businesses and, ultimately, more employment opportunities for VR consumers.

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

The designated state unit did not reject any of the Council’s input or recommendations.