### Program-Specific Requirements for Vocational Rehabilitation (Combined or General)

The Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Services Portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan [13] must include the following descriptions and estimates, as required by section 101(a) of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended by title IV of WIOA:

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[13] Sec. 102(b)(2)(D)(iii) of WIOA

**A. Input of State Rehabilitation Council**

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

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

The Arkansas State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) is a citizen advisory council appointed by the Governor that partners with the Arkansas Department of Commerce, Division of Workforce Services, Arkansas Rehabilitation Services (ARS) to develop and to carry out the VR State Plan and ARS’ goals and priorities. The SRC assists in shaping and reviewing policy, engages in strategic planning, evaluates the effectiveness of the VR Program, analyzes consumer satisfaction data, and provides guidance when developing and reviewing cooperative agreements.

Because of COVID-19, the SRC utilized virtual meeting applications to conduct quarterly and called meetings. The SRC provided input on the following initiatives:

* ARS Field Policy Manual updates regarding rates of payment for medically directed services, the ARS Small Business Program, and WIOA common performance measures
* The preliminary planning for the 2021-2022 Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA)

The SRC also participated in the Rehabilitation Services Administration’s (RSA) monitoring of ARS providing input regarding the services ARS provides and its relationship with ARS.

At the request of the SRC, ARS provides a consumer satisfactory survey at case closure. Survey results are tabulated and are included as part of the SRC’s annual report, which is reviewed at the December SRC meeting each year.

**2. The designated State unit's response to the Council’s input and recommendations;**

ARS appreciates its relationship with the Council, and values the input and recommendations provided by SRC members. During the December 2020 quarterly meeting the SRC provided input regarding changes to the Field Services Policies and Procedures Manual. The SRC provided additional input regarding the Field Services Policies and Procedures Manual during the March 2021 meeting as well as the 2021 RSA monitoring activity. During the June 2021 meeting the SRC provided input for determining vendor qualifications and the scope of the upcoming triannual comprehensive statewide needs assessment.

**3. The designated State unit’s explanations for rejecting any of the Council’s input or recommendations.**

No input or recommendation from the SRC was rejected by ARS.

**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:**

**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.**

Not applicable to ARS.

**The designated State unit will approve each proposed service before it is put into effect.**

Not applicable to ARS.

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

Not applicable to ARS.

**C. Cooperative Agreements with Agencies Not Carrying Out Activities Under the Statewide Workforce Development System**

**Describe interagency cooperation with and utilization of the services and facilities of agencies and programs that are not carrying out activities through the statewide workforce development system with respect to:**

**1. Federal, State, and local agencies and programs**

ARS collaborates and coordinates services with federal, state, and local agencies that contribute to the vocational rehabilitation and independent living of Arkansans with disabilities. Collaborating agencies include:

* Arkansas Department of Education, Division of Learning Services, Special Education Unit – Arkansas Transition Services
* Arkansas Governor’s Employment First Taskforce
* Centers for Independent Living
* Community Rehabilitation Programs
* Developmental Disability Providers
* Department of Human Services - Division of Adult, Aging and Behavioral Health Services, Working Disabled Medicaid Program, and Division of Developmental Disabilities Services.
* Supported Employment Vendors
* Social Security Administration Ticket to Work
* Arkansas Spinal Cord Commission

**2. State programs carried out under section 4 of the Assistive Technology Act of 1998**

ARS is the lead agency for the Arkansas Assistive Technology (AT) program. AT initiatives supported through the Increasing Capabilities Access Network (ICAN) program include device demonstration, loan, and reutilization activities. ARS also has administrative responsibility for the Alternative Financing Program (AFP) that provides low interest rate, extended term loans for the purchase of assistive technology.

**3. Programs carried out by the Under Secretary for Rural Development of the Department of Agriculture**

ARS has no cooperative agreements with programs carried out by the Under Secretary for Rural Development of the United States Department of Agriculture. The ARS field program provides information and contact names to potential clients that may qualify for SNAP benefits.

Additionally, ARS field offices collaborate with local SNAP liaisons to provide updates to field staff on SNAP processes.

**4. Non-educational agencies serving out-of-school youth**

ARS maintains an active presence on numerous councils and committees, including:

* Arkansas Workforce Development Boards (state and local)
* Governor’s Council on Developmental Disabilities
* Behavioral Health Planning and Advisory Council
* SoundStARt
* The Arkansas Independent Living Council
* The Governor’s Commission on People with Disabilities
* Arkansas Trauma Rehabilitation Program
* Arkansas Apprenticeship Coalition
* Disability:IN – Arkansas

**5. State use contracting programs.**

ARS has no state use contracting programs.

**D. Coordination with Education Officials. Describe:**

**1. The designated State unit's plans, policies, and procedures for coordination with education officials to facilitate the transition of students with disabilities from school to the receipt of VR services, including pre-employment transition services, as well as procedures for the timely development and approval of individualized plans for employment for the students**

A pre-employment transition services (Pre-ETS) counselor and a Transition counselor are assigned to high schools in the state. Counselors provide direct services to students in the school setting under the core service categories for Pre-ETS, and they provide counseling and guidance on moving into transition services, fully affording students both knowledge and the means to enter into the vocational rehabilitation program.

In order for Pre-ETS to be provided in the school setting, an application for services must be completed by the entity proposing to provide services. The application must be reviewed and approved by a selection committee. Next, an agreement to operate within the school system is developed and approved by all parties. Pre-ETS require monthly reporting by the vendor, prior approval of the curriculum, and monitoring by ARS and the Division of Services for the Blind (DSB) with collaboration and input from the local school officials.

Additionally, ARS has developed a plan to partner with school systems to provide Opportunities for Work-Based Learning (OWL). School systems complete proposals to provide services, which delineate Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and WIOA responsibilities. The partnership includes measurable criteria, a reporting structure, and a monitoring guideline.

The following are the responsibilities of ARS and DSB regarding transition planning and vocational rehabilitation services for eligible youth:

Designate vocational rehabilitation personnel to be responsible for the provision of technical assistance, consultation, and the development of statewide program strategies and procedures applicable for youth with disabilities and those eligible for 504 plans.

Facilitate the identification of youth with disabilities who may benefit from vocational rehabilitation services as early as possible, but no later than the academic year in which the student turns 16.

Make relevant data available about eligibility for vocational rehabilitation services and track information about employment outcomes for youth with disabilities.

Assign vocational rehabilitation counseling personnel to develop relationships with LEAs to formalize collaborative approaches to student outreach and transition planning and referral development and tracking.

Make LEA personnel, students, and their families aware of the vocational rehabilitation program, including VR eligibility requirements (in accordance with 34 CFR 361.42), and the application procedures and scope of services (in accordance with 34 CFR 361.48) that are provided to all eligible or potentially eligible individuals.

Provide the core Pre-ETS to eligible and potentially eligible students with signed parent/guardian consent.

Procedures for Timely Development and Approval of Individualized Plans for Employment for Transition Students

The process for moving students into transition for the development and approval of an Individualized Plan for Employment includes having the Pre-Employment Transition Counselor first identify the students that want to participate along with the parents/guardians that have given their approval. The Participation Agreement Form captures who would like to move forward with signatures of the student and the parent/guardian. These forms are given to the Regional Managers in the Fall Semester of the Senior year, no later than December 1st for assignment to Transition Counselors. Next, a meeting is scheduled by the Pre-ETS Counselor for the Transition Counselor, Pre-ETS Counselor, Parent/Guardian, Student, and School staff. The IEP is reviewed along with the student’s progress in Pre-ETS services. This meeting is to explain the process, services, and the documents required in order for the student to apply for VR Transition services.

The party responsible for the student (parent/guardian/student) will be provided with a flyer that describes the steps of the VR process and the documentation needed to initiate the process.  In some cases, students may not have social security cards or state issued identification cards. At this time applications and information are provided in order to obtain these documents. The Pre-Employment Transition Counselor will facilitate obtaining the documents needed to make a seamless referral to the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor for Transition.

In order for the Vocational Rehabilitation Transition Counselor to move forward with an application, certain documentation is needed. The Pre-Employment Transition Counselor assists in providing a smooth referral process by giving clear copies of the following documents to the receiving counselor:

1.    Demographic Form
2.    Driver’s License or State Identification Card
3.    Social Security Card
4.    Disability Information (IEP, 504, or medical record)
5.    Social Security Benefits Awards Letter
6.    Income information (if available)

These items along with the complete referral packet is given to the receiving counselor.  The Pre-Employment Transition Counselor then documents the date of referral. Students will have Individualized Plans for Employment completed prior to graduation in May of each year when cases are transferred in this manner by December 1st.

Pre-ETS Students and Section 511

ARS has developed forms and processes to delineate that the required services and documentation are provided prior to entry into a subminimum wage situation.

Counselors contact each school they are assigned to at the beginning of the school year (1st semester of school) to inquire if any families or educators have identified their students as a potential candidate for sub-minimum wage/sheltered work. If a student is seeking subminimum wage, or if it is unknown whether or not the student could benefit from competitive integrated employment, the Pre-Employment Transition Counselor meets with the student and parent or guardian to provide informed choice and career counseling.

The counselors work with the high school transition team, the student, and their family to gather documentation of the transition services the student receives while participating in high school. This documentation will demonstrate the student’s ability to participate in competitive integrated employment.

Students are afforded work-based learning through Pre-Employment Transition and should they require additional supports to participate, they are moved into trial work to utilize Employment 1st Discovery or Supported Employment where they experience a variety of work situations. An eligibility determination can be made once these processes have had sufficient time and variety to allow the student to work.

If a student has participated in Pre-Employment Transition with ARS and/or through transition services offered by the school and there is clear and convincing evidence that the student is not a candidate for competitive integrated employment, the counselor will gather the documentation (Individualized Education Plan, Transition Plan, Pre-employment Services Progress Reports, and/or the ARS Work Experience Progress Reports) and the appropriate forms will be signed and disseminated.

ARS forms require clear and convincing supporting documentation regarding a decision on the student’s ability to benefit in competitive integrated employment, signatures be obtained of all parties involved, all documents are presented at least 45 days after completion, that the method of transmission is documented, and that career counseling is again provided within 30 days of case closure.

Age for Pre-Employment Transition Services

Arkansas Rehabilitation Services and the Division of Services for the Blind Arkansas have agreed to begin Pre-Employment Transition Services at age 16 through age 21.

**2. Information on the formal interagency agreement with the State educational agency with respect to:**

**A. Consultation and technical assistance to assist educational agencies in planning for the transition of students with disabilities from school to post-school activities, including VR services;**

ARS has a Memorandum of Understanding with the Arkansas Department of Education, Special Education Unit (ADE SEU) for students in public schools. The parties agree to participate in technical assistance and in-service training to assist educational agencies in planning and coordinating services to ensure eligible individuals receive timely and appropriate supports and services. ARS Transition policy requires counselors to engage school personnel to generate student referrals and to develop an IPE for each student determined eligible. ADE is financially responsible for the delivery and coordination of secondary education as set forth through IDEA. ARS is responsible for coordinating Pre-ETS, taking applications, determining eligibility, and providing vocational rehabilitation services for individuals determined eligible for transition services. The Memorandum of Understanding between the agencies was signed by the
Department of Education, Special Education Unit on 12/13/17, by the Commissioner of ARS on 1/11/18, and the Division of Services for the Blind on 1/30/18. It went into effect on 1/30/18 when the last party signed.

ARS participates in the state level Arkansas Interagency Transition Partnership (AITP). AITP is a taskforce made up of representatives of state agencies, including ARS, DSB, ADE SEU – Arkansas Transition Services, the Arkansas Workforce Development Board, DHS-Division of Adult, Aging and Behavioral Health Services, and parent advocates.

Consultation and Technical Assistance

In order to improve the transition of students with disabilities from school to postsecondary education and employment, ARS and DSB support the following transition services to vocational rehabilitation personnel, the ADE SEU, and the local education agencies by:

* Providing instruction to vocational rehabilitation counselors, school transition personnel, and other persons supporting students with disabilities through group conferences, instructional materials and guidelines, reporting forms, webinar training, and telephone/email communications.
* Coordinating public speaking and training activities on transition services provided by local education agencies under IDEA.
* Developing model transition demonstration projects and establishing or supporting partnerships involving the local education agencies to achieve the goals of improved transition outcomes.
* Expanding Pre-ETS in schools throughout the State and at the Arkansas Career Development Center (ACDC). ARS transformed the Arkansas Career Training Institute (ACTI) to a new service delivery model, ACDC. This model focuses as a hub for training and services to support VR consumers and/or students with disabilities to successfully reach the milestones of their individual plans for employment.

ARS, LEAs, ADE, and VR service providers receive intensive technical assistance and professional development from the National Technical Assistance Center on Transition (NTACT) on topics like implementing evidence-based practices and preparing graduates for success in postsecondary education and employment.

**B. Transition planning by personnel of the designated State agency and educational agency that facilitates the development and implementation of their individualized education programs;**

ARS provides eligibility determination according to ARS policy, and consultation and technical assistance to educational agencies in planning for the transition of students with disabilities from school to post-school activities, including VR services when requested and appropriate. ARS counselors meet with special education teachers during the school year and provide information to schools about VR services, and ensure schools have appropriate forms and information for students to apply for services. ARS works with schools to assist the student with significant disabilities in identifying, selecting, and pursuing appropriate career objectives.

Partner high schools agree to work cooperatively with ARS to provide appropriate transition services to students to equip them for entry into the workforce, postsecondary education or training, and independent living. Schools carry out all required transition planning provisions mandated by the IDEA and state regulations, conduct regular staff development training regarding transition requirements and include ARS counselors in the training when appropriate, provide referrals to counselors, provide private space for counselors to meet with students, include counselors in students Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings with authorization by parents or guardians and student knowledge, communicate regularly with counselors, and provide copies of school records.

ARS provides accommodations as needed to aid in successful completion of the vocational education program for VR eligible youth in accordance with their respective IPEs, unless these accommodations are the responsibility of the LEA pursuant to Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) regulations. ARS provides technical assistance to local education agencies to ensure all youth and students have equal educational opportunities to participate in programs, activities, and job opportunities, and to analyze, identify, and change policies and activities that impede the achievement of equal opportunities for all individuals.

**C. Roles and responsibilities, including financial responsibilities, of each agency, including provisions for determining State lead agencies and qualified personnel responsible for transition services;**

The Interagency Agreement between the Arkansas Department of Education, Special Education Unit – Arkansas Transition Services, Division of Career and Technical Education, and ARS defines each party’s responsibilities with regard to ensuring FAPE for eligible students, ages 16-21, and younger when appropriate, which are identified as having a disability in accordance with IDEA.

ADE SEU, ARS, and DSB jointly agree to the following:

The ADE SEU is the agency responsible for ensuring that FAPE is made available to eligible students pursuant to IDEA (20 U.S.C. § 1412(a)(1).

School districts have the primary planning, programmatic, and financial responsibilities for the provision of education transition services and related services for students as a component of FAPE and these services are provided to eligible students with disabilities, ages 16 to 21, and younger when determined appropriate through the implementation of the IEP. The parties acknowledge ADE SEU has general supervisory responsibility over the educational program of any public agency providing FAPE to individuals with disabilities, ages birth to 21, as defined in state and federal statutes.

The distinction between transition and related services that are the planning, programmatic, and financial responsibility of the school district is determined based on a delineation of the customary services the school provides under IDEA Part B. These distinctions describe the activities, supports, and funding ARS provides to support Pre-ETS in partner school settings or during the school day.

ARS is financially responsible for providing Pre-ETS to students who meet the definition of students with a disabilities as defined by WIOA. ARS works cooperatively to ensure individuals with disabilities have access to the training and necessary supports to transition successfully from secondary school to postsecondary activities, including but not limited to vocational training and employment, and completing an IPE before leaving the school setting. ARS agrees the student and/or designated party has choice in the development of the IPE.

