

**NEW YORK STATE
OFFICE OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES**

**COMMISSION FOR THE BLIND
AND VISUALLY HANDICAPPED**

INFORMATION BOOKLET

For

**Open Forums on the
Assistive Technology Services and the
Proposed Update to the State Plan for Vocational
Rehabilitation and Supported Employment Services for
FY 2010**

**February 4, 2009
White Plains, New York**

**February 10, 2009
New York City, New York**

**February 19, 2009
Rochester, New York
(Snow Date: February 26)**



New York State
Office of
Children and Family
Services

COMMISSION FOR THE BLIND AND VISUALLY HANDICAPPED (CBVH)

HAVE A VOICE IN CBVH'S FUTURE

Come to an open forum to share your thoughts and to hear what others are saying about services and issues that affect people who are blind.

Provide input for the 2010 State Plan for Vocational Rehabilitation and Supported Employment Services, CBVH policies and Assistive Technology Services and talk about issues that are important to you.

Hear about the CBVH State Rehabilitation Council and share your ideas and concerns with a representative of the Council.

Consumers, family members, advocates, rehabilitation service professionals, and other interested individuals are invited to attend.

Suggested topics to Address:

- 1. What does CBVH do best? What needs the most improvement and how can those improvements be made?**
- 2. How can CBVH improve Assistive Technology Services?**
- 3. How can CBVH improve outreach to expand job opportunities and effectively work with employers and community partners?**

The open forums for the State Plan (SP) will be held on the same date as the Assistive Technology Services (ATS) forums at separate time slots at three locations across New York State as scheduled on the next page.

Open Forum Dates and Locations

White Plains

February 4, 2009

2:00 PM - 3:00 PM (ATS)

3:30 PM - 6:00 PM (SP)

(914) 422 - 1493

White Plains Library

100 Martine Avenue

White Plains, NY 10601

New York City

February 10, 2009

2:00 PM - 3:00 PM (ATS)

3:30 PM - 6:00 PM (SP)

(212) 206-5400

Andrew Heiskell Library

40 West 20th Street

New York City, NY 10011-4211

Rochester

February 19, 2009

2:00 PM - 3:00 PM (ATS)

3:30 PM - 6:00 PM (SP)

(585) 428-7300

Central Library of Rochester

115 South Avenue

Rochester, NY 14604-1896

The proposed State Plan update and policy revisions are detailed in an information booklet that is available upon request by contacting CBVH at the numbers listed below. Please let us know if you want the booklet in regular print, large print, Braille, disk, via email or on tape. The information booklet will also be available at www.ocfs.state.ny.us/main/cbvh beginning Jan. 24, 2009.

You do not need to pre-register in order to speak at the forum however, if you do plan to speak, you can pre-register for a specific time. Please limit your comments to ten minutes. To pre-register, call or E-mail CBVH (see contact information below).

If you are unable to attend one of the forums, you can send written comments to CBVH. Mail or E-mail comments by March 3, 2009 to CBVH (see contact information next page).

CBVH Contact Information

Voice: (518) 473-2346

TDD: (518) 474-7501

Voice Relay: 1-800-421-1220

E-mail: Mike.Rose@ocfs.state.ny.us

Regular Mail: New York State Commission for the Blind and Visually Handicapped
52 Washington Street, South Building, Room 201
Rensselaer, NY 12144-2796
Attention: Public Comments

Please share this notice: Post it in common areas; include it in your newsletter; distribute it to people and organizations that may be interested in attending.

All open forums are being held in facilities that are accessible to individuals with disabilities. If you require an interpreter or other accommodations at one of the forums, please contact CBVH by January 24, 2009, at the numbers listed above.

OVERVIEW

The New York State Office of Children and Family Services' Commission for the Blind and Visually Handicapped (CBVH) is holding three Town Meetings across the state to obtain input for the development of the Federal Fiscal Year 2010 update to the State Plan for Vocational Rehabilitation and Supported Employment Services and to hear comments on a variety of issues affecting individuals who are blind. Comments received at the Town Meetings will be reviewed and incorporated into the State Plan and into general activities, as appropriate.

The Federal Rehabilitation Act provides funding for states to implement vocational rehabilitation and supported employment programs. The purpose of these programs is to empower individuals with disabilities to maximize employment opportunities and achieve economic self-sufficiency and independence with the goal of full inclusion and integration into society. CBVH is the agency designated in New York State to provide vocational rehabilitation and supported employment services to individuals who are legally blind. In order to receive funding under the Rehabilitation Act for vocational rehabilitation services, CBVH must submit a State Plan for Vocational Rehabilitation and Supported Employment Services to the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) as well as annual updates to the plan.

THE VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION AND SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT STATE PLAN

The update to the State Plan for Vocational Rehabilitation and Supported Employment Services consists of several attachments that provide narrative information about CBVH activities in certain areas. It is expected that the final State Plan submittal will include the following attachments:

- 4.8(b)(1) Cooperation with Agencies that Are Not in the Statewide Work Force Investment System and Other Entities
- 4.10 Comprehensive System of Personnel Development
- 4.11(a) Results of Comprehensive Statewide Assessment of the Rehabilitation Needs of Individuals with Disabilities and Need to Establish, Develop or Improve Community Rehabilitation Programs
- 4.11(b) Annual Estimates of Individuals to Be Served and Costs of Service
- 4.11(c)(1) State's Goals and Priorities
- 4.11(c)(4) Goals and Plans for Distribution of Title VI, Part B Funds
- 4.11(d) State's Strategies and Use of Title I Funds for Innovation and Expansion Activities

4.11(e)(2) Evaluation and Report of Progress in Achieving Identified Goals and Priorities and Use of Title 1 Funds for Innovation and Expansion Activities

SUMMARY OF ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 4.8(b)(1) – Cooperation with Agencies That Are Not In the Statewide Workforce Investment System and With Other Entities

This attachment describes the variety of entities that CBVH works closely with to enhance vocational rehabilitation services and placement opportunities for CBVH consumers.

Attachment 4.10 – Comprehensive System of Personnel Development

This attachment describes CBVH's system of personnel development to enable CBVH to maintain an adequate supply of qualified professionals and paraprofessionals to provide vocational rehabilitation services.

