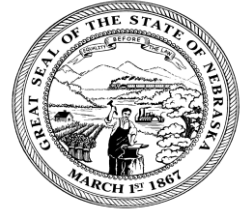


STATE OF NEBRASKA

NEBRASKA COMMISSION FOR THE BLIND AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED

Pearl Van Zandt, Ph.D.

Executive Director



Dave Heineman
Governor

May 25, 2005

Mr. Joe Cordova, Regional Commissioner
U.S. Department of Education
Region VII Rehabilitation Services Administration
8930 Ward Parkway, Suite 2212
Kansas City, Missouri 64114

Dear Mr. Cordova:

I herewith transmit for your review and approval the Annual Updates, for fiscal year 2006, to the State Plan for Vocational Rehabilitation Services Program and State Plan Supplement for the State Supported Employment Services Program. These updates are effective October 1, 2005.

This packet contains the attachment updates required and forms ED 80-0013 (Certifications Regarding Lobbying) for Title I and for Title VI, Part B. No further review of these documents is required under Nebraska administrative procedures.

We have held Public Forums at Public Commission Board Meetings and meetings of Consumer Organizations to inform consumers and obtain feedback from them regarding these annual updates. With my signature on this transmittal letter and on the certifications, I request approval of this submittal from the Regional Office of the Rehabilitation Services Administration.

Sincerely yours,

Pearl Van Zandt, Ph.D.
Executive Director

cc: NCBVI Board of Commissioners


CERTIFICATIONS REGARDING LOBBYING

Applicants must review the requirements for certification regarding lobbying included in the regulations cited below before completing this form. Applicants must sign this form to comply with certification requirements under 34 CFR Part 82, "New Restrictions on Lobbying." The certifications shall be treated as a material representation of fact upon which reliance will be placed when the Department of Education decides to award the grant, cooperative agreement, loan or loan guarantee.

As required by Section 1352, Title 31 of the U.S. Code, and implemented at 34 CFR Part 82, for persons entering into a grant or cooperative agreement over \$100,000, as defined at 34 CFR Part 82, Sections 82.105 and 82.110, the applicant certifies that:

- (a) No Federal appropriated funds have been paid or will be paid, by or on behalf of the undersigned, to any person for influencing or attempting to influence an officer or employee of any agency, a Member of Congress, an officer or employee of Congress, or an employee of a Member of Congress in connection with the making of any Federal grant, the entering into of any cooperative agreement, and the extension, continuation, renewal, amendment, or modification of any Federal grant or cooperative agreement;
- (b) If any funds other than Federal appropriated funds have been paid or will be paid to any person for influencing or attempting to influence an officer or employee of any agency, a Member of Congress, an officer or employee of any agency, a Member of Congress, an officer or employee of Congress, or an employee of a Member of Congress in connection with this Federal Grant or cooperative agreement, the undersigned shall complete and submit Standard Form – LLL, "Disclosure Form to Report Lobby," in accordance with its instructions;
- (c) The Undersigned shall require that the language of this certification be included in the award documents for all subawards at all tiers (including subgrants, contracts under grants and cooperative agreement, and subcontracts) and that all subrecipients shall certify and disclose accordingly.

As the duly authorized representative of the applicant, I hereby certify that the applicant will comply with the above certifications.

NAME OF APPLICANT /AWARD NUMBER AND/OR PROJECT NAME	
Commission for the Blind & Visually Impaired H126A060040 Title I, Rehab Act	
PRINTED NAME AND TITLE OF AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE	
Dr. Pearl Van Zandt	Executive Director
SIGNATURE	DATE
	May 25, 2005

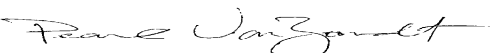
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- (b) If any funds other than Federal appropriated funds have been paid or will be paid to any person for influencing or attempting to influence an officer or employee of any agency, a Member of Congress, an officer or employee of any agency, a Member of Congress, an officer or employee of Congress, or an employee of a Member of Congress in connection with this Federal Grant or cooperative agreement, the undersigned shall complete and submit Standard Form – LLL, "Disclosure Form to Report Lobby," in accordance with its instructions;
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As the duly authorized representative of the applicant, I hereby certify that the applicant will comply with the above certifications.

