

**Modifications to the New York State  
Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act  
Four Year Combined State Plan  
2020 - 2023**

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**Commission  
for the Blind**

## **New York State Commission for the Blind (NYSCB) Announces Opportunities for Public Input on the State Plan**

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) places emphasis on competitive integrated employment, services to youth with disabilities, and improving services to employers and businesses.

NYSCB works closely with the Department of Labor, Adult Education, Adult Career and Continuing Education-Vocational Rehabilitation and other state and local agencies to build a workforce system that supports all individuals seeking employment.

### **The meetings are on:**

**September 13, 2021**

1:30 PM – 3:00 PM

**September 27, 2021**

9:00 AM – 10:30 AM

To participate in one of the two meetings, please call Colleen Ruck at (518) 474-7812 or via email at [NYSCB.Publicinput@ocfs.ny.gov](mailto:NYSCB.Publicinput@ocfs.ny.gov) by Friday, September 10<sup>th</sup>.

At that time, the zoom link or phone number

for the meeting you sign up to participate in will be provided to you.

Interpreters will be provided only upon request. To request an interpreter for a teleconference, contact Abigail Mason by email at [Abigail.Mason@ocfs.ny.gov](mailto:Abigail.Mason@ocfs.ny.gov) or by phone at (518) 473-0914, by August 27, 2021.

The NYSCB portion of the NYS Combined State Plan will be available on September 8, 2021 for review at <https://ocfs.ny.gov/main/cb/stateplan/>

Please contact Abigail Mason if you would like a copy of the proposed State Plan modifications sent to you in print or in an alternative format including: Braille, electronic large print and audio.

If you prefer to provide written feedback or comments, NYSCB will accept these at the address below:

NYS Commission for the Blind, Attn: Public Comments  
52 Washington Street., South Building, Room 201  
Rensselaer, NY 12144

or by email by September 30, 2021 to:

[NYSCB.Publicinput@ocfs.ny.gov](mailto:NYSCB.Publicinput@ocfs.ny.gov)

## **DESCRIPTION a: INPUT OF THE STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL**

**\*Please note, this draft version does not include updated information for this description as it has yet to be presented to the NYSCB State Rehabilitation Counsel (SRC). OCFS/NYSCB will be presenting this plan to the SRC in November 2021. Comments from that meeting will be included in the final draft version of this plan.**

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## **DESCRIPTION b. REQUEST FOR WAIVER OF STATEWIDENESS**

*When requesting a waiver of the statewideness requirement, the designated State unit must identify the types of services to be provided by the program on a non-statewide basis. The waiver request must also include written assurances that:*

**1. a local public agency will provide the non-Federal share of costs associated with the services to be provided in accordance with the waiver request;**

NYSCB has not requested a waiver of statewideness.

**2. the designated State unit will approve each proposed service before it is put into effect; and**

NYSCB has not requested a waiver of statewideness.

**3. All State plan requirements will apply**

*requirements of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan will apply to the services approved under the waiver.*

NYSCB has not requested a waiver of statewideness.

## **DESCRIPTION C: COOPERATIVE AGREEMENTS WITH AGENCIES NOT CARRYING OUT ACTIVITIES UNDER THE STATEWIDE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM**

### **Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR)**

CSAVR's National Employment Team (NET) provides a coordinated approach to serving business customers through business development, business consulting and corporate relations. By establishing partnerships with businesses, OCFS/NYSCB can better match business staffing needs with the skills and interests of participants seeking employment, as well as help business to retain employees who experience disability. The NET provides:

- Businesses with direct access to qualified applicants and support services from the public VR system;
- VR participants with access to national employment opportunities and career development resources; and
- VR agencies with a national system for sharing employment resources, best practices, and business connections.

A designated point of contact serves as the primary contact for businesses seeking to partner with OCFS/NYSCB. In the past year, through the NET partnership, OCFS/NYSCB has shared information and job postings from federal and corporate partners with OCFS/NYSCB staff and placement partners. In addition, OCFS/NYSCB has distributed NET-shared information on a number of internship and skill camp opportunities for high school and college students.

### **Working with Community Rehabilitation Programs (CRP)**

OCFS/NYSCB works closely with its community rehabilitation partners to create opportunities for successful careers for its participants who are legally blind. This partnership is most visible in the annual Vision Rehabilitation Institute, which is planned jointly by OCFS/NYSCB and CRP staff together for training and networking on issues related to workforce development.

OCFS/NYSCB implemented a new five-year vocational evaluation and placement contract which began January 1, 2020. OCFS/NYSCB worked to increase the network of providers throughout the state, reaching out to new providers through the NYS General VR agency. The awardees include agencies for individuals who are blind, agencies that provide services to individuals with disabilities, independent living centers, and individually owned businesses, affording participants greater choice in selecting an appropriate provider. New guidelines for these services were developed and distributed and joint training sessions for OCFS/NYSCB staff and providers were held in Spring 2020. Due to the short time between the trainings and the beginning of the pandemic, NYSCB is planning Fall 2021 updated training for staff and providers to realign the system for moving forward.

The Assistive Technology Services contract is being updated and guidelines are being reworked and modernized for implementation in January 2023 NYSCB worked in collaboration with technology specialists at National Industries for the Blind to review and update guidelines based on NYSCB experience and guidance from leaders in the ATC field.

OCFS/NYSCB continues to provide assistive technology services and devices to individuals through seven Assistive Technology Center (ATC) contracts, covering seven areas. Participants who are deaf-blind can receive assessment and training at the adaptive technology center located at Helen Keller National

Center in Sands Point. Participants who are unable to access technology services at an ATC may receive services through private vendors located throughout the state. All approved assistive technology contractors and vendors, and the services they offer, are listed on the OCFS/NYSCB website, [visionloss.ny.gov](http://visionloss.ny.gov).

Adaptive technology centers are required to have an array of equipment available for the participant to review during the assessment process. Training is then customized to the participant's need both in terms of hardware and software.

Two NYSCB loan closets also provide statewide access to loaner equipment while a participant is awaiting delivery of equipment purchased for them for school or employment.

NYSCB continues to encourage development of vocational training programs that meet the requirements of business and will work with providers to create and approve curricula, especially in fields with jobs in demand where vocational training has not previously been available. OCFS/NYSCB continues to support community rehabilitation providers in the development of pre-vocational programs beginning with youth at age ten and continuing through the transition years. These programs will provide both variety and increasing complexity so that youth are well prepared for post-secondary education and training. NYSCB worked diligently with CRPs and was able to transition many of these programs to digital platforms during the pandemic. As a result, many participants who may have been idle or unable to receive services were able to engage and gain knowledge and skills that will help them in their future employment opportunities.

### **Meeting the Needs of Special Populations**

NYSCB staff participates in educational webinars and networking events presented by the New York Deaf-Blind Collaborative (NYDBC), along with being a member of the NYDBC 4201 Network and Friends which serves as a resource to deaf-blind youth, families, and professionals, providing technical assistance (program development and support) to improve services for children and youth who are deaf-blind (ages 0-21).

NYSCB remains a member of the Interagency Council for Services to Persons who are Deaf, Deaf-Blind, or Hard of Hearing formed to coordinate the collection of information on population needs, engage in comprehensive strategic planning, and prepare legislative and policy recommendations to the Governor and the State Legislature.

### **Cooperation with National Industries for the Blind**

NYSCB has designated the New York State Preferred Source Program for People who are Blind, a subsidiary of the National Industries for the Blind (NIB), as its designee for New York State Preferred-Source products. The creation of service sector jobs is highlighted as a priority in the Letter of Designation (LOD).

NYSCB encourages NIB associated agencies to provide needed work experience and skill training to enable individuals to seek competitive employment in an integrated setting. NYSPSP has developed a Business Development Innovation Committee with guidance from NYSCB to look at opportunities to advance and modernize employment opportunities including partnering with businesses to develop competitive integrated employment opportunities.

## **Cooperative Agreement with Recipients of Grants for Services to American Indians**

NYSCB continues to act as a partner with the Seneca Nation of Indians Tribal Vocational Rehabilitation (SNI TVR) Program. The partnership represents both parties' commitment to mutual cooperation, coordination and collaboration to increase vocational opportunities for members of the Seneca Nation of Indians who are legally blind. 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 NYSCB Buffalo District Office and the SNI TVR Program has increased awareness, acceptance, and utilization of NYSCB services. OCFS/NYSCB maintains a relationship in which referrals are handled in a timely and culturally sensitive manner. OCFS/NYSCB staff conducts in-service training with agencies on the Cattaraugus Reservation, and works closely with staff of the Salamanca satellite of the Section 121 program and with the Area Office for the Aging on the reservation. OCFS/NYSCB staff serves on the Section 121 Project Advisory Board, which meets monthly. OCFS/NYSCB 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.

## **State Programs Carried Out Under Section 4 of the Assistive Technology Act of 1998**

The OCFS/NYSCB Buffalo equipment loan closet, managed through Center for Assistive Technology at Buffalo EDU is a TRAIID site. is OCFS/NYSCB contracts with the Buffalo equipment load closet These combined efforts with the TRAIID program are managed by the NYS Justice Center for the Protection of People with Special Needs and provides OCFS/NYSCB participants short and long-term equipment loans. participants. These participants often need equipment quickly while waiting to receive their purchased equipment or who need equipment for a specific time limited period.

## **Programs Carried Out by the Undersecretary for Rural Development of the USDA**

OCFS/NYSCB has not had an active working relationship with programs carried out by the assistant to the Secretary for Rural Development in the U.S. Department of Agriculture and will look into opportunities for future collaboration to determine whether opportunities for New Yorkers who are blind are available.

## **Noneducational Agencies Serving Out-of-School Youth**

Placement services continue to be a priority for OCFS/NYSCB. A workgroup consisting of both OCFS/NYSCB and provider staff developed new expectations and requirements for delivery of placement assistance which will enhance delivery of job seeking, job development, and other employment services. OCFS/NYSCB and a workgroup representing its major community rehabilitation partners continue to meet periodically throughout the year to discuss how to deliver quality programming to participants. OCFS/NYSCB and community provider staff continues to meet through the Vision Rehabilitation Institute to learn and discuss issues related to blindness and employment. OCFS/NYSCB works closely with the Chapter 515 programs to provide supported employment services to participants including out-of-school youth. OCFS/NYSCB district office staff has relationships with local social service agencies that provide essential services to out-of-school youth. These relationships provide an opportunity for referrals of individuals who are legally blind to OCFS/NYSCB for vocational services and a reciprocal referral opportunity when out-of-school youth involved with OCFS/NYSCB need the services provided through the state social service network. OCFS/NYSCB will continue to work to develop relationships with other non-educational agencies serving out-of-school youth so that youth who are legally blind who are eligible for VR services can receive those services.