**D. Procedures for outreach to and identification of students with disabilities who need transition services.**

ARS counselors attend IEP and transition planning meetings, career fairs, back to school nights, group orientations, and transition fairs, and make presentations to schools and families throughout the year with partner agencies like Arkansas Transition Services, Department of Youth Services, Department of Human Services, Adult Education, Workforce Services and the Division of Services for the Blind. ARS collaborates with partner agencies through shared recruiting and the application processes for special programs outreach. These outreach efforts provide creative programs like the Youth Leadership Forum, the Inclusion Film Camp, the Transition Employment Program, and the Opportunities for Work-Based Learning Program in order to identify students and get them interested in work and in participating in the full array of transition services. Additionally, ARS goes directly to educational settings in Department of Youth Services facilities, where youth who are at-risk are identified and provided Pre-ETS, as well as given an opportunity to apply for full vocational rehabilitation services. ARS also provides brochures and introductory meetings to explain what Project SEARCH can offer youth seeking permanent employment outcomes.

ARS works directly with the schools and community partners to provide education on Pre-ETS and Section 511 of the Rehabilitation Act.

Transition stakeholders and partners participate in NTACT’s sponsored capacity building activities, such as The Capacity Building Institute and related regional and/or national meetings. Arkansas utilizes a state implementation team to support personnel development opportunities for Arkansas educators and service providers. The implementation team participates in data review, problem solving, and strategic planning that informs personnel development opportunities.

Referral Process and Parental Consent

Pre-ETS counselors directly assigned to the school provide Pre-ETS referral packets to all students and schools. Students who are interested complete the referral packet with their parent/guardian with assistance from the Pre-ETS counselor. The Referral packet includes:

Cover Letter

* Pre-ETS Referral Form
* Informed Consent/Release of Information – This form is required to be signed and uploaded in the electronic case file prior to the initiation of services.
* Benefits Planning Consent Form (if applicable)
* Social Security Administration 3288 Consent Form (if applicable)

Number of Potentially Eligible in the State

Each year in September ARS requests a data pull from the Arkansas Office of Information Technology, which provides a total count of students aged 16-21 in the state on Individual Education Plans and on 504 plans within the public school system.

Set-aside Process for Authorized Activities

ARS utilizes the WINTAC guidance formula for determining the total amount of funds that can be expended on authorized activities. First, ARS uses the WINTAC formula to find the cost per student on coordination and core services using the financial information for this fiscal year.

Using Office of Information Technology statistics, we locate the total number of students in the system who could be potentially eligible and divide that by the total amount of money spent on core and coordination services. That total cost is divided by the total of potential students to calculate a cost per student. Because we have no clear documentation that can show what percentage refuse services, we leave this amount at 0%. Then the total number of students is multiplied by the cost per student. That number is subtracted by the total of our 15% set-aside.

It is important to note that as a result of completing this exercise for the 2018-2019 school year, the projected total cost per student was $172.00, much lower than what ARS should spend to provide a quality service with enough time investment to impact students in a positive way. For this reason, ARS made the decision to focus on core and coordination activities for expenditures to the 15% in the future.

**E. Cooperative Agreements with Private Nonprofit Organizations**

**Describe the manner in which the designated State agency establishes cooperative agreements with private non-profit VR service providers.**

ARS requires potential vendors to complete an application process and provide required credentialing to become an approved vendor. ARS contracts with Community Rehabilitation Programs (CRPs) utilizing Purchased Service Agreements. All vendors are required to meet standards to ensure VR clients achieve acceptable employment outcomes, and vendors are compensated based on performance outcomes.

The CRP contract outlines the specific employment services to be provided and the available compensation, which is outcome-based fees per service with the total funding available. The service component varies per vendor dependent on their ability to provide the service. CRPs may provide only job placement services (Referral, Job Development/Placement and Closure.) Others may provide Employment First services (Discovery, Employment Path, Job Development/Placement, and Closure), Supported Employment (Referral, Job Development/Placement, Stabilization and Closure) and Individual Job Coaching Services. The contract describes the objectives/scope of the service(s), and performance standards for competitive integrated employment. The contract has separate attachments related to service description, outcome per service, funding grid, and an attachment identifying the performance deliverables and the performance indicators requiring expansion of employment opportunities and successful outcomes to individuals with disabilities. The contract defines continued funding may be based on successful outcomes.

**F. Arrangements and Cooperative Agreements for the Provision of Supported Employment Services**

**Describe the designated State agency’s efforts to identify and make arrangements, including entering into cooperative agreements, with other State agencies and other appropriate entities in order to provide supported employment services and extended employment services, as applicable, to individuals with the most significant disabilities, including youth with the most significant disabilities.**

ARS maintains cooperative agreements/contracts with private non-profit and for profit CRPs, which define the requirements for the provision of supported employment (SE) services and extended services. The cooperative agreements/contracts include commitments by the CRP to fund extended services for a period of time as needed by the client and the employer for successful employment.

ARS maintains a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Department of Human Services - Division of Developmental Disabilities Services (DDS) in which DDS agrees to pay for extended services for clients who receive Medicaid waiver services after ARS has closed the case as successfully employed.

**G. Coordination with Employers**

Describe how the designated State unit will work with employers to identify competitive integrated employment and career exploration opportunities in order to facilitate the provision of:

**1. VR Services; and**

The Business Engagement Unit (BEU) is responsible for employer outreach. The BEU builds relationships with employers to identify and provide solutions to assist businesses in overcoming the challenges of recruiting, retaining, and developing talent, and provides disability awareness and sensitivity training. The BEU provides counselors with information about labor market, job vacancies, skills necessary to obtain jobs in high demand occupations, and earning potential and advancement opportunities in various occupations to increase opportunities for achieving competitive integrated employment.

ARS works with Career Workforce and Local Workforce Boards to identify potential skill deficits that may act as barriers to employment and identifies the most appropriate training to assist clients in obtaining employment.

ARS provides presentations, evaluation, expertise, and assistance to counselors, their clients, employers, and employees with disabilities in the provision of accommodations to facilitate successful vocational outcomes through the AT@Work and Stay-at-Work/Return-to-Work (SAW/RTW) programs.

The AT@Work program is designed to assist ARS clients and referring Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors in selecting and obtaining the appropriate assistive technology to facilitate the achievement of the clients’ established vocational goals and attain successful, competitively integrated employment outcomes. Services through the AT@Work program include assistive technology and accommodation evaluation and assessment, assistive technology device selection and procurement, training and technical assistance, as well as occupational abilities assessments. These services are primarily directed as it relates to education, school, training programs, vocational and technical education programs, and job retention efforts. AT@Work is a statewide program staffed by Occupational Therapists and an Accommodations Specialist.

The SAW/RTW program is designed to provide support to employers and employees when an employee is experiencing an injury or illness that results in a disabling condition, inhibiting the employee from remaining at work or returning to work as soon as it is safe and medically feasible. Program staff include a SAW/RTW coordinator and an administrative assistant. They can also recruit the assistance of evaluation staff located in the AT@Work program. SAW/RTW provides access to professionals who have expertise in the areas of: Vocational counseling to assist an employee in the process of adjusting to a disability and the importance of remaining positive as it relates to stay-at-work/return-to-work efforts; specialized vocational assessments that help identify an employee’s vocational strengths and weaknesses as it relates to successful job performance; job site assessment to determine how an employee’s presenting disability interferes with task performance and with the identification of potential modifications to the work environment; job analysis to identify the specific functions of a job and the mental and/or physical requirements needed for successful job performance; and individualized employee training regarding the correct use of any new technology or equipment introduced to assist in work performance. Staff can also provide general ergonomic assessments and training targeted toward employees in jobs that may present the likelihood of occurrence of injury or illness that leads to disability.

The SAW/RTW coordinator works with the employee and the employer to develop a SAW/RTW plan that, if required, addresses the need for accommodation in the workplace; identifies successful performance indicators with employer assistance; outlines the process to return or maintain the employee’s employment; or after investigation may determine potential assignments for transitional employment.

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

ARS provides and/or procures transition services including Pre-ETS for students and youth with disabilities through community rehabilitation programs that place students into paid work experiences with a variety of employers throughout the state or directly with employers, depending on the vocational interests of the student or youth. Employers facilitate opportunities in group settings and individually with job exploration counseling, work-based learning experiences, and workplace readiness training. Employers are also contracted to provide on-the-job training experiences, job placement, supported employment, and customized employment opportunities. ARS provides assistive technology assessments and training to assist students transitioning from school to postsecondary or to vocational training or to work.

**H. Interagency Cooperation**

Describe how the designated State unit will collaborate with the State agency responsible for administering each of the following programs to develop opportunities for competitive integrated employment, to the greatest extent practicable:

**1. The State Medicaid plan under title XIX of the Social Security Act;**

The Arkansas Department of Human Services operates the State Medicaid program. ARS, the State Medicaid program, and other agencies have in place an interagency agreement that delineates roles and responsibilities related to sequential funding for combined waiver programs for individuals participating in employment related activities under WIOA. ARS, the State Medicaid program, and the other agencies collaborate on the Arkansas’ Employment First and State Agency Model Employer initiatives.

ARS, along with DHS – Medicaid, Developmental Disabilities Services, and Aging, Adult and Behavioral Health Services, through a Memorandum of Understanding and collaborative efforts have received technical assistance through EconoSys (Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Program) to enhance employment opportunities since 2015. Most recently the technical assistance has orchestrated Subject Matter Experts (SME) to assist with State Agency as Model Employer (SAME), to begin planning for the expansion of Employment First, and to enhance supported employment for individuals with behavioral health concerns.

Since 2019, the SME for SAME has assisted this partnership in hosting training sessions with state human resource managers educating them on SAME and by helping them to see that individuals with disabilities can be a part of the talent pool of job seekers. Ten individuals with developmental disabilities remain employed from the 2018 pilot in extra help positions working within state agencies. Two individuals have been employed permanently with the State. The DHS/Developmental Disabilities Services created the process for using extra help positions with services provided through ARS supported employment for on-the-job supports, stabilization in their positions, and extended services funded by Medicaid. In 2020, the SAME technical assistance plan is to create a Round Table of State Directors to develop a strategic plan for changing the state HR hiring practices for individuals with disabilities to become employed either through permanent state positions or extra help. The state unit has received support from the Governor’s Office and the state Office of Personnel Management. The SME will continue to provide training opportunities through PowerPoints, webinars, and onsite visits.

The Arkansas state team collaborated with the SME to show solidarity for Employment First, to identify employment as a choice for all individuals with disabilities with a focus primarily on individuals with behavioral health concerns. In 2019, the technical assistance plan focused on educating the state leaders in the behavioral health agency on employment/supported employment as part of the recovery plan for individuals with behavioral health concerns through evidence-based practices called Individual Placement and Supports (IPS.) As Arkansas transitioned the Medicaid Waiver services from DHS to organized care through the Arkansas Provider-led Shared Savings Entities, referred to as the PASSE, the efforts related to moving this initiative forward slowed. The SME and team trained the PASSE supervisor on supported employment for individuals with behavioral health concerns in late summer of 2019, who supports these new services.  In 2020, the technical assistance plan focus is on identifying the types of services to be offered to individuals with behavioral health concerns, and the continued education of the PASSE staff, vocational rehabilitation staff, and behavioral health entities with the desired outcome of initiating one pilot program.

**2. The State agency responsible for providing services for individuals with developmental disabilities; and**

The Department of Human Services – Division of Developmental Disabilities Services (DDS) is responsible for providing services to individuals with developmental disabilities. ARS, DDS, and other agencies collaborate on Arkansas’ Employment First and State Agency Model Employer initiatives. ARS, DDS, and the other agencies have in place an interagency agreement that delineates roles and responsibilities related to sequential funding for combined waiver programs for individuals participating in employment related activities under WIOA.

**3. The State agency responsible for providing mental health services.**

The Department of Human Services – Division of Adult, Aging and Behavioral Health Services (DAABHS) is responsible for providing mental health services. ARS, DAABHS, and other agencies have in place an interagency agreement that delineates roles and responsibilities related to sequential funding for combined waiver programs for individuals participating in employment related activities under WIOA. ARS, DAABHS and the other agencies collaborate on Arkansas’ Employment First and State Agency Model Employer initiatives.

**I. Comprehensive System of Personnel Development; Data System on Personnel and Personnel Development**

Describe the designated State agency's procedures and activities to establish and maintain a comprehensive system of personnel development designed to ensure an adequate supply of qualified State rehabilitation professional and paraprofessional personnel for the designated State unit, including the following:

**1. System on Personnel and Personnel Development**

**A. Qualified Personnel Needs**

**Describe the development and maintenance of a system for collecting and analyzing on an annual basis data on qualified personnel needs with respect to:**

**i. The number of personnel who are employed by the State agency in the provision of VR services in relation to the number of individuals served, broken down by personnel category;**

ARS currently is serving 10,948 clients and employs a total of  276 staff.

**Access and Accommodation – (Total 18)**
Administration – 3
Evaluation (RIDAC and LEC) – 11
Administrative Support – 4
Extra Help – 0

**ACDC – (Total 29)**
Administration – 6
Counseling – 3
Training – 8
Evaluation– 3
3Other (Maintenance, Engineering, Security Skilled Trade, Equipment Tech) – 3
Administrative Support – 4
Extra Help – 2

**Field Services – (Total 173)**
Managers – 14
Counselors – 85
BERs – 10
Administrative Support – 64
Extra Help – 0

**Central Office – (Total 56)**
Commissioner’s Office – 6
Field Administration – 4
PPD&E – 10
IT – 3Finance – 12
Communication – 3
HR – 7
Administrative Support – 5
Extra Help – 4

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

**Access and Accommodation – (Total 18)**
Administration – 3
Evaluation (RIDAC and LEC) – 11
Administrative Support – 4
Extra Help – 0

**ACDC – (Total 29)**
Administration – 6
Counseling – 3
Training – 8
Evaluation– 3
Other (Maintenance, Engineering, Security Skilled Trade, Equipment Tech) – 3Administrative Support – 4
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**Field Services – (Total 173)**
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**Central Office – (Total 56)**
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IT – 3
Finance – 12
Communication – 3
HR – 7
Administrative Support – 5
Extra Help – 4

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

**Access and Accommodation – (Total 23)**
Administration – 4
Evaluation (RIDAC and LEC) – 13
Administrative Support – 5
Extra Help – 1

**ACDC – (Total 44)**
Administration – 7
Counseling – 7
Training – 18
Evaluation– 3
Other (Maintenance, Engineering, Security Skilled Trade, Equipment Tech) – 4
Administrative Support – 5
Extra Help – 0

**Field Services – (Total 205)**
Managers – 14
Counselors – 95
BERs – 13
Administrative Support – 80
Extra Help – 3

**Central Office – (Total 72)**
Commissioner’s Office – 6
Field Administration – 7
PPD&E – 11
IT – 3
Finance – 13
Communication – 5
HR – 9
Administrative Support – 8
Extra Help – 10

**B. Personnel Development**

Describe the development and maintenance of a system for collecting and analyzing on an annual basis data on personnel development with respect to:

**i. A list of the institutions of higher education in the State that are preparing VR professionals, by type of program;**

Currently, the University of Arkansas – Fayetteville and the University of Arkansas – Little Rock provide degrees in rehabilitation counseling. ARS monitors student enrollment in vocational rehabilitation and related programs at each institution by category, the number of students currently enrolled, the number of students graduating the previous year, and certification or licensure. ARS works with the institutions to provide internship and practicum opportunities and notifies the universities when job openings become available.

**ii. The number of students enrolled at each of those institutions, broken down by type of program; and**

FY2020

University of Arkansas – Fayetteville MRC – 15 (FT) and 2 (PT)

University of Arkansas – Little Rock MRC – 66 (FT) and 60 (PT)

FY2021

University of Arkansas – Fayetteville MRC – 19 (FT) and 3 (PT)

University of Arkansas – Little Rock MRC – 43 (FT) and 92 (PT)

**iii. The number of students who graduated during the prior year from each of those institutions with certification or licensure, or with the credentials for certification or licensure, broken down by the personnel category for which they have received, or have the credentials to receive, certification or licensure.**

FY2020

University of Arkansas – Fayetteville MRC – 9 (FT)

University of Arkansas – Little Rock MRC – 9 (FT) and 10 (PT)

**2. Plan for Recruitment, Preparation and Retention of Qualified Personnel**

Describe the development and implementation of a plan to address the current and projected needs for qualified personnel including, the coordination and facilitation of efforts between the designated State unit and institutions of higher education and professional associations to recruit, prepare, and retain personnel who are qualified, including personnel from minority backgrounds and personnel who are individuals with disabilities.