NAME OF APPLICANT /AWARD NUMBER AND/OR PROJECT NAME	
<u>Commission for the Blind & Visually Impaired H187A060041 Title VIC, Rehab Act</u>	
PRINTED NAME AND TITLE OF AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE	
<u>Dr. Pearl Van Zandt</u>	<u>Executive Director</u>
SIGNATURE	DATE
	
May 25 2005	

Attachment 4.11(b): Comprehensive System of Personnel Development

The Designated State Agency, Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (NCBVI) has in place established policies, procedures and activities to maintain a comprehensive system of personnel development. These mechanisms are designed to ensure an adequate supply of qualified State rehabilitation professional and paraprofessional personnel for the designated State unit.

State Personnel Standards for Counselors.

In the State of Nebraska, the highest entry-level academic degree standard applicable to the discipline of rehabilitation counseling is a Master's degree in counseling or a related field. This degree is required for certification as a Professional Counselor under Nebraska's Uniform Licensing Act (Neb. Rev. Stat. §71-1,269). The Uniform Licensing Act exempts employees of state agencies from coverage. Other state agencies, with the exception of Nebraska VR/General, typically require the Bachelor's degree or significant experience for work comparable to that of NCBVI's Rehabilitation Counselors. NCBVI requires a Bachelor's degree in counseling or a closely related field such as the social sciences. Consequently, NCBVI's hiring standard meets that of other Nebraska state agencies. As a result of our comprehensive system of personnel development, our process will bring us to the highest standard in the State.

Currently, we place most emphasis upon experience with blindness and an intensive three-to-four-month, systematic training, for all newly hired staff, followed by three months of training specific to their new position. This training provides an orientation to the agency's understanding of blindness and the strategy of service delivery that grows out of that understanding. The training includes reading and discussion of various articles and documents in the blindness field, and skills training in non-visual techniques and technologies through hands-on experiences. When possible, para-professional or support personnel receive four to six weeks of intensive pre-service training.

The second three months for newly hired rehabilitation personnel involves on-the-job training activities for specific job duties including agency policies and procedures, accessing local resources, sensitivity training, social security, vocational counseling techniques, consumer group information, etc. In-Service training sessions are provided to all staff at least once every year. The topics covered include a wide range of policies and procedures, counseling techniques, teaching modalities, etc.

For ongoing efficacy, we have Staff Refresher Training. As a part of each year's Performance Review, each employee and supervisor establish a plan for individualized training. The goals include activities to renew abilities in blindness skills or to refresh philosophical concepts, as well as opportunities for training specific to rehabilitation counseling for those positions. For example, an individual might choose to attend the Orientation Center's intensive training for four and one half days, to review philosophical perspectives about blindness and take classes in the non-visual techniques of blindness. There are also philosophy discussions held by the Administrative Team and in local offices. Employees are also encouraged to spend time with other staff to learn new practices and to stimulate ongoing improvement.

Extent to Which Counselors Meet the Standard.

Our annual collection and analysis of data on qualified personnel needs and personnel development reveals the following data.

NCBVI currently employs fifty-one full-time staff persons and one permanent part-time. Twelve are vocational rehabilitation counselors; fourteen point five are rehabilitation teachers; five are program specialists or coordinators (technology, transition, and Deaf Blind programs); five are vocational rehabilitation technicians; three are field supervisors; nine are administrative personnel; three are support staff. All the rehabilitation counselors do meet the current NCBVI standard and seven hold Master's degrees. Others have completed some hours toward a Master's degree, are working toward a graduate degree, or are investigating application to graduate programs. Four of the rehabilitation teachers also hold graduate degrees.

Staffing Levels and Projections

We project the number of applicants for vocational rehabilitation services and eligible individuals to be served by V.R. during FY 2006 to total 900. The ratio of applicants and eligible individuals served to all personnel will be 17 to 1. The current staffing level does enable NCBVI to provide core services to customers. As the numbers of referrals increase, we work to find ways to streamline our process to enable us to continue meeting customer needs in effective ways. There is a definite need for additional specialists focused on technology and on transition-aged clients, however, for the basic vocational rehabilitation services current numbers will suffice.