NYSCB in partnership with NYSDOL, was meeting monthly as part of the Youth Collaborative which seeks to increase awareness of agencies serving out-of-school youth and increase referrals for services. These meetings were put on hold due to the pandemic and a change in the availability of NYSDOL staff. There have been conversations about resuming the meetings in late 2021 but no official date has been set. Other youth focused agencies are also part of the collaboration and include the NYS Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA), NYSED/ACCESS-VR, NYS Higher Education (OHE), and the OCFS Child Welfare and Community Services/Bureau of Youth Development and Crossover Initiatives.

### **State Use Contracting Programs**

OCFS/NYSCB accesses goods and services through the NYS Preferred Source Program (NYSPSP) for People Who Are Blind. NYSPSP for People who are Blind is a state-mandated initiative to create and sustain employment opportunities for New Yorkers who are blind or visually impaired. State and local agencies are required to purchase products and services that appear on the Preferred Source List through NYSPSP. These commodities are produced by affiliated nonprofit agencies in NYS that employ people who are blind or visually impaired. Agencies are required to purchase from the preferred source program. The products and services meet their needs and are comparatively priced. NYSPSP played a vital role in providing personal protective equipment (PPE) to NYS agencies and community providers throughout the pandemic.

## **DESCRIPTION d: COORDINATION WITH EDUCATION OFFICIALS**

NYSCB transition policy states that as a participant in the school's transition planning process, OCFS/NYSCB staff should provide consultation and technical assistance 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 services, contribute knowledge of rehabilitation services and outcomes to facilitate the development of the individualized education programs (IEPs) under Section 614(d) of the IDEA , and identify the need for involvement of other state agencies, adult service programs, independent living centers, and community based services whose resources can assist students and youth who are legally blind, their families, and education personnel during the transition planning and service delivery process, and identify the roles and responsibilities, including financial responsibilities, for each agency.. It also states that NYSCB is responsible for providing information to assist in the coordination of the IEP and individualized plan for employment (IPE), including the selection of vocational goals that are consistent with labor market needs and integrated community living opportunities. OCFS/NYSCB is only responsible for services written into the IEP by the Committee on Special Education with the direct knowledge and agreement of the OCFS/NYSCB counselor. Financial responsibility for services, other than those which are mandated for school districts by federal or state statute or regulation, may be shared by other agencies, including OCFS/NYSCB.

Cooperative efforts between the schools and OCFS/NYSCB take place on a daily basis at the district office level. OCFS/NYSCB Children's Consultants provide schools with technical support, help parents learn to advocate effectively for their children, and purchase services to supplement those that school districts are required to provide. As the student nears transition age, the OCFS/NYSCB Children's Consultants' familiarity with particular students allows for a more effective transition to the vocational rehabilitation program. In cooperation with the school and community agencies, OCFS/NYSCB vocational rehabilitation counselors encourage and help individuals to live more independently and develop meaningful employment plans. During school years, OCFS/NYSCB counselors can provide vocational guidance and counseling, resource information, pre-employment transition services (Pre-ETS) and VR/transition services that help students begin to identify and explore their career interests. These services support obtaining competitive integrated employment outcomes including supported employment. In addition, OCFS/NYSCB counselors may be able to provide job related occupational tools, purchase low vision aids, facilitate, and coordinate work-based learning experiences and assist in obtaining employment.

OCFS/NYSCB employs nine vocational rehabilitation counselors who work exclusively with transition age youth. The transition counselors provide educational guidance to OCFS/NYSCB vocational rehabilitation counselors and encourage student and parent involvement in the transition process. Brochures describing OCFS/NYSCB services have been widely distributed. The brochures are available in regular print, large print, and Braille (upon request) and electronically. OCFS/NYSCB staff frequently visit transition career fairs and attend high school open houses and present information about OCFS/NYSCB at college programs held on college campuses. In addition, staff participate in transition conferences and work closely with many staff from local school districts to reinforce the mission of VR, explain the role VR plays in the transition process, and discuss VR policies and procedures.

The OCFS/NYSCB Transition Policy requires that the student's IPE be developed within 90 days of eligibility determination. Information on the IPE should be consistent with the content of the IEP, including vocational goals, educational and rehabilitation objectives, projected dates, and responsibilities for participation in the transition process. OCFS/NYSCB transition counselors have

received training on this policy requirement and on the requirements of coordinating the IPE with the IEP. All OCFS/NYSCB transition counselors have been actively developing employment plans for youth.

OCFS/NYSCB Transition Counselors also work closely with NYSED Transition Specialists. The newly developed Office of Special Education Educational Partnership was established in 2019. OCFS/NYSCB will continue to access the resources available through the network of Regional Partnership Centers. The Partnership Centers will continue to provide training targeted for parents, school districts, and other agency providers on topics such as transition and the IEP, measurable post-secondary goals, and work-based learning.

### **The New York Deaf-Blind Collaborative (NYDBC)**

The New York Deaf-Blind Collaborative (NYDBC) is a five-year federally funded project which provides technical assistance to improve services for children and youth who are deaf-blind (ages 0-21). The contract supporting NYDBC was extended from October 1, 2018 through September 20, 2023. The NYDBC is housed at Queens College in Flushing, New York and is funded by the United States Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP). OCFS/NYSCB has agreed to collaborate on specific initiatives with NYDBC. Specifically, OCFS/NYSCB assisted NYDBC in disseminating a state-wide needs assessment to increase the early identification of children who are deaf-blind in NYS. OCFS/NYSCB staff also receive considerable technical assistance and training from NYDBC that will increase knowledge and skills in addressing the developmental and educational needs of children who are deaf-blind. OCFS/NYSCB will also be involved in collaborative relationships with local, regional and statewide teams (as necessary) to support and improve systems to better serve children and youth.

### **Consultation and Technical Assistance**

OCFS/NYSCB staff provide consultation and technical assistance to assist local educational agencies (LEAs or "school districts") in planning for the transition of students who are legally blind from school to post-school activities, including pre-employment transition services and vocational rehabilitation services; provide guidance and professional development to educational and vocational rehabilitation personnel responsible for facilitating the transition planning process and the development and coordination of student individualized education programs (IEPs) and IPEs; provide information about each agency's roles and responsibilities, including financial responsibilities, and the State lead agencies and qualified personnel responsible for transition services; coordinate efforts to satisfy the documentation requirements set forth in Title IV of the Rehabilitation Act regarding students with disabilities who are considering sub-minimum wage employment as a post-high school option (Section 511) and pre-employment transition services (Section 113); and establish policies and procedures to facilitate the transition of students with disabilities, including outreach to and identification of students with disabilities who need pre-employment transition services and/or transition services.

### **Transition Planning**

OCFS/NYSCB works with students, families, and school districts to facilitate the coordination of pre-employment transition services and transition services for students who are legally blind and transitioning from school to the world of adult responsibilities and work. OCFS/NYSCB recognizes that these efforts are critical to enable students to achieve maximum success in employment, post-secondary education, independent living, and community participation, and is committed to being an active partner in the transition process. Making the transition from school to the adult world requires careful planning and a cooperative effort among families, school staff and community service providers.

Planning helps students, their families and school districts design services to maximize the student's years in school to prepare for full inclusion and integration into society, employment, independent living, and economic self-sufficiency.

The OCFS/NYSCB VR program serves eligible transition aged students ages ten years and older by providing an array of services that give students the tools necessary to enable them to make informed decisions about their future goals. The youth and his or her parents work with the OCFS/NYSCB counselor to set academic and career goals and put a plan in motion to meet those goals. This often includes gaining work experience before graduating from high school, as well as learning self-advocacy and independent living skills that help lead to future success.

The Transition Policy was revised in 2019 and is currently undergoing another revision for 2021. The policy provides information about the requirements, roles, and responsibilities of VR in preparing students with disabilities for competitive integrated employment. It includes updated information regarding pre-employment transition services and outlines the role of the vocational rehabilitation counselor as an active participant in the transition planning process. OCFS/NYSCB's responsibilities lie primarily in providing technical consultation to schools and preparing students for permanent employment. OCFS/NYSCB staff use their knowledge and experience to influence schools to provide services needed to prepare students to participate in postsecondary, employment and community living outcomes.

Some of the ways OCFS/NYSCB works with school personnel in the transition process include:

1. Sharing knowledge of rehabilitation services and outcomes;
2. Identifying the need for involvement by other state agencies, adult service programs, independent living centers, and community-based services whose resources can assist students who are legally blind, their families, and education personnel during the transition planning and service delivery process;
3. Providing information to assist in the selection of vocational goals that are consistent with labor market needs and integrated community living opportunities, including information about:
  - a. Work site accommodations;
  - b. Employer expectations;
  - c. Labor trends and occupational outlooks;
  - d. Job entry qualifications;
  - e. Job placement analysis;
  - f. Work opportunities;
  - g. And other vocationally-related issues.

OCFS/NYSCB supports the Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC) from the National Agenda for the Education of Children and Youths with Visual Impairments which includes skills that are not part of the core curriculum of reading, writing, mathematics, science, and social studies. The ECC is the body of knowledge and skills needed by students with vision loss in order to be successful in schools and in post-graduate pursuits as a result of unique, disability-related needs.

OCFS/NYSCB Children's Consultants and Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors will continue to emphasize to school district personnel, the importance of integrating the ECC into standard academic instruction and routine daily tasks and encourage school staff to work closely with itinerant vision teachers and staff from local private agencies for individuals who are blind to provide the comprehensive services needed by students.

### **Formal Interagency Agreement with the State Educational Agency**

OCFS/NYSCB revised the State Education Agency (SEA) Agreement in 2020. The Joint Agreement between the New York State Education Department's (NYSED) Office of Special Education (OSE) and OCFS/NYSCB will assist in the facilitation of the transition of students who are legally blind, including those with additional disabilities, from school to post-school activities, including the receipt of pre-employment transition services, transition services, and other vocational rehabilitation services. The agreement provides an overview of the purpose, objectives and joint responsibilities of each party in the provision of pre-employment transition and transition services for students who are legally blind.

Specifically, the new agreement:

- 1) strengthens shared efforts to prepare youth who are legally blind for successful careers, community jobs, and independent living;
- 2) outlines a collaborative framework for coordinating State and local services and resources; and
- 3) provides guidance for coordinating plans, policies, and procedures developed to facilitate the transition of students who are legally blind from school to post-school activities, including the receipt of vocational rehabilitation services leading to employment.

and includes the following:

- Information regarding pre-employment transition services;
- Delineate that the responsibilities of OCFS/NYSCB include providing consultation and technical assistance to assist educational agencies in planning for the transition of youth from school to post-school activities;
- Delineate the responsibilities of each party with respect to transition planning in order to facilitate the development of the IEP for each student;
- Articulate the financial responsibilities of each agency involved in the transition process;
- List the procedures for outreach to, and identification of, students with disabilities in need of transition services;
- Document requirements with regard to students with disabilities who are seeking subminimum wage employment; and
- Provide an assurance that neither the SEA nor the LEA will enter into an arrangement with an entity holding a special wage certificate.

