

BIENNIUM BUDGET REQUEST  
AGENCY NARRATIVES 70-A  
AGENCY 81 - NEBRASKA COMMISSION FOR THE BLIND AND  
VISUALLY IMPAIRED  
BIENNIUM STARTING IN FY 2008 VERSION AI

STATUTORY AUTHORITY:

Reference Nebraska Revised Statutes Sections 71-8601 through 71-8616 and 20-63-105 to 63-106. The Nebraska Commission for the Blind (NCBVI) was created in 2000 by the Nebraska Unicameral (LB 352). The agency operates under one primary grant and four grants of lesser funding. The Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) numbers are as follows:

CFDA 84.126A Basic Support (primary grant)

CFDA 84.177B Older Individuals Who Are Blind

CFDA 84.169A Part B Independent Living

CFDA 84.265A In-Service Training

CFDA 84.187A Supported Employment (100% federal)

AGENCY VISION, MISSION AND PRINCIPLES, AND GOALS

## VISION

The vision of NCBVI is that blind individuals will become full participants in economic and community life. The general public will understand that blind Nebraskans provide a tremendous human resource to society as a whole. With skills, confidence, and resource, blind and visually impaired persons can participate fully in all facets of life according to their unique strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities, interests, and informed choice. NCBVI will provide services that enable blind persons to achieve education or training, engage in the workforce, live independently, and to minimize or eliminate their dependence on public support.

## MISSION AND PRINCIPLES

NCBVI Mission Statement: Empowering blind individuals, creating opportunities, and building belief in the blind.

Vision loss itself does not prevent people from achieving personal goals and ambitions. To achieve full participation in life, blind persons need to develop a positive understanding of blindness, learn non-visual skills and techniques, and gain confidence and belief in their skills and abilities. With these resources, blind persons are able to elevate their personal expectations and then can work to achieve personal goals.

Employers and the public in general need education and information about blindness, to eliminate the attitudinal barriers that do prevent the blind from achieving their goals. Community members who expect equal participation from blind individuals can help to create opportunities for employment, education, and independence.

NCBVI resources are invested to increase fiscal and personal contributions made to Nebraska by blind persons, and to decrease dependency on public support that often occurs without these services.

#### GOALS:

1. Increase the number of blind/visually impaired persons who are gainfully employed in the career of their choice, including transition ages 16 to 26 years as well as persons of all adult age groups.
2. Increase the number of blind persons who live independently without dependence on public support, including the increasingly large older blind population.
3. Increase number of persons served who are Deaf-Blind or have other multiple disabilities, and those who represent underserved racial and ethnic population groups.
4. Expand the funding base to assure that federal match requirements continue to be met and to assure long-term stability of rehabilitation & independent living services to blind Nebraskans.

#### MANAGEMENT PROCESSES, AND SERVICE DELIVERY METHODS:

The Governor of the State of Nebraska appoints a five-member Board of Commissioners, at least three of whom must be blind or visually impaired, to provide consumer-driven leadership to NCBVI. The agency is managed by Administrative staff in a central Lincoln office. The Executive Director heads the agency.

Two Deputy Directors provide leadership to field operations statewide in the two primary operational areas of Vocational Rehabilitation and Independent Living. An Orientation and Training Center, in Lincoln, provides residential, intensive training to blind persons from across Nebraska. Field services of training and counseling are facilitated by three Districts, each with its own caseload-carrying supervisor. The Districts are served by six local offices (Lincoln, Omaha, North Platte, Kearney, Norfolk and Scottsbluff). Nebraska Business Enterprises operates the Randolph-Sheppard blind vendor employment opportunities. Statewide, from the District office base, itinerant services are provided in the areas of vocational rehabilitation, independent living, transition from school to work, older blind, Deaf-Blind, supported employment, adaptive technology, and related services as needed. Special programs are held for specific purposes, such as employment opportunities for youth, curriculum-based training for groups, workshops for persons entering college or seeking employment, job-seeking clubs, leadership training, assistive technology, etc.