Efforts are made at NCBVI, on an ongoing basis, to hire and retain personnel to provide the highest quality of service possible for blind and visually impaired persons in Nebraska. A few years ago we accomplished the goal of implementing position

upgrades for many of our professional staff positions. Previously, the pay scales for positions in the Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired were significantly lower than those of other rehabilitation agencies (more than \$4000 per annum less than that for vocational rehabilitation counselors at the general VR agency in Nebraska). Our hiring rate is still less, but is much closer to that for general Voc Rehab. VR-General does require a minimum of a Master's degree for that entry level. Despite the higher level of pay, VR-General does have difficulty recruiting qualified applicants for those positions. And despite our now more comparable hiring rate, we have few applicants with graduate degrees and almost zero applicants with Master's in Rehabilitation Counseling. However, the position upgrades do enable NCBVI to attract and retain quality rehabilitation professionals, keeping the Commission in compliance with the requirements for CSPD.

Identified Factors that Inhibit Ability to Hire Qualified Staff.

A factor inhibiting our ability to hire Certified Rehabilitation Counselors is that there is no such degree program within Nebraska. We almost never have job applicants who have their CRC, and rarely have applicants with the M.S. in Rehabilitation Counseling specifically. There is no need for a personnel development data system, since there are no institutions of higher education in Nebraska receiving funds under Title III of the Rehabilitation Act, to prepare vocational rehabilitation professionals in the disciplines designated in the Act [29 usc 771(b)(1)(B)].

There are however related counseling graduate degree programs, which equip students with requisite skills, resources, and capabilities for providing vocational rehabilitation services to people who have disabilities. Particularly in some parts of Nebraska, we have found that few people with graduate degrees apply for openings with NCBVI. We do sometimes have applicants with an M.S. degree in a related field, but more often the candidate pool is limited to persons with undergraduate degrees only.

NCBVI does strive to hire the best candidate for each position. Sometimes experience is the deciding factor; our comprehensive pre-service training combined with support for continuing education help to assure that the best choice at hire develops the additional skills and requisite knowledge base to fully develop as an integral part of the overall personnel resources of the agency.

Objectives & Activities for Achieving the Plan.

Supervisors have provided data regarding education completed by all subordinates, including degrees held and graduate work completed toward the Master's degree. The Director and administrative staff will evaluate what factors are involved with bringing current counselors up to the new standard. NCBVI has six offices across the State of Nebraska. Some of those locales are many hours away from colleges or universities with graduate programs relevant to this endeavor. Distance learning is an option for some parts of a degree program, but may not fulfill all requirements for such a program.

NCBVI coordinates efforts with institutions of higher education, organized consumer groups and professional associations to recruit, prepare, and retain qualified personnel, including personnel from minority backgrounds, and personnel who are individuals with disabilities. We maintain standards that ensure that all personnel are adequately trained and prepared to meet standards that are based on the highest requirements in the State. NCBVI also works to ensure the availability of personnel internally or from external resources who are, to the maximum extent feasible, trained to communicate in the native language or mode of communication of an applicant or eligible individual. Ongoing staff development activities will ensure that all NCBVI personnel receive appropriate and adequate training.

Resource Plan.

Funds from several segments of the NCBVI budget are committed to developing personnel, including funding tuition and related expenses for expanding the capacities of NCBVI staff. The In-Service Training Grant will assist in accomplishing CSPD Objectives. It will be utilized to increase the skills and competencies of all staff, particularly in areas such as job development and job placement that directly relate to goals and priorities of the Workforce Investment Act. This crucial issue continues to have highest priority. We explore whether the training sessions scheduled will be eligible for credits that apply to graduate degree programs or for Continuing Education Credits for those who do have their Certification in Rehabilitation Counseling.

Ongoing training will be made available to all staff on relevant and timely topics. Retaining qualified personnel is particularly important because of the investment we make with our three-month Center Training as well as our willingness to reimburse 100% of tuition for course work leading to a graduate degree. A key focus will be on building capacity in the areas of job development and job placement. Building

leadership and networking with consumer groups are also important. Our Executive Director, Deputy Directors for Vocational Rehabilitation and for Independent Living Services, and a Field Supervisor have completed the Leadership Academy Training at the University of Oklahoma. Our Deputy Director for Vocational Rehabilitation has participated in the Leadership Curriculum administered by San Diego State University.