### **Roles and Responsibilities**

The joint agreement clarifies that school districts have the primary planning and programmatic responsibilities for the provision of transition services for their students in school. School districts are financially responsible for transition services mandated for school districts by federal or state statutes and regulations. OCFS/NYSCB personnel consult with schools to see that adult services are part of the

planning and decision-making process for students with disabilities in transition. OCFS/NYSCB is responsible only for services written into the IEP by the Committee on Special Education with the direct knowledge and agreement of the OCFS/NYSCB counselor. Transition services for youth are to be aligned with labor market needs, integrated community living opportunities, and coordinated with the adult world to facilitate employment, post-secondary education, and community living outcomes. OCFS/NYSCB may be consulted for vocational evaluation interpretation, occupational opportunities, decision making with the Committee on Special Education, coordination with adult services, peer counseling, role modeling and job placement analysis. OCFS/NYSCB will provide pre-employment transition services if they are beyond the scope of the special education program and within the scope of VR services. Assessments for in-school youth may be purchased by OCFS/NYSCB when existing assessments fail to provide adequate information for the counselor to determine OCFS/NYSCB eligibility or to develop plans for OCFS/NYSCB services. If the student needs specific vocational services to prepare for employment upon exiting school, OCFS/NYSCB will fund these services.

### **Procedures for Outreach**

OCFS/NYSCB and OSE will continue to work together to implement consistent policies and procedures for transition planning and services, including, but not limited to, student referral and access to VR services, including pre-employment transition services and transition services. OCFS/NYSCB collaborates with school districts and other state agencies to create a coordinated approach to the provision of all transition services and to eliminate the duplication of assessments, services, and reporting requirements, and to promote increased access to work-based learning opportunities for students who are legally blind. The agreement specifically states that local school districts are responsible for providing transition services that improve academic and functional achievement and facilitate the movement of students with disabilities from school to post-school activities, including but not limited to, post-secondary education, vocational education, employment, continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, and community participation. NYSCB will provide Pre-ETS and VR/transition services that help students begin to identify and explore their career interests and will lead to employment outcomes in competitive integrated employment or supported employment.

## **DESCRIPTION e: COOPERATIVE AGREEMENTS WITH PRIVATE NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS**

OCFS/NYSCB establishes cooperative agreements primarily with private non-profit vocational rehabilitation service providers for assessment and training services through three types of outcomes-based contracts: comprehensive services, assistive technology services, and vocational evaluation/placement services. Contractors provide agreed upon assessment and training services within a specific geographic area. Where an individual's needs call for specialized services outside the scope of these contracts, or where there is no service available in a particular geographic area, OCFS/NYSCB district offices seek out additional providers and develop local agreements to obtain the services.

Comprehensive contract services are designed to assist participants with a goal of employment to develop or improve the basic skills they need to successfully seek and maintain employment. For some, this may begin with a referral for low vision services. Providers assess each participant to determine their unique needs. The assessment is followed by services which may include comprehensive and integrated training in basic life skills for preparation for competitive or supported employment, along with pre-vocational (for transition age youth) and vocational training services to prepare participants to seek employment and enter the workforce.

OCFS/NYSCB initiated new five-year contracts for comprehensive services for individuals who are blind on January 1, 2019. With two new contractors approved; Alphapointe and Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired of Northern New York. The total number of providers is now thirty-four, statewide. Changes recommended by the workgroup were incorporated into new contract guidelines and were released to contractors and made available on OCFS/NYSCB's website. Training on the new guidelines was held in each OCFS/NYSCB region. Updated guidelines were posted to the OCFS/NYSCB website, [www.visionloss.ny.gov](http://www.visionloss.ny.gov), and are revised as needed.

Assistive technology contract (ATC) services provide participants with computer and/or computer-related technical training leading to employment. In January 2018, ATC contracts were awarded, through an RFP process, in seven areas of the state: Buffalo, Rochester, Central New York, Capital District, Hudson Valley, New York City, and Hempstead, Long Island for the period January 2018-December 2022. The ATC guidelines, service standards and contracts are currently being revised for issuance January 2023. Participants referred for computer technology services participate in assessment and training to prepare them for post-secondary education, vocational training, and employment. Participants had the opportunity to view a wide selection of appropriate hardware and adaptive software, and to have input into the development of an equipment recommendation to meet their individual needs. NYSCB is currently working on updating the contract and guidelines for bid and implementation for January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2023.

NYSCB conducts quality assurance reviews with all Comprehensive Services Contract providers, ATC providers and placement providers on a regularly scheduled basis. The reviews will cover all contracted services and will measure provider performance against contractual standards and contract guidelines. The quality assurance review includes an off-site review of randomly selected participant case files, a participant satisfaction survey and on-site meetings with direct service staff and administration. A report detailing the results of the review and any recommendations for improvement is shared with the provider and the NYSCB district office(s) in the provider's catchment areas. Training is developed and offered to providers and staff based on areas of need.

OCFS/NYSCB and Helen Keller National Center (HKNC) revamped services to deafblind participants. OCFS/NYSCB and HKNC modeled the contracted services to the Comprehensive Services Contract and aligned the service naming convention to align with the other CRP's outcome/contract services. Rates were determined for each service based on the inclusion of auxiliary services, such as interpreting, audiological aids and on-site time required for the participant to actively engage in services.

In 2012 OCFS/NYSCB began entering into agreements with nonprofit organizations for the provision of benefits advisement services. OCFS/NYSCB currently has 19 vendors approved for the provision of benefits advisement services throughout NYS, three additional providers have been approved to provide this service since 2019. Providers of these services include agencies chartered primarily for provision of services to individuals who are blind, independent living centers, and other agencies that have engaged staff who are trained and certified by the Social Security Administration, by the Cornell Institute of Labor Relations, or by Virginia Commonwealth University. Many of these providers offer advisement not only on Social Security benefits, but also on a host of other benefits which may be affected by entering employment.



## **DESCRIPTION f: ARRANGEMENTS AND COOPERATIVE AGREEMENTS FOR THE PROVISION OF SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES**

The purpose of the OCFS/NYSCB's supported employment program is to enable individuals with the most significant disabilities to achieve and maintain competitive employment in their communities. OCFS/NYSCB continues to serve all eligible individuals who need supported employment services, with a goal of placing as many individuals as possible in employment. In Program Year (PY) 2020, 23 individuals received supported employment services. A total of three participants were successfully placed in supported competitive employment and transitioned to extended supported employment services; the average hourly wage slightly increased from \$9.72/hr. to \$14.25/hr., and the average number of hours worked per week increased from 21.6 to 24.6. Referrals decreased from 12 to 5. **\*Please note data from PY 2021 is not yet available and will be updated in the Final Draft of this report.**

OCFS/NYSCB has four primary goals for PY 2022: the first is to increase the number of individuals placed in supported employment; the second is to maintain hourly wages to at least current minimum wage; the third is to maintain the average number of hours worked at a minimum of 24 hrs./week; and the fourth is to increase referrals. In NYS, the administrative responsibility for supported employment programs is consolidated in the Office of Adult Career and Continuing Education Services (NYSED/ACCES-VR), as established in accordance with Section 3, Chapter 515 of the Laws of New York of 1992. NYSED/ACCES-VR incorporated supported employment into its new Core Rehabilitation Services Contract effective January 1, 2019. Supported Employment is an outcome based-funded model. OCFS/NYSCB works cooperatively with NYSED/ACCES-VR to provide opportunities for supported employment across the state. OCFS/NYSCB staff has been trained on policy and procedure for the supported employment process.

Because blindness is a low incidence disability, OCFS/NYSCB continues to be challenged in anticipating service needs and distributing the limited funds available. The lack of extended services funds further limits the number of individuals who can enter intensive supported employment services. OCFS/NYSCB plans to work more closely with NYSED/ACCES-VR in the future to determine the distribution of funds available for intensive and extended services, while providing information and training to enable staff to better access extended services through the Office for People with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD) or Office of Mental Health (OMH), as appropriate.

OCFS/NYSCB does provide extended supported employment services to youth with the most significant disabilities for a period not to exceed four years. OCFS/NYSCB currently works directly with OPWDD and OMH to transition to extended supported employment services prior to the 24-month limitation of supported employment intensive services.

OCFS/NYSCB continues to maintain case management, program monitoring and oversight responsibilities for the supported employment services provided to OCFS/NYSCB participants. Service providers regularly provide OCFS/NYSCB with individual participant reports, and OCFS/NYSCB staff meets regularly with providers and participants.

OCFS/NYSCB will continue to work with NYSED/ACCES-VR to assess performance on an ongoing basis, participate in on-site reviews, and provide technical assistance or recommend adjustments to contracts as needed.

OCFS/NYSCB, with NYSED/ACCES-VR, continues to take a close look at supported employment caseloads to utilize Title VI-B funds in the most effective manner to assist individuals with most significant disabilities in obtaining competitive employment.

Counselors have been instructed to:

- Conduct comprehensive assessments, including situational assessments, prior to referral for supported employment services in order to increase the likelihood that individuals referred for supported employment will benefit from it. This also allows intensive service dollars to be focused more on job development, placement and training and should allow individuals to complete the intensive phase more quickly.
- Consider the use of natural supports following employment and start to establish eligibility for extended services at the beginning of the planning process. This will maximize the use of limited NYSED/ACCES-VR funding for extended services.

Provider agencies have been instructed to regularly review cases to determine which participants no longer require extended services due to their increased experience and confidence, and the availability of natural supports.

NYSCB provided each office with detailed training on NYSCB supported employment policy and process as well as building bridges with service providers. Due to the pandemic occurring shortly after the training NYSCB will revive the training for Spring 2022.

## **DESCRIPTION g: COORDINATION WITH BUSINESSES**

OCFS/NYSCB will work to increase outreach to businesses and develop relationships that lead to increased opportunities for individuals who are legally blind. OCFS/NYSCB has worked closely with NYSDOL and NYSED to coordinate the effectiveness in serving employers performance measure. An important part of that coordination is representation by OCFS/NYSCB on all 10 regional business engagement teams through NYSDOL. OCFS/NYSCB is represented by area district managers and will allow OCFS/NYSCB direct access to businesses within a community that are working with NYSDOL for services. Through the Effectiveness in Serving Employer measure, NYSCB also has access to NYSDOL's One Stop Operating System (OSOS) which is used to track the measure for all partners statewide. This access allows NYSCB staff to see current businesses, understand their needs, and not duplicate services being provided by another WIOA partner.

OCFS/NYSCB is a member of the National Employment Team (NET) through the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR). CSAVR's NET provides a coordinated approach to serving business customers through business development, business consulting and corporate relations. By establishing partnerships with businesses, OCFS/NYSCB will better match business staffing needs with the skills and interests of participants seeking employment, as well as help business to retain employees who are legally blind. OCFS/NYSCB will continue to develop the connections between both CSAVR as well as businesses.

OCFS/NYSCB also connects with businesses on a regional level through direct outreach by district managers and district office staff. Regional and small businesses are best accessed through a regional approach and local OCFS/NYSCB staff that live and work in the community are often the best resource. District offices will continue to develop relationships with businesses through internships, Work Experience Training opportunities and Work Try-Outs. OCFS/NYSCB will also continue to collaborate with NYSED/ACCES-VR Regional Workforce Coordinators to connect with businesses that have interest in working with VR program individuals. OCFS/NYSCB has held collaborative meetings with local businesses' human resources hiring managers and will continue to foster these relationships through ongoing meetings on a regional basis. OCFS/NYSCB will use these connections to make matches between participant's skills and local job openings.