## REQUEST PRIORITIES AND SIGNIFICANT ISSUES

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (Agency 081) is the state agency established to assist persons who are blind or visually impaired in obtaining gainful employment, to expand economic opportunities for blind persons, to increase the available occupational range and diversity for blind persons, and to stimulate other efforts that aid blind persons in becoming self-supporting tax-payers. The agency provides direct services and aid to individuals; its programs are structured primarily under the divisions of vocational rehabilitation and independent living, and also include a residential training component for blind adults, and the Randolph-Sheppard blind vendor operations.

Our Budget Request for the 2008 - 2009 Biennium is summarized as follows:

Base FY 2006-7

Operations Request: \$ 3,280,375

Gov't Aid Request: \$ 661,330

Total Requested: \$ 3,941,705

PSL: \$ 1,858,673

FTE: 47.5

Base FY 2007-8

Operations Request: \$ 3,367,578

Gov't Aid Request: \$ 693,852

Total Requested: \$ 4,061,430

PSL: \$ 1,892,561

FTE: 48.5

Base FY 2008-9

Operations Request: \$3,386,779

Gov't Aid Request: \$ 697,252

Total Requested: \$4,084,031

PSL: \$1,892,561

FTE: 48.5

Difference SFY 2007-2008

Operations Request: \$ 87,203

Gov't Aid Request: \$ 32,522

Total Requested: \$ 119,725

PSL: \$ 33,888

FTE: 1

Difference SFY 2008-2009

Operations Request: \$ 19,201

Gov't Aid Request: \$ 3,400

Total Requested: \$ 22,601

PSL: \$ -

FTE: 0

## REQUEST PRIORITIES

1. Strengthen job placement, job development, and independence training & counseling to maximize the number of blind and visually impaired persons of working age who achieve employment outcomes, contribute economically to their community, pay taxes, and minimize dependency on public support, including “retired” persons who want to continue in the workforce.

2. Establish high expectations, build self-confidence, and provide resources to develop the skills and get the training needed for self-sufficiency and gainful employment for all blind consumers, but especially youth and young adults, throughout their working years.

Increase efficiencies of effort to effectively meet the complex needs of the increasing numbers of older individuals who are blind, persons who are Deaf-Blind or experience other multiple disabilities, and persons who represent underserved racial and ethnic populations.

## SIGNIFICANT ISSUES

The Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired was established as an independent agency effective July 1, 2000. NCBVI serves as the designated state agency to provide vocational rehabilitation (VR) and independent living (IL) services to people with significant vision loss in Nebraska. With minimal general funds, federal funds are allocated to Nebraska to administer programs under the Rehabilitation Act (U.S. Department of Education, Rehabilitation Services Administration). The match ratio is:

VR 78.7% Federal 21.3% General

IL 90% Federal 10% General (includes the Older Blind program)

IST 90% Federal 10% General (In-Service Training grant for staff)

It is crucial that adequate general funds are appropriated so as to fully match the available federal dollars. Attention must also be paid to "Maintenance of Effort," which is a formula in federal regulations to assure a relatively stable level of funding and expenditures for vocational rehabilitation programs in each state (US Dept. of Education, 34 CFR Part 361).

Beyond fully matching the federal funds and maintaining the effort, there is the potential for additional needs. The demand for services from NCBVI is increasing due to both an increase in the condition of blindness and in the general population's need for all potential workforce resources and growing acceptance and expectations of people who are blind or visually impaired. The Workforce Development Act and subsequent State and Local efforts increase the need for NCBVI to work with employers to develop career opportunities for the blind.

Benefits to be reaped are two-fold. Services provided INCREASE the likelihood that people who are blind will contribute by working, paying taxes, spending their earnings, and living independently as full participants of society. Commission services correspondingly DECREASE the likelihood that blind persons will remain dependent upon government benefits for subsistence, living in nursing homes, or other subsidized settings and unable to work or pay taxes.