Topics of focused training sessions will include methods for achieving successful employment in high-quality positions with benefits and opportunities for advancement, ways to work effectively with the increasing numbers of older individuals who are losing vision, maximizing effectiveness in the group training or counseling setting, PASS plan development, supported employment, workplace policies, and discussions of philosophy and positive understandings of blindness.

The long-range plan for ongoing development of staff was based upon needs identified by the former State Rehabilitation Council's study of clients closed both successfully and unsuccessfully in previous years. The plan is updated and kept current from issues identified from ongoing client satisfaction surveys, employees' requests for additional training on specific topics, and analyses of agency performance on the RSA Standards and Indicators. It is also a result of priorities established by the Workforce Investment Act and the 1998 Amendments to the Rehabilitation Act.

Evaluation.

The evaluative segment of the plan is both quantitative and qualitative. We track the number of hours spent by staff in training sessions, the costs for such training (including registration, tuition, books/materials, lodging, transportation, and related costs). The NCBVI Administrative Team is working to assure that the process is moving and will revise aspects as needed. The Commission no longer has a Program Specialist for Personnel Development. We do have a Personnel Officer who will manage the logistics of the process.

Non-Discriminatory Plan.

NCBVI always strives to be non-discriminatory in hiring candidates and retention and promotion of staff from minority backgrounds and with disabilities. To recruit qualified personnel including those from minority backgrounds and those with disabilities, NCBVI utilizes the Department of Administrative Services' Division of Personnel affirmative action resource bank, a database record of members of the four protected groups who are seeking employment or advancement with the State of Nebraska. We also recruit via national consumer groups of blind individuals. To prepare and retain all personnel, including those from minority backgrounds and those with disabilities, the initial training and the ongoing training plan are individualized according to each person's specific training needs and also encompass training issues that will maximize the agency's effectiveness and efficiency.

Attachment 4.12: Assessments; Estimates; Goals and Priorities; Strategies; and Progress Reports

The Designated State Agency, Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (NCBVI) is an independent commission that is responsible under State law for operating, or overseeing the operation of, the vocational rehabilitation program for the blind in Nebraska. It is consumer-controlled by persons who are blind or visually impaired and who represent individuals who are blind. NCBVI undertakes the functions set forth in section 105(c)(4) of the Act, to review and analyze the effectiveness of services and consumer satisfaction with services provided by the Commission, vocational rehabilitation services provided by other state, public and private entities, and employment outcomes achieved by eligible individuals receiving vocational rehabilitation services from NCBVI, to assure high quality, career track employment outcomes, with health and other employment benefits, wages comparable to state wages for non-disabled persons, and equity for persons of minority status.

Throughout the year, NCBVI provides numerous public forums to elicit opinions and comments from consumers regarding the services currently being provided and the needs of consumers that are not being addressed. In some cases, the forums are conducted jointly with other vocational rehabilitation, education, health and human services providers. Other forums are conducted as a part of our presentations to statewide meetings of consumer or peer support groups of the blind: the American Council of the Blind of Nebraska, National Federation of the Blind of Nebraska, and Nebraska VIPS (Visually Impaired Peer Support). The Governing Board of Commissioners also holds quarterly public meetings during which they take comment from consumers and interested persons.

During this past year, we have held or participated in forums in the following locations throughout Nebraska: Kearney, Omaha, Lincoln, Grand Island, and Gering. It should also be noted that the Commission Board governing NCBVI holds public meetings at least quarterly and encourages public comment during their meetings. During the past year, the Board met in Lincoln and Omaha; it will meet in Grand Island, August 2005. The consumer-controlled Commission Board handles all functions previously performed by the State Rehabilitation Council, with added responsibility for governance in accordance with State Law.

Notes are taken at each forum or meeting to track consumers' ideas. Following such sessions, action is taken to research ideas to determine what will help to improve services provided by NCBVI and when appropriate and possible, to implement new strategies. Some of the comments and questions expressed at the forums included: the growing numbers of blind people, especially as the elderly population increases; how we will provide services to the growing numbers of the blind; NCBVI Rules and Regulations; continued need for more computer and assistive technology training in all

parts of the state; the need for more public awareness of NCBVI; details of the State Plan; the need for more funding, more staff, and continued availability of staff to travel to consumers' homes statewide; how to find additional resources; transportation problems, especially in the rural areas; NCBVI services to transition-age clients; budget cutbacks which will impact much of the above concerns in a negative way, and other aspects of our services or issues important to blind consumers. It is very common for individuals at public forums to have questions specific to services, thus generating referrals. We respond by putting the person in touch with NCBVI staff in their area.