ARS focuses on the successful recruitment, preparation, and retention of qualified personnel, and maintains a working relationship with colleges, universities, and higher education programs within the state. ARS provides information about agency benefits such as tuition assistance and loan forgiveness to partner universities that have vocational rehabilitation programs.

ARS maintains staff liaisons with the university programs at the University of Arkansas – Fayetteville, the University of Arkansas – Little Rock, the University of Arkansas – Pine Bluff, and Arkansas Tech University, and meets quarterly with the universities to provide vocational rehabilitation field updates, and to give practitioner input.

The agency actively recruits minorities and students with disabilities and encourages students to join professional rehabilitation organizations such as the National Rehabilitation Association and the National Association of Multicultural Rehabilitation Concerns. These rehabilitation professional organizations provide scholarship opportunities to individuals, including minorities, who major in the field of rehabilitation.

ARS partners in job fairs, maintains a positive relationship with the community and its representatives, and utilizes online recruitment efforts.

ARS provides staff training, especially to those providing direct services to clients. Professional qualifications for counselors are monitored to ensure current certification and to track educational progress for those achieving certification.

**3. Personnel Standards**

Describe the State agency's policies and procedures for the establishment and maintenance of personnel standards consistent with section 101(a)(7)(B) to ensure that designated State unit professional and paraprofessional personnel are adequately trained and prepared, including:

A. Standards that are consistent with any national or State-approved or -recognized certification, licensing, registration, or other comparable requirements that apply to the profession or discipline in which such personnel are providing VR services; and

The State of Arkansas has no established standards that apply to the VR counselor position. However, ARS has a goal for all rehabilitation counseling positions to meet the Master’s degree in Rehabilitation Counseling with Certified Rehabilitation Counselor (CRC) standard. The agency seeks to hire MRC/CRC counselors as a first priority. In situations where the agency is unable to recruit and hire an MRC/CRC, ARS has a minimum hiring standard of a master’s or doctoral degree in a field of study related to vocational rehabilitation counseling or a baccalaureate degree in a field of study reasonably related to vocational rehabilitation plus a minimum of one year of demonstrated work or service experience in a vocational rehabilitation setting.

Individuals employed as counselors who have not achieved the MRC/CRC designation or standard are provided ongoing training to prepare for the CRC and/or MRC.

**B. The establishment and maintenance of education and experience requirements, in accordance with section 101(a)(7)(B)(ii) of the Rehabilitation Act, to ensure that the personnel have a 21st century understanding of the evolving labor force and the needs of individuals with disabilities.**

The Deputy Chief of Field Services reviews curriculum for Rehabilitation Counseling higher education programs and provides input on current educational needs for incoming counselors.

The ARS Commissioner is a member of the WIOA Board, the Chief of Field Services is a member of the executive WIOA Committee, and rehab area managers are members of the local workforce boards. These individuals provide updates on labor force initiatives at both the state and local levels to agency personnel. They also have the responsibility of educating other board members about the needs of individuals with disabilities.

**4. Staff Development**

**Describe the State agency's policies, procedures, and activities to ensure that, consistent with section101(a)(7)(C) of the Rehabilitation Act, all personnel employed by the designated State unit receive appropriate and adequate training in terms of:**

**A. A system of staff development for professionals and paraprofessionals within the designated State unit, particularly with respect to assessment, vocational counseling, job placement, and** **rehabilitation technology, including training implemented in coordination with entities carrying out State programs under section 4 of the Assistive Technology Act of 1998; and**

Staff is provided training opportunities through the Arkansas Rehabilitation Association Training Conference, Special Topics Training, Administrative Assistants Training Conference, online training, and webinars. Training is also available through the state Interagency Training Agency, the University of Arkansas CURRENTS program, CRC training, CEU training for purposes of certification or licensure in the professions, and training provided internally by the agency in case management and policy and procedures compliance.

Employees have opportunities to complete the Facilitating Career Development program through the National Career Development Association, which provides relevant skills and knowledge to assist clients in planning careers and obtaining meaningful work.

Access and Accommodations works with counselors in collaboration with ICAN and community partners to provide training about assistive technology and related programs and services available to clients to assist in the home, at work, or in school.

**B. Procedures for the acquisition and dissemination of significant knowledge from research and other sources to designated State unit professionals and paraprofessionals.**

While findings from the 2019 CSNA indicated the leadership team is very well-trained and boasts an excellent core group of field counselors, there is a need for training throughout the organization, but in particular for counselors in the areas of serious mental health issues and autism. The survey team recommended ARS give a higher level of concentration to training needs and use survey methods to identify training needs for each employee level. The CSNA also indicated employees feel the agency leadership could do a better job of communicating with rank-and-file staff. Staff was often unaware of changes even when those changes affected their work directly.

The agency enables employees to attend classes, seminars, and conferences, and disseminates information through newsletters, in-service training, workshops, and conferences. The field program conducts monthly area meetings. Topics include the latest techniques for providing services to clients, updates on statewide performance measures, and guidance on other WIOA initiatives. The field program has outlined four regional trainings to address chronic mental illness and autism topics, which will enable counselors to increase their knowledge and better understand mental health identifiers, treatment, and medications, and better understand support systems for individuals with autism. Additionally, field staff will have access to seminars, conferences, and in-service training on mental health and autism topics.

**5. Personnel to Address Individual Communication Needs**

Describe how the designated State unit has personnel or obtains the services of other individuals who are able to communicate in appropriate modes of communication with or in the native language of applicants or eligible individuals who have limited English speaking ability.

ARS provides access and contracts as needed to employ personnel who communicate in the native languages of applicants and clients with limited English-speaking ability. ARS also provides special communication modes such as interpreters, captioned videos, specialized telecommunications services, and materials for individuals who are deaf and deaf-blind, as well as other specialized media systems for individuals with disabilities. Interpreters are provided for the deaf or hearing impaired. Sign language skills are included as a minimum qualification for positions providing services to persons who are deaf or hearing impaired.

**6. Coordination of Personnel Development Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act**

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

ARS staff participates in state, regional, and national transition meetings and conferences. ARS Field Program staff serves on the Arkansas Interagency Transition Partnership (AITP) Team and attends the annual National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center (NSTTAC) Conference. In addition, they help plan, coordinate, and facilitate the bi-annual State Transition Summit, and help lead the planning and coordination of local transition fairs and parent’s nights with assistance from rehab area managers and local VR counselors. AITP promotes personnel development through online training for teachers, students, and families, and through an annual Summer Agency Connection, which includes ARS rehab area managers, ACDC, Access and Accommodations personnel, and representatives from high schools. AITP maintains a directory of services provided by ARS and other stakeholders.

**J. Statewide Assessment**

**1. Provide an assessment of the rehabilitation needs of individuals with disabilities residing within the State, particularly the VR services needs of those:**

**A. With the most significant disabilities, including their need for supported employment services;**

The most recent Arkansas Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment was completed in April 2019. ARS contracted with the University of Arkansas – Fayetteville who worked collaboratively with the State Rehabilitation Council, key stakeholders, and ARS to survey the rehabilitation needs of individuals with disabilities in Arkansas. Multiple data gathering strategies were used including focus group discussions with clients and participants from ARS, SRC, key stakeholders, vendors, employers, and ACDC administrators and staff, and structured surveys were sent to all ARS counselors, a random sample of clients, employers, and ARS leadership.

Findings

Individuals with the most significant disabilities were the largest underserved group, and supported employment and transition services were consistently listed as most needed services.

Recommendations

* ARS should continue to work across departments and agencies to increase funding for the provision of supported employment and transition services.
* ARS should increase training for CRPs, specifically to address the fear families have about the loss of benefits when individuals achieve competitive integrated employment.
* ARS should explore ways for CRPs to play a more vital role in providing supported employment services across the state.

**B. Who are minorities;**

Findings

Hispanic/Latino clients who do not speak English as a first language were identified as needing interpreters provided by ARS, in order to ensure that counselor-client communications are effective.

Recommendation

* ARS must make stronger efforts to locate interpreters who will be available for applicants who do not use English as their primary language.

**C. Who have been unserved or underserved by the VR program;**

Findings

Data collected through focus groups as well as online surveys revealed that racial and ethnic minorities experienced barriers when seeking VR services. Certain geographic areas were considered underserved, including the Delta Region counties, the Southeast quadrant of the state, and some counties in Northeast Arkansas.

Recommendations

* ARS must pursue the expansion of services to geographically underserved areas of the state as well as the underserved populations.
* ARS must expand its outreach to these populations to overcome a lack of trust in state government, which is common in the underserved geographic regions.

Findings regarding Center for Independent Living

Arkansas’ Centers for Independent Living (CILs) are required to provide five core services: peer support, information and referral, individual and systems advocacy, independent living skills training, and transition. There are four CILs operating in the state located in Fayetteville (SOURCES), Little Rock (Mainstream Living), Whitehall (Delta Resources), and Hot Springs (SAILS). CILS work hard to provide outreach and to serve individuals from outlying areas who are most in need, but they only cover 25 of the 75 counties in Arkansas.

The CILs work cooperatively and maintain courteous relationships but have very few collaborative programs. The CILs advocate strongly for their clients; however, there is little intentional integration between CILs and the VR system. For example, counselors were unaware that one Center provides transition services in public schools in their service area, and both counselors and rehab area managers were unaware that SOURCES manages the Work Incentives Planning and Assistance (WIPA) grant and employs five Community Work Incentive Coordinators throughout the state to provide benefits counseling.

The CILs provide excellent services and embrace the philosophy people with disabilities are the experts on their needs, and therefore, they must take the initiative, individually and collectively, in designing and promoting better solutions, and must organize themselves to work together for those solutions. To fully live in this philosophy, Arkansas’ CILs must work more closely together to advocate for expanded IL services in Arkansas.

Recommendations

* CILs should work with the VR system and specifically with ARS to become a fully integrated and intentional partner with the agency. There are a number of valuable services provided by the CILs not fully understood by the agency; when there is understanding and collaboration, it is too often centered with senior management and is not known or understood by the rank and file counselors and staff across the state.
* A CIL representative should be a member of the State Rehabilitation Council. It is not enough to have a SILC representative on the council, since the CILs and SILC are separate and distinct entities.
* CILs should work closely with ARS and act as advocates for additional funding to operationalize a fifth CIL in the state. It is not acceptable to have the majority of Arkansas’ counties located outside of a CIL service area.

**D. Who have been served through other components of the statewide workforce development system; and**

Findings

ARS has taken a leadership role in developing and maintaining partnerships with WIOA partners. The creation and ongoing review of the WIOA state plan is one example of the collaboration and cooperation among the partners. However, the most frequently stated concern with the Workforce/ARS partnership revolves around the “no wrong door” concept, which hinges on the development of a common intake system. Workforce applicants with disabilities, who are transferred to co-located ARS counselors, provide duplicative information to initiate the ARS application, since the two agencies have not developed a common intake system. The ARS IT staff continue to work for a better system.

Recommendations

* ARS leadership should continue to take a leadership role in the WIOA partnership efforts.
* ARS should push for the development of a shared database to eliminate the significant workload added to ARS counselors and support staff to duplicate information already provided by the consumer to a WIOA partner.

**E. Who are youth with disabilities and students with disabilities, including, as appropriate, their need for pre-employment transition services or other transition services.**

Findings

ARS provides transition and Pre-ETS services across the state and meets the WIOA requirement to utilize at least 15% of the state’s VR funding to provide Pre-ETS to support youth with disabilities in transition from secondary school to postsecondary school and employment. ARS recruits and contracts with CRPs and willing public school districts.

Recommendations

* ARS must take a leadership role in bringing Transition partners fully on board.

**2. Identify the need to establish, develop, or improve community rehabilitation programs within the State; and**

Findings

It has taken several years for Community Rehabilitation Programs in Arkansas to accept and embrace the need to meet federal and state guidelines as outlined in Section 511 of the Rehabilitation Act; however, they now are working to become compliant by providing access to mandated career counseling and information and referral services to their program participants, and by working with the ARS monitoring unit.

If ARS is to successfully meet the needs of individuals who have significant disabilities throughout the state, the network of CRPs will be critical partners. The agency has done a good job of communicating the new requirements and of setting deadlines for their implementation, but this is just the first step in the process. Initiating the second step in the transformation of the CRP network is no less important to the provision of needed services. It is imperative for ARS to create an atmosphere of mutual respect and support within the CRP network.

Recommendations

* ARS and representatives from the CRPs should meet and work together to create a path forward for these programs. Potential service additions and changes must meet the expanding needs of Arkansas’ citizens with disabilities as defined by ARS, while providing an expanded array of services and funding options for CRPs. Opportunities for CRPs include:
* Expanded Supported Employment services for individuals with significant disabilities. ARS can assume a more active role in the development of additional funding sources for initial Supported Employment services as well as long-term supports when needed. Possible partnerships with DDS should be sought.
* Expanded School to Work Transition and Pre-ETS opportunities. ARS’ challenge is to explore ways to utilize CRPs to expand these services. One example is for CRPs to partner in the OWL program.
* Partnering with the Arkansas Career Development Center (ACDC) to provide training and certification programs in local communities. ACDC staff would be responsible for maintaining certifications for existing programs, as well as expanding those offerings as resources warrant, and for monitoring the training services provided in the communities. CRP staff could provide the hands-on, day-to-day supports to help clients master the training ACDC provides.
* Additional training programs for CRP staff. ARS should work with CRPs to identify specific training needs and then develop and make available training presentations in affordable and accessible formats in local communities.

Findings regarding Arkansas Career Training Institute

ACTI had a dedicated staff who worked hard to seek and earn national certifications for their program offerings. ACTI leadership actively explored apprenticeship opportunities for individuals with disabilities. In addition, ACTI staff established and provided innovative programs for transition-aged youth including the Transition Employment Program (TEP). This comprehensive pre-employment training service provided Arkansas high school students with disabilities who have completed the 11th grade with job exploration counseling, work-based learning opportunities, counseling on postsecondary opportunities, and instruction in self-advocacy. In just a few short years, the enrollment in the TEP has grown and has proven to be an excellent tool for motivating students to think more broadly about their options after high school.

However, downsides to operating ACTI under a twenty-four-hour, residential model were identified: the distance clients travelled from most areas of the state to attend ACTI; the long waiting periods for acceptance and enrollment; the perception in the local communities that ACTI did not accept referrals who have significant disabilities; and ACTI’s annual budget, which was approximately one-third of the total ARS services budget.

Recommendations regarding Arkansas Career Training Institute

In response to these findings, ACTI began transformation into ACDC.  One of the major changes with this transformation was the elimination of the residential component and consolidating of central services away from the main campus located at 105 Reserve Street in Hot Springs to 200 Reserve Street in Hot Springs.  The consolidation of equipment, personnel, and other resources necessitated the need for some renovation of the Armory Building located at 200 Reserve Street along with the construction of a structure to support welding training.

The new model used at ACDC is focused on four program areas:

* Vocational Rehabilitation Support Services
* Career and Technical Education Programs
* Pre-Employment Career Development and Transition Services
* Pre-Apprenticeship and Registered Apprenticeship

Vocational Rehabilitation Support Services: These services are needed to provide evaluation of students to ensure their educational goals are attainable. In addition, staff members will provide detailed information to students with disabilities about training, education, and career opportunities.  This will assist the students and their VR counselors across the state to develop better individual plans for employment.  In addition, it will assist with referrals for individuals with disabilities that are currently working in sub-minimum wage, with training, education, and career options available that lead to competitive integrated employment.