The numbers of older blind persons is increasing rapidly and will be even more dramatic during the next period of years, now that the large “baby boom” population is entering the later years. Four of the five main causes of blindness are directly related to aging. As the 65-plus population grows larger, the proportion of people with significant vision loss will also increase dramatically.

More people survive catastrophic events and prenatal complications than in the past, resulting in increased numbers of persons who have multiple disabilities, in addition to blindness. Traumatic Brain Injury/Closed Head Injury, for example, is much more common today than in previous periods. The training for staff and specialized services required by this growing population is costly.

For blind or visually impaired persons of all ages, the role of assistive technology has become increasingly important. The majority of jobs and vocations today require the use of technology. Businesses often have proprietary software and data systems, which can be made accessible but it is a complex task which requires time and the expertise of NCBVI specialists to work with employers on the worksite. Costly technology is often required for full rehabilitation of individuals who are multiply disabled. The pervasiveness of technology in the workforce, education, and everyday life can be expected to increase. There have been advances in the usage and availability of technology for persons in all walks of life. This trend impacts the cost of providing effective services.

The U.S. Dept. of Education, Rehabilitation Services Administration, has a requirement for a Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD), through which all counseling staff of state vocational rehabilitation agencies must attain graduate degrees in rehabilitation or a closely related field. There is an ongoing need to provide assistance to NCBVI employees for them to obtain the additional education, while continuing in the employment of the state.



## PROGRAM NARRATIVE - 70-P

AGENCY 81 COMMISSION FOR THE BLIND AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED

PROGRAM 357 BLIND AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED

### PROGRAM OBJECTIVES:

Meet or exceed the national standards and indicators for state vocational rehabilitation agencies.

1. Equal or exceed the number of clients who achieve employment outcomes;
2. Meet or exceed required percentage of clients who achieve employment goals after receiving services;
3. Meet or exceed required percentage of clients who achieve competitive employment at or above minimum wage;
4. Meet or exceed required percentage of clients served who have significant disabilities;
5. Meet or exceed required ratio of average hourly earnings for clients who become employed as compared to the state average hourly rate;
6. Meet or exceed required percentage of clients who are self-supporting at closure compared to beginning of case services; and,
7. Meet or exceed required ratio of persons served from racial or ethnic minorities.

Increase successful independent living closures each year, with special emphasis on older blind individuals, persons who are deaf-blind or have other multiple disabilities, and who represent racial or ethnic minority groups.

## PERFORMANCE MEASURES:

**INPUTS:** Staffing levels and number of person-hours for providing services will be tracked. Positions which had been cut in previous period, due to funding constraints, will be examined and added back in as available funds are stabilized. Resources used to provide the services will be examined in comparison to results in terms of efficiency of effort, outcomes and quality levels achieved.

**OUTPUTS:** The amount of government aid provided, via vocational and independent living rehabilitation services, will be monitored and measured. Outputs will be expected to increase in line with the funding base we achieve. This is highly dependent upon the amount of non-federal match available, to pull down the full federal allotment and to fully support needed inputs.

**EFFICIENCY:** As with any human service program, efficiency evaluation is difficult. Costs of labor and materials per unit of service provided will be tracked and monitored. Previous year data can then be utilized to establish performance measures of efficiency in the planning process for the subsequent biennium.

**OUTCOMES:** The primary outcome measures are number of persons served in the two tracks: Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) and Independent Living (IL), and performance on the Standards and Indicators described above for persons receiving VR services.

**QUALITY:** Customer satisfaction is measured in several ways: satisfaction survey forms, telephone interviews, analysis of job placement data, length of continued gainful employment following case services, and numbers of blind older persons living independently. The agency executive director meets with groups and organizations of blind consumers at least annually, to obtain feedback and input and to determine whether unmet needs or problems exist. The governing board of commissioners also holds quarterly public meetings to conduct business. As a part of those meetings, public comment is sought on any aspect of the quality of services provided by NCBVI.