Three tools are used to evaluate service effectiveness, on an ongoing basis. Clients of the Orientation and Training Center are asked to participate in a confidential telephone interview three months after completing their Center training. Surveys are conducted by an objective individual to explore the client's perspectives about various aspects of their training. Results of the surveys are shared with the Center Director and Staff, NCBVI Executive and Deputy Directors, and the Governing Board. In general, most clients are satisfied or enthusiastically positive with the training and state that they benefited from it. Many comment that the staff is too busy, but most feel that is part of the nature of a Center. Occasionally, problems are mentioned. Center Staff and the Executive Director follow up on such comments to examine the problems and improve service delivery where possible.

Another tool is a basic satisfaction survey, mailed to all vocational rehabilitation clients after case closure. Approximately 95 % of the respondents state that the services they received were excellent. Some make no comments at all. It is rare that we receive negative responses on these surveys. These surveys are also confidential. If the individual does include their name, and if they have any questions or negative comments, a follow-up contact is made to determine whether it is appropriate for any additional service delivery to address the unmet need. If no name is given, but negative comments are made, we discuss and remind counseling staff of issues to which they need to be sensitive.

Finally, we have just implemented telephone interviews with Vocational Rehabilitation clients, four months after closure in statuses 26, 28, and 36. These interviews will be used in the same way as the interviews following Center training. The comments will help to assure quality services, correct any problems not discovered sooner, and work on continuous improvement.

An important process we use to determine the effectiveness of our program are the Standards and Indicators Measures established by RSA. The following are results of our status in meeting those parameters for quality vocational rehabilitation services to blind and visually impaired Nebraskans for FY2002. The data is computed via formulas generally based on an average of two years.

Standard 1.1: Change in number of Employment Outcome - Difference must be greater than previous year. For 2003 NCBVI had 133 closures with employment outcomes; 2002 Data show 149 closures with employment outcomes. The difference is minus 16. These figures include homemakers, but our totals are decreasing because we have less homemaker closures than previous years and may be providing services to some older blind individuals through Independent Living rather than through Vocational Rehabilitation.

Standard 1.2: Percentage of persons receiving services who become employed must be 68.9% or better. For 2003, 133 of 209 served achieved employment outcomes, or 63.64 %.

Standard 1.3: Percent of Employment Outcomes that were Competitive Employment. The percentage must be 35.40% or better. In 2003, total Competitive Closures equaled 83, or 62.41 %. NCBVI achieved almost double the required level.

1.4: Significant Disabilities served from NCBVI was 100%. The level required is to serve at least 89% with significant disabilities.

1.5 Average Hourly Earnings: Ratio must be .59 or better. In 2003, the average hourly wage for NCBVI clients achieving competitive employment outcomes was \$10.70; the weighted average hourly wage in Nebraska was \$14.35; thus, the ratio of wages our clients earned compared to the average in the state was .746.

1.6 Self Support at Closure compared to Application: Percentage must be 30.40% or better. For 2003, of the 83 with Competitive Employment Outcomes, there were 30 who had been primarily self-supporting at application. At closure, 59 were self-supporting. The difference between the percent self-supporting at closure and at application was 34.94%.

2.1 Minority Ratio - all agencies must attain a ratio level of .80. If a DSU has fewer than 100 individuals from a minority background exit the program during the reporting period, the DSU must describe the policies it has adopted or will adopt and the steps it has taken or will take to ensure that individuals with disabilities from minority backgrounds have equal access to VR services, in lieu of calculating the ratio. NCBVI works on several levels to assure that individuals from a minority background are aware of vocational rehabilitation services for the blind. Our Deputy Director sits on multicultural boards, we provide training on multicultural sensitivity issues and resources to staff, we engage in networking cooperative efforts to assure knowledge of and access to vocational rehabilitation services.