Attachment 4.11(a) – Results of Comprehensive Statewide Assessment of the Rehabilitation Needs of Individuals with Disabilities and Need to Establish, Develop or Improve Community Rehabilitation Programs

This attachment describes methods CBVH uses to determine the vocational rehabilitation service needs of individuals who are legally blind. This attachment includes information about the needs assessment currently being undertaken.

Attachment 4.11(b) – Annual Estimates of Individuals to Be Served and Costs of Services

This attachment provides updated information regarding the estimate of the number of individuals expected to be served using vocational rehabilitation funds and supported employment funds during the next fiscal year and the cost of those services.

Attachment 4.11(c)(1) - State's Goals and Priorities

This attachment identifies several goals and priorities for the coming year.

Attachment 4.11(c)(4) – Goals and Plans for Distribution of Title VII, Part B, Funds

This attachment provides information regarding the use of supported employment funds and the supported employment services provided by CBVH.

Attachment 4.11(d) – State's Strategies and Use of Title I Funds for Innovation and Expansion Activities

This attachment identified several strategies to be employed to enable CBVH to achieve the goals and priorities in the State Plan.

Attachment 4.11(e)(2) – Evaluation and Report of Progress in Achieving Identified Goals and Priorities and Use of Title I Funds for Innovation and Expansion Activities.

This attachment describes the progress CBVH has made towards achieving the goals and priorities described in the FY2008 State Plan.

COOPERATION WITH AGENCIES THAT ARE NOT IN THE STATEWIDE WORKFORCE INVESTMENT SYSTEM AND WITH OTHER ENTITIES

CBVH works closely with a variety of entities to enhance vocational rehabilitation services and placement opportunities for CBVH consumers. These efforts are described in this attachment.

A Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) developed among the New York State Department of Labor, State Education Department/Vocational and Educational Services for Individuals with Disabilities (SED/VESID) and the Office of Children and Family Services/Commission for the Blind and Visually Handicapped (OCFS/CBVH) for administration, implementation and promotion of the Work Opportunities Tax Credit program and the New York State Workers with Disabilities Employment Tax Credit Program remains current.

Employment Related Collaboration Activities

CBVH is collaborating with community rehabilitation programs, schools, employers and other state vocational rehabilitation programs to improve employment outcomes. These collaborative efforts are described in this section.

Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR) Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Business Network

CSAVR is actively working with business, consumers and state Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) agencies to develop a national VR Business network. The vision is to create a coordinated approach to serving business customers through a national VR team that specializes in employer development, business consulting and corporate relations. The dual customer approach provides the following benefits to the customers of the national network – business, VR consumers and state VR agencies:

- Business has direct access to qualified applicants and the support services provided by the public VR system;
- VR consumers have access to national employment opportunities and career development resources; and
- VR agencies have a national system for sharing employment resources, best practices and business connections.

As a member of the national network, CBVH has designated an Associate Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor to serve as a point person in New York State. The point person is the primary contact for national employers looking to partner with the state VR program and is responsible for providing a consistent set of services that support employers in hiring and retaining individuals who are legally blind. In addition to being a resource for the referral of qualified candidates, CBVH offers the following support services to employers:

1. Assistance with Work Accommodations - CBVH has expertise in designing and providing work accommodations for individuals who are legally blind to assist in meeting performance expectations.
2. Tax Credits - CBVH qualifies job candidates for Federal and State tax credits for businesses, such as the Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC) and the New York Workers with Disabilities Employment Tax Credit (WETC).
3. Employee Retention Services - CBVH provides retention assistance that assists employees who are legally blind to remain a skilled asset to businesses.

In the past year, CBVH has shared information about federal positions with the Internal Revenue Service, another partner seeking to diversify their federal workforce. CBVH is developing a partnership with a major staffing company based in New York and assisting with efforts to bring the company into the national partnership. CBVH has also benefited from information available over the partnerships communication software, ShareNet. Through discussion boards, CBVH has participated in conversations regarding home-based employment resources, the effectiveness of different providers, testing accommodations and other issues. CBVH anticipates support of its sister agencies in working to improve accessibility of common tests used to screen job applicants.

Regional and Bi-Regional Coordination

Until fiscal restraints limited the opportunity to meet, CBVH worked closely with VESID and other state VR agencies in Region I, meeting periodically to share information and resources. The relationships established through the group remain an important resource in planning initiatives to improve employment outcomes.

National, bi-regional and regional efforts are expected to lead to the development of numerous cooperative relationships with employers and human resource organizations and to provide employment opportunities for CBVH consumers. CBVH's State Coordinator for Employment Partnerships also meets periodically with her VESID counterpart to plan mutual efforts and share information.

Working with Community Rehabilitation Partners

CBVH is interested in improving the capacity of community rehabilitation partners to successfully place consumers who are legally blind. With the enthusiastic support of community rehabilitation partners, CBVH re-established both a Downstate and an Upstate Employment Providers Group. Due to provider agency staff turnover and geographic isolation of placement staff, the Upstate group teleconferenced only a few times in the past year. A new approach will be piloted this year, forming smaller regional groups who will meet in person, supported by a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor from the district office and one from home office. The downstate group continues to meet regularly share best practices, gain knowledge on specific programs or disabilities and discuss issues impacting efforts to place people in competitive settings. Toward this end, the group plans to learn more from HR professionals in different sectors (health care, entertainment, education) and conduct ongoing events for employers. In addition to repeating the Employer recognition event at Baruch

College Computer Center for the Visually Impaired, the group is also involved in developing the program for the symposium, entitled “Changing Vision, Changing Lives.” The consortium is also working with Baruch to establish a mock interview event in May. The goal is to provide opportunities for consumers to gain practice in interviewing, while expanding employers’ disability awareness and knowledge of assistive technology.

CBVH removed Diagnostic Vocational Evaluation and Placement services from its Comprehensive Services Contract with not-for-profit agencies serving individuals who are blind in order to expand the number of providers available to consumers. A Request for Qualifications resulted in 49 agencies being approved to provide placement services, and 12 agencies being approved to provide evaluation services. Changes in service guidelines enforce increased expectations of both counselors and contractors, and bring employers into the process at earlier phases, with a focus on achievement of quality outcomes.