## REQUEST PRIORITIES AND SIGNIFICANT ISSUES:

### REQUEST PRIORITIES

1. Strengthen job development, job placement and independence training & counseling to maximize the number of blind and visually impaired persons who achieve employment outcomes, become fully self-sufficient and self-supporting, not dependent upon public support, including youth transitioning from school to work, adults of “working age,” and older individuals who are blind.
2. For all blind consumers, but especially youth and young adults, establish high expectations, build self-confidence, and provide resources to develop the skills and get the training needed for self-sufficiency and gainful employment throughout their working years.

3. Increase efficiencies of effort to effectively meet the complex needs of the increasing numbers of older individuals who are blind, persons who are Deaf-Blind or experience other multiple disabilities, and persons who represent underserved racial and ethnic populations.

## SIGNIFICANT ISSUES

The Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired was established as an independent agency as of July 1, 2000. NCBVI serves as the designated state agency to provide vocational rehabilitation (VR) and independent living (IL) services to people with significant vision loss in Nebraska. With minimal matching funds, federal funds are allocated to Nebraska to administer programs under the Rehabilitation Act (U.S. Department of Education, Rehabilitation Services Administration). The match ratio is:

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It is crucial that adequate general funds are appropriated so as to fully match the available federal dollars. Attention must also be paid to "Maintenance of Effort," which is a formula in federal regulations to assure a relatively stable level of funding and expenditures for vocational rehabilitation programs in each state (US Dept. of Education, 34 CFR Part 361).

Beyond fully matching the federal funds and maintaining the effort, there is the potential for additional needs. The demand for services from NCBVI is increasing due to both an increase in the condition of blindness and in the general population's need for all potential workforce resources and growing acceptance and expectations of people who are blind or visually impaired. The Workforce Development Act and subsequent State and Local efforts increase the need for NCBVI to work with employers to develop career opportunities for the blind.

Benefits to be reaped are two-fold. Services provided INCREASE the likelihood that people who are blind will contribute by working, paying taxes, spending their earnings, and living independently as full participants of society. Commission services correspondingly DECREASE the likelihood that blind persons will remain dependent upon government benefits for subsistence, living in nursing homes, or other subsidized settings and unable to work or pay taxes.

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For blind or visually impaired persons of all ages, the role of assistive technology has become increasingly important. The majority of jobs and vocations today require the use of technology. The pervasiveness of technology in the workforce, education, and everyday life can be expected to increase. There have been advances in the usage and availability of technology for persons in all walks of life. Costly technology is often required for full rehabilitation of individuals who are multiply disabled. This trend impacts the cost of providing effective services.

The U.S. Dept. of Education, Rehabilitation Services Administration, has a requirement for a Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD), through which all counseling staff of state vocational rehabilitation agencies must attain graduate degrees in rehabilitation or a closely related field. There is an ongoing need to provide assistance to NCBVI employees for them to obtain the additional education, while continuing in the employment of the state.

## BUDGET MODIFICATIONS OPERATIONS NARRATIVE

Modifications in the General Fund Request, required at 0.95, compute to a difference of \$60,500 for Operations. In discussion of Operations it is important to keep in mind that most NCBVI personnel provide direct client services; thus modification to the Operations budget does directly impact Aid, or services to blind Nebraskans. Services that more populous states purchase from the private sector as aid, must be provided by NCBVI directly. The amount of \$60,500 in cuts will not result in loss of federal funds.

Our analysis of modifications that would be made in the budget identifies several areas to address. Potential cuts are listed in priority sequence, with #1 being the highest priority and the first to be added above the base.

### Priority One:

A major function of NCBVI counselors and teachers is to travel to people's homes to provide the needed services throughout the state. Typically, blind persons can be isolated, unable to get out until they have developed the skills and resources needed. They need to have the professionals in blindness come to their homes and communities. We could, however, cut travel costs by decreasing the state-owned transportation that is currently budgeted (Account # 573100). We would propose to eliminate one vehicle from the planned fleet.