Career and Technical Education Programs: The programs are needed to provide skills and knowledge to people with disabilities to help them achieve competitive integrated employment. A brief description of the training area is listed below:

Customer Service and Retail.  This program covers the basic aspect of careers in retail with a focus on customer service. In addition, there is a retail lab and externship developed jointly with CVS pharmacy. Students completing this program will be prepared for jobs in retail and those requiring high levels of customer service.  Also, it gives them access to industry specific training for jobs under the corporate umbrella of CVS. It should be noted CVS is one of the largest health care/retail organizations in the world.

Construction Technology.  Home Repair and Maintenance covers basic skills and techniques used in carpentry, plumbing, electricity, and other building trades.  The optional module on electrical construction is a complete orientation to the electrical trade, giving students a competitive edge as an apprentice electrician.

Welding.  This program has two eight-week modules, which allow students to learn in-demand skills that lead to jobs in the construction and manufacturing sectors.

Environmental Services.  This three-week program provides fundamental training in environmental services and prepares students with the skills needed for entry level jobs in environmental services. Also, by stacking other training, they will be able to move from diverse careers in multiple industry sectors.

Automotive Maintenance Technology. This eight-week program focuses on safety and routine maintenance items, tire repair, oil and filter service, belts, hoses and the like. It has been designed to allow students to enter the automotive workplace quickly and build skills on the job.

Culinary Arts. This eight-week course is designed to train students as food service workers in cafeterias, hospitals, restaurants or other food service facilities. Students will follow a scheduled rotation that provides training in Food Safety, Personal Hygiene, Food Preparation, Ingredients, Dishwashing, and Proper Food Storage.  This increases opportunities for competitive integrated employment of students with significant disabilities, as well as opens the door for internships and other employer-based training opportunities across the state.

Certified Nursing Assistant Training. There are three-, six- and seven-week options for this program depending on the classes. The classes provide students with the practical application of basic care skills and the required theory training for nursing assistants, per the rules and regulations of the Office of Long-Term Care of Arkansas. In addition, the course articulates with a registered apprenticeship program, which provides an additional learn as you earn opportunity.

Pre-Employment Career Development and Transition Services: These services are needed to enhance knowledge of competitive integrated employment opportunities in the state and develop skills needed for employment or to further post-secondary education and training.  With the passage of the WIOA, Pre-Employment Transition Services for students with disabilities is a required service to be coordinated with and provided to all high schools.

ACDC will provide and facilitate pre-employment transition services including career exploration and work-based learning.  The areas include:

* ServSafe Food Handler Program
* Professional Guest Services
* Certified Production Technician
* Certified Logistics Technician
* OSHA 10-hour Outreach
* Security Guard

Pre-apprenticeship and Registered Apprenticeship: ACDC has been working with several registered apprenticeship programs that are related to current career and technical education provided on campus.  The property allows adequate space and opportunity to conduct pre-apprenticeship training for students to prepare for registered apprenticeship and careers in trades that are in demand in the state. The partnership with registered apprenticeship allows for greater opportunities for the students served on the property while limiting redundant education and training provided by local educational entities.  This also has the added benefit of helping registered apprenticeship programs meet the requirement of 29 CFR 30.7, which requires programs to recruit and include people with disabilities.

ARS ceased operation of ACTI as a residential program to which selected individuals are referred and adopted a different business model to provide an array of supports to individuals throughout the state that is fiscally sustainable. The new model is known as the Arkansas Career Development Center (ACDC).

ACTI transformed from a residential program housing a variety of training programs in one central location, to a team of experts facilitating training and credentialing programs across the state through CRPs, High Schools, and Core Workforce Partners. This “hub and spoke” model retains the core group of training staff and credentialing experts.  By establishing the “hub and spoke” model, ACDC will provide an effective response to the three major negative viewpoints cited in this study. First, since these programs would be offered closer to home, individuals will no longer be forced to travel long distances and live in a residential setting to participate in ACDC certification programs. Second, the long waiting periods for acceptance and enrollment in ACTI programs would be eliminated. There should be an exponential increase in the number of individuals served by these certification programs through partnerships with the network of CRPs, High Schools and Core Workforce Partners, thereby reducing the waiting time for enrollment. Finally, the addition of hands-on support from well-trained CRP staffers to provide assistance to individuals enrolled in the local programs would make completion and certification accessible to individuals with more significant disabilities.

ACDC is seeking out and developing partnerships with existing CRPs throughout the state to create specific training programs similar to those currently being offered at the residential facility.

ACDC continues to develop and expand ancillary programs like TEP, and aggressively pursue apprenticeship programs that could be incorporated into the CRP, High School, and Core Workforce partnership model.

**3. Include an assessment of the needs of individuals with disabilities for transition career services and pre-employment transition services, and the extent to which such services are coordinated with transition services provided under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act**

Findings

ARS has worked diligently to provide transition and Pre-ETS services across the state, and has met the WIOA requirement that at least 15% of the state’s vocational rehabilitation funding be used to provide Pre-ETS to support youth with disabilities in transition from secondary school to postsecondary school and employment. ARS management and field staff have worked tirelessly to recruit CRPs and willing public school districts with whom to contract in order to meet the requirement. However, to meet the 15% benchmark quickly, ARS allowed some Pre-ETS providers to pay students for “work experience” placements for as much as 20 hours per week. While this incentive worked well in terms of recruiting employers and providers, based on the estimated 17,700 individuals with disabilities who received supports in 2018 is not sustainable for the long term unless the total number of individuals served is reduced.

Recommendations

* ARS leadership, in consultation with providers and school personnel, should set a lower number of hours for work experience. ARS must make some significant changes in order to continue an acceptable level of services. ARS partners, CRPs and school districts, have allowed some students to work as much as 20 hours per week, with ARS paying those wages, which is not sustainable, nor in line with best practices. The purpose of the Pre-ETS program is to provide paid work experience. It is not to create long term jobs for these students. A series of work site experiences, averaging eight hours per week, for an expanded number of students, would provide the desired workplace exposure. Adjustments must be made to the structure of the program to ensure its sustainability, and the sustainability and viability of the existing VR program.
* ARS must take a leadership role in bringing Transition partners fully on board.
* ARS should continue to negotiate with public schools and the Department of Education to increase the portion of transition costs paid through IDEA.

**K. Annual Estimates**

**Describe:**

**1. The number of individuals in the State who are eligible for services**

In Arkansas, out of a total of 1,757,980 non-institutionalized population aged 18 to 64, there are 270,686 individuals with disabilities. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Table B18121: Work Experience by Disability Status and Type, from the 2018 American Community Survey Estimates Detailed Table.

**2. The number of eligible individuals who will receive services under:**

**A. The VR Program;**

ARS estimates 16,700 eligible individuals with disabilities will receive vocational rehabilitation services and 3,000 youth will receive pre-employment transition services.

**B. The Supported Employment Program; and**

ARS estimates 375 eligible individuals with disabilities will receive supported employment services.

**C. Each priority category, if under an order of selection.**

Arkansas Rehabilitation Services is not under an Order of Selection.

**3. The number of individuals who are eligible for VR services, but are not receiving such services due to an order of selection; and**

Arkansas Rehabilitation Services is not under an Order of Selection.

**4. The cost of services for the number of individuals estimated to be eligible for services. If under an order of selection, identify the cost of services for each priority category.**

ARS estimates the annual cost of services for the number of individuals estimated to be eligible for services is $13.9 million for VR services and $6.7 million for pre-employment transition services. Arkansas Rehabilitation Services is not under an Order of Selection.

**L. State Goals and Priorities**

**The designated State unit must:**

**1. Identify if the goals and priorities were jointly developed and agreed to by the State VR agency and the State Rehabilitation Council, if the State has a Council, and jointly agreed to any revisions**

ARS and the State Rehabilitation Council developed and agreed upon goals and priorities based on the 2019 Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment for PY2020-2021.

**2. Identify the goals and priorities in carrying out the VR and Supported Employment programs**

The purpose of Arkansas Rehabilitation Services is to assist Arkansans with disabilities in achieving competitive integrated employment. The goals and priorities identified to support this purpose are:

**Goal 1: ARS will meet performance accountability measures as outlined in WIOA.**

Priorities:

* ARS will monitor established performance accountability measures.
* ARS will provide career counseling to 14(c) program participants to meet Section 511 requirements.
* ARS will strengthen data verification procedures.

**Goal 2: ARS will provide pre-employment transition and transition services as outlined in WIOA.**

Priorities

* ARS will expand and improve Pre-ETS.
* ARS will provide Pre-ETS and ensure students with employment and training goals are moved into Vocational Rehabilitation prior to the second semester of the senior year of high school.
* ARS will expand and improve Pre-ETS utilizing the resources at ACDC.  The new model focuses resources to serve students with disabilities to prepare and guide them toward achieving competitive integrated employment.
* ARS will increase the number of Transition students that enter employment by having students work-ready upon graduation from high school or postsecondary training.

**Goal 3: ARS will create effective partnerships to advance employment for Arkansans with disabilities.**

Priorities:

* ARS will focus on public and private sector employers and increase business and industry awareness of ARS’ services.
* ARS will develop and strengthen partnerships with business, workforce development partners, economic development agencies, and community organizations to meet the needs of existing and new business customers.
* ARS will increase services provided to public and private sector employers by leveraging Stay-at-Work/Return-to-Work (SAW/RTW) programs to assist employers in keeping the employees with disabilities on the job.

**Goal 4: ARS will increase effectiveness and efficiency of service delivery.**

**Priorities:**

* ARS will determine effective methods to serve the underserved/unserved populations.
* ARS will strengthen relationships with WIOA partners and business and industry.
* ARS will improve service delivery to job seekers and businesses by consistently providing services that meet individual needs.
* Staff will receive comprehensive training to improve service delivery.
* ARS will ensure clients have access to assistive technology services by evaluating the need for assistive technology throughout the rehabilitation process, and by making the proper referrals when assistive technology is appropriate.

**Goal 5: ARS will increase the utilization of Community Rehabilitation and Supported Employment providers to achieve employment outcomes.**

Priorities:

* ARS will increase the effectiveness of current and new external Employment/Supported Employment providers.
* ARS will expand the availability of community employment providers and partner services that meet the needs of Arkansans with disabilities, including those requiring supported employment.
* ARS will transform ACTI to a new service delivery model, ACDC. This model focuses as a hub for training and services to support VR consumers and/or students with disabilities to successfully reach the milestones of their individual plans for employment.

**3. Ensure that the goals and priorities are based on an analysis of the following areas:**

**A. The most recent comprehensive statewide assessment, including any updates;**

Using data from the 2019 CSNA, ARS and the SRC developed the goals and priorities listed in Section L.2 above.

**B. The State’s performance under the performance accountability measures of section 116 of WIOA; and**

The performance accountability measures of section 116 of WIOA are addressed in Goal 1: ARS will meet performance requirements, under the priorities: ARS will monitor established performance accountability measures, and ARS will strengthen data verification procedures.

**C. Other available information on the operation and effectiveness of the VR program, including any reports received from the State Rehabilitation Council and findings and recommendations from monitoring activities conducted under section 107.**

Input provided by the State Rehabilitation Council contributed to the development of Goals and Priorities as outlined previously. ARS’ existing strategic plan was also utilized.

**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**

ARS does not currently follow an Order of Selection.  However, in the event that available vocational rehabilitation funding cannot support the full range of services for all eligible individuals, the ARS Commissioner will initiate a structured process to move to an Order of Selection.  This process will include public participation and comment, notification to the Rehabilitation Services Administration, and input from the State Rehabilitation Council.

An Order of Selection requires that priority be given to individuals with the most significant disabilities in the provision of vocational rehabilitation services.  Therefore, after determining eligibility, ARS counselors will determine the client’s priority for services based on the significance of the client’s disability using the categories defined below.

Priority Category I – Most Significantly Disabled
An individual with a most significant disability is defined as one who has a physical or mental impairment that seriously limits at least four functional capacity areas (mobility, communication, self-direction, self-care, interpersonal skills, work tolerance, or work skills) in terms of an employment outcome, and whose vocational rehabilitation is expected to require multiple services over an extended period of time.

Priority Category II – Significantly Disabled
An individual with a significant disability is defined as one who has a physical or mental impairment that seriously limits three functional capacity areas (mobility, communication, self-direction, self-care, interpersonal skills, work tolerance, or work skills) in terms of an employment outcome and whose vocational rehabilitation is expected to require multiple services over an extended period of time.

Priority Category III – Non-Significantly Disabled
An individual with a non-significant disability is defined as one who has a physical or mental impairment that seriously limits one or two functional capacity areas (mobility, communication, self-direction, self-care, interpersonal skills, work tolerance, or work skills) in terms of an employment outcome and whose vocation rehabilitation is expected to require multiple services over an extended period of time.

If an Order of Selection becomes necessary, ARS anticipates that individuals who are receiving services under Individualized Plans for Employment at the time the Order is implemented will continue to receive services through closure of their cases.

**B. The justification for the order**

Because ARS does not currently follow an Order of Selection, this subsection does not apply.

**C. The service and outcome goals**

Because ARS does not currently follow an Order of Selection, this subsection does not apply.

**D. Time within which these goals may be achieved for individuals in each priority category within the order; and**

Because ARS does not currently follow an Order of Selection, this subsection does not apply.

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

Because ARS does not currently follow an Order of Selection, this subsection does not apply.

**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**

If an Order of Selection becomes necessary, ARS anticipates serving all eligible individuals requiring specific services or equipment to maintain employment.

**N. Goals and Plans for Distribution of title VI Funds**

**1. Specify the State's goals and priorities for funds received under section 603 of the Rehabilitation Act for the provision of supported employment services**

ARS addresses the provision of supported employment services in Goal 5: ARS will increase the utilization of Community Rehabilitation and Supported Employment providers to achieve employment outcomes.

Priority – ARS will increase the effectiveness of current and new external Employment/Supported Employment providers.

Strategies – ARS will:

* Target individuals with the most significant disabilities to provide customized employment, supported employment, and other individualized services.
* Collaborate with qualified vendors, community partners, and employers to expand supported employment initiatives.
* Continue to partner with other state agencies to provide collaborative services to individuals with the most significant disabilities.

Priority – ARS will expand the availability of community employment providers and partner services that meet the needs of Arkansans with disabilities, including those requiring supported employment.

Strategies - ARS will:

* Develop a community employment advisory committee.
* Develop partnership resources with other state agencies, provider associations and advocacy organizations to expand employment opportunities, transportation access, funding for extended services, and/or wrap around services for individuals not on Medicaid waiver.

**2. Describe the activities to be conducted, with funds reserved pursuant to section 603(d), for youth with the most significant disabilities, including:**

**A. The provision of extended services for a period not to exceed 4 years; and**

ARS sets aside 50 percent of supportive employment funds specifically for youth programs that support competitive integrated employment.

**B. How the State will leverage other public and private funds to increase resources for extended services and expanded supported employment opportunities for youth with the most significant disabilities.**

Strategies – ARS will:

* Determine methods for funding extended services for youth with disabilities not to exceed four years through the Employment First Vendors (CRPs, SE providers, and other external employment).
* Develop new service components or agreements with partners of state agencies for sequential funding of extended services to assure youth with disabilities have successful employment opportunities.
* Provide education and instruction of WIOA expectations to providers and will establish Memorandums of Understanding or contract services to providers to initiate services to potentially eligible clients.

**O. State's Strategies**

**Describe the required strategies and how the agency will use these strategies to achieve its goals and priorities, support innovation and expansion activities, and overcome any barriers to accessing the VR and the Supported Employment programs (See sections 101(a)(15)(D) and (18)(B) of the Rehabilitation Act and section 427 of the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA)):**

**1. The methods to be used to expand and improve services to individuals with disabilities**

ARS addresses the methods to be used to expand/improve services in Goal 4: ARS will increase effectiveness and efficiency of service delivery.

Priority – ARS will determine effective methods to serve the underserved/unserved populations.

Strategies – ARS will:

* Work with WIOA partners to establish a common intake process that streamlines client application for services across partner programs.
* Collaborate with WIOA partners’ field staff statewide to provide information and awareness about vocational rehabilitation services.
* Host partners’ training conferences to provide education and resources available for potential clients.
* Partner with local Hispanic and Marshallese communities to increase awareness and availability of services.
* Collaborate with other partners to more effectively reach the deaf/hard of hearing community.
* Partner with the Centers for Independent Living to provide information about ARS services in the geographically underserved areas.