Meeting the Needs of Special Populations

CBVH’s Rural Employment Group continues to meet by teleconference to discuss issues unique to rural areas. As a vehicle for problem solving, it has helped counselors find new approaches and share solutions that have worked. CBVH has also formed a group focusing on the needs of individuals who are legally blind who also have mental health issues. The group has shared resources and sought out expert advice on issues such as the effects on vocational pursuits of the various medications used to treat mental illness.

Chapter 515 Workgroup

An interagency group composed of representatives of CBVH, VESID, the Office of Mental Health (OMH) and the Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities (OMRDD) have been meeting regularly to assure cooperative implementation of the State Education Chapter 515 Integrated Employment law. Chapter 515 primarily focuses upon supported employment, including a memorandum of understanding which outlines the responsibilities of each agency in terms of intensive and extended services. This past year, the group focused its efforts on improving the Chapter 515 Annual Report, and strengthening reporting through the existing New York Integrated Supported Employment Reporting (NYISER) system. The state agencies have consulted with the Empire State Chapter of the Association for Persons in Supported Employment (APSE) to improve service provision. Resulting changes to the system are expected to ease the reporting burden on providers and lead to better collection of data on the statewide supported employment program. Now the group is working with the Center for Essential Management Services, under the auspices of the Disability Statistics Research and Training Center, to develop a survey of supported employment providers to help define the service needs of persons participating in supported employment.

Most Integrated Setting Coordinating Council (MISCC), Committee on Employment

In the past year, CBVH joined 44 other members of the MISCC Committee on Employment to advise the larger MISCC regarding strategies to improve employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities. Developing a shared vision, values and beliefs by which to measure its recommendations, the Employment Committee identified five opportunities for collaboration:

Proposed Attachment 4.8(b)(1), Page 3 of 5 Pages for 2010 State Plan

1. Develop a statewide infrastructure for benefits and work incentives planning and assistance, including statewide collaboration on implementation for the Centers for Medicaid and Medicare Services (CMS) Comprehensive Employment System Medicaid Infrastructure Grant entitled “New York Makes Work Pay.”
2. Develop employer-focused strategies for increasing the employment rate.
3. Review data and funding integration to explore how existing funding and reporting structures across agencies can be more effectively integrated to better meet the needs of people with disabilities seeking employment and meaningful community integration.
4. Develop recommendations to significantly improve opportunities for public sector employment for individuals with disabilities.
5. Improve access to employment services for individuals with disabilities across State agencies by developing clear cross-systems partnership policies and procedures to ensure collaboration, coordination and a streamlined experience for customers.

Specific recommendations and strategies were identified and forwarded to the MISCC for consideration and approval. Smaller workgroups will move forward with those recommendations approved by the larger Council.

Cooperation with Industries for the Blind of New York State

CBVH continues its partnership with Industries for the Blind of New York State (IBNYS) to facilitate growth in competitive employment options. IBNYS' Strategic Plan states that its leadership will focus 50% of its time on opportunity development, including areas of employment in service and technology. While supporting new initiatives, IBNYS will also maintain its manufacturing components, looking for new products and customers.

CBVH has encouraged IBNYS affiliates to provide needed work experience and skill training to enable individuals who are interested to move on to competitive employment in an integrated setting.

Cooperative Agreement with Recipients of Grants for Services to American Indians

In 2003, CBVH established an interagency agreement with the Seneca Nation of Indians Tribal Vocational Rehabilitation Program. The agreement represents both parties' commitment to mutual cooperation, coordination and collaboration to increase vocational opportunities for members of the Seneca Nation of Indians with legal blindness. It establishes shared values, outlines how services will be coordinated and how members of both organizations will participate in cross-training activities.

The collaborative relationship between the CBVH Buffalo District Office and the Seneca Nation of Indians Tribal Vocational Rehabilitation Program has increased awareness, acceptance and utilization of CBVH services. CBVH maintains a relationship in which referrals are handled in a timely and culturally sensitive manner. CBVH staff conducts in-service training with agencies on the Cattaraugus Reservation, and working closely with staff

of the Salamanca satellite of the Section 121 program and with the Area Office for the Aging on the reservation. CBVH staff serves on the Section 121 Project's Advisory Board, which meets monthly. CBVH further supports the activities of the section 121 Tribal VR Program through the delivery of state-funded services to children and elderly individuals, allowing them to better focus resources on tribal members seeking employment.

COMPREHENSIVE SYSTEM OF PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT

This attachment describes the New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS), CBVH, system of personnel development to obtain an adequate supply of qualified professionals and paraprofessionals to provide vocational rehabilitation (VR) services to legally blind New Yorkers. As requested by the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA), this plan will focus on the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor (VRC), Senior VRC, Orientation and Mobility Specialist (O&M), and Vision Rehabilitation Therapist/Rehabilitation Teacher (RT) positions. The Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD) plan was developed by a workgroup composed of representatives from CBVH and the New York State Education Department (SED) - Office of Vocational and Educational Services for Individuals with Disabilities (VESID) and is updated annually. It has been reviewed and commented on by the CBVH State Rehabilitation Council.

A. DATA SYSTEM ON PERSONNEL AND PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT

1. Number of Personnel Employed

- a. As of August 1, 2008, CBVH employed a total of 53 individuals in field-based VRC and Senior VRC items. Two VRC items remain vacant and are expected to be filled this year.

Approximately 4,000 legally blind individuals are "active" on VRC's caseloads at any given time. The average caseload is 49 consumers per VRC upstate, and 70 consumers per VRC downstate. The decrease in the average caseloads is a result of the reduction in the number of consumers in homemaker status. The discrepancy in caseload sizes from upstate to downstate is due to the concentrated number of consumers in the downstate area.

CBVH employs six O&M instructors and two RT's in field positions. One rehabilitation teacher retired and, because of the continuing shortage of qualified rehabilitation teachers, CBVH has been unable to fill the vacancy. CBVH intends to fill this position with an individual who is certifiable as a rehabilitation teacher. Otherwise, this number has remained constant in recent years.