OCFS/NYSCB has established mechanisms to assist transition age youth to access paid work experiences during their teenage years. OCFS/NYSCB Transition Counselors will continue to work closely with students and businesses to develop appropriate integrated work experiences in local communities. Counselors will also work closely with school staff to coordinate work-based learning experiences for students. Job coaching services will be provided when the vocational rehabilitation counselor has determined that the services are necessary for the individual to benefit from the work experience. Many private agencies for individuals who are blind in NYS have developed pre-employment transition services within the pre-vocational programs that assist students and youth in vocational clarification, job seeking skills, work readiness skills, interviewing preparation and resume writing. Most summer work experiences that have been developed through partnerships with OCFS/NYSCB staff, local businesses, and staff of private agencies for individuals who are blind. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic some work experiences have been available virtually, but many students did not have the opportunity to participate during the summer of 2020. During the summer of 2021 work experiences were readily available for our participants. Some experiences did remain virtual however due to the high rate of job openings throughout NYS youth were able to establish relationships with employers either on their own or

through Community Rehab Providers. Through work experiences it is expected that transition age youth will be able to experience work life, explore careers and fields of interest, and access spending money.

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## **DESCRIPTION h: INTERAGENCY COOPERATION**

OCFS/NYSCB collaborates with OPWDD and OMH in the provision of employment and supported employment services. OCFS/NYSCB plans to work to increase collaboration and communications with partner state agencies and will focus on sharing specific knowledge and expertise in the area of vision loss. The encouragement of a multi-disciplinary approach will be promoted at both a regional and state level.

OCFS/NYSCB will encourage staff to provide in-service presentations for OPWDD and OMH staff regarding blindness, vision rehabilitation therapy, orientation, and mobility, as well as job site accommodations. OCFS/NYSCB recognizes that collaboration with these partner state agencies is integral to the employment success of individuals served by multiple agencies.

NYSCB actively participates in Most Integrated Setting Coordinating Council (MISCC). The MISCC was established by Chapter 551 of the Laws of 2002. The MISCC is responsible for ensuring that New Yorkers of all ages with physical, intellectual, developmental, and mental disabilities receive care and services in the most integrated settings appropriate to their individual needs. The council is currently lead by OMH and NYSCB is also active on the MISCC employment sub-committee. The employment sub-committee is currently in the process of developing goals but will be continuing the work of the Employment First Commission.

OCFS/NYSCB will continue to participate in these initiatives advocating for individuals who are legally blind receiving OCFS/NYSCB services and will continue to work to provide seamless services to participants in conjunction with our partner state agencies.

NYSCB has developed an initiative to work with NYS Veterans Affairs in an effort to provide training to all NYSCB staff on the services available to Veterans. As part of this initiative resources on available services for Veterans will be developed for staff and participants. NYSCB intake practices are being updated to include information gathering about an individual's military service, veteran status, and any Veterans Services they are currently receiving.

## **DESCRIPTION i: COMPREHENSIVE SYSTEM OF PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT: DATA SYSTEM ON PERSONNEL AND PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT**

This plan outlines strategies to update staff credentials so that all staff meets the highest academic standards for their profession.

### **Number of Personnel Employed**

As of June 30, 2021, OCFS/NYSCB employees totaled 121 individuals, resulting in 119.75 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) staff in seven district offices and the home office. The fill level of OCFS/NYSCB is 127 FTE staff. Therefore, the identified vacant positions below that are identified as OCFS/NYSCB having the capacity to fill only eight positions currently, any additional staff above eight FTE must be met with a corresponding decrease in another area or office. OCFS/NYSCB is in the process of filling all vacant positions.

The total number of field staff was 69, with 9 positions vacant. Approximately 3,000 legally blind individuals are active in the Vocational Rehabilitation program at any given time. The average caseload is 67 participants per VRC.

Of the 62 Senior VRC and VRCs in positions, 52 are Certified Rehabilitation Counselors (CRC) or CRC eligible. Staff who are not certified or have elected not to upgrade their credentials will receive Senior VRC sign-off prior to establishing eligibility, signing the IPE (including any amendments and the annual IPE review) and closing cases.

OCFS/NYSCB's current staffing allows OCFS/NYSCB to effectively provide services to all individuals who apply for and are determined eligible for VR services. OCFS/NYSCB is aware that many professional staff intend to retire within the next five years. The result of personnel transactions for calendar year 2020 as they affected each district office is as follows:

- Buffalo – No vacancies;
- Syracuse – One Senior Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor (VRC) position;
- Albany – One Vision Rehabilitation Therapist position is vacant
- White Plains – One Senior VRC position vacant and one VRC position vacant;
- Manhattan – No vacancies;
- Hempstead – no vacancies
- Harlem – No vacancies.

As required, OCFS/NYSCB will request approval to fill any vacancies. OCFS/NYSCB must seek NYS Division of the Budget approval for a waiver from the ongoing state hiring freeze in order to hire any personnel.

### **Staff Five Year Projections**

OCFS/NYSCB estimates that by the year 2023, 31 current VRCs and Senior VRCs will be age 55 or older and eligible to retire. Many of those within retirement age, however, will not have enough time in service to retire at age 55 and will retire at a later time. In using age 55 as a likely retirement age, along

with 30 years of state service, it is estimated that 26 VRCs, Senior VRCs, Orientation and Mobility (O&M) Instructors and Vision Rehabilitation Therapists will retire from OCFS/NYSCB in the next five years, as shown in the table below. All VRCs and Senior VRCs expected to remain will be CRC or CRC eligible.

Using the same formula, it is estimated that three of the five O&M instructors and Rehabilitation Therapists (RT) will retire or leave for other reasons. All vacancies in the O&M and RT disciplines are expected to be replaced.

Row	Job Title	Total Positions	Current Vacancies	Projected Vacancies Over the Next 5 Years
1	Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor	60	7	18
2	Senior Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor	12	2	5
3	O&M Instructor	7	3	2
4	Vision Rehabilitation Therapist	5	4	1

OCFS/NYSCB maintains contact with the three colleges and universities in the state that prepare VRCs as a source for staff positions. In addition, OCFS/NYSCB continues to work closely with the colleges 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.

For the calendar year beginning January 1, 2020 and ending December 31, 2020, the colleges reported the enrollment outlined in the table below.

**\*Please note, this draft version doesn't include updated data for the chart below. OCFS/NYSCB works collaboratively with SED/ACCES-VR on obtaining this data. Data will be updated for the calendar year noted above and be included in the final draft version of this plan.**

Row	Institutions	Students Enrolled	Employees Sponsored by Agency and/or RSA	Graduates Sponsored by Agency and/or RSA	Graduates from the Previous Year
1	Hofstra University	37	0	0	10
2	Hunter College, CUNY	70	0	0	16
3	State University of New York at Buffalo	53	0	0	21
4	Hunter College, CUNY O&M/RT*	19	0	0	3
5	Eligible for Academy Certification of Vision	0	0	0	0

\*\*Row 4: Hunter College of CUNY is the only university preparation program in NYS graduating O&M instructors and VRTs. Graduates from this program are eligible for certification by the Academy for Certification of Vision Rehabilitation and Education Professionals (ACVREP).

### Plan for Recruitment, Preparation and Retention of Qualified Personnel

The following steps describe the ongoing activities to enable OCFS/NYSCB to continue the long-term Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD) plan and develop resources needed to recruit, prepare, and retain qualified personnel in NYS:

1. Continue to develop relationships with distance learning programs to locate curricula that meet the learning styles and needs of OCFS/NYSCB staff. These include video conferencing, videotapes, and/or computer technology.
2. Increase opportunities for staff in-service training.
3. The in-service training coordinator of OCFS/NYSCB manages and evaluates all training programs attended by staff. All in-service training records are maintained electronically. A personnel file is maintained for each staff member containing: name, title, phone number, date hired, district office, college major, and highest degree earned.
4. Continue to recruit qualified VRCs, O&Ms, and RTs including those from diverse backgrounds or who have foreign language skills.
5. Continue to partner with NYSED/ACCES-VR, ACCES-Adult Education, NYSDOL, and OTDA, and other agencies participating in the WIOA Interagency workgroup as applicable, with regard to the CSPD and the long-term training of workforce employees.
6. Provide financial stipends to master's level students who complete an internship program at OCFS/NYSCB as part of their VRC program.
7. Provide financial reimbursement to VRCs maintaining their CRC Certification upon renewal every five years, and for eligible OCFS/NYSCB staff opting to sit for the CRCC examination to obtain certification upon verification of required recertification or initial certification documents.
8. Collaborate with colleges and universities to train O&M Specialists and Vision Rehabilitation Therapists. Graduates will qualify for national certification through the ACVREP or the National Blindness Professional Certification Board (NBPCB). OCFS/NYSCB and stakeholders continue to meet with officials from the University at Buffalo to establish a certificate training program in O&M. The certificate program would be the first of its kind and graduates would be eligible for certification by the ACVREP.

## **Personnel Standards**

### ***Highest Standard for VRCs***

OCFS/NYSCB hires only individuals who meet the NYS Department of Civil Service's personnel standard for VRCs. The standard is:

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

### ***Plans to Retrain Staff Who Do Not Meet the Highest Requirements***

Staff who does not meet the highest academic standards will either have a training plan in place or they will require supervisory approval prior to establishing eligibility, signing the IPE or determining case closure. The NYS Department of Civil Service does not permit OCFS/NYSCB to hire new staff in VR Counselor positions who do not meet the personnel standard.



## ***Staff Development***

OCFS/NYSCB understands the importance of maintaining a well-trained and current workforce. OCFS/NYSCB continues to work to increase training opportunities for counseling staff in identified areas of need as well as integrating a multi-disciplinary approach. Obtaining participant perspective, by participating in events and public forums offered by blindness support agencies, is encouraged when workload and fiscal considerations allow.

NYSCB staff attend workshops, conferences and agency developed training sessions. Training has been offered in counseling, rehabilitation, medical aspects of disability, job placement, rehabilitation technology, cultural diversity, informed choice, the Americans with Disabilities Act, and other topics related to vocational rehabilitation. NYSCB contracts with Adaptive Technology Centers throughout the state. Upon request, the centers provide training to NYSCB staff on new access technology for individuals with disabilities.

Information gained by staff attending conferences or training is shared at staff meetings with local staff. District managers share the information with senior staff at bi-weekly conference calls and quarterly meetings of district managers and information is disseminated to all staff as appropriate.