The primary goal of NCBVI's Title I program is to assure that blind and visually

impaired Nebraskans obtain quality jobs of their choice, with benefits and long-term potential for advancement. The Workforce Investment Act and our own understanding of realities of the business world and changes in technology, reinforce the importance of this focus. Vocational Rehabilitation personnel work with individual clients to establish career goals, informed choice, training options, and to develop and implement the Individualized Plan for Employment. Commission personnel also build relationships with employers, to develop job opportunities in a wide range of vocations. It is important to do so in every part of the state, rural as well as urban. NCBVI will continue its major investment in training to rehabilitation staff in the techniques of job development and job placement.

Work teams in each of the six NCBVI offices have developed plans and approaches which best fit the composition of their team and the nature of their locale and clientele. The task assignments and strategies most effective in a large city are not the same as those best suited to the rural areas. With the leadership of the NCBVI Deputy Directors and District Supervisors, strategies will be monitored and adjusted to evolve over time.

The NCBVI vocational rehabilitation program has become very pro-active in providing training required to use adaptive equipment, and in providing the computers and adaptive computerized equipment necessary to compete in the job market of the present and the future. Employment in almost every field has become much more geared to technology. It is our intent to improve our ability to meet technology-related needs across the state and to build resources in the community when possible.

To achieve the goals and priorities of achieving high-quality successful employment for clients, we are using many creative approaches. Each situation is individualized, thus the strategies and solutions for each client is unique.

This approach is productive in itself. It also helps to model for the individual that throughout life, one can accomplish new things by thinking creatively and having the confidence to try new approaches. The overall priority of high-quality employment includes the "standard" working age client, persons in transition from school to work, persons with multiple disabilities (e.g. Deaf Blind) or other special needs (e.g. Supported Employment candidates). Even older applicants or persons who express interest in NCBVI's Independent Living programs are encouraged to explore vocational rehabilitation. The individual is encouraged to examine whether, if not for a visual impairment, he or she would still be in the workforce. If so, counselors help individuals to understand blindness and to raise personal expectations and aspirations. This process often does lead to employment goals for individuals who otherwise would not have believed it possible.

Attachment 4.12(b): Annual Estimates of Individuals to Be Served and Costs of Services

The incidence of visual impairment and blindness has been established based upon causes of blindness and occurrence in various age cohorts. Computing those incidence rates with population figures for Nebraska, we find that there are approximately 4,500 persons who are legally blind and approximately 25,300 persons with a severe visual impairment. The basis for services is based upon a functional definition of blindness; thus, the potential target population includes persons who are not legally blind, but who have significant limitations to functions and activities of daily life and vocation due to vision loss. It is also the case that not everyone with legal, or even total blindness is in need of vocational rehabilitation services and that some who could benefit from services remain in a state of denial of their vision loss.

The majority of blind and visually impaired people are in the older age ranges: one in twenty between ages 65 to 74 has a significant visual impairment; one in ten in the 75 to 84 age range, and 1 in 4 in the 85-plus population. Thus, many needed services are provided through Title VII Chapter 2 funds. As people live longer, healthier lives, there is a trend to continue working longer and retiring later or to retire and then return to full or part time work. Obviously, Title I Vocational Rehabilitation services are appropriate for such individuals. NCBVI places an emphasis upon enabling persons of all ages to understand their full range of choices. Neither age nor ability to see needs to limit the options and life choices open to the individual. Transition services are provided to younger persons while still in school, to facilitate a smooth transition from school to work, despite blindness, visual impairment or other disabilities.

The total number of persons served in all Vocational Rehabilitation statuses during fiscal year 2004 was 861. Total number served in all Independent Living statuses for the same time period was 847. It is not uncommon for persons, even of the traditional working age range, to enter our system requesting only basic assistance or financial support. We have found that with initial onset of blindness it is common to limit one's expectations and to seek "charitable help." As people learn about vision loss, develop non-visual skills, and gain confidence in their own abilities, they are likely to expand their personal expectations and move to the vocational rehabilitation "track" of service delivery.

The cost of services can range between \$900 and \$80,000 for an individual client. This portrays an inaccurate image, however, since the program is so highly individualized. Many people require only basic information, marking of appliances, and being set up with ancillary resources such as talking books. Many others require much more, including orientation teaching; guidance and counseling; tuition, books and other

expenditures related to achieving their vocational goal; and so on. The increased need for technological aids and devices, particularly computer adaptive software and hardware, has increased the level of case service expenditures for some individuals. We work on an ongoing basis to assure the best possible services, addressing each individual's personal goals and aspirations, while maximizing the efficient appropriation of resources toward that end.