- b. Projected Needs: It is projected for the period of September 1, 2009 to August 31, 2010 that five VRCs and Senior VRCs will retire or leave for other reasons. One orientation and mobility instructor is expected to retire during the next year.
- c. Projections: Of the 53 Senior VRC and VRCs in field positions, 48 are Certified Rehabilitation Counselors (CRC) or CRC eligible and four are not CRC eligible. One individual completed the requirements for a master's degree majoring in vocational rehabilitation counseling and is now eligible for certified rehabilitation counselor status. Of the four who are not CRC eligible:

1. three intend to retire;
2. one is currently exploring credentialing options.

CBVH estimates that all state unit personnel will meet the CSPD standard by the end of 2015.

All six O&M instructors earned Master's degrees and are eligible for certification from the Academy for Certification of Vision Rehabilitation and Education Professionals (ACVREP). Of the two RTs, one has a Master's degree and one earned a Bachelor's degree. Both are eligible for certification from ACVREP.

- d. Several personnel transactions occurred during the period September 1, 2007 and August 31, 2008. The result of these transactions for the year as they affected each district office is as follows:

Buffalo

- No vacancies as of 8/31/08

Syracuse

- One VRC retired
- One VRC was hired
- No vacancies as of 8/31/08

Albany

- One vacant Rehabilitation Teacher of 8/31/08

White Plains

- Two VR Counselors left
- Two VR Counselor were hired
- One vacant VR Counselor position as of 8/31/08

New York City

- One Senior VRC Retired
- One VRC promoted to Sr. VRC
- One VR Counselors hired
- One VR Counselor left
- One vacancy as of 8/31/08

Hempstead

- Sr. VR Counselor retired
- Sr. VR Counselor hired
- No vacancies as of 8/31/08

B. DATA ON PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT

1. There are six institutions of higher education in New York State (NYS) accredited by the Council on Rehabilitation Education (CORE) that prepare vocational rehabilitation professionals. CBVH maintains contact with all of these institutions of higher education, assists in recruitment for the colleges and uses their students as a source for CBVH staff positions. Last year, the colleges reported the following enrollment information:

- State University of New York at Albany
18 Students enrolled
9 Graduates last year
2 Disabled
1 Non-white
- Hofstra University
29 Students enrolled
4 Graduates last year
7 Disabled
17 Non-white
- Hunter College of the City University of New York (CUNY)
91 Students enrolled
25 Graduates last year
16 Disabled
66 Non-white
- St. John's University
14 Students enrolled
5 Graduate last year
1 Disabled
3 Non-white
- State University of New York at Buffalo
16 Students enrolled
10 Graduates last year
4 Disabled
2 Non-white
- Syracuse University
11 Students enrolled
4 Graduates last year
4 Disabled
2 Non-white

The New York University Rehabilitation Counselor program ceased operation last year. CBVH continues to work with the six remaining institutions of higher education to develop a process for the recruitment of students from diverse populations, and to establish a curriculum based on best practices, research, and development trends.

2. Hunter College of CUNY is the only university preparation program in New York State graduating individuals as both O&M instructors and RTs. Graduates from this program are eligible for certification by the ACVREP.

A. Dual Orientation and Mobility/Rehabilitation Teacher

30 Students enrolled
4 Graduates last year
3 Disabled
9 Non-white

3. The Lighthouse in Manhattan also trains RTs using distance learning technology and on-site visits to prepare RTs. This innovative program has been co-sponsored by CBVH to prepare RTs in order to relieve the critical shortage of RTs in that area. All graduates of the program are certified by ACVREP.

15 Students enrolled
15 Graduates last year
7 Disabled
6 Non-white

4. The Lighthouse also conducts a training program for Vision Rehabilitation Assistants (VRA) who assist O&M instructors and RTs. Although CBVH does not employ any VRAs at this time, individuals included in this pool of instructors may progress to professional status and become eligible for employment by CBVH.

17 Students enrolled
15 Graduates
12 Disabled
12 Non-white

C. Plan for Recruitment, Preparation, and Retention of Qualified Personnel.

The following steps describe the ongoing activities that will enable CBVH to continue the long-term CSPD plan and develop resources needed to recruit, prepare and retain qualified personnel in New York State:

- a. Maintain relationships established with the Regional Technical Assistance and Training Center (TACE – formally the Regional Rehabilitation Continuing Education Program (RRCEP)), the VR counseling pre-service preparation programs in NYS, pre-service O&M and RT programs, and long distance learning pre-service programs from other states.

- b. Continue to track the number of students who graduate from pre-service programs statewide and the percentage of diverse populations (e.g. severely disabled, Latino) within those programs.
- c. Continue to develop relationships with distance learning programs to locate curriculum that meet the learning styles and needs of CBVH staff. These include video conferencing, videotapes, and/or computer technology.
- d. Increase opportunities for staff in-service training.
- e. Maintain a training database for all CBVH staff that includes the following information:
 - 1. CRC status
 - 2. Educational history
 - 3. Proficiency areas (sign language, foreign language)
 - 4. Training priority requests
 - 5. Graduate course work
- f. Continue to recruit qualified VRCs, O&Ms, and RTs including those from diverse backgrounds or who have needed language skills.
- g. Continue to partner with VESID with regard to the CSPD and the long term training of employees.

D. PERSONNEL STANDARDS

1. Highest Standard For VRCs

CBVH hires only individuals who meet The New York State Department of Civil Service's personnel standard for vocational rehabilitation counselors. The standard is:

- a. A current Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification (CRCC) certificate; OR
- b. A master's degree in Rehabilitation Counseling, including a supervised internship, from a Council on Rehabilitation Education (CORE) accredited program; OR
- c. A master's degree in Rehabilitation Counseling or Counseling and notice of eligibility to sit for the Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification (CRCC) certificate examination.

2. Plans to Retrain or Hire Staff Who Do Not Meet The Highest Requirements

Staff Hired Prior to Implementation Date

Nine staff was hired prior to the implementation date of this CSPD. Their progress is updated in section A.1.c. of this report. An individual plan to achieve CRC academic eligibility is developed for each staff person who requires this credential.

Staff Hired Subsequent to the Implementation Date

New York State Civil Service VRC personnel standards were approved and reflect this CSPD. All VRCs in VRC titles will be required to commit to academic eligibility for CRC.