OCFS/NYSCB participates in an Executive Steering Committee for Diversity Equity and Inclusion. In their ongoing commitment to inclusion and diversity in the workplace, the committee is currently evaluating ways for OCFS/NYSCB to be more inclusive in their recruitment efforts. OCFS/NYSCB has encouraged their staff to participate in sub-committees to promote diversity at OCFS. As part of this initiative training will be provided to all staff on the topics of Implicit Bias and LGBTQ. OCFS/NYSCB Mission Statement was reviewed and is being modified to be inclusive of the population they serve. In PY 2020 an LGBTQ Advisory Committee was formed at NYSCB to develop training and provide resources for Staff. A goal of this committee is to revise the NYSCB intake process to be more inclusive of Gender Identity.

## ***Personnel to Address Individual Communication Needs***

OCFS/NYSCB continues to obtain the services of individuals able to communicate in the native language of individuals who are of limited English proficiency (LEP) or require American Sign Language. Qualified interpreters are hired for services for individuals who are deaf-blind or who require in-person language interpretation. OCFS/NYSCB staff with the required qualifications may be used for this purpose, or sub-contractors with specialty skills may be used.

OCFS/NYSCB also uses the LanguageLine Solutions® telephone interpretation services program that offers interpretation services in over 250 languages.

## ***Coordination of Personnel Development Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act***

OCFS/NYSCB coordinates policy and services relating to transition services for students who are legally blind from school to adult services and begins planning VR services for individuals with disabilities prior to their exiting high school. The coordination of meaningful transition services for students with disabilities from school-age to postsecondary settings is a priority for OCFS/NYSCB and may begin as early as age 10.

OCFS/NYSCB designates VR liaisons to school districts to inform educators on OCFS/NYSCB services and application processes; participates in regional trainings, annual kick-off meetings and/or teacher in-

service trainings with school districts; provides informational pamphlets on OCFS/NYSCB services; and participates in local job fairs where youth with disabilities are seeking employment opportunities.

OCFS/NYSCB and NYSED collaborate on a regular basis to provide guidance to educational agencies and vocational rehabilitation personnel responsible for facilitating transition services, and to provide information about consultation and technical assistance resources to assist schools and related community support entities in planning for transition of students who are legally blind. At the state level, both agencies have designated personnel that provide oversight and leadership for the development of policies, procedures, interagency training, and other state-level partnership activities for transition services. At the local level, VR counselors work closely with school district staff and local school districts have transition to work specialists that collaborate together. OCFS/NYSCB will continue to work closely with schools to enable the smooth transition of students who are legally blind from school to work.

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## **DESCRIPTION J: STATEWIDE ASSESSMENT**

**\*Please note, this draft version doesn't include updated information for this description as the final draft of the NYSCB Statewide Needs Assessment has not been completed to date. A copy of the final report will be included in the final draft version of this plan.**

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## DESCRIPTION k: ANNUAL ESTIMATES

There are numerous factors that impact an individual's choice to seek vocational rehabilitation services to obtain employment. There is currently no method to accurately assess how many of the legally blind individuals in NYS would apply for OCFS/NYSCB services and be found eligible for services. According to the American Community Survey, there are 19,342,600 individuals in NYS. The prevalence rate of visual impairment is 1.8% which results in an estimated 356,700 individuals reporting a visual disability. For individuals between the ages of 16 and 64, there is an estimated 176,000 individuals reporting a visual disability. Because the data includes individuals who are visually impaired and not only individuals who are legally blind, it can provide some useful information to estimate the number of individuals who would be eligible for services from OCFS/NYSCB; however, it cannot be used as a benchmark since OCFS/NYSCB only serves individuals who are legally blind. Therefore, the best estimate of the number of individuals in the state who are eligible for VR services is based on historical data as noted below.

OCFS/NYSCB provides a full range of vocational rehabilitation services to eligible individuals. OCFS/NYSCB has evaluated data on the number of individuals who applied for services, the number of people found eligible for VR services and the number of individuals served in the past three years. Based on this evaluation, OCFS/NYSCB estimates that 1,400 individuals will be found eligible during both Program Years 2021 and 2022. OCFS/NYSCB anticipates serving 4,020 individuals in each of these program years. Of the 4,020 individuals expected to receive services, OCFS/NYSCB expects that ,000 individuals will be served using Title I Vocational Rehabilitation funds at a total estimated cost of \$29,000,000 and an average cost of services of \$7,250. OCFS/NYSCB expects that the remaining 20 individuals in each FFY will be served using a State VR Comparable Benefits Provider., Title VI, Part B Supported Employment funds are transferred to SED/ACCES-VR and are used for their participants in the Supported Employment program.

OCFS/NYSCB is not implementing an Order of Selection.

Category	Title I or Title VI	Estimated Funds	Estimated Number to Be Served	Average Cost of Services
Vocational Rehabilitation	Title I	\$29,000,000	4,000	\$7,250
Supported Employment	Title VI	\$ 0	0	0
Totals		\$29,000,000	4,000	\$7,250

## DESCRIPTION I: STATE GOAL & PRIORITIES

OCFS/NYSCB updated the goals and priorities developed for the 2022 State Plan Modification. These goals and priorities were developed using feedback from OCFS/NYSCB workgroups, , the State Rehabilitation Council, participant input from OCFS/NYSCB open forums, the results of the Statewide Needs Assessment and NYSC administrative priorities. RSA conducted onsite monitoring in April 2018, NYSCB continues to move through each of the corrective action plans with RSA, and has taken time in 2020 and 2021 to meet with RSA on each individual CAP. The policies and procedures implemented as a result of the closing of the corrective action plans have been incorporated into NYSCB's goals and strategies.

Goal 1: Improve and expand participant services.

Goal 2: Monitor cases closed in Competitive Integrated Employment for one year after closure and work to increase baseline performance measures, including retention with employer during second and fourth quarters after exit quarter by 1% each Program Year.

Goal 3: Promote awareness of NYSCB services for individuals who are blind throughout New York State.

Goal 4: Increase staff capacity to deliver quality services to participants.

## **DESCRIPTION m: ORDER OF SELECTION**

*Describe:*

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

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

NYSCB is not implementing an Order of Selection.

**B. The justification for the order.**

NYSCB is not implementing an Order of Selection.

**C. The service and outcome goals.**

NYSCB is not implementing an Order of Selection.

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

NYSCB is not implementing an Order of Selection.

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

NYSCB is not implementing an Order of Selection.

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

NYSCB is not implementing an Order of Selection.

## DESCRIPTION n: GOALS AND PLANS FOR DISTRIBUTION OF TITLE VI FUNDS

The purpose of the OCFS/NYSCB supported employment program is to enable individuals with the most significant disabilities to achieve and maintain competitive employment in their communities. OCFS/NYSCB continues to serve all eligible individuals who need supported employment services, with a goal of placing as many individuals as possible in employment. In Program Year (PY) 2020, 23 individuals received supported employment services. A total of three participants were successfully placed in supported competitive employment and transitioned to extended supported employment services. The average hourly wage slightly increased from \$9.72/hr. to \$14.25/hr., and the average number of hours worked per week increased from 21.6 to 24.6. Referrals decreased from 12 to 5. **\*Please note data from PY 2021 is not yet available and will be updated in the Final Draft of this report.**

1. OCFS/NYSCB has four primary goals for PYs 2023 & 2024: the first is to increase the number of individuals placed in supported employment; the second is to maintain hourly wages to at least the current minimum wage; the third is to maintain the average number of hours worked at a minimum of 24 hrs./week; and the fourth is to increase referrals. In NYS, the administrative responsibility for supported employment programs is consolidated NYSED/ACCES-VR, as established in accordance with Section 3, Chapter 515 of the Laws of New York of 1992. NYSED/ACCES-VR incorporated supported employment into its new Core Rehabilitation Services Contract effective January 1, 2014. Supported Employment is now an outcome based-funded model. OCFS/NYSCB works cooperatively with NYSED/ACCES-VR to provide opportunities for supported employment across the state.
2. OCFS/NYSCB offers extended services to youth with the most significant disabilities through the NYSED/ACCES-VR CRS contract network of providers. OCFS/NYSCB currently works directly with OPWDD and OMH to transition to extended supported employment services prior to the 24-month limitation of supported employment intensive services. OCFS/NYSCB continues to maintain case management, program monitoring and oversight responsibilities for the supported employment services provided to OCFS/NYSCB participants. Service providers regularly provide OCFS/NYSCB with individual participant reports, and OCFS/NYSCB staff meets regularly with providers and participants.

OCFS/NYSCB will continue to work with NYSED/ACCES-VR to assess performance on an ongoing basis, participate in on-site reviews, and provide technical assistance or recommend adjustments to contracts as needed.

OCFS/NYSCB, with NYSED/ACCES-VR, continues to take a close look at supported employment caseloads to utilize Title VI-B funds in the most effective manner to assist individuals with most significant disabilities in obtaining competitive employment.

Counselors have been instructed to:

- Conduct comprehensive assessments, including situational assessments, prior to referral for supported employment services in order to increase the likelihood that individuals referred for supported employment will benefit from it. This also allows intensive service dollars to be focused more on job development, placement and training and should allow individuals to complete the intensive phase more quickly. Counselors are also encouraged to collaborate with supported employment providers so that they may better understand vision loss and employment. NYSCB provides other vision related wrap around services to participants while in supported employment to increase opportunities for success.

- Consider the use of natural supports following employment and start to establish eligibility for extended services at the beginning of the planning process. This will maximize the use of limited NYSED/ACCES-VR funding for extended services.

Provider agencies have been instructed to regularly review cases to determine which participants no longer require extended services due to their increased experience and confidence, and the availability of natural supports.

NYSCB provided comprehensive in person training to each district office before the start of the pandemic and will develop a refresher training for Spring 2022 due to the proximity of the training and start of the pandemic.

Because blindness is a low incidence disability, OCFS/NYSCB continues to be challenged in anticipating service needs and distributing the limited funds available. The lack of extended services funds further limits the number of individuals who can enter intensive supported employment services. OCFS/NYSCB plans to work more closely with NYSED/ACCES-VR in the future to determine the distribution of funds available for intensive and extended services, while providing information and training to enable staff to better access extended services through OPWDD or OMH, as appropriate.



## **DESCRIPTION O: STATE'S STRATEGIES**

These goals and priorities for Program Years 2022 and 2023 have been developed using feedback from OCFS/NYSCB workgroups, the Executive Board, the State Rehabilitation Council, participant input from OCFS/NYSCB open forums, the results of the Comprehensive Needs Assessment, the Executive Board and OCFS/NYSCB administrative priorities.

### **Goal 1: Improve and expand participant services.**

#### ***Strategies***

1. Develop additional vocational training programs that meet the needs of participants and businesses.
2. Continue to foster and expand the current working relationships with OPWDD and OMH on both the local and state level.
3. Improve participant access to ESL training programs, literacy and the High School Equivalency (HSE) test prep programs and educational services.
4. Utilize information gathered during the Quality Assurance process to identify regionally-specific needs and increase activities in those areas to support participant outcomes and collaboration between OCFS/NYSCB and partner providers.