**2. How a broad range of assistive technology services and devices will be provided to individuals with disabilities at each stage of the rehabilitation process and on a statewide basis**

Field Services staff receives training to determine whether a client would benefit from the provision of assistive technology services and devices at each stage of the rehabilitation process.  As appropriate, counselors refer clients to ARS’ Assistive Technology at Work (AT@Work) and Stay-at-Work/Return-to-Work (SAW/RTW) programs for assessment and consultation regarding the need for assistive technology as it relates to the achievement of their vocational goals. Counselors are also aware of services addressing the ~~Arkansas~~ Assistive Technology Act of 1998 offered by ICAN and the associated AFP.

ARS addresses the provision of assistive technology services for individuals with disabilities at each stage of the rehabilitation process in Goal 4: ARS will increase effectiveness and efficiency of service delivery.

Priority – ARS will ensure clients have access to assistive technology services by evaluating the need for assistive technology throughout the rehabilitation process and make the proper referrals when assistive technology is appropriate.

Strategies – ARS will:

* Make the assistive technology/AT@Work referral available in the CMS at the time of intake, plan development, placement, and post-employment checks.
* Train staff on the assistive technology services available to clients.
* Make application forms for various community service programs dealing with assistive technology available in the CMS.

ARS also addresses this provision in Goal 3: ARS will create effective partnerships to advance employment for Arkansans with disabilities.

Priority – ARS will increase services provided to public and private sector employers by leveraging Stay-at-Work/Return-to-Work (SAW/RTW) programs to assist employers in keeping employees with disabilities on the job.

Strategies – ARS will:

* Increase the overall number of SAW/RTW and Job Retention clients.
* Increase the number of employer referrals for SAW/RTW services.
* Incorporate SAW/RTW services when business engagement staff interacts with businesses.

**3. The outreach procedures that will be used to identify and serve individuals with disabilities who are minorities, including those with the most significant disabilities, as well as those who have been unserved or underserved by the VR program**

ARS will address outreach procedures in Goal 4: ARS will increase effectiveness and efficiency of service delivery.

Priority – ARS will determine effective methods to serve the underserved/unserved populations.

Strategies – ARS will:

* Partner with local Hispanic and Marshallese communities to increase awareness and availability of services.
* Collaborate with other partners to more effectively reach the deaf/hard of hearing community.
* Partner with the Centers for Independent Living to provide information about ARS services in the geographically underserved areas.

**4. The methods to be used to improve and expand VR services for students with disabilities, including the coordination of services designed to facilitate the transition of such students from school to postsecondary life (including the receipt of VR services, postsecondary education, employment, and pre-employment transition services)**

ARS addresses pre-employment transition services in Goal 2: ARS will provide pre-employment transition and transition services as outlined in WIOA.

Priority – ARS will expand and improve Pre-ETS.

Strategies – ARS will:

* Create internships in competitive integrated settings that could lead to on-the-job training and/or job placement.
* Identify industry recognized curriculums and train counselors to utilize it with students.
* Develop partnerships by contacting Special Education personnel in schools and by attending school board meetings.
* Create and implement marketing campaigns.
* Create standards and benchmarks evaluation criteria for each core service for vendors, schools, and counselors to use in identifying the knowledge/skills/abilities gained by students in the program.
* Increase awareness of viable work options in the areas where students live.
* Create a peer mentorship program including mentoring with CILS.
* Create a Professional Advisors Learning Series (PALS) where professionals in a field provide hands-on demonstrations to students on the work in that field, offer job shadowing opportunities, and informational interviews on the job duties.
* Promote and track employment outcomes directly from Pre-ETS services.

Priority – ARS will provide pre-employment transition services and ensure students with employment and training goals are moved into vocational rehabilitation prior to the second semester of the senior year of high school.

Strategies – ARS will:

* Spend at least 15% of VR grant on Pre-ETS.
* Direct students with disabilities into classes leading to certifications in Career and Technical Education and concurrent enrollment postsecondary training while in high school.
* Provide students in Pre-ETS with paid and unpaid work experiences.
* Provide students participating in Pre-ETS with career portfolios upon exiting high school.
* Provide Pre-ETS core services internally or by utilizing external contractors.
* Develop and implement a process for Pre-ETS students to become traditional VR services clients and monitor results.

Priority – ARS will increase the number of Transition students that enter employment by having students work ready upon graduation from high school or postsecondary training.

Strategies – ARS will:

* Develop and support apprenticeships for students prior to graduation.
* Increase credential attainments in high school by moving Pre-ETS-VR ready students to VR services prior to graduation.
* Develop and support on-the-job trainings/direct job placement and supported employment with businesses that have Pre-ETS internship sites.

**5. If applicable, plans for establishing, developing, or improving community rehabilitation programs within the State**

ARS will transform ACTI from a residential program to a new service delivery model. ACDC’s continual operation will be critical for ARS to meet needs of potentially eligible and eligible individuals with disabilities who live in the rural and other parts of the State.  ACDC will provide skilled training and other coordination services for individuals with disabilities that lead to competitive integrated employment. The continual maintenance and improvement of ACDC will be necessary to maintain its operation in the most efficient and cost effective manner possible.

Priority – ARS will transform ACTI from a residential program to a new service delivery model, ACDC.

Strategies – Through ACDC, ARS will:

* Develop a new organizational structure consistent with meeting the demands of the new model, which will address:
* Career and Technical Education training programs to meet the needs of students and labor market demands.
* Pre-apprenticeship training programs to facilitate placement in USDOL approved registered apprenticeship programs.
* Registered apprenticeships.
* Pre-employment transition and career development services to assist students in transitioning to postsecondary education and employment.
* Talent development for Pre-ETS and Transition customers.
* Co-developing programming with Field Services to assist students in achieving career goals including identifying needed accommodations in postsecondary education and employment.
* Obtain resources to support direct and facilitated provision of training and vocational rehabilitation services at the central location in Hot Springs and with partners across the state.
* Develop a new plan for marketing and branding the new program model.

Priority – ARS will provide career counseling to 14(c) program participants to meet Section 511 requirements.

Strategy – Through ACDC, ARS will:

* Transition career counseling services from a contracted external provider to internal provision.

**6. Strategies to improve the performance of the State with respect to the performance accountability measures under section 116 of WIOA**

The Quality Assurance (QA) team ensures statewide consistency in state and federal vocational rehabilitation compliance issues by providing information to support the delivery of comprehensive services in order to prepare individuals with disabilities to enter and to remain in the workforce. The QA team monitors and reviews the field program for policy compliance by randomly selecting cases from specific categories for on-site review. Throughout the year, the QA team provides case management training during new counselor orientation training, and financial resources training.

ARS addresses performance accountability measures in Goal 1: ARS will meet performance accountability measures as outlined in WIOA.

Priority – ARS will monitor established performance accountability measures.

Strategies – ARS will:

* Utilize all available data to monitor performance outcomes.
* ARS Field staff will receive ongoing performance accountability measurement training.

Priority – ARS will strengthen data verification procedures.

Strategies – ARS will:

* (The QA team will) monitor and review randomly selected cases from specific categories for on-site review.
* Train personnel on acceptable data verification criteria and acceptable documentation.
* Collaborate with DSB to establish consistent documentation practices for data verification.

**7. Strategies for assisting other components of the statewide workforce development system in assisting individuals with disabilities**

ARS addresses assisting the workforce development system in Goal 3: ARS will create effective partnerships to advance employment for Arkansans with disabilities.

Priority – ARS will focus on public and private sector employers and increase business and industry awareness of ARS’ services.

Strategies – ARS will:

* Continue to market to employers how ARS can be an effective resource as it relates to the hiring of individuals with disabilities and assisting them in remaining in the workforce.
* Maintain its partnership with Disability: IN - Arkansas and assist in membership recruitment by leveraging partnerships with existing business customers.
* Work with employers to identify opportunities for pre-apprenticeship, Registered Apprenticeship, and On-the-Job programs.

Priority – ARS will develop and strengthen partnerships with business, workforce development partners, economic development agencies, and community organizations to meet the needs of existing and new business customers.

Strategies – ARS will:

* Utilize state agency transformation to expand relationships with partner agencies within the Department of Commerce.
* Continue to advance relationships with other WIOA partners at both the state and local levels.
* Conduct joint business service team meetings with all Workforce Development Boards.
* Develop products and services that meet individual business customer needs.
* Work with local workforce boards to identify local in demand occupations.
* Work with business and industry to establish on-the-job training, work-based learning opportunities, and apprenticeships.

ARS also addresses assisting the workforce development system in Goal 4: ARS will increase effectiveness and efficiency of service delivery.

Priority – ARS will improve service delivery to job seekers and businesses by consistently providing services that meet individual needs.

Strategies – ARS will:

* Develop and implement a Job Club initiative and collaborate with counselors to support clients in honing soft skills to enhance job readiness.
* Assist counselors and clients in IPE development by providing local labor market information so clients are trained for employment with in-demand industries in order to create opportunities for sustainable employment.
* Work with counselors to develop a mechanism to determine when referral for job placement is appropriate.
* Develop career pathways with input from private industries and educational training providers in the state.

Priority – Staff will receive comprehensive training to improve service delivery.

Strategies – ARS will:

* Assist counselors and clients in IPE development by providing local labor market information and regional sector strategies.
* Train counselors to determine when referral for job placement is appropriate.
* Host statewide training to insure understanding of policy and procedures.
* Provide training on special populations to include those with serious mental illness and autism spectrum disorders.

Priority – ARS will strengthen relationships with WIOA partners and business and industry.

Strategies – ARS will:

* Conduct partner meetings with educational training providers on a quarterly basis to foster stronger relationships.
* Participate in business and industry Expo/Chamber events with other workforce partners.
* Participate in monthly “Core-Four” partner’s meetings with other WIOA partners.
* Seek opportunities for rehab area managers and counselors to collaborate with BEU staff through joint business customer visits to meet employer needs.
* Train field personnel on apprenticeships/pre-apprenticeships, on-the-job training opportunities, and paid work experiences available for students and youth.
* (Rehab area managers will) access local workforce board funding and resources to utilize as a similar benefit in service delivery.

Priority – ARS will improve service delivery to Arkansas businesses by consistently providing services that meet the employers’ needs.

Strategies – Business Engagement will:

* Utilize Salesforce CRM as licenses are issued to share information with partner agencies to more effectively serve business customers.
* Implement a customer satisfaction survey to measure the effectiveness of services offered to business customers.

**8. How the agency's strategies will be used to:**

**A. Achieve goals and priorities by the State, consistent with the comprehensive needs assessment;**

ARS and the SRC jointly developed the goals, priorities, and strategies based on input provided by the most recent CSNA and input from key stakeholders. ARS has developed a strategic plan that supports the goals, priorities, and strategies. The strategies are intended to position ARS to successfully meet WIOA performance requirements, to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of services provided to agency clients including those who are unserved or underserved, and to create opportunities to enhance relationships with employers, community organizations, and WIOA partners.

**B. Support innovation and expansion activities; and**

As required, ARS will reserve and use a portion of its funds for the development and implementation of innovative approaches to expand and improve the provision of vocational rehabilitation services. The provision of transition/pre-employment transition services is anticipated to be a targeted area. Establishing more effective and efficient ways to serve the unserved and underserved, another. ARS will continue to utilize innovation and expansion funds to support the State Rehabilitation Council as well as the State Independent Living Council.

**C. Overcome identified barriers relating to equitable access to and participation of individuals with disabilities in the State VR Services Program and the State Supported Employment Services Program.**

ARS recognizes that providing Arkansans with disabilities equitable access and the opportunity to fully participate in its programs and services is and has been an ongoing issue as evidenced by results from the most recent CSNA where the unserved/underserved populations of Hispanics and the deaf/hard of hearing were specifically mentioned. In addition, ARS recognizes, geographically, a significant part of the state is rural and the availability of services is limited including supported employment. ARS believes the following goals will address this issue: Goal

3: ARS will create effective partnerships to advance employment for Arkansans with disabilities; Goal 4: ARS will increase the effectiveness and efficiency of service delivery; and Goal 5: ARS will increase the utilization of community rehabilitation and supported employment providers to achieve employment outcomes. The intent is to provide more opportunities for these populations to participate in services provided or sponsored by ARS.

**P. Evaluation and Reports of Progress: VR and Supported Employment Goals**

**Describe:**

**1. An evaluation of the extent to which the VR program goals described in the approved VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan for the most recently completed program year were achieved. The evaluation must:**

**A. Identify the strategies that contributed to the achievement of the goals**

**Goal 1: ARS will meet performance accountability measures as outlined in WIOA.**

Priorities:

* ARS will monitor established performance accountability measures.
* ARS will provide career counseling to 14(c) program participants to meet Section 511 requirements.
* ARS will strengthen data verification procedures.

Goal 1: Evaluation and Progress

**Priority 1: ARS will monitor established performance accountability measures.**

ARS set the strategy to utilize all available data (supporting documents) to monitor performance outcomes. IWAGE was utilized to verify employment of clients. ARS used direct unemployment insurance (UI) wage match using IWAGE (applies to status 26 and status 28 closures); federal or military employment records; paystubs; W2 or tax records; written verification using an agency form or a letter from the client, signed and dated from the client and counselor; verification using an agency out-of-state wage form; verification from the employer on letterhead with employment start date and justification; verification form for Self-Employment Income and Expenses. For MSG/Credential attainment counselors routinely obtained students' grades, copies of degrees attained, and progress reports to provide documentation for reporting purposes.

ARS set the strategy ARS Field staff will receive ongoing performance accountability measurement training. Performance accountability training was completed state-wide and is ongoing. This training helped reduce errors in the case management system to ensure more accurate reporting. A monitoring tool for all performance measures is in development and is anticipated to be in full production within this state plan period.

**Priority 2: ARS will provide career counseling to 14(c) program participants to meet Section 511 requirements.**

ACDC and the University of Arkansas hosted virtual sessions on career counseling and referral. Five-hundred-thirty-three individuals stated they wanted to go to work. CCIR individuals were referred to the ARS Field for services. The Field created a MS Team for real time updates on referrals. PPD&E Community Program Development took the lead on assuring the MS Team tools are utilized. There were 2,272 individuals who received CCIR.

**Priority 3: ARS will strengthen data verification procedures.**

ARS set the strategy the QA team will monitor and review randomly selected cases from specific categories for on-site review. During PY 20, ARS developed and implemented a monitoring tool utilized by the QA team to assist in determining whether performance accountability measure data entered in the case management system is accurate and complete. Utilization of this tool will continue and be adjusted as necessary.

ARS set the strategy to train personnel on acceptable data verification criteria and documentation. Training is provided to personnel on acceptable data verification criteria and documentation.

ARS set the strategy to collaborate with DSB to establish consistent documentation practices for data verification. ARS and DSB jointly formed a data verification committee to write policy outlining acceptable data verification procedures and documentation.

**Goal 2: ARS will provide pre-employment transition and transition services as outlined in WIOA.**

Priorities

* ARS will expand and improve Pre-ETS.
* ARS will provide Pre-ETS and ensure students with employment and training goals are moved into Vocational Rehabilitation prior to the second semester of the senior year of high school.
* ARS will expand and improve Pre-ETS utilizing the resources at ACDC.  The new model focuses resources to serve students with disabilities to prepare and guide them toward achieving competitive integrated employment.
* ARS will increase the number of Transition students that enter employment by having students work-ready upon graduation from high school or postsecondary training.

Goal 2: Evaluation and Progress

**Priority 1: ARS will expand and improve Pre-ETS.**

ARS set the strategy to create internships in competitive integrated settings that could lead to on-the-job training and/or job placement. The WOLF, WIN and vendor programs all support paid internships up to 40 hours per school year. As a result of the pandemic, only ten highs schools and two juvenile justice partners were able to participate.