E. STAFF DEVELOPMENT

1. The CBVH in-service training program provides funds for attendance at workshops, conferences, formal course work, agency developed training sessions, RCEP developed or sponsored training and conferences. Training has been offered in counseling, rehabilitation, medical aspects of disability, job placement, rehabilitation technology, cultural diversity, informed choice, the Americans with Disabilities Act, the Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1998, and other topics related to vocational rehabilitation. CBVH contracts with 11 Adaptive Technology Centers in the state. Upon request, the centers provide training to CBVH staff on new access technology for individuals with disabilities.
2. Training areas for staff development are determined by the following:
 - a. Annual needs assessment conducted by the Training Unit,
 - b. RSA priorities, and
 - c. CBVH administration priorities.
3. CBVH maintains a library, which contains current information and research in the rehabilitation field. This information is available to all staff.

F. PERSONNEL TO ADDRESS INDIVIDUAL COMMUNICATION NEEDS.

CBVH continues to obtain the services of individuals able to communicate in the native language of individuals who have limited English speaking ability or require American Sign Language. Qualified interpreters are hired for services for individuals who are deaf/blind. CBVH staff with the required qualifications may be used for this purpose, or sub-contractors with specialty skills may be used.

G. PERFORMANCE EVALUATION SYSTEM

VRCs and their supervisors establish performance standards that become the basis for the counselor's annual evaluation. These performance standards will include the measures needed by those who must upgrade their qualifications to meet nationally recognized standards.

H. COORDINATION OF CSPD WITH THE INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES EDUCATION ACT (IDEA)

CBVH is not responsible for hiring staff who work in school systems – that is the responsibility of VESID, the New York state agency that administers both the vocational rehabilitation program for individuals with disabilities other than legal blindness as well as special education programs for school-age children. The CSPD functions for both areas are carried out within VESID's Office of Program Development and Support Services (PDSS), in collaboration with other VESID organizational units. The CBVH CSPD was developed by a workgroup, which included representatives of both VESID and CBVH.

STATEWIDE ASSESSMENT

CBVH and the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) jointly agreed to once again work with the staff from the Center for Essential Management Services (CEMS) to complete a second phase of the CBVH comprehensive statewide assessment required by the Rehabilitation Services Administration. CBVH and the SRC have decided to conduct needs assessments on a continuing basis – in other words, conducting needs assessments annually over a three year period. The Statewide Needs Assessment completed in (to be determined date, probably early spring 2009) focused on analyzing extant data and conducting consumer surveys for all consumers who cases were closed in status 26, 28 or 30 during FY 2008. The surveys will capture data reflecting not only the consumer's satisfaction with services but also how important those services are to the life of the consumer. By including consumers who did not successfully complete a vocational rehabilitation program in the survey process, CBVH expects to gather information that will provide insight into what changes need to be made to the service provision system that would offer opportunities to more individuals to obtain and maintain employment. Year three will address the State workforce investment system and focus on combining the results of the qualitative needs assessment (2008) with the quantitative needs assessment (2009) to facilitate a more systematic and ongoing effort to identify the needs of persons who are legally blind and to determine if there is a need to establish, develop or improve community rehabilitation programs.

Individuals with the most significant disabilities, including their need for supported employment – this section will be completed when the results of the current needs assessment are provided by CEMS.

Individuals with disabilities who are minorities – this section will be completed when the results of the current needs assessment are provided by CEMS

Individuals with disabilities who are unserved – this section will be completed when the results of the current needs assessment are provided by CEMS

Individuals with disabilities who are underserved – this section will be completed when the results of the current needs assessment are provided by CEMS

Individuals with disabilities served through other components of the statewide workforce investment system – The 2009 needs assessment will not address the needs of individuals with disabilities served through other components of the statewide workforce investment system. The 2010 needs assessment will address this topic.

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The need to establish, develop, or improve community rehabilitation programs within the state – this section will be completed when the results of the current needs assessment are provided by CEMS. It is expected that the results of the 2009 Needs Assessment will assist CBVH in determining if there is a need to establish, develop or improve community rehabilitation programs with the state.

Attachment 4.11(a), Page 1 of 1 Page for FY 2009 State Plan

ANNUAL ESTIMATES OF INDIVIDUALS TO BE SERVED AND COSTS OF SERVICES

CBVH estimates that during FY 2010, 950 individuals will be found eligible for CBVH services. CBVH anticipates serving 4,130 individuals during Federal Fiscal Year 2010. Of the 4,130 individuals expected to receive services, CBVH expects that 4,000 individuals will be served using Title I Vocational Rehabilitation funds at a total estimated cost of \$21,300,000. CBVH expects that the remaining 130 individuals will be served using Title VI, Part B Supported Employment funds at a total estimated cost of \$300,000.

In order to also provide information requested by RSA regarding an estimate of the number of individuals in the State who are eligible for VR services under the Rehabilitation Act CBVH has examined data from the 2000 Census. Using an incidence of legal blindness formula, CBVH estimates that there are 40,910 legally blind non-institutionalized individuals' ages 22-64 in New York State.

There are numerous factors that impact an individual's choice to seek vocational rehabilitation services and ultimately employment. There is currently no method to accurately assess how many of the estimated 40,910 legally blind individuals ages 22-64 would apply for CBVH services and be found eligible for services. Therefore, the best measure of the estimate of the number of individuals in the State who are eligible for VR services is the estimate based on historical data as noted above.

STATE'S GOALS AND PRIORITIES

Goals and Priorities

CBVH has revised two of the goals and priorities that were developed for the 2009 State Plan. These goals and priorities have been updated and revised in response to the results of the Statewide comprehensive needs assessment and in response to recommendations from RSA. The SRC has provided input into these goals and priorities.

Proposed Goals:

- Goal #1:** *Continue to refine existing quality assurance processes to identify gaps and determine improvements needed to expand and enhance quality assurance activities.*
- Goal #2:** *Increase the number of competitive employment outcomes using Fiscal Year 2008 data on the number of competitive employment outcomes as a baseline.*
- Goal#3:** *Increase the number of individuals from ethnic and racial minority populations who receive services, beginning with a baseline of data for Fiscal Year 2008.*
- Goal#4** *Continue to pass the RSA Standards and Indicators.*
- Goal#5** *Implement a new case management system.*

GOALS AND PLANS FOR DISTRIBUTION OF TITLE VI, PART B FUNDS

The goal of CBVH's supported employment program is to enable individuals with the most significant disabilities to achieve and maintain competitive employment in their communities. CBVH continues to serve all eligible individuals that need supported employment services with a goal of placing as many individuals as possible in employment.