### **Goal 2: Monitor cases closed in Competitive Integrated Employment for one year after closure and work to increase baseline performance measures, including retention with employer during second and fourth quarters after exit quarter by 1% each Program Year.**

#### ***Strategies***

1. Increase collaborative efforts with community rehabilitation providers in regard to business development efforts, increase partnerships, face-to-face contacts and regional relationships with businesses to increase their awareness of the skills and abilities of individuals who are blind and the services provided by OCFS/NYSCB.
2. Expand partnerships with America's Job Centers in addition to the other core partners; NYSDOL, Adult Career and Continuing Education Services- Adult Education and NYSED/ACCES-VR, to increase access to services needed by OCFS/NYSCB participants.
3. Support and promote the modernization of the Business Enterprise Program in order to increase employment opportunities and successful outcomes.
4. Work with National Industries for the Blind to develop competitive integrated employment opportunities in the Service sector.

### **Goal 3: Promote awareness of OCFS/NYSCB services for individuals who are blind throughout NYS.**

#### ***Strategies***

1. Continue to promote awareness of OCFS/NYSCB services to the populations identified as underserved in the Statewide Needs Assessment.

2. Promote awareness of OCFS/NYSCB services through participation in a variety of community events including job fairs and culturally specific outreach activities; through social media exposure; through direct outreach to eye care providers; and through distribution of marketing materials in multiple language and formats to a wide variety of entities.

#### **Goal 4: Increase staff capacity to deliver quality services to participants.**

##### ***Strategies***

1. Encourage staff to attend supervision and management training in connection with diversity, equity and inclusion and working with diverse populations.
2. Continue employee orientation programming in all regional offices to include training on visual impairment, blindness and low vision.
3. Increase the regional workforce development conducted at a regional, district office level, including promoting OCFS/NYSCB with community businesses and working with providers of employment services.
4. Expand services and increase awareness of services available to individuals who are deaf-blind by encouraging staff to participate in training, events and programs offered by the New York Deaf-Blind Collaborative.

OCFS/NYSCB has not identified any impediments to the achievement of these goals and priorities.

#### **Provision of Assistive Technology Services and Devices**

OCFS/NYSCB provides assistive technology services and devices to individuals during each stage of the rehabilitation process through ATC contracts and through private vendors. The outcome-based services of ATC Readiness Evaluation, ATC Assessment and ATC Training provide a comprehensive and rigorous array of assessments and training with the goal of preparing participants for success in educational or training settings and employment. AT Centers, as well as a network of more than 30 private assistive technology trainers, provide onsite needs evaluation and training for individuals who are unable to travel to a center or whose needs require intervention at their education or employment site.

OCFS/NYSCB has begun to survey documentation submitted at the end of the Readiness Assessment and the AT Assessment and Training to determine whether AT Centers are conducting assessments and services in accordance with the *Assistive Technology Center Standards Manual*.

A list of approved private vendors is posted on the OCFS/NYSCB website.

Two OCFS/NYSCB loan closets also provide statewide access to loaner equipment while a participant is awaiting delivery of equipment purchased for them for educational or training purposes or employment.

In addition, OCFS/NYSCB provides assistive technology devices and training to current managers and manager trainees in the Randolph-Sheppard Business Enterprise Program to enable them to manage their newsstands and food service operations in accordance with industry standard.

## **Outreach Services**

OCFS/NYSCB has developed contract guidelines for a new Outreach/Case Finding component that establishes a reimbursable outcome for outreach to underserved communities. The service component was implemented in June 2015 and continues in the re-issued 2019-2023 Comprehensive Services Contract. Specific criteria were developed that needed to be met in order for the agency to receive funding and referring an individual for OCFS/NYSCB services. The goal of this new service is to promote the availability of VR services to New Yorkers who are legally blind who are not yet known to OCFS/NYSCB. One hundred and forty individuals met the criteria for case finding during PY20 and a portion of PY 2021 . These individuals were not previously known to OCFS/NYSCB and after submitting an application, were found eligible for VR services. This is an increase from 61 cases meeting this criteria during FFYs 18 and 19.

## **Working with Community Rehabilitation Programs**

OCFS/NYSCB continues to work closely with community rehabilitation providers to create new pre-vocational, pre-employment transition services and vocational training programs for both adults and transition-age youth. In addition, OCFS/NYSCB district offices engage new providers when specialized training is required for a participant to reach their vocational goal. OCFS/NYSCB also conducts both quality assurance and curriculum reviews so that existing programs continue to provide quality programming that prepares participants to enter the workforce.

OCFS/NYSCB continues to encourage development of vocational training programs that meet the requirements of business and will work with providers to create and approve curricula, especially in fields with jobs in demand where vocational training has not previously been available.

OCFS/NYSCB continues to support community rehabilitation providers in the development of pre-vocational programs for youth ages 10-13. OCFS/NYSCB is also focused on increasing pre-employment transition services for youth ages 14-21.

OCFS/NYSCB conducts meetings with directors of rehabilitation and agency administrators throughout its service regions to discuss quality of service delivery and new programming needs on a regular basis.

OCFS/NYSCB and community provider staff continues to meet annually at the Vision Rehabilitation Institute to learn and discuss issues related to blindness and employment.

## **Working with the Statewide Workforce Investment System to Assist Individuals with Disabilities**

1. Efforts to connect with Disability Resource Coordinators (DRCs) in America's Job Centers and to participate in LWDBs serve multiple purposes: connecting OCFS/NYSCB to businesses, promoting knowledge about OCFS/NYSCB and its services, and connecting job seekers to services at the job centers which may lead to more competitive outcomes. OCFS/NYSCB will work with the core State Plan partners to implement the WIOA related strategies outlined in the Combined State Plan.
2. Participation by OCFS/NYSCB staff in Chapter 515 meetings allows discussions among OCFS/NYSCB, NYSED/ACCES-VR, OPWDD, and OMH about the challenges facing mutual participants including minorities and individuals who are deaf-blind and those in more isolated communities. The group

works to achieve more effective transition from pre-employment programs to employment, identify barriers to participation in employment and distribute services to achieve equitable access. In planning and coordinating activities, including training, the group will help staff to increase skills needed to help participants achieve integrated employment while increasing knowledge and access to each other's services.

3. By supporting increased use of benefits planning through Independent Living Centers, DRCs and other qualified resources, OCFS/NYSCB anticipates that more participants will choose careers, and work hours, which will allow them to go off SSA benefits and achieve economic self-sufficiency. In addition, OCFS/NYSCB has signed a Partnership Plus agreement with the OMH Administrative Employment Network (AEN). This will increase opportunities for participants to obtain continued support to maintain their jobs after case closure. OCFS/NYSCB works with NYSED/ACCES-VR to allocate contract capacity for Supported Employment services to try to assure the services are available to individuals with most significant disabilities seeking those services.

### **Achieving Goals and Priorities Consistent with the Comprehensive Needs Assessment**

OCFS/NYSCB developed strategies and goals based on recommendations and findings from the recently conducted Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA). OCFS/NYSCB will continue to engage with Disability Resource Coordinators (DRCs) in America's Job Centers, especially in rural areas. Rural participants may need to overcome transportation and location issues and when possible, using these sites for meetings and job leads, a local perspective can be provided and additional support generated for a participant to achieve an employment outcome.

The CSNA also identified an underserved participant group as those with English as a Second Language (ESL). A goal of OCFS/NYSCB has been identified as increasing and improving participant access to ESL training programs. Marketing will continue to include the provision of marketing materials in multiple languages as well as be distributed through a variety of community events including culturally specific events.

As identified in the CSNA, OCFS/NYSCB has included goals and strategies to increase vocational and job skills training, also taking into account labor market trends and growing fields with higher rates of employment needs.

### **Overcoming Barriers to Equitable Access and Participation in Vocational Rehabilitation**

Several of the strategies identified in the State Plan are geared toward overcoming barriers to equitable access to and participation in VR and supported employment services including strategies to develop additional training programs, improve access to English as a Second Language training programs, the expansion of pre-vocational services for youth and to increase the awareness of services among minority populations by providing information in different languages.

During the COVID-19 global pandemic, and throughout PYS 20 and 21, NYSCB and partner providers worked collaboratively to provide services, as appropriate, in a virtual format. As a result of the increase use of virtual service provision, many participants that would have experienced barriers in regard to transportation, location of programming, and residing in rural areas were able to participate in programs they otherwise would have been unable to. NYSCB saw increased participation in remote service provision and programs that were conducted virtually and will work to ensure these options, are available in the future, as appropriate to support overcoming these access barriers.

## **Performance Accountability Measures**

Many of the strategies identified in this State Plan align with the performance accountability measures under section 116 of WIOA. In particular, the strategies associated with improving employment outcomes, preparing youth for employment, and engaging the business community will support improving performance on the performance accountability measures. NYSCB continues to increase the reporting and data collection for Measurable Skills Gains as documented in the Appendix 2: Performance Goals for the Core Programs.

## **Use of Innovation and Expansion Funds**

OCFS/NYSCB will continue to support the NYSBC State Rehabilitation Council's initiatives and meetings. The Council meets four times annually and Innovation and Expansion funds are used to support the meetings and their efforts and initiatives.

OCFS/NYSCB used innovation and expansion funds during PY 2020 and 2021 to support participants in pre-employment transition skills programs at the Visions Rehabilitation Center in NYS and anticipates to continue to use Innovation and Expansion funds for this program in PYs 2022 and 2023. The programs are run by VISIONS Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired. The 4-week summer Pre-ETS program focuses on helping students begin to identify their occupational interests and develop the skills to reach their goals. The 15-week program is designed to provide vocational skills training combined with work readiness skills to prepare our youth for the world of work. The program has expanded to include additional certification programs, work-based learning experiences and a summer session in addition to fall and spring. Students are enrolled in either Rockland County BOCES certificate programs or Rockland County Community College certificate programs. Vocational training program options for certification include Administrative Professional, Certified Nursing Assistant, IT Support Professional and Bookkeeping in addition to many other options. OCFS/NYSCB had thirty-two students participate in the programs.

OCFS/NYSCB expanded residential services during PY 20, Innovations and Expansion funds will continue to be used to support the residential contracts during PYs 22 and 23. These services support participants with the most significant disabilities and service needs. OCFS/NYSCB created and developed a request for proposals available to all residential programming opportunities for participants who are blind across the nation. Based on the responses, OCFS/NYSCB was able to establish relationships and develop residential contracts for thirteen programs across the country. NYSCB recognized the need for residential services programs for participants who are legally blind. Residential programming provides more intensive, integrated services for participants that need more individualized attention and structure to make progress towards their goals of employment and independence.

## **DESCRIPTION p: EVALUATION AND REPORTS OF PROGRESS: VR AND SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT GOALS**

### **Goal 1: Improve and expand participant services**

1. Develop additional vocational training programs that meet the needs of participants and businesses.

OCFS/NYSCB updates the training required to become a licensed BEP manager to keep up with industry standards and changes in technology. Training focuses on practical application of materials learned and also incorporates Hadley BEP Licensee Training offering online curriculum meant to maximize hands-on practice. All Comprehensive Service Contractors approved to provide the service of Vocational Skills Training were required to submit new curricula for the programs they would provide under the service and were approved by senior management prior to implementation.