ARS set the strategy to identify industry recognized curriculums and train counselors to utilize it with students. This is a work in progress. There are several mechanisms of access to industry recognized credentials. ACDC is working closely with field services to integrate training and services that lead to credentials. Examples include Fayetteville and Alma high schools.

ARS set the strategy to develop partnerships by contacting Special Education personnel in schools and by attending school board meetings. This is actively being done. Transition counselors routinely attend board meetings as well as parent planning meetings.

ARS set the strategy to create and implement marketing campaigns. Pre-ETS marketing efforts have been limited as a result of the COVID pandemic. Those that did occur were virtual.

ARS set the strategy to create standards and benchmarks evaluation criteria for each core service for vendors, schools, and counselors to use in identifying the knowledge/skills/abilities gained by students in the program. The standards and benchmarks evaluation criteria have been developed and incorporated into the Pre-ETS manual. Monthly report forms are utilized to evaluate student progress.

ARS set the strategy to increase awareness of viable work options in the areas where students live. Because of the COVID pandemic this strategy was not addressed during PY 20.

ARS set the strategy to create a peer mentorship program including mentoring with CILS.Because of the COVID pandemic this strategy was not addressed during PY 20.

ARS set the strategy to create a Professional Advisors Learning Series (PALS) where professionals in a field provide hands-on demonstrations to students on the work in that field, offer job shadowing opportunities, and informational interviews on the job duties. Because of the COVID pandemic this strategy was not implemented during PY 20.

ARS set the strategy to promote and track employment outcomes directly from Pre-ETS services. ARS is in the process of implementing new case management software that will allow tracking of employment outcomes directly from Pre-ETS services. The anticipated go-live date of the system is October 2022.

**Priority 2: ARS will provide Pre-ETS and ensure students with employment and training goals are moved into Vocational Rehabilitation prior to the second semester of the senior year of high school.**

ARS is required to spend 15% of VR case services budget on Pre-ETS. This requirement is being met.

ARS set the strategy to direct students with disabilities into classes leading to certifications in Career and Technical Education and concurrent enrollment postsecondary training while in high school. This is being done routinely through ACDC programming. ACDC students are provided information regarding CTE classes and encouraged to participate. High schools involved include Magnet Cove, Lake Hamilton, Cutter Morning Star, and Fountain Lake.

ARS is required to provide students in Pre-ETS with paid and unpaid work experiences. This is occurring in Pre-ETS through the OWL and WINS programs at participating programs.

ARS set the strategy to provide students participating in Pre-ETS with career portfolios upon exiting high school. Because of the COVID pandemic and associated staffing issues this strategy will be implemented at a later date.

ARS set the strategy to provide Pre-ETS core services internally or by utilizing external contractors. This is occurring but not all school districts have as many options. Where possible, ACDC provides internal core services to participating schools.

ARS set the strategy to develop and implement a process for Pre-ETS students to become traditional VR services clients and monitor results. This is a work in progress. It is happening but needs to be streamlined. ARS recognizes it is an individual’s choice to apply for VR services. An application to determine those clients who receive Pre-ETS services and then apply for VR service will be included as part of the new case management system.

**Priority 3: ARS will expand and improve Pre-ETS utilizing the resources at ACDC.  The new model focuses resources to serve students with disabilities to prepare and guide them toward achieving competitive integrated employment.**

ACDC dedicated staff helped facilitate the creation of mentorship program working with juvenile justice clients and Pre-ETS students a pre-apprenticeship program for Pre-ETS students.

**Priority 4: ARS will increase the number of Transition students that enter employment by having students work-ready upon graduation from high school or postsecondary training.**

ARS set the strategy to develop and support apprenticeships for students prior to graduation. Pilots have been initiated and are showing success.

ARS set the strategy to increase credential attainments in high school by moving Pre-ETS-VR ready students to VR services prior to graduation. Pilots have been initiated and are showing success.

ARS set the strategy to develop and support on-the-job trainings/direct job placement and supported employment with businesses that have Pre-ETS internship sites. This is happening and is an integral part of OWL, WOLF, WIN, and ACDC Pre-ETS services.

**Goal 3: ARS will create effective partnerships to advance employment for Arkansans with disabilities.**

Priorities:

* ARS will focus on public and private sector employers and increase business and industry awareness of ARS’ services.
* ARS will develop and strengthen partnerships with business, workforce development partners, economic development agencies, and community organizations to meet the needs of existing and new business customers.
* ARS will increase services provided to public and private sector employers by leveraging Stay-at-Work/Return-to-Work (SAW/RTW) programs to assist employers in keeping the employees with disabilities on the job.

Goal 3: Evaluation and Progress

**Priority 1: ARS will focus on public and private sector employers and increase business and industry awareness of ARS’ services.**

ARS set the strategy to market to employers how ARS can be an effective resource as it relates to the hiring of individuals with disabilities and assisting them in remaining in the workforce. The Business Engagement Unit (BEU) addressed this strategy by using face-to-face contact as their primary source in communicating with customers; however, because of the pandemic contact was adjusted to phone and email to maintain customer relations. Virtual and drive through job fairs along with Chamber of Commerce business expo events were utilized. These efforts increased awareness and hiring. There were 1,159 personal visits and 2,829 phone contacts made.

ARS set the strategy to maintain its partnership with Disability:IN-Arkansas and assist in membership recruitment by leveraging partnerships with existing business customers. The 2020 face-to-face business summit was cancelled due to the pandemic; however, two virtual business summits in collaboration with Disability:IN-Arkansas and the Governor’s Council on Developmental Disabilities were held in the spring and fall of 2021. There were more than 250 attendees and 90 viewed the NDEAM Summit. This resulted in increased awareness of inclusion among Arkansas employers. In total 412 people attended both the business summit and NDEAM Summit.

ARS set the strategy to work with employers to identify opportunities for pre-apprenticeship, Registered Apprenticeship, and On-the-Job programs. This strategy is ongoing with options remaining available through ACDC and Registered Apprenticeship Providers. Greater emphasis on this will become a part of the SASS program provided by ACDC.

**Priority 2: ARS will develop and strengthen partnerships with business, workforce development partners, economic development agencies, and community organizations to meet the needs of existing and new business customers**.

ARS set a strategy to utilize state agency transformation to expand relationships with partner agencies within the Department of Commerce. Prior to the COVID pandemic, the BEU was involved with WIOA partnerships consisting of monthly partner meetings~~,~~ and bi-annual workforce partner summits. Because of COVID ARS and other partners were limited to virtual state-wide partners meeting in April 2021.

ARS set a strategy to advance relationships with other WIOA partners at both the state and local levels. The BEU continued its efforts to collaborate with other WIOA stakeholders through scheduled meetings, events, and partnership opportunities. The BEU increased collaboration education of partner services in expansion of employment opportunities for ARS clients.

Field managers are members of local WIOA boards. ARS provided presentations of available services to partners. Senior management is part of the Executive Board. To increase wrap-around services and reduce duplication of services, ARS has co-located with other Workforce Services partners in Jonesboro, Hot Springs, Searcy, and Harrison with plans underway to do the same with other field offices when opportunities allow.

ARS set the strategy to conduct joint business service team meetings with all Workforce Development Boards. This strategy remains ongoing but limited because of the pandemic. Prior to COVID, ARS representatives attended meetings in person but now only attend virtually.

ARS set the strategy to develop products and services that meet individual business customer needs. ARS will utilize results of the comprehensive statewide needs assessment conducted in PY 21 to address this strategy.

ARS set the strategy to work with local workforce boards to identify local in-demand occupations. BEU staff attend monthly meetings of WIOA partners, Chambers of Commerce and business partner events to help determine local/regional labor market information and sector strategies communicating finds to ARS Counselors and clients.

ARS set the strategy to work with business and industry to establish on-the-job training, work-based learning opportunities, and apprenticeships. Initial training for apprenticeships and OJT were completed in fall 2019. However, the 2020 pandemic impacted the BEU’s ability to pursue and implement this initiative with business customers. The BEU is revisiting this service and plan to offer it to our customers.

**Priority 3: ARS will increase services provided to public and private sector employers by leveraging Stay-at-Work/Return-to-Work (SAW/RTW) programs to assist employers in keeping the employees with disabilities on the job.**

ARS set a strategy to increase overall number of SAW/RTW and Job Retention clients. With the pandemic still in place many civic and industry liaison groups are still not allowing individuals to present to them in person or are not meeting at all. This has hampered the ability to market SAW/RTW to employers across the state. With that ARS has increased SAW/RTW case closures from 0 in 2019 to 9 in 2020 and maintained at 9 in 2021. ARS served 65 total clients for job retention in 2021 compared to 72 in 2020.

ARS set a strategy to increase the number of employer referrals for SAW/RTW. ARS increased the number of employers served in 2021 to 43 from 35 in 2020. Access and Accommodations currently has the largest number of active cases from outside employers with 14.

A final strategy set was to incorporate SAW/RTW services when business engagement staff interacts with businesses. There have been no client referrals from business engagement staff this reporting period. SAW/RTW staff have been included in three business engagement meetings and two employer meetings facilitated by business engagement in this reporting period.

**Goal 4: ARS will increase effectiveness and efficiency of service delivery.**

Priorities:

* ARS will determine effective methods to serve the underserved/unserved populations.
* ARS will strengthen relationships with WIOA partners and business and industry.
* ARS will improve service delivery to job seekers and businesses by consistently providing services that meet individual needs.
* Staff will receive comprehensive training to improve service delivery.
* ARS will ensure clients have access to assistive technology services by evaluating the need for assistive technology throughout the rehabilitation process, and by making the proper referrals when assistive technology is appropriate.

Goal 4: Evaluation and Progress

**Priority 1: ARS will determine effective methods to serve the underserved/unserved populations.**

ARS set the strategy to work with WIOA partners to establish a common intake process that streamlines client application for services across partner programs. ARS and other WIOA partners are currently working on an IT solution to implement a common intake process. The anticipated completion of the project is unknown.

ARS set the strategy to collaborate with WIOA partners’ field staff statewide to provide information and awareness about vocational rehabilitation services. ARS field managers are members of local WIOA boards and provided presentations about available services to other core agencies. To increase wrap-around services and reduce duplication of services ARS has co-located with other Workforce Services partners in Jonesboro, Hot Springs, Searcy, and Harrison with plans underway to do the same with other field offices when opportunities allow.

ARS set a strategy to host partners’ training conferences to provide education and resources available for potential clients. This routinely occurs through the ACDC SASS program. All participants are referred to DWS and Adult Education for comparable benefits. ARS participated in WIOA core partners state-wide meetings in April and September 2021.

ARS set the strategy to partner with local Hispanic and Marshallese communities to increase awareness and availability of services. This action is still in progress. Regions are in the process of establishing itinerary points for applicable populations.

ARS set the strategy to collaborate with other partners to more effectively reach the deaf/hard of hearing community. This action is ongoing. In PY 20 ARS participated in a Job Fair at the Arkansas School for the Deaf.

ARS set the strategy to partner with Centers for Independent Living to provide information about ARS services in the geographically underserved areas. This action is still in progress. ARS assigned counselors to serve as liaisons with the CILS and partnered with CILS across the state in resource fairs. ARS utilizes the CILS to provide information to Pre-ETS regarding Social Security benefits.

ARS set a strategy to provide training on special populations to include those with serious mental illness and autism spectrum disorders. Because of COVID this strategy was not addressed in PY 20. ARS anticipates utilizing the Arkansas Rehabilitation Association, UALR, UAMS, and Partners for Inclusive Communities to provide such training in the future.

**Priority 2: ARS will strengthen relationships with WIOA partners and business and industry.**

ARS set the strategy to participate in business and industry Expo/Chamber events with other workforce partners. Prior to Covid, the BEU participated in these events in person, but they continue virtually to maintain relationships with workforce partners. EXPO/Chamber and workforce partners meetings were completed which promotes sustained and productive collaborations. Field managers participated in local business expos and job fairs.

ARS set a strategy to participate in monthly “Core Four” partner’s meetings with other WIOA partners. Core-Four partner meetings were not consistently held across the state. The outcome of this strategy was to engage WIOA partners and expand Core Four relationships. This is ongoing.

ARS set the strategy to seek opportunities for rehab area managers and counselors to collaborate with BEU staff through joint business customer visits to meet employer needs. Because of COVID activities around this strategy did not occur. ARS anticipates reinstituting such activities once the pandemic subsides.

ARS set the strategy for rehab area managers to access local workforce board funding and resources to utilize as a similar benefit in service delivery. This is remains ongoing. Field managers are members of local WIOA boards and attend meetings to determine programs funded at the local level. Information is passed on the Counselors as a resource for similar benefits.

ARS set the strategy to conduct partner meetings with educational training providers on a quarterly basis to foster stronger relationships. Because of COVID, educational providers were able to be invited to monthly regional area manager meetings and local field office staff meetings on a limited basis with the majority attending virtually.

**Priority 3: ARS will improve service delivery to job seekers and businesses by consistently providing services that meet individual needs.**

ARS set the strategy to develop and implement a Job Club initiative and collaborate with counselors to support clients in honing soft skills to enhance job readiness. There were 354 referrals made to job club in PY20; 115 attended and 67 completed the job clubs either virtually or in-person. There were 38 participants who received direct job placement assistance through job club. Clients attended from all regions of the state with the highest concentrations in Little Rock and Fayetteville.

ARS set the strategy to assist counselors and clients in IPE development by providing local labor market information and regional sector strategies. The BEU is providing ongoing labor market information to VR counselors when available regarding employment vacancies and trends. LMI assists VR counselors in guiding ARS clients in career choices to promote the achieving of WIOA employment standards. There were 453 referrals.

ARS set the strategy to train counselors to determine when referral for job recruitment is appropriate. The BEU provided job readiness training to all VR staff to promote achieving competitive integrated employment for ARS clients. As a result of the combined efforts of VR counselors and Business Engagement Representative in 2020-2021, 205 ARS clients achieved employment.

ARS set the strategy to develop career pathways with input from private industries and educational training providers in the state. ARS developed a model for career pathways for healthcare, logistics, and manufacturing with input from DWS and the local boards; however, funding for implementation of the complete plan was not approved. ARS can support the pathways as offered throughout the State in existing educational institutions.

**Priority 4: Staff will receive comprehensive training to improve service delivery.**

ARS set the strategy to train field personnel on apprenticeships/pre-apprenticeships, on-the-job training opportunities, and paid work experiences available for students and youth. The BEU took no action. ACDC provided presentations and training on accessing registered apprenticeship. The process is on-going.

**Priority 5: ARS will ensure clients have access to assistive technology services by evaluating the need for assistive technology throughout the rehabilitation process, and by making the proper referrals when assistive technology is appropriate.**

Access and Accommodations set the strategy to make the assistive technology/AT@Work referral available in the CMS at the time of intake, plan development, placement, and post- employment checks. ARS is currently in the middle of transitioning to a new CMS. The referral will be available once the new system is fully implemented. This strategy is delayed until the CMS is implemented. This is ongoing.

Access and Accommodations also set the strategy to train staff on the assistive technology services available to clients. Access and Accommodations staff presented to field offices across the state and have participated in two conferences in which a large portion of ARS staff are present. This will continue to be an ongoing process. This is ongoing.

Finally, Access and Accommodation set the strategy to make application forms for various community service programs dealing with assistive technology available in the CMS. ARS is currently in the middle of transitioning to a new CMS. The referral will be available once the new system is fully implemented. This strategy is delayed until the CMS is implemented. This is ongoing.

**Goal 5: ARS will increase the utilization of Community Rehabilitation and Supported Employment providers to achieve employment outcomes.**

Priorities:

* ARS will increase the effectiveness of current and new external Employment/Supported Employment providers.
* ARS will expand the availability of community employment providers and partner services that meet the needs of Arkansans with disabilities, including those requiring supported employment.
* ARS will transform ACTI to a new service delivery model, ACDC. This model focuses as a hub for training and services to support VR consumers and/or students with disabilities to successfully reach the milestones of their individual plans for employment.