In New York State, the administrative responsibility for supported employment programs is consolidated in the Office of Vocational and Educational Services for Individuals with Disabilities (VESID). In 1990, the former Department of Social Services (now the Office of Children and Family Services) Commission for the Blind and Visually Handicapped (CBVH) entered into a "Memorandum of Interagency Understanding Regarding Supported Employment" with the State Education Department - VESID, the Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities (OMRDD), and the Office of Mental Health (OMH) governing current and future program administration. This document is updated annually, as needed. The administrative arrangement is established in accordance with Section 3, Chapter 515 of the Laws of New York of 1992.

The current contracts, which were implemented on July 1, 2004, provide opportunities for individuals with most significant disabilities and blindness to access a broad variety of supported employment programs. CBVH continues to work with VESID to refine methods to enter authorizations, cancellations and billing for CBVH consumers into the fiscal system being established to support the new contract.

CBVH has worked with generic providers of supported employment services to provide technical assistance and encourage them to extend their services to individuals who are legally blind. CBVH encourages providers to explore a broad variety of employment options for supported employment placements. In addition to the individual placement model, CBVH is working with providers to use other supported employment strategies as appropriate for the consumer.

Under the current contract, a total of 44 providers have the capacity to serve a total of 156 individuals who are legally blind, with a goal to place, train and stabilize 105 individuals who are legally blind. Because of the low incidence of blindness, VESID and CBVH contracted with several generic agencies to serve individuals who are blind, with the understanding that much of this capacity may not be used by CBVH if there are no supported employment candidates in that region. In addition, CBVH continues to access services at other providers based on additional disabilities of the consumer. This is achieved through access to a limited number of "VESID slots" or the purchase of intensive services on a fee-for-service basis. CBVH and VESID are working together so that the limited supported employment funds are utilized in the most effective manner to meet consumer needs. CBVH maintains case management, program monitoring and oversight responsibilities for the supported employment services provided to CBVH consumers. Service providers regularly provide CBVH with individual consumer reports, and CBVH staff meets regularly with providers and consumers. Information on services to CBVH consumers is also available through data provided by contractors to the New York Integrated Supported Employment Reporting System (NYISERS).

During the past year, the four agencies who have signed on to the Memorandum of Understanding have been working cooperatively to improve collection of data on the Statewide supported employment program. A planned change in the monthly reporting requirements will allow providers to complete and transmit reports on-line. This change will reduce data entry for the providers, with monthly information being automatically compiled for portions of required quarterly reports. As payment will be tied to reporting, it should also provide more accurate reporting in NYISERS. This will allow the four agencies to plan more precisely for future program needs.

CBVH will continue to work with VESID to assess performance on an ongoing basis, participate in on-site reviews, and provide technical assistance or recommend adjustments to contracts as needed.

STATE'S STRATEGIES AND USE OF TITLE I FUNDS FOR INNOVATION AND EXPANSION ACTIVITIES

As noted in Attachment 4.11(c) State Goals, CBVH has revised the goals and priorities that were developed last year as part of a strategic planning process. These goals and priorities have been updated in response to the results of the Statewide Comprehensive Needs Assessment and in response to recommendations from RSA. CBVH has worked with the SRC to develop and refine the goals and priorities.

Outreach activities have been incorporated into the strategies as appropriate. The second phase of the needs assessment will help to identify reasons that consumers successfully and unsuccessfully complete rehabilitation plans.

CBVH performance on the Standards and Indicators provides positive information about CBVH's current policies and practices with respect to the equitable provision of services and in particular, services to individuals who are minorities. In addition, CBVH will use the results of the needs assessment and information learned from the standardized Senior Counselor reviews to make any needed improvements in these areas.

Goal #1: *Examine existing quality assurance processes to identify gaps and determine improvements needed to expand and enhance quality assurance activities.*

Strategies

1. Working with the Region II RRCEP, current quality assurance processes were examined. As a result, CBVH has developed and will be implementing a "report card" as part of the quality assurance process which will allow comparison of contractor service delivery and performance. The "report card" will be available on the CBVH website.
2. Work with CBVH district offices to increase direct CBVH counselor involvement with consumers during the provision of contracted services.
3. Conduct consumer satisfaction surveys for consumers who received services from contract agencies. The Center for Essential Management Services will be conducting a consumer satisfaction survey for cases closed in status 26, 28 and 30 for fiscal year 2008. In addition, CBVH will conduct surveys of consumers who received Independent Living services.

Goal #2: *Increase the number of competitive employment outcomes using Fiscal Year 2008 data on the number of competitive employment outcomes as a baseline.*

Strategies

1. Using information from the needs assessment and other sources, conduct an evaluation to identify the reasons for consumers not obtaining or maintaining employment.
2. Continue expanding relationships with employers and business associations to encourage hiring CBVH consumers;
3. Strengthen partnership with VESID to take advantage of provider networks providing services to individuals with disabilities other than blindness;
4. Continue to establish and utilize linkages with state, local, and community non-profit organizations that provide free services to individuals interested in setting up their own businesses.
5. Work with contract agencies to develop training programs for consumers that provide them with the skills necessary to obtain and maintain employment.
6. Increase the amount of face-to-face time that CBVH counselors spend with consumers. CBVH will attempt to add four additional counselor positions in the downstate area, where caseload sizes are the largest. Additionally, the new computer information system is expected to reduce time spent on paperwork, while increasing counselor time spent with consumers.

Goal#3: *Increase the number of individuals from ethnic and racial minority populations who receive services, beginning with a baseline of data from Fiscal Year 2008.*

Strategies

1. Improve outreach activities to the specific populations who are unserved/underserved
2. Increase culturally sensitive marketing and outreach activities to those populations, using strategies identified as effective in other locations;
3. Work with other OCFS divisions to collaborate on initiatives that will expand and increase CBVH's ability to work effectively with individuals from ethnic and racial minority populations.
4. Through the Comprehensive Needs Assessment, explore reasons why individuals from racial and ethnic minority populations are less likely than those from non-minority backgrounds to participate in services from CBVH.