Given the Nebraska Commission's commitment to improving overall services and job placement in particular, it is expected that the total number of clients served will continue to rise over the next several years.

Based upon previous years, we project that in FY 2006 there will be 900 persons served by Title I funds, and 25 to 30 persons served by Title VI, Part B. NCBVI is not under an order of selection. At present, we do not anticipate the need to establish an order of selection unless the State budget shortfall increases in the future and the Commission budget is impacted dramatically. We do have provisions in the NCBVI Rules and Regulations for instituting order of selection if the need arises.

Attachment 4.12(c)(3): Goals and Plans for Distribution of Title VI, Part B Funds.

Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (NCBVI) will concentrate its primary attention on developing supported employment situations for persons who experience the additional involvement of a developmental disability. A system is in place to provide both the expertise and resources, including ongoing support, to develop and sustain individualized services within the Nebraska Health and Human Services System. A small number of blind and visually impaired persons with non-developmental complications might benefit from supported employment (SE) services. Generally, however, funding for extended support beyond eighteen (18) months is not available in Nebraska to such persons. In such cases, the Deputy Director of Independent Living & Supported Employment will work with the NCBVI Counselor involved to identify possible resources for the ongoing support, such as developing a PASS Plan. He also works to keep NCBVI Counselors informed and updated on the Supported Employment program, so that any clients eligible do, in fact, obtain the services they require. Continued training regarding Supported Employment services is available.

Our chief approach to achieve the planned goals for Title VI, Part B services is to enter into formal agreements with providers in the Nebraska Developmental Disability Service system, or other private providers of job coaching and related services. As appropriate, additional funding will be available from Title I funds. The total amount of Title VI, Part B funds we project to expend in FY 2006 is \$30,000. We expect to provide SE services to approximately 25 to 30 clients in FY 2006.

We will collaborate with the Developmental Disabilities Division of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to identify potential clients, coordinate service plans and share funding for those individuals in the System who are described as blind and visually impaired. We train persons with experience in blindness and alternative techniques as Job Coaches to work specifically with blind and visually impaired persons who could benefit from Supported Employment services. Five Commission support staff have been upgraded to Vocational Rehabilitation Technicians; part of their duties is to serve as Job Coaches when necessary. Overall, NCBVI Management staff will work to implement creative strategies to most effectively utilize Title VI, Part B funds to maximize the benefit for those individuals in the program's target population.

Attachment 4.12(c)(3)

Page 1 of 1

Effective Date: October 1, 2005

Attachment 4.12(e): Evaluation and Report of Progress in Achieving Identified Goals and Priorities and Use of Title I Funds for Innovation and Expansion Activities.

The Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired evaluates effectiveness of its vocational rehabilitation program in several different ways from the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA), employers, the public, staff members, the Client Assistance Program, and private or other public entities with whom we collaborate. Most importantly, service recipients are asked for their evaluation of services provided at several stages as detailed in Attachment 4.12. We gather identified needs of Nebraskans who are blind or have visual impairments on a statewide basis through our public forums and meetings, our surveys of clients after completion of Center training and after case closure, and in an ongoing fashion through communication with our consumer-controlled Governing Board and our accessible website.

The system of Standards and Indicators established by RSA is the benchmark we use to measure the effectiveness of our program. The following are results of our status in meeting those parameters for quality vocational rehabilitation services to blind and visually impaired Nebraskans.

Standard 1.1: Change in number of Employment Outcome - Difference must be greater than previous year. For 2003 NCBVI had 133 closures with employment outcomes; 2002 Data show 149 closures with employment outcomes. The difference is minus 16.

Standard 1.2: Percentage of persons receiving services who become employed must be 68.9% or better. For 2003, 133 of 209 served achieved employment outcomes, or 63.64 %.

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1.5 Average Hourly Earnings: Ratio must be .59 or better. In 2003, the average hourly wage for NCBVI clients achieving competitive employment outcomes was \$10.70; the weighted average hourly wage in Nebraska was \$14.35; thus, the ratio of wages our clients earned compared to the average in the state was .746.