Goal 5: Evaluation and Progress

**Priority 1: ARS will increase the effectiveness of current and new external Employment/Supported Employment providers.**

ARS set the strategy to target individuals with the most significant disabilities to provide customized employment, supported employment, and other individualized services. This action is still in progress. ARS is partnering with SE vendors to serve 511 clients.

ARS set the strategy to collaborate with qualified vendors, community partners, and employers to expand supported employment initiatives. The agency provides ongoing training for vendors that partner with the agency to provide job placement assistance, supported employment services, career counseling, and customized employment. A Business Engagement Representatives is assigned to each region or field office to build relationships with employers in the community and serve as liaisons for connecting clients to employers. Field Staff are trained to utilize tools such as the Labor Market Index to assist clients with identifying a vocational goal and exploring that goal for the purpose of providing VR services and assisting the client with necessary training leading to competitive employment. The Covid-19 pandemic has been the biggest challenge for the agency for employment and it correlates to the increased rates of unemployment due to safety and the decrease in employers.

ARS:

* Participated on a radio show for outreach.
* Created online YouTube training related to ARS External Employment Services for providers and ARS staff.
* Created an External Employment Services Provider manual for qualified vendors.

In addition, Community Rehabilitation Program staff received training opportunities about ARS requirements and forms.

ARS set the strategy to continue to partner with other state agencies to provide collaborative services to individuals with the most significant disabilities. This is ongoing. ARS participates in partner meetings with DDS and Adult Education to determine collaborative ways to streamline delivery across multiple WIOA partners to serve individuals with the most significant disabilities.

ARS partnered with the Department of Human Services Medicaid, developmental Disabilities Services, and Division of Adult, Aging, and Behavioral Health Services, and the Division of Medical Services to connect with the Provider-led Arkansas Shared Savings (PASSE). The PASSE is a managed care organization for Medicaid Waiver Services. The goal was to build the PASSE’s to prioritize Community Employment Services. ARS had two meetings with the PASSEs educating them on individuals with behavioral health disabilities and work as part of recovery. The meetings were held virtually due to the COVID pandemic.

ARS participated on the Children and Youth with Sensory and other disabilities (CAYSI), Division of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), Special Education Unit, Deaf Blind Transition Interagency Team enhancing opportunities for Deaf/Blind individuals (transition students and adults) to seek Supported Employment. The list of team members is: AR School for the Deaf, Arkansas School for the Blind, AR Dept of Blind, Arkansas Dept of Education, Division of Services for the Blind, Arkansas Deaf/Blind Community, AR National Federation for the Blind, AR Dept of Human Services/Development Disabilities Services, Arkansas Rehabilitation Services, Department of Workforce Services/Veteran Affairs, World Services for the Blind, South Central Helen Keller National Center, Goodwill, Community Advocates. CAYSI began a Pilot Program in PY2020 to establish policies, procedures, and processes. ARS and DSB have created a dual process. ARS provided opportunities for VR counselors and Community Rehabilitation Programs to receive free trainings from the Helen Keller National Center.

ARS updated a Memorandum of Understanding and pursued signatures with the Division of State Services for the Blind, Arkansas Department of Human Services, through the Division of Developmental Disabilities Services, which is responsible for administering the Home and Community-Based Services program; the Division of Adult, Aging, and Behavioral Health Services; and the Division of Medical Services; Arkansas Department of Education, Division of Elementary and Secondary Education, Special Education; and Arkansas Division of Workforce Services. The Department of Human Services agencies have not signed the updated MOU despite multiple attempts including outreach by the ARS Commissioner.

**Priority 2: ARS will expand the availability of community employment providers and partner services that meet the needs of Arkansans with disabilities, including those requiring supported employment.**

ARS set the strategy to develop a community employment advisory committee.

ARS assisted Summit Community Care, a PASSE, and its community initiative for outreach to employment vendors. ARS participated with Summit Community Care to develop a cadre of providers for training on Employment First and to participate in the APSE Arkansas Regional Collaborative monthly meeting and a quarterly meeting in employment support development.

ARS set the strategy to develop partnership resources with other state agencies, provider associations and advocacy organizations to expand employment opportunities, transportation access, funding for extended services, and/or wrap around services for individuals not on Medicaid waiver.

ARS assisted Summit Community Care and the National APSE with outreach to providers for their Community Initiative of Employment First Bootcamp and the employment monthly meetings. A Summit Community Care contractor developed updated professional development webinars on employment services held in November and December 2021. The webinars are continuing in FY2022.

**Priority 3: ARS will transform ACTI to a new service delivery model, ACDC. This model focuses as a hub for training and services to support VR consumers and/or students with disabilities to successfully reach the milestones of their individual plans for employment.**

ACDC set the strategy to address Career and Technical Education training programs to meet the needs of students and labor market demands. ACDC narrowed the focus of CTE programming and continues to develop options in conjunction with educational services cooperatives. There were eight programs with 48 students enrolled and 43 who completed.

ACDC set the strategy to address pre-apprenticeship training programs to facilitate placement in USDOL approved registered apprenticeship programs. Pilots were completed. ACDC worked with the NW Arkansas regional office, NATF, and Fayetteville High School to provide Certified Nursing Pre- and Registered Apprenticeships. There were 17 participants who completed the CNA program and eight who completed the area grant program.

ACDC set the strategy to address pre-employment transition and career development services to assist students in transitioning to postsecondary education and employment. This continues to be an option for students on the ACDC campus in Hot Springs and those served in the community. There are 187 currently enrolled in training targeted for placement in registered apprenticeships.

ACDC set the strategy to address talent development for pre-ETS and Transition customers. OSHA, ServSafe, Guest Services training are available for all students with disabilities served by ARS.

ACDC set the strategy to address co-developing programming with Field Services to assist students in achieving career goals including identifying needed accommodations in postsecondary education and employment. Initial stages of development are completed for the SASS Program. To date there are over 60 students with disabilities receiving services primarily targeted for those attending two-year colleges.

ACDC set the strategy to address to obtain resources to support direct and facilitated provision of training and vocational rehabilitation services at the central location in Hot Springs and with partners across the state. This is a work in progress. Efforts are underway to develop contracts to partner with Educational Service Cooperatives to facilitate CTE/WBL to students with disabilities while still in high school.

ACDC set the strategy to address to develop a new plan for marketing and branding the new program model. This is a work in progress. Currently, ACDC is working with ARS Communications on a final product.

**Outreach: Strategy**

ARS provides outreach activities to individuals from minority backgrounds, individuals with the most significant disabilities, and others who are unserved or underserved. For PY 2018, ARS’ focus is to provide training to improve outreach activities, and to utilize its network of CRPs to identify individuals with disabilities who are minorities and/or have the most significant disability. These individuals, who because of rural living, a lack of transportation, or English as a second language, can be referred to ARS and other support service networks needed to reach employment.

**Outreach: Evaluation and Progress**

ARS:

* Implemented training for counselors and professional assessment staff to learn the cultural values of the state’s Hispanic community and ways to break down cultural and language barriers to accessing VR services.
* Worked with the state’s Hispanic transition clients to encourage them to consider VR counseling as a career.
* Developed alternative strategies including use of virtual technology to connect with the Hispanic and Marshallese communities.
* Continued to partner with the Centers for Independent Living to provide awareness about ARS’ services for individuals with disabilities.
* Continued to work with WIOA partners to more effectively provide services to individuals with disabilities throughout the state.

**B. Describe the factors that impeded the achievement of the goals and priorities**

The Covid-19 pandemic had a direct impact on ARS’ ability to achieve its goals and priorities because of the restrictions imposed for in person meetings, restricted training, business closures, decreased staffing due to Covid exposures and quarantines, and health concerns for individuals with disabilities.

**2. An evaluation of the extent to which the Supported Employment program goals described in the Supported Employment Supplement for the most recent program year were achieved. The evaluation must:**

**A. Identify the strategies that contributed to the achievement of the goals**

ARS increased the availability of supported employment services to clients by providing training and technical assistance to vendors and vocational rehabilitation counselors. ARS placed a greater emphasis on proven and innovative supported employment outcomes related to competitive integrated employment performance-based outcomes. ARS created a new monitoring process to track the number of vendors in each area, number of clients served by each vendor, milestone payments made, and expenditures. Successful closure data is shared with CRPs.

**Supported Employment:** Evaluation and Progress

* During PY2020, the COVID pandemic had a major impact on individuals with the most significant disabilities who were seeking service. SE referrals decreased from 267 in PY 19 to 187 in PY20. The SE successful employment outcomes decreased from 88 in PY19 to 74 in PY20. Based on all 26 closures, SE successful employment outcomes decreased from five percent to three percent.

ARS:

* Ensured the quality of SE services by monitoring data related to expenditures, through ongoing communication with the counselors, and by monitoring CRPs, who received specific funding amounts, through vendor case review.
* Hosted two trainings provided by DOL ODEP Subject Matter Experts that targeted the Arkansas waiver managed care entities referred to as Provider-led Arkansas Shared Saving Entities (PAASE) and focused on supported employment for individuals with significant behavioral health concerns.
* Trained field staff by region using virtual training on External Employment Services 101.
* Developed YouTube an External Employment Services training, which included Supported Employment for service providers and ARS Field staff.
* Revised a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), with Division of Workforce Services, Division of Services for the Blind, Arkansas Department of Education – Special Education Unit, and the Department of Human Services: Division of Developmental Disabilities Services and Division of Adult, Aging, and Behavioral Health Services. The MOU defines the partnership, the roles and responsibilities between the agencies, and successful employment as competitive integrated employment for individuals with the most significant disabilities.
* Participated in AR APSE Chapter meetings bimonthly, which focused on best models of service provision for supported employment, customized employment, and provider transformation.
* ARS provided transition from employment to extended services beginning when individuals reach a point of stabilization on the job and for the next 90 days towards successful closure. After ARS closes the cases as successful, extended services is transitioned to the provider responsible for funding. If the individual is on waiver, originally funding has been through the Department of Human Services, Division of Developmental Disabilities Services Waiver Program. In PY2018, this funding transferred to the Provider-led Arkansas Shared Savings Entity (PASSE), a model of organized care created by Act 775 of 2017. Each PASSE is made up of governing providers who have entered a partnership with an experienced program administration organization. If the individual is not on waiver, providers must generate funding to provide extended services.

**B. Describe the factors that impeded the achievement of the goals and priorities**

The Covid-19 pandemic had a direct impact on ARS’ ability to achieve its goals and priorities because of the restrictions imposed for in person meetings, restricted training, business closures, decreased staffing due to Covid exposures and quarantines, and health concerns for individuals with disabilities.

**3. The VR program’s performance on the performance accountability indicators under section 116 of WIOA**

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In PY2020, ARS achieved the following levels on the performance measures as reported on the ETA-9169.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Employment Rate Second Quarter After Exit | 64.10% |
| Employment Rate Fourth Quarter After Exit | 62.90% |
| Median Earnings | $5,648.03 |
| Credential Rate | 26.40% |
| Measurable Skills Gain | 55.10% |

**4. How the funds reserved for innovation and expansion (I&E) activities were utilized**

During PY2020, ARS utilized I&E funds to support activities of the State Rehabilitation Council and to fund a portion of the State Independent Living Council’s (SILC) budget as outlined in the SILC’s resource plan. Traditionally, ARS uses I&E funds to support outreach activities to unserved and underserved Arkansans with disabilities and to strengthen relationships with our business partners. Due to Covid-19, these activities did not occur.

**Q. Quality, Scope, and Extent of Supported Employment Services**

**Include the following:**

**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**

Quality

ARS refers individuals for Supported Employment services to one of 70 certified CRPs. Supported Employment services are provided to individuals with a most significant disability, including youth with a most significant disability. The services are individualized and customized, consistent with the unique preferences, interests, needs, supports (PINS), and informed choice by the individual. Supported Employment processes assist job seekers with job development, job placement, stabilization on the job, 90 days to successful employment and extended services funded by other entities or by ARS for a youth under 25. Supported Employment is a “place then train” model.

Scope of Services

ARS determines eligibility for SE services and CRPs bill based on meeting the Milestone requirements.

Milestone 1 – Referral/Job Development: CRPs accept the referral and provide assistance with career readiness activities (seeking employment, filling out applications, and interviewing skills, etc.) and assistance in the development, creation, or identification of paid integrated work in a community business or self-employment setting.

Milestone 2 – Job Placement: CRPs assist an individual in obtaining a job in a competitive integrated setting based on his/her interests, abilities, needs, and informed choice. The individual is placed in a competitive integrated employment setting with supports for a period of time and is compensated commensurate with others in the same position at minimum wage or above.

Milestone 3 – Stabilization: This service time frame assures an individual has learned his/her job with supports to meet the demands of the integrated work environment in assurance of long-term job success. The individual works successfully for the minimum required 15 hours a week identified in the IPE. The individual must remain on the job 30 days or more to be considered stable, and the Job Coach reduces support to less than 20 percent of the individual's working hours. Extended services begin in stabilization with the identification of the funding source or by ARS, if a youth is under the age of 25. Youth receiving extended services funded by ARS will remain in this status until the service is no longer needed and the youth is considered successfully employed or until four years of this service expires or the youth reaches the age of 25.

**2. The timing of transition to extended services**

ARS provides time-limited services needed to support an individual in employment. Vocational Rehabilitation can fund a maximum of 24 months of job coaching and follow-along services unless the IPE indicates more than 24 months of services are necessary for the individual to achieve job stability before transitioning to extended services. Prior to the purchase of supported employment services, the counselor determines the need for services, the appropriate funding stream for extended services, and the selected CRP through informed choice and identified on the IPE. The transition to the extended services (long-term funding source) occurs after the individual is employed at the goal of 15 hours established in ARS policy and begins to stabilize on the job. After the determination of funding for extended services, the individual must maintain employment for at least 90 days before the individual’s case is a successful closure and before he/she is transitioned to extended services. This transition would be completed within a 24-month time frame of supported employment services, including job coaching. If a determination is made based that the individual needs more than 24 months of services to achieve job stability and the time-limited services of job coaching, ARS will obtain justification from the CRP.

ARS developed the Youth Extended Services policy for individuals under the age of 25. This policy allows ARS to pay for youth extended services if no other resources are available up to four years or age 25. Youth Extended Services may be available through Individualized Job Coaching Services on an as needed basis after job placement. Youth Extended Services is available for up to 200 hours per year not to exceed four years during the execution of the IPE. The service supports youth to ensure job longevity and includes onsite visits to both the individual and the employer. The Extended Services requirement for onsite contact is a minimum requirement for monthly onsite contact. Once the individual reaches the age of 25, ARS must assure extended service funding resources are available through another source. Youth receiving extended services funded by ARS will remain in stabilization status until the service is no longer needed and the youth is considered successfully employed or until four years of this service expires or the youth reaches the age of 25.

Once the case is closed successful (status 26), this service is transitioned to the provider responsible for funding, which may include payment through the individual’s community employment services waiver plan funded by the Provider-led Arkansas Shared Savings Entity (PASSE), a model of organized care created by Act 775 of 2017. Each PASSE is made up of governing providers who have entered a partnership with an experienced program administration organization. If the individual is not on waiver, providers must generate funding to provide extended services.

**Priority: ARS will leverage other public and private funds to increase resources for extended services and expanded supported employment opportunities for youth with the most significant disabilities.**

ARS set the strategy to determine methods for funding extended services for youth with disabilities not to exceed four years through the Employment First Vendors (CRPs, SE providers, and other external employment). No action was taken because of Covid-19.

ARS created the Youth Extended Services (YES) policy for fee payments by ARS that was promulgated in 2019. ARS Field staff were trained on the policy during PY2020. Providers received training related to ARS’ Youth Extended Services policy and fee for service.

ARS set the strategy to develop new service components or agreements with partners of state agencies for sequential funding of extended services to assure youth with disabilities have successful employment opportunities. ARS has not pursued this strategy due to the COVID pandemic.

ARS set the strategy to provide education and instruction of WIOA expectations to providers and will establish Memorandums of Understanding or contract services to providers to initiate services to potentially eligible clients. This is ongoing. MOUs are renewed annually. ARS has partnered with vendors to provide Pre-ETS services to potentially eligible and eligible students.