2. Continue to foster and expand the current working relationships with OPWDD and OMH on both the local and state level.

OCFS/NYSCB staff continues to build relationships with community rehabilitation providers and partner state agencies to increase referrals for supported employment (SE) services. OCFS/NYSCB staff received SE training and discussed the importance of OPWDD and OMH in the provision of services. As part of that initiative, OCFS/NYSCB reached out and presented on OCFS/NYSCB and vision loss to many of the general Community Rehabilitation Providers (CRPs). OPWDD in particular has been an ongoing partner and presented to the children's counselors and transition counselors on OPWDD services including vocational services and eligibility.

NYSCB continues to be represented on the MISCC (Most Integrated Setting Coordinating Council). Opportunities for interaction continue during ongoing meetings. NYSCB actively participates in Most Integrated Setting Coordinating Council (MISCC). The MISCC was established by Chapter 551 of the Laws of 2002. The MISCC is responsible for ensuring that New Yorkers of all ages with physical, intellectual, developmental, and mental disabilities receive care and services in the most integrated settings appropriate to their individual needs. The council is currently lead by OMH and NYSCB is also active on the MISCC employment sub-committee. The employment sub-committee is currently in the process of developing goals but will be continuing the work of the Employment First Commission.

3. Improve participant access to English as a Second Language training programs, literacy and the high school equivalency test prep programs and educational services.

NYSCB will continue to support the State Rehabilitation Councils advocacy efforts for a fully accessible TASC™ for blind state residents.

**Goal 2: Increase the number of competitive employment outcomes using Program Year 2018 data on the number of competitive employment outcomes as a baseline.**

1. Increase collaborative efforts with community rehabilitation providers in regard to business development efforts, increase partnerships and regional relationships with businesses to increase their awareness of the skills and abilities of individuals who are blind, and the services provided by OCFS/NYSCB.

NYSCB has representation on the 10 local workforce business engagement teams across NYS. While there was a delay in meetings NYSCB is poised to regroup and work with local business and state partners to meet the needs of business as the state pivots out of the pandemic. NYSCB staff also have access at the local office level to NYSDOL's One Stop Operating System (OSOS) to enter business engagement information as well as gather the most up to date information on a business that may be being served by another WIOA partner. All business engagement data in NYS is being gathered in the one system.

For PY 2020, the NYSCB Quality Assurance team conducted a follow up review for one CRP.. The team also conducted reviews for two other CRPs. During PY 20 additional reviews were conducted to evaluate the efficiency of providing remote services during COVID. Reviews included surveys with both participants and providers. Reviews on remote service provision during the global pandemic evaluated a range of services throughout the state.. Late summer of 2020, NYSCB held open forums on the provision of remote services during the pandemic, these forums included feedback from participants, stakeholders, advisory bodies and service providers. .

During PY 2021, NYSCB Quality Assurance team will continue to conduct agency reviews for CSC, ATC and Placement services contracts. The NYSCB QA team will continue to review in-person service provision as well as any services being provided virtually.. Participant satisfaction surveys will continue to be conducted.

2. Continue to work with the National Employment Team (NET) of the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR) and other employment networks to improve employment options for OCFS/NYSCB participants.

OCFS/NYSCB continues to have contact and gather business leads from the National Employment Team through CSAVR. This connection puts OCFS/NYSCB in direct contact with businesses interested in working with VR and allows those connections to then be shared at a regional level to access OCFS/NYSCB's talent pool.

OCFS/NYSCB also coordinates its own placement consortium in the New York City area. This group consists of all of the placement providers as well as other vision loss community stakeholders. The group gathers every six weeks to share business leads and best practices. Businesses and community resources are also brought into each meeting to share information and help the staff and CRPs better understand opportunities for collaboration.

3. Expand partnerships with America's Job Centers as well as the four core partners (NYSDOL, NYSED Adult Education and ACCES-VR), to increase access to services needed by OCFS/NYSCB participants.

OCFS/NYSCB continues to build bridges with each of the 96 career centers across NYS. OCFS/NYSCB developed an introduction to OCFS/NYSCB training and has shared that with staff at each center in the region. These trainings are provided by local OCFS/NYSCB staff who would then be in the region working with that center. OCFS/NYSCB now has staff sharing space and meeting participants in a number of centers and continues to be a resource for general Workforce Development staff. NYSCB also encouraged CRPs to work directly with the local career centers through changes in the placement services contract. NYSCB looks forward to increasing connections when the physical career centers reopen to job seekers.

4. Support and promote the Business Enterprise Program (BEP) in an effort to increase employment opportunities and successful outcomes.

Prior to the pandemic OCFS/NYSCB held joint staff meetings that included VR and BEP staff to work on increasing VR participant referrals to BEP as well as to increase BEP manager's hiring rate of OCFS/NYSCB VR participants seeking competitive integrated employment. These meetings were put on hold in 2020 but are scheduled to resume in late 2021. The OCFS/NYSCB VR/BEP liaison group previously met via teleconference quarterly to discuss BEP processes, training program schedules, discusses concerns and provide feedback and collaboratively work to improve the BEP referral and training process. These meetings were put on hold in 2020 due to the pandemic and are scheduled to resume in late 2021.

OCFS/NYSCB continued to address issues pertaining to program expansion through active participation with the State Committee of Blind Vendors.

5. Work with National Industries for the Blind (NIB) to develop competitive integrated employment opportunities in the Service sector.

OCFS/NYSCB is actively working with NIB subsidiary Empire State Employment Resources for the Blind, to develop a three-year strategic plan highlighting strategy to develop Competitive Integrated Employment.

### **Goal 3: Promote awareness of OCFS/NYSCB services for individuals who are blind throughout NYS**

1. Continue to promote OCFS/NYSCB services to the populations identified as underserved in the Statewide Needs Assessment.

OCFS/NYSCB has increased the promotion of services in underserved, rural regions by advertising in local news publication and free shopper magazines in their "For the Community" sections. Letters were sent to eye doctors and school districts in underserved and rural areas of NYS to introduce and expand knowledge of OCFS/NYSCB services.

NYSCB has focused on improving the direct outreach to eye providers across the state to strengthen and expand the promotion of services. Through this initiative NYSCB has been able to increase awareness of services available to blind residents of New York State.

2. Promote awareness of OCFS/NYSCB services through participation in a variety of community events including job fairs and culturally specific outreach activities; social media exposure; direct outreach to eye care providers; and distribution of marketing materials in multiple languages and formats to a wide variety of entities.



OCFS/NYSCB has presented at many regional agencies such as Catholic Charities of Schoharie County and a newly developed Albany White Cane Day, which occurred virtually in October 2020. Various cultural and awareness days are attended by OCFS/NYSCB staff statewide.

OCFS/NYSCB has representation at NYS legislative disability awareness days, and regional job fairs. OCFS/NYSCB has a representative on each of the regional Business Engagement teams across the state and regional NYSDOL job fair information is shared. District Office Managers are also on the distribution list generated by NYSDOL for job fairs occurring within their territory.

In conjunction with the National Library Service for the Blind, OCFS/NYSCB's VR intake materials are being converted to audio cartridges and are going to be available to the public in this new widely accessible format.

#### **Goal 4: Increase staff capacity to deliver quality service to participants**

1. Encourage staff to attend supervision and management training in connection with succession planning.

Continue new employee orientation programming in all regional offices to include training on visual impairment, blindness, and low vision.

Increase the regional workforce development conducted at a regional, district office level, including promoting OCFS/NYSCB with community businesses and working with providers of employment services.

Expand services and increase awareness of services available to individuals who are deaf-blind by encouraging staff to participate in training, events, and programs offered by the Deaf-Blind Collaborative (DBC).

In partnership with the Helen Keller National Center (HKNC), OCFS/NYSCB:

- Attends and acts as presenters at DBC trainings, workshops and events;
- Collaborates on OCFS/NYSCB participant cases;
- Attends webinars;
- Shares and observes each other's programs and curricula;
- Cross refers participants, accessing many services from DBC and OCFS/NYSCB; and
- Receives direct consultations and accesses information and referrals .

DBC maintains an ongoing relationship with Laquanda Community College (LCC) for training in deaf education.

OCFS/NYSCB has also sponsored participant and counselor staff for training via this DBC and LCC partnership.

OCFS/NYSCB evaluates progress toward the achievement of goals and priorities on an ongoing basis. OCFS/NYSCB is reporting on the goals and objectives identified in the 2020-2023 NYSCB Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) State Plan. During PYs 19 & 20, OCFS/NYSCB placed 344 and 236 individuals in competitive integrated employment respectively.. The average hourly wage in PY 19 was \$22.76/hour and for PY 20 \$23.35/hour. Due to the global COVID-19 pandemic competitive integrated employment outcomes were likely impacted.

NYSCB was mostly successful in achieving goals and priorities set in the State Plan. One area that needs continual development is Language Access. An increased demand for VR services by non-English speakers has increased awareness of the need to develop vendors and resources outside of Language Line Solutions (R). This was also indicated as an underserved population in the recently conducted CSNA, and efforts will continue to provide better access to services by this and other identified underserved populations.

OCFS/NYSCB outcomes and services were greatly impacted by the global COVID-19 pandemic. In March of 2020 and throughout much of 2021, OCFS/NYSCB's employee base was working from home. Social distancing measures created a significant impact on the ability to gather with others. The inability to provide one-on-one direct services impacted the service provision OCFS/NYSCB and our partner providers were accustomed to. OCFS/NYSCB did issue guidance on the provision and approval of services and outcomes in a remote modality for some services, as appropriate; As numbers and statistics on infection and vaccination rates came in remote services were modified appropriately. OCFS/NYSCB did have a decrease in competitive employment outcomes as a result of the pandemic, however the full impact on outcome and data is not fully understood. NYSCB will work to determine the impact and implement goals and strategies in forthcoming plans to work on increasing employment outcomes.

### **Provision of Assistive Technology Services and Devices**

OCFS/NYSCB provides assistive technology services and devices to individuals during each stage of the rehabilitation process through ATC contracts and through private vendors. The outcome-based services of ATC Readiness Evaluation, ATC Assessment and ATC Training provide a comprehensive and rigorous array of assessments and training with the goal of preparing students for success in school and employment. AT centers as well as a network of more than 30 private assistive technology trainers provide onsite needs evaluation and training for individuals who are unable to travel to a center or whose needs require intervention at their education or employment site.

Two OCFS/NYSCB loan closets also provide statewide access to loaner equipment while a participant is awaiting delivery of equipment purchased for them for school or employment.

In addition, OCFS/NYSCB provides assistive technology devices and training to current managers and manager trainees in the Randolph-Sheppard Business Enterprise Program to enable them to manage their newsstands and food service operations in accordance with industry standard.