1.6 Self Support at Closure compared to Application: Percentage must be 30.40% or better. For 2003, of the 83 with Competitive Employment Outcomes, there were 30 who had been primarily self-supporting at application. At closure, 59 were self-supporting. The difference between the percent self-supporting at closure and at application was 34.94%.

2.1 Minority Ratio - all agencies must attain a ratio level of .80. If a DSU has fewer than 100 individuals from a minority background exit the program during the reporting period, the DSU must describe the policies it has adopted or will adopt and the steps it has taken or will take to ensure that individuals with disabilities from minority backgrounds have equal access to VR services, in lieu of calculating the ratio. NCBVI works on several levels to assure that individuals from a minority background are aware of vocational rehabilitation services for the blind. Our Deputy Director sits on multicultural boards, we provide training on multicultural sensitivity issues and resources to staff, we engage in networking cooperative efforts to assure knowledge of and access to vocational rehabilitation services.

Ongoing communication between client and counselor provides an informal mechanism for evaluation. Counselors are trained in working with clients to be receptive to changes that need to be made in order to better meet the needs of individuals. Caseload reviews between Counselors, Supervisors, and Administrators (the Deputy Directors in charge of V.R. and I.L. services) provide a vehicle for additional evaluation and input regarding services delivered. Ideas from the discussions often impact the direct service offered, improving the likelihood of achieving goals and priorities, and accomplishing positive outcomes for clients.

A satisfaction survey is sent in Large Print format to all active NCBVI clients (both V.R. and I.L.), upon case closure. These are returned to us on a voluntary and anonymous basis, unless the respondent chooses to self-identify. Generally, responses are positive. When there are specific issues mentioned, the Deputy Director follows up to resolve the issues involved. In these cases, it is not unusual for the individual to list his/her own name or to identify the staff person involved. If no name is given, but negative comments are made, we discuss and remind counseling staff of issues to which they need to be sensitive. This allows us to make changes if needed to facilitate better services in the future.

Another assessment procedure has been initiated in the past few years. NCBVI operates an Orientation and Training Center providing intensive training in the skills of blindness and attitude adjustment for building self-confidence. Many clients from across the State come to the Center for this training. Three months after students leave the Center, they receive a telephone call and are asked to answer questions related to Center training. This occurs whether the individual completes the training or

not. In some cases, a student may leave because of personal, health, or other reasons. The Deputy Director of Vocational Rehabilitation Services trains objective interviewers who conduct the telephone interviews. Results of each interview are provided to the Center Director who then changes the client name to a code number and forwards to Center Staff, the Executive Director of NCBVI, and to the Board of Commissioners.

These interviews have proven to be a very useful tool for assessing a major component of our overall service system. In addition to evaluating our Center program, comments sometimes relate to Field Services which individuals receive in preparation for attending the Center, or which occur during the months following training. The interviewee is assured that comments will be held in confidence. Much of the feedback is very positive regarding the productive impact felt as a result of attending the Orientation Center. The more negative comments have included the need for more one-on-one training or are specific to the student's personal expectations and needs. When trends are noticed or issues of concern are raised, we discuss the issue with the Center Director and find ways to revise our approach so that services continue to be improved.

Finally, we have just implemented telephone interviews with Vocational Rehabilitation clients, four months after closure in statuses 26, 28, and 36. These interviews will be used in the same way as the interviews following Center training. The comments will help to assure quality services, correct any problems not discovered sooner, and work on continuous improvement.

Each fiscal year, a percentage of Title I funds is used to develop and implement innovative approaches to expand and improve services to individuals with disabilities and to support the Board of Commissioners and the Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC). Board meetings are held in locations across the State, requiring funds for travel and related expenses of Council members. Rehabilitation services for the blind are provided in Nebraska by a consumer-controlled Independent Commission, which is not required to have a State Rehabilitation Council (SRC).

Expansion and improvement efforts are increasingly focused on technology. As technology advances, NCBVI will continue to utilize Title I funds (not I & E) in ways to enable clients to become employed in the occupations of their choice. This includes, but is not limited to, specialized training in assistive technology applications and equipment and the provision of that software or equipment needed to accomplish the job placement most appropriate to each individual client. In one case, we were even instrumental in the development of a new mechanism to enable a blind person to operate a multi-line telephone switchboard system. Information on this entirely new technology has been shared with many other state rehabilitation agencies and employers within Nebraska and