5. Translate written materials and brochures into other languages in addition to the ones currently available in Spanish, Arabic, Chinese, and Russian.

Goal #4: *Continue to pass the RSA Standards and Indicators*

Strategies

1. Increase oversight of CBVH counselor performance through supervisory review of open and closed cases. This will be enhanced by the use of the new CBVH Consumer Information System (CIS).
2. Develop new and existing relationships with employers in order to increase then number of successful closures.
3. Increase CBVH counselor emphasis on initial assessment and planning in order to increase successful employment outcomes for consumers.
4. Use the findings of the recent Comprehensive Needs Assessment to identify ways to improve the services for individuals from minority backgrounds.

Goal #5: *Refine the new case management system.*

Strategies

1. Continue to provide training and technical assistance to both CBVH staff and contractor agency staff who uses the case management system.
2. Continue to work with the software manufacturer to customize and refine the case management system.

Innovation and Expansion Funds

Innovation and expansion funds were used during 2008 to fund seven ATCs across the state. These ATCs provide technology assessment and training to CBVH consumers through contracts with CBVH. ATC staff meets with CBVH at least twice a year to share best practice information, learn about new equipment and to address issues that arise during the year. As requested, ATC staff provide training and demonstrations of new equipment to CBVH district office counselors. Available innovation and expansion funds will continue to be used to fund the ATCs at a comparable level in the next fiscal year.

EVALUATION AND REPORT OF PROGRESS IN ACHIEVING IDENTIFIED GOALS AND PRIORITIES AND USE OF TITLE I FUNDS FOR INNOVATION AND EXPANSION

CBVH evaluates progress toward achievement of goals and priorities (objectives) on an ongoing basis. Progress achieved during the past year is reported as activities completed to address the strategies associated with each goal and objective. Many of the strategies listed to achieve the objectives are ongoing activities. Where appropriate, objectives that have been met are noted. CBVH is reporting on the goals and objectives from the 2009 VR State Plan. As noted in Attachment 4.11 (c)(1), the goals and priorities have been revised.

Goal #1:

Examine existing quality assurance processes to identify gaps and determine improvements needed to expand and enhance quality assurance activities.

Strategies:

1. With the assistance of a grant from RSA, CBVH worked with the National Consortium of Regional Rehabilitation Continuing Education Programs to examine the existing quality assurance processes. Staff from RCEP in Region I and Region IV and from staff California DVR directly assisted in this process. All parties were in agreement that CBVH had a thorough review process; however, it was agreed that CBVH could enhance the process by developing a performance index or report card system. This system allows CBVH and other stakeholders to compare the services offered by contract agencies across the state. The first two quality assurance reviews completed in FY2009 included a report card. Currently, the quality assurance process includes an on-site review process to determine the extent to which contract agencies are meeting the standards of specific contract services. Upon completion of the review, data is analyzed and a narrative report is forwarded to the agency reviewed. The report highlights the strengths and weaknesses of services provided by the agency and will include corrective action plans to address any areas that the contractor is falling short in meeting the standards of the contract. The report card is included in the narrative report, providing a synopsis of the data available from the review process and is made available for review by stakeholders via the CBVH website.
2. CBVH implemented a new case management system (CIS) on October 4, 2008. All CBVH staff received training on the new system. CIS eliminates duplication of paperwork and that is expected to result in allowing counselors to spend more time with consumers. It is anticipated that this additional time spent with consumers will improve the consumer's perception of and response to CBVH services.
3. CBVH contracted with the Center for Essential Management Services to conduct a consumer satisfaction survey for all consumers closed in status 26, 28 and 30 in FY 2008. In addition, CBVH is using its new computer management system to identify cases closed in status 26, 28 and 30 and will conduct telephone surveys to determine consumer satisfaction with CBVH and contracted services. Information from these surveys will assist CBVH to improve programs and services.

4. Training was conducted in 2 locations to communicate to contract agencies the nature and scope of the quality assurance plan. Part of the training included training on the performance index or report card system. Agency staff who could not physically attend the training program participated by teleconference.

Goal #2:

Increase the number of competitive employment outcomes using Fiscal Year 2008 data on the number of competitive employment outcomes as a baseline.

1. Employment outcomes continue to increase. During Fiscal Year 2008, CBVH placed 401 individuals in competitive employment. This was an increase of 3.35 over Fiscal Year 2007, when 388 individuals were placed in competitive employment. The average wage for FY2008 was \$25,300. This was a decrease of 8.33% over FY2007, when the average wage was \$27,600. It should be noted that the average wage for 2007 was skewed high due to the wage of one individual. The average wage for 2008 was slightly higher than the average wage for 2006.
2. CBVH continues to expand relationships with employers and business associations. The CBVH point person for employment issues is active with "The NET" – the National Employment Network. Peggy Anderson provided training to the CBVH District Managers regarding how to work with employers and how to prepare consumers for employment in today's job market. There is a Downstate Employment Consortium of agencies working with CBVH consumers seeking employment and there was an Employer Recognition Event at a downstate college. All of these efforts are expected to yield more employment opportunities for CBVH consumers.
3. CBVH issued two Request for Proposals (RFP's) to solicit providers for diagnostic vocational evaluation and job placement services. CBVH obtained a list of providers from VESID as a way to expand the provider network for services to its consumers.
4. CBVH staff continues to develop linkages with local organizations that are willing to work with consumers who are interested in setting up a business.

Goal #3:

Increase the number of individuals from ethnic and racial minority populations who receive services, beginning with a baseline of data from FY2008.

1. The Comprehensive Needs Assessment completed in March 2008 identified deaf-blind individuals and those legally blind individuals who have multiple impairments as the individuals served by CBVH with the most significant disabilities. The 2009 Comprehensive Needs Assessment will be determining the consumer satisfaction with CBVH services by surveying consumers whose cases were closed in FY2008 after determination of eligibility for services. It is expected that the results of these surveys will identify best practices that CBVH utilized to assist consumers in obtaining or maintaining employment. These best practices will be continued. It is also expected that the results of these surveys will identify areas that CBVH needs to improve in order to better assist consumers in obtaining and maintaining employment.