#### Vocational Rehabilitation (Combined or General) Certifications

States must provide written and signed certifications that:

##### The (enter the name of designated State agency or designated State unit, as appropriate,) is authorized to submit the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan under title I of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Rehabilitation Act), as amended by WIOA[14], and its supplement under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act[15];

###### Enter the name of designated State agency or designated State unit, as appropriate

Arkansas Rehabilitation Services

##### 2. As a condition for the receipt of Federal funds under title I of the Rehabilitation Act for the provision of VR services, the (enter the name of designated State agency)[16] agrees to operate and administer the State VR Services Program in accordance with the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan[17] , the Rehabilitation Act, and all applicable regulations[18] , policies, and procedures established by the Secretary of Education. Funds made available under section 111 of the Rehabilitation Act are used solely for the provision of VR services and the administration of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan;

###### Enter the name of designated State agency

Division of Workforce Services

##### 3. As a condition for the receipt of Federal funds under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act for supported employment services, the designated State agency agrees to operate and administer the State Supported Employment Services Program in accordance with the supplement to the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan[19] , the Rehabilitation Act, and all applicable regulations[20] , policies, and procedures established by the Secretary of Education. Funds made available under title VI are used solely for the provision of supported employment services and the administration of the supplement to the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan;

##### 4. The designated State agency and/or the designated State unit has the authority under State law to perform the functions of the State regarding the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement;

##### 5. The State legally may carry out each provision of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement.

##### 6. All provisions of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement are consistent with State law.

##### 7. The (enter the name of authorized representative below) has the authority under State law to receive, hold, and disburse Federal funds made available under the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement;

###### Enter the name of authorized representative below

Joseph Baxter

##### 8. The (enter the title of authorized representative below) has the authority to submit the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and the supplement for Supported Employment services;

###### Enter the title of authorized representative below

Commissioner, Arkansas Rehabilitation Services

##### 9. The agency that submits the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement has adopted or otherwise formally approved the plan and its supplement.

##### Footnotes

 [14] Public Law 113-128.
 [15] Unless otherwise stated, "Rehabilitation Act" means the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended by WIOA, signed into law on July 22, 2014.
 [16] All references in this plan to "designated State agency" or to "the State agency" relate to the agency identified in this paragraph.
 [17] No funds under title I of the Rehabilitation Act may be awarded without an approved VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan in accordance with section 101(a) of the Rehabilitation Act.
 [18] Applicable regulations, in part, include the Education Department General Administrative Regulations (EDGAR) in 34 CFR parts 76, 77, 79, 81, and 82; 2 CFR
part 200 as adopted by 2 CFR part 3474; and the State VR Services program regulations.
 [19] No funds under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act may be awarded without an approved supported employment supplement to the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined  State Plan in accordance with section 606(a) of the Rehabilitation Act.
[20] Applicable regulations, in part, include the citations in footnote 6.

##### Certification Signature

| Signatory information | Enter Signatory information in this column |
| --- | --- |
| Name of Signatory | Joseph Baxter |
| Title of Signatory | Commissioner, Arkansas Rehabilitation Services |
| Date Signed | 09/24/2020 |

#### Assurances

The designated State agency or designated State unit, as appropriate and identified in the State certifications included with this VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement, through signature of the authorized individual, assures the Commissioner of the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA), that it will comply with all of the requirements of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement, as set forth in sections 101(a) and 606 of the Rehabilitation Act. The individual authorized to submit the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement makes the following assurances: **The State Plan must provide assurances that:**

| The State Plan must include | Include |
| --- | --- |
| 1. Public Comment on Policies and Procedures: The designated State agency assures it will comply with all statutory and regulatory requirements for public participation in the VR Services Portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan, as required by section 101(a)(16)(A) of the Rehabilitation Act. |  |
| 2. Submission of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and Its Supplement: The designated State unit assures it will comply with all requirements pertaining to the submission and revisions of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement for the State Supported Employment Services program, as required by sections 101(a)(1), (22), (23), and 606(a) of the Rehabilitation Act; section 102 of WIOA in the case of the submission of a unified plan; section 103 of WIOA in the case of a submission of a Combined State Plan; 34 CFR 76.140. |  |
| 3. The designated State agency or designated State unit, as appropriate, assures it will comply with the requirements related to:Administration of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan: |  |
| 3.a. The establishment of the designated State agency and designated State unit, as required by section 101(a)(2) of the Rehabilitation Act |  |
| 3.b. The establishment of either a State independent commission or State Rehabilitation Council, as required by section 101(a)(21) of the Rehabilitation Act. The designated State agency or designated State unit, as applicable (A or B must be selected): |  |
| 3.b.(A) “is an independent State commission” (Yes/No) | No |
| 3.b.(B) “has established a State Rehabilitation Council” (Yes/No) | Yes |
| 3.c. Consultations regarding the administration of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan, in accordance with section 101(a)(16)(B) of the Rehabilitation Act |  |
| 3.d. The financial participation by the State, or if the State so elects, by the State and local agencies, to provide the amount of the non-Federal share of the cost of carrying out the VR program in accordance with section 101(a)(3) |  |
| 3.e. The local administration of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan, in accordance with section 101(a)(2)(A) of the Rehabilitation Act. Select yes or no, as appropriate, to identify if the designated State agency allows for the local administration of VR funds (Yes/No) | No |
| 3.f. The shared funding and administration of joint programs, in accordance with section 101(a)(2)(A)(ii) of the Rehabilitation Act. Select yes or no, as appropriate, to identify if the designated State agency allows for the shared funding and administration of joint programs (Yes/No) | No |
| 3.g. Statewideness and waivers of statewideness requirements, as set forth in section 101(a)(4) of the Rehabilitation Act. Is the designated State agency requesting or maintaining a waiver of statewideness for one or more services provided under the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan? (Yes/No) See Section 2 of this VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan | No |
| 3.h. The descriptions for cooperation, collaboration, and coordination, as required by sections 101(a)(11) and (24)(B); and 606(b) of the Rehabilitation Act |  |
| 3.i. All required methods of administration, as required by section 101(a)(6) of the Rehabilitation Act |  |
| 3.j. The requirements for the comprehensive system of personnel development, as set forth in section 101(a)(7) of the Rehabilitation Act |  |
| 3.k. The compilation and submission to the Commissioner of statewide assessments, estimates, State goals and priorities, strategies, and progress reports, as appropriate, and as required by sections 101(a)(15), 105(c)(2), and 606(b)(8) of the Rehabilitation Act |  |
| 3.l. The reservation and use of a portion of the funds allotted to the State under section 110 of the Rehabilitation Act for the development and implementation of innovative approaches to expand and improve the provision of VR services to individuals with disabilities, particularly individuals with the most significant disabilities |  |
| 3.m. The submission of reports as required by section 101(a)(10) of the Rehabilitation Act |  |
| 4. Administration of the Provision of VR Services: The designated State agency, or designated State unit, as appropriate, assures that it will: |  |
| 4.a. Comply with all requirements regarding information and referral services in accordance with sections 101(a)(5)(D) and (20) of the Rehabilitation Act |  |
| 4.b. Impose no duration of residence requirement as part of determining an individual's eligibility for VR services or that excludes from services under the plan any individual who is present in the State in accordance with section 101(a)(12) of the Rehabilitation Act |  |
| 4.c. Provide the full range of services listed in section 103(a) of the Rehabilitation Act as appropriate, to all eligible individuals with disabilities in the State who apply for services in accordance with section 101(a)(5) of the Rehabilitation Act? (Yes/No) | Yes |
| 4.d. Determine whether comparable services and benefits are available to the individual in accordance with section 101(a)(8) of the Rehabilitation Act |  |
| 4.e. Comply with requirements regarding the provisions of informed choice for all applicants and eligible individuals in accordance with section 102(d) of the Rehabilitation Act |  |
| 4.f. Comply with requirements regarding the provisions of informed choice for all applicants and eligible individuals in accordance with section 102(d) of the Rehabilitation Act |  |
| 4.g. Provide vocational rehabilitation services to American Indians who are individuals with disabilities residing in the State, in accordance with section 101(a)(13) of the Rehabilitation Act |  |
| 4.h. Comply with the requirements for the conduct of semiannual or annual reviews, as appropriate, for individuals employed either in an extended employment setting in a community rehabilitation program or any other employment under section 14(c) of the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, as required by section 101(a)(14)of the Rehabilitation Act |  |
| 4.i. Meet the requirements in sections 101(a)(17) and 103(b)(2) of the​​​​​​​ Rehabilitation Act if the State elects to construct, under special circumstances, facilities for community rehabilitation programs |  |
| 4.j. With respect to students with disabilities, the State, |  |
| 4.j.i. Has developed and will implement, |  |
| 4.j.i.I. Strategies to address the needs identified in the assessments; and |  |
| 4.j.i.II. Strategies to achieve the goals and priorities identified by the State, to improve and expand vocational rehabilitation services for students with disabilities on a statewide basis; and |  |
| 4.j.ii. Has developed and will implement strategies to provide pre-employment transition services (sections 101(a)(15) and 101(a)(25)) |  |
| 5. Program Administration for the Supported Employment Title VI Supplement: |  |
| 5.a. The designated State unit assures that it will include in the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan all information required by section 606 of the Rehabilitation Act |  |
| 5.b. The designated State agency assures that it will submit reports in such form and in accordance with such procedures as the Commissioner may require and collects the information required by section 101(a)(10) of the Rehabilitation Act separately for individuals receiving supported employment services under title I and individuals receiving supported employment services under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act |  |
| 5.c. The designated state unit will coordinate activities with any other State agency that is functioning as an employment network under the Ticket to Work and Self-Sufficiency program under Section 1148 of the Social Security Act |  |
| 6. Financial Administration of the Supported Employment Program: |  |
| 6.a. The designated State agency assures that it will expend no more than 2.5 percent of the State's allotment under title VI for administrative costs of carrying out this program; and, the designated State agency or agencies will provide, directly or indirectly through public or private entities, non-Federal contributions in an amount that is not less than 10 percent of the costs of carrying out supported employment services provided to youth with the most significant disabilities with the funds reserved for such purpose under section 603(d) of the Rehabilitation Act, in accordance with section 606(b)(7)(G) and (H) of the Rehabilitation Act |  |
| 6.b. The designated State agency assures that it will use funds made available under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act only to provide supported employment services to individuals with the most significant disabilities, including extended services to youth with the most significant disabilities, who are eligible to receive such services; and, that such funds are used only to supplement and not supplant the funds provided under Title I of the Rehabilitation Act, when providing supported employment services specified in the individualized plan for employment, in accordance with section 606(b)(7)(A) and (D), of the Rehabilitation Act |  |
| 7. Provision of Supported Employment Services: | Yes |
| 7.a. The Designated State Agency Assures That it Will Provide Supported Employment Services as Defined in Section 7(39) of the Rehabilitation Act |  |
| 7.b. The designated State agency assures that: |  |
| 7.b.i. The comprehensive assessment of individuals with significant disabilities conducted under section 102(b)(1) of the Rehabilitation Act and funded under title I of the Rehabilitation Act includes consideration of supported employment as an appropriate employment outcome, in accordance with the requirements of section 606(b)(7)(B) of the Rehabilitation Act |  |
| 7.b.ii. An individualized plan for employment that meets the requirements of section 102(b) of the Rehabilitation Act, which is developed and updated with title I funds, in accordance with sections 102(b)(3)(F) and 606(b)(6)(C) and (E) of the Rehabilitation Act |  |

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#### Vocational Rehabilitation Program Performance Indicators

**Performance Goals for the Core Programs**

Each state submitting a Unified or Combined State Plan is required to identify expected levels of performance for each of the primary indicators of performance for the first two years covered by the plan. The state is required to reach agreement with the Secretary of Labor, in conjunction with the Secretary of Education, on state-negotiated levels of performance for the indicators for each of the first two years of the plan.

For Program Year (PY) 2016-2019 plans, the Departments used the transition authority under section 503(a) of WIOA to designate certain primary indicators of performance as “baseline” indicators to ensure an orderly transition from the requirements of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 to those under WIOA. A “baseline” indicator was one for which states did not propose an expected level of performance and did not come to agreement with the Departments on negotiated levels of performance because sufficient data was not available to establish such performance levels. As a result, “baseline” indicators were not used in the end of the year adjustment of performance levels and were not used to determine failure to meet adjusted levels of performance for purposes of sanctions. The Departments designated indicators as “baseline” based on the likelihood of a State having insufficient data with which to make a reasonable determination of an expected level of performance.

For PYs 2020-2023 Plans, Title I programs (Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth) and the Title II program (Adult Education and Family Literacy Act) will have two full years of data available to make reasonable determinations of expected levels of performance for the following indicators for PY 2020 and PY 2021:

* Employment (Second Quarter after Exit);
* Employment (Fourth Quarter after Exit);
* Median Earnings (Second Quarter after Exit);
* Credential Attainment Rate; and
* Measurable Skill Gains

The Wagner-Peyser Act Employment Service program, authorized under the Wagner-Peyser Act, as amended by title III of WIOA, will have two full years of data available to make a reasonable determination of expected levels of performance for the following indicators for PY 2020 and PY 2021:

* Employment (Second Quarter after Exit);
* Employment (Fourth Quarter after Exit); and
* Median Earnings (Second Quarter after Exit)

The Credential Attainment Rate and Measurable Skill Gains indicators do not apply to the Wagner-Peyser Act Employment Service program; therefore, this program will not submit expected levels of performance for these indicators.

For the first two years of PYs 2020-2023 Plans, the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program, authorized under title I of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended by title IV of WIOA, will have two full years of data available for the Measurable Skill Gains indicator only. Therefore, the Departments will designate the following indicators as “baseline” for the VR program for PY 2020 and PY 2021:

* Employment (Second Quarter after Exit);
* Employment (Fourth Quarter after Exit);
* Median Earnings (Second Quarter after Exit); and
* Credential Attainment Rate

VR agencies must continue to collect and report on all indicators, including those that have been designated as “baseline, pursuant to section 116(d) of WIOA.” The actual performance data reported by these programs for indicators designated as “baseline” for PY 2020 and PY 2021 will serve as baseline data in future years. The Departments will require VR agencies to submit expected levels of performance for these indicators for PY 2022 and PY 2023.

The Departments determined that the Effectiveness in Serving Employers indicator will be measured as a shared outcome across all six core programs within each state to ensure a holistic approach to serving employers. The Departments will continue piloting approaches for measuring this indicator for the first two years of PY 2020-2023 plans. Therefore, states are not required to submit an expected level of performance for the Effectiveness in Serving Employers indicator for PY 2020 and PY 2021. However, core programs are expected to collect data and report on this indicator for PY 2020 and PY 2021 as they did for PYs 2016-2019 plans.

Each core program must submit an expected level of performance for all of the other indicators, as applicable, with the exception of the four indicators designated as “baseline” for the VR program in PY 2020 and PY 2021. The Departments will work with states during the negotiation process to establish negotiated levels of performance for each of the primary indicators for the core programs not listed as “baseline.” Each state must update its plan to include the agreed-upon negotiated levels of performance before the Departments approve a state’s plan.

States may identify additional indicators in the plan, including additional approaches to measuring Effectiveness in Serving Employers, and may establish levels of performance for each of the state indicators. Please identify any such state indicators under Additional Indicators of Performance.

| Performance Indicators | PY 2020 Expected Level | PY 2020 Negotiated Level | PY 2021 Expected Level | PY 2021 Negotiated Level |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Employment (Second Quarter After Exit) | Baseline | Baseline | Baseline | Baseline |
| Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit) | Baseline | Baseline | Baseline | Baseline |
| Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)  | Baseline | Baseline | Baseline | Baseline |
| Credential Attainment Rate  | Baseline | Baseline | Baseline | Baseline |
| Measurable Skill Gains  | 24.0% | 24.0% | 24.0% | 25.0% |
| Effectiveness in Serving Employers  | Not Applicable [1](#footnote-1) | Not Applicable [1](#footnote-1) | Not Applicable [1](#footnote-1) | Not Applicable [1](#footnote-1) |

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