### **Outreach Services**

OCFS/NYSCB has developed contract guidelines for a new Outreach/Case Finding component that establishes a reimbursable outcome for outreach to underserved communities. The service component was implemented in June 2015 and continues in the re-issued 2019-2023 Comprehensive Services Contract. Specific criteria were developed that needed to be met in order for the agency to receive funding and referring an individual for OCFS/NYSCB services. The goal of this new service is to promote the availability of VR services to New Yorkers who are legally blind who are not yet known to OCFS/NYSCB. One hundred and forty individuals met the criteria for case finding during PY20 and a portion of PY 2021. These individuals were not previously known to OCFS/NYSCB and after submitting an application, were found eligible for VR services. This is an increase from 61 cases meeting these criteria during FFYs 18 and 19.

## **Working with Community Rehabilitation Programs**

OCFS/NYSCB continues to work closely with community rehabilitation providers to create new pre-vocational and vocational training programs for both adults and transition-age youth. OCFS/NYSCB district offices engage new providers when specialized training is required for a participant to reach his/her vocational goal. OCFS/NYSCB also conducts both quality assurance and curriculum reviews so that existing programs continue to provide quality programming that prepares participants to enter the workforce.

OCFS/NYSCB has begun to survey documentation submitted at the end of the Readiness Assessment and the AT Assessment and Training to verify that AT centers are conducting assessments and services in accordance with the *Assistive Technology Center Standards Manual*.

OCFS/NYSCB continues to encourage development of vocational training programs that meet the requirements of business and will work with providers to create and approve curricula, especially in fields with jobs in demand where vocational training has not previously been available.

OCFS/NYSCB continues to support community rehabilitation providers in the development of pre-vocational programs beginning with youth at age 10 and continuing through the transition years. These programs will provide both variety and increasing complexity so that youth are well prepared for post-secondary education and training.

New placement contracts reflecting the expectations and requirements for service delivery were implemented on January 1, 2020 for a five-year period. New services were added to the contract in order to increase employer engagement and participant advancement in employment.

The new employer outcome service, which is achieved when a participant is successfully placed with an employer where an NYSCB participant has never been placed at before. For PY 20 & 21, there were 21 outcomes obtained, meaning 21 participants were successfully closed at employers previously unknown to NYSCB.

An outcome related to Substantial Gainful Activity (SGA), was achieved 31 times in PYs 20 & 21. This outcome is achieved when a successful placement in which the participant is engaging in Substantial Gainful Activity (SGA) for a minimum of two months is eligible for the Substantial Gainful Activity Outcome service.

OCFS/NYSCB conducts meetings with directors of rehabilitation and agency administrators throughout its service regions to discuss quality of service delivery and new programming needs on a regular basis.

OCFS/NYSCB and community provider staff continues to meet annually at the Vision Rehabilitation Institute to learn and discuss issues related to blindness and employment, describing strategies to improve the performance of the state with respect to the evaluation standards and performance indicators. In 2021 the VRI was held virtually through eleven different sessions from January through June. The opportunity to provide these meetings virtually increased the attendance among NYSCB staff and providers and provided a wider variety of topics.

## **Working with the Statewide Workforce Investment System to Assist Individuals with Disabilities**

1. Efforts to connect with Disability Resource Coordinators (DRCs) in America's Job Centers and to participate in Local Workforce Development Boards (LWDBs) serve multiple purposes: connecting OCFS/NYSCB to businesses, promoting knowledge about OCFS/NYSCB and its services, and connecting job seekers to services at the job centers which may lead to more competitive outcomes. OCFS/NYSCB will work with the core State Plan partners to implement the WIOA related strategies outlined in the Combined State Plan.
2. Participation by OCFS/NYSCB staff in Chapter 515 meetings allows discussions among OCFS/NYSCB, NYSED/ACCES-VR, the Office for People with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD), and the Office of Mental Health (OMH) about the challenges facing mutual participants including minorities and individuals who are deaf-blind and those in more isolated communities. The group works to achieve more effective transition from pre-employment programs to employment, identify barriers to participation in employment and distribute services to achieve equitable access. In planning and coordinating activities, including training, the group will help staff to increase skills needed to help participants achieve integrated employment while increasing knowledge and access to each other's services.
3. By supporting increased use of benefits planning through Independent Living Centers, DRCs and other qualified resources, OCFS/NYSCB anticipates that more participants will choose careers, and work hours, which will allow them to go off SSA benefits and achieve economic self-sufficiency. OCFS/NYSCB currently has 19 vendors approved for the provision of benefits advisement services throughout NYS, three additional providers have been approved to provide this service since 2019. Providers of these services include agencies chartered primarily for provision of services to individuals who are blind, independent living centers, and other agencies that have engaged staff who are trained and certified by the Social Security Administration, by the Cornell Institute of Labor Relations, or by Virginia Commonwealth University. Many of these providers offer advisement not only on Social Security benefits, but also on a host of other benefits which may be affected by entering employment. In addition, OCFS/NYSCB has signed a Partnership Plus agreement with the OMH Administrative Employment Network (AEN). This will increase opportunities for participants to obtain continued support to maintain their jobs after case closure. OCFS/NYSCB works with NYSED/ACCES-VR to allocate contract capacity for Supported Employment services to try to assure the services are available to individuals with most significant disabilities seeking those services.

### **VR Program's Performance on the Performance Accountability Measures**

OCFS/NYSCB moved out of baseline for one of the six Common Performance Measures under WIOA. In early 2020 OCFS/NYSCB and SED/ACCES-VR collectively negotiated the NYS Measurable Skills Gains performance rates for PY 20 and PY 21. OCFS/NYSCB has individually achieved the negotiated rate for MSG's for PY 20, PY 21 will be calculated after this plan is finalized, however OCFS/NYSCB expects to also achieve that negotiated rate.

OCFS/NYSCB has provided training, guidance documents and guidance from VRTAC-QM and WINTAC to staff and providers. OCFS/NYSCB continues to support district offices in documenting their participants achievement of MSG as well as include the required documentation in the case record.

OCFS/NYSCB continues to work on Business Engagement and in PY 20 & 21....

OCFS/NYSCB continues to review performance measure dashboards as provided by RSA as well as the section on “other measures that matter.” The additional four Common Performance Measures are identified in that section and baseline negotiations for rates on those are expected to occur as part of this plan submittal and will be updated here once this is completed. Updated negotiation rates and outcomes for PY 19 and PY 20 can be found in Appendix 2: Performance Goals for the Core Programs of the NYS Combined State Plan.

### **Use of Innovation and Expansion Funds in PY 20 and 21**

OCFS/NYSCB used Innovation and Expansion funds for the following projects in PY 2020 and 2021.

OCFS/NYSCB supports the NYSBC State Rehabilitation Council. The Council meets four times annually and Innovation and Expansion funds are used to support the meetings and their efforts and initiatives.

OCFS/NYSCB used innovation and expansion funds during PY 2020 and 2021 to support participants in pre-employment transition skills programs at the Visions Rehabilitation Center in NYS. The programs are run by VISIONS Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired. The 4-week summer Pre-ETS program focuses on helping students begin to identify their occupational interests and develop the skills to reach their goals. The 15-week program is designed to provide vocational skills training combined with work readiness skills to prepare our youth for the world of work. The program has expanded to include additional certification programs, work-based learning experiences and a summer session in addition to fall and spring. Students are enrolled in either Rockland County BOCES certificate programs or Rockland County Community College certificate programs. Vocational training program options for certification include Administrative Professional, Certified Nursing Assistant, IT Support Professional and Bookkeeping in addition to many other options. OCFS/NYSCB had thirty-two students participate in the programs.

OCFS/NYSCB expanded residential services during PY 20. These services support participants with the most significant disabilities and service needs. OCFS/NYSCB created and developed a request for proposals available to all residential programming opportunities for participants who are blind across the nation. Based on the responses, OCFS/NYSCB was able to establish relationships and develop residential contracts for thirteen programs across the country. NYSCB recognized the need for residential services programs for participants who are legally blind. Residential programming provides more intensive, integrated services for participants that need more individualized attention and structure to make progress towards their goals of employment and independence.

## **DESCRIPTION q: QUALITY, SCOPE AND EXTENT OF SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES**

1. 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:

The Vocational Rehabilitation division of NYSED/ACCES–VR continues to have primary responsibility for supported employment programs and other integrated employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities in NYS. A MOU is in place covering the respective roles and responsibilities of OCFS/NYSCB, NYSED/ACCES–VR, OPWDD, and OMH in supported employment for participants who are blind.

Since 1989, the number of community agencies utilizing Supported Employment Grant Funds under Title VI–B of the Rehabilitation Act to provide supported employment services to individuals who are blind has expanded from 8 to 59. The grant awards stipulate adherence to all requirements set forth in Title VI–B of the Rehabilitation Act. Targeted populations include individuals with multiple disabilities who are aging out of educational programs, individuals in day treatment and long term extended employment, and those who have been unable to maintain employment in integrated community settings. The "individual placement" is the prevailing model; however, this does not preclude consideration of alternatives including the "enclave" and "affirmative business." The 59 agencies are located in major cities and in suburban and rural areas across the State.

When an individual's work performance is actualized, natural supports maximized, and the services (job coaching, adjustment counseling and advocacy) reach the lowest level necessary for the individual to maintain employment, the individual's supported employment case is closed. Extended services provide ongoing support and can be provided by a state agency, private organization, business, co-workers and family members, or any other source available to assist the individual to maintain employment. Under the Memorandum of Interagency Understanding Regarding Supported Employment, OMH and OPWDD provide follow-along services for individuals who meet their respective eligibility criteria. Individuals who do not meet OMH or OPWDD criteria may receive extended services through designated NYSED/ACCES–VR funds or through natural supports in the work place. Individuals in extended services may request Post Employment Services or, if necessary, ask to have their cases reopened.

Traditional vocational rehabilitation services continue to be available to supported employment candidates using Vocational Rehabilitation funds in the development as well as the execution of Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE). In this regard, there is no distinction from other vocational rehabilitation participants. Quality assurance is a matter of ongoing concern. Vendors receive Guidelines for Supported Employment which are updated as needed and convey the expectations for quality services. NYSED/ACCES–VR quality assurance staff, with input from OCFS/NYSCB and other partners, established new case review form protocols to gather information that can be used to monitor and improve services. OCFS/NYSCB district office staff is invited to participate in reviews of agencies in their catchment area; however, they typically participate only in reviews of agencies that are serving participants who are blind.

The OCFS/NYSCB Supported Employment Coordinator and staff regularly monitor reports and contract implementation. The coordinator regularly talks with OCFS/NYSCB district office staff,

contractors and state monitors to address progress and opportunities for program improvement, providing technical assistance and training as needed.

2. The timing of transition to extended services

Supported employment services are delivered through the NYSED/ACCES–VR contracting system, as agreed under Section 3, Chapter 515 of the Laws of New York of 1992. OCFS/NYSCB transfers its supported employment funds to NYSED/ACCES–VR but retains case management responsibility for individuals in the intensive service phase. In January 2014, a new Supported Employment contract methodology was implemented which resulted in:

- Increased time for counselors and providers to plan together and review participant progress;
- More efficient authorization and reporting processes;
- More timely movement from referral to job placement and stabilization; and
- Increased earnings and work hours for successful supported employment participants.