2. Once data is obtained from the 2009 Comprehensive Needs Assessment, CBVH will be able to determine strategies that will assist to improve service delivery to CBVH consumers, thereby increasing the number of successful closures.
3. In an effort to increase CBVH presence among ethnic and minority populations, CBVH opened another field office in the Harlem State Office Building. In addition, a new counselor was hired for that office who is blind and Hispanic.
4. CBVH is participating in an agency-wide initiative known as the Disproportionate Minority Representation/Cultural Competence Committee. This committee will focus its efforts on identifying and eliminating racial and ethnic inequities in agency service delivery systems, practices and policies.
5. The opening of the field office at the Harlem State Office Building is expected to identify new referral sources for consumers, service providers and translators.
6. CBVH participates in an agency-wide effort to identify those consumers who are not proficient in using the English language. CBVH provides its written materials in Spanish, Arabic, Chinese and Russian, however, this agency-wide effort will assist CBVH in determining other languages that need to be made available.

Goal #4:

Pass the RSA Standards and Indicators

1. All applicants over the age of 55 who are not interested in competitive employment are now being served with ILOB and state funds. This has dramatically decreased the number of Vocational Rehabilitation Homemakers without decreasing services to that population.
2. New Senior Counselor Review Forms and the implementation of the Computer Information System have increased the oversight of CBVH counselor performance. It is expected that this increased supervision will result in counselors developing and/or enhancing the skills need to move consumers more quickly and effectively through the rehabilitation process, thus increasing the number of successful closures.
3. Encouraging counseling staff to place more emphasis on initial assessment and planning. With the implementation of CIS, the counseling staff should have more time to be involved in these activities. It is expected that this increased focus on assessment and planning will increase the number of competitive closures.
4. When the results of the Needs Assessment are available, CBVH will be able to determine ways to improve the services rate for individuals of minority backgrounds.

Goal #5:

Purchase and Implement a new case management system.

1. The customization of the new computer case management system (CIS) continues.
2. Use acceptance testing is utilized with each process that is customized. This insures that the customization is appropriate and functioning properly.
3. Initial training for CIS was provided to all CBVH and contractor agency staff before implementation. Because CBVH staff and contractor staff use different functions within CIS, training was provided to each group at different times.
4. CIS was implemented on October 2, 2008.
5. CBVH staff and contractor agency staff have received follow-up training as needed. Training has been provided by teleconference as well as on-site.

Progress In Achieving Supported Employment Goals

The current supported employment delivery system has allowed all eligible individuals with the most significant disabilities who are interested in supported employment to obtain that service.

Goal #1: The goal of CBVH's supported employment program is to enable individuals with the most significant disabilities to achieve and maintain competitive employment in their communities.

Goal #2 Under the current contract, a total of 44 providers have the capacity to serve a total of 156 individuals who are legally blind, with a goal to place, train and stabilize 105 individuals who are legally blind.

In 2008, 172 individuals received supported employment services. Thirty one individuals obtained and have maintained integrated employment in the community.

Standards and Indicators

During Federal Fiscal Year 2008, CBVH passed the Standards and Indicators for the third year in a row, meeting the required performance levels for Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Standards, 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, and 1.6. CBVH continued during FFY 2008 to submit a quarterly Program Improvement Plan (PIP) documenting progress toward achievement of 1.1 and 1.5, as well as Standard 2.1. Due to having successfully met the Standards and Indicators for more than two years consecutively, as required by RSA, CBVH will no longer report Quarterly on the PIP.

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CBVH's difficulty in meeting Standard 1.1 is primarily the result of an intentional decrease in the number of older individuals served through the VR program with a goal of Homemaker implemented through contract and policy changes in calendar years 2004 and 2005. In both FFY 2007 and FFY 2008, CBVH increased the number of individuals placed in competitive employment, however, since the number of Homemakers closed successfully continued to decrease, CBVH's overall VR closure numbers also decreased. As of 1/1/08, CBVH elected to provide non-employment bound consumers age 55 and older with services through the Adaptive Living Program (ALP). This shift from the vocational rehabilitation program to other funding sources will extend the overall decrease in VR closures, despite the increases in competitive placements. To counter the decrease, CBVH is also working with counselors to further increase the number of competitive employment closures. CBVH expects to successfully meet performance indicator 1.1 by no later than September 30, 2010.

Standard 1.5, which measures the difference between the average hourly wage earned by consumers closed as employed during the federal fiscal year and the State average hourly wage, presents a challenge to CBVH. New York State has a very high average hourly wage, which makes it a challenge to achieve a federal standard that is the same for all blindness agencies nationwide, regardless of the vast differences between wages state to state. CBVH did not pass this Standard in FFY 2008. CBVH will continue to focus on good assessment and planning in order to train and place individuals in the highest level of employment for which they are interested and qualify, in order to improve overall performance on Standard 1.5. Additionally, Wall Street losses may actually have the effect of lowering the state average hourly wage in 2009, making it more likely that CBVH can meet this standard.

CBVH did not meet Standard 2.1, which measures service rates to minority individuals, as compared to service rates for non-minority individuals in FFY 2008. The recently completed Needs Assessment points to the huge variety of racial and ethnic minorities who live in New York City and its surrounding areas as a factor making it difficult for New York CBVH to achieve Standard 2.1. In addition to having a diverse and multi-ethnic staff, CBVH will strive to identify and implement ways to break down the additional barriers that make it difficult for individuals from minority groups to achieve successful employment. Also, CBVH opened a field office in the Harlem State Office Building in December 2008, enhancing visibility in and outreach efforts to minority populations in that area.

Innovation and Expansion Funds

Innovation and expansion funds were used during 2008 to fund seven ATCs across the State. These ATCs provide technology assessment and training to CBVH consumers through contracts with CBVH. ATC staff meets with CBVH at least twice a year to share best practice information, learn about new equipment and to address issues that arise during the year. As requested, ATC staff provide training and demonstrations of new equipment to CBVH counselors. Available innovation and expansion funds will continue to be used to fund the ATCs at a comparable level in the next fiscal year.