Staff would need to make more contacts by telephone, losing the vital personal contact that often makes the difference between confident independence or reliance on public funds for support or worse. At a public forum in 2002, an independent elderly blind woman stated that if the NCBVI counselor had not come to her home a few years ago, she is certain that she would have committed suicide.

Budget impact: \$6,000 General Funds.

Priority Two:

The second operational priority is Contractual Services (Account #554900). The primary expenditures in this account are for drivers who provide the reasonable accommodation to our blind rehabilitation staff, in order for them to work with blind individuals across the state. This priority is linked to priority one, such that if we have one less state vehicle, there will be a corresponding need for fewer dollars to be spent on contractual services. Both blind and sighted staff would have to share the vehicles, so the travel for all would be less. NCBVI would still continue to provide the accommodations to staff to enable them to do their jobs.

Budget impact: \$3,000 General Funds.

Priority Three:

Our third operational priority is Room and Board for staff during meetings or in travel status while serving clients statewide (Account #571100). There is a need for agency administrators to attend national meetings to keep up with the field of vocational rehabilitation services for the blind and to have the most current information regarding federal requirements, funding, etc. This category includes the cost to send the Executive Director and one other person to such events twice each year. A prohibition from attending, due to lack of funds, would make it more difficult to remain as one of the most highly respected state agencies for the blind.



A decrease in this account will also present barriers to in-state staff travel to serve clients. Field supervisors will need to make decisions to limit overnight stays when the location is furthest away from the offices. This will be done in such a way to allow for minimum impact on client service, but the fact remains that there will be an impact. Especially in the panhandle and north central Nebraska, it is difficult to provide timely services without having some trips which last longer than one day.

Budget impact: \$6,000 General Funds.

Priority Four:

The fourth priority is equipment for the Randolph-Sheppard Nebraska Business Enterprise blind vendor program. Equipment (Account #586900) has a minimal budget. However, if funds were limited, we would plan to replace only the most crucial items. Through Nebraska Business Enterprises, NCBVI works with 20 blind vendors. Expenditures from this account provide the equipment needed for those individuals to remain competitive with the private sector, as business managers of their vending sites. We therefore need to retain funds in this account as much as possible, to keep equipment operational and current.

Budget impact: \$5,000 General Funds

Priority Five:

Computer and related equipment is another area in which NCBVI is quite frugal (Account #583300). We would propose to limit the funds available for

obtaining new computers for staff. This change would hamper our ability to stay current with changes in technology. It would also have a negative impact on the NCBVI Information Technology Plan.

Budget impact: \$4,500 General Funds.

Priority Six:

As a State agency for vocational rehabilitation, NCBVI must stay current with rehabilitation issues at the national level. One way this is accomplished is via membership in two national organizations - one for all state vocational rehabilitation agencies (Council of State Agencies for Vocational Rehabilitation) and one specifically for agencies for the blind. The dues for the Council of State Agencies for Vocational Rehabilitation could be eliminated. The cost for CSAVR dues is in Account # 522100.

Budget impact: \$3,000 General Funds.

Priority Seven:

Another item from our agency IT Plan is to explore the feasibility of developing a paperless information technology system. Staffing at the Commission has changed and it is becoming more important that our files and filing become electronic. Blind staff members have little utility of paper documents. We must move toward paperless filing utilizing the SON server farm in DAS. At this time, we need to look at proceeding with this project.

A system that integrates paperless documents and forms with our client and federal reporting database, and maybe the NIS system, could be a major step forward to dedicating more of our staff time to serving clients as opposed to filing paper. It is very important that we move to electronic record-keeping in the future. Removing funds for this project will delay our progress toward this goal. The costs for this project are in Account # 521400.

Budget impact: \$5,000 General Funds.

Priority Eight:

S.O.S. Temporary Staff (Account #542100) is an option that we use primarily to fund the additional employees needed for a summer employment program for blind youth. WAGES (Work And Gain Experience in the Summer) provides blind youth with a chance to have a real job, earn a salary, and learn about expectations for performance in the world or work. This nationally acclaimed program has been a strong force in preparing blind youth for adult life. While we would only cancel the program in the most extreme of budget constraints, we could shorten its duration. We would propose to shorten the six week program to four weeks. This would allow for a decrease in needed funding by \$13,000.

Budget impact: \$13,000 General Funds.

## Priority Nine:

NCBVI has not updated office furnishings (Account # 532100) in over 20 years. Much of our equipment has become quite outdated, so we planned to begin in 2007 to add or replace office furnishings. We would dedicate \$15,000 per year to this effort for probably the next six years. The budget modification level of 0.95 would require us reduce this account and to replace only the most crucial items. NCBVI does already purchase via surplus whenever possible; doing so would be stressed even more strongly.

Budget impact: \$15,000 General Funds

## Operations Summary:

A 0.95 decrease in the budget for Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired would result in a loss of \$60,500 in general funds. "Operations" is a bit of a misnomer, since nearly all NCBVI staffing and represents direct services to the blind in Nebraska. Thus, what the state "saves" by cutting operations of NCBVI, it will pay for in far greater sums over the long run as people remain on state support.

Total Budget Impact on Operations: \$60,500.

## BUDGET MODIFICATIONS

### GOVERNMENT AID NARRATIVE

The modification in General Fund Request, required at the 0.95 level, computes to a difference of \$63,214 for government aid, or Case Services. Aid, or Case Services, consists of a wide range of rehabilitation aid provided to clients of NCBVI. The majority of expenditures are within Account #592100. The services include, but are not limited to assessment, counseling, blindness skills training, tuition and related costs, referral, job search and placement assistance, rehabilitation technology, supported employment, transition school to work, post-employment, and peer support.

#### Priority One

Exact expenditures in aid each year are directly related to the pool of active clients. The Rehabilitation Act places strong emphasis upon individualized plans, informed choice, and active participation in the rehabilitation process. Therefore, the State Agency, NCBVI, must gear its expenditures on Aid to the individualized needs and choices of specific clients. Each year, the number of clients served continues to rise and the complexity of the cases is also rising. Medical advances have had an impact on people who survive diseases and tragic accidents that would not have survived even ten years ago; these individuals often suffer severe vision loss and additional disabilities. The cost of services for people who are blind and deaf, head injured, or physically impaired is generally high. Thus, the increase in numbers of people in Nebraska who need rehabilitation services to work or live independently should be taken into account along with the increasing proportions of our target population who have multiple disabilities.

As client needs are served, throughout the budget year, the balance of aid funds decreases. If a State Agency gets to the point where those funds are exhausted before year-end, it must go into an Order of Selection process; establish priorities for service and waiting lists based upon significance, or severity, of the disability. Because the disability of visual impairment or blindness is already considered "most significant," the prioritization process would require judgments to be made regarding level of blindness and other factors, such as multiple disabilities. We work very hard to assure that services can be provided in accordance with Individualized Plans for Employment developed each year.

When we implement changes in our Case Services budget, we are mandated to do so within the framework described above. We would cut costs but maintain the integrity of the Rehab Act requirements to provide services.

Budget impact: \$48,214 General Funds.

## Priority Two

In order to achieve the 0.95 modification level, we would make one specific change as well as the general changes listed above. The WAGES program mentioned in the Operations section of this document, if shortened to a four-week program, would require less funding. Case Services funds provide for the transportation, lodging, maintenance, and training costs during the program. All of these would be impacted by a shortened program.

Budget impact: \$15,000 General Funds.

## Aid Summary

A 0.95 decrease in the budget for Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired would result in a loss of \$63,214 in general funds to support Case Services. This funding helps blind Nebraskans to achieve their employment goals and to become full participants in their communities. Thus, what the state “saves” by cutting operations of NCBVI, it will pay for in far greater sums over the long run as people remain on state support.

Total Budget Impact on Aid: \$63,214 General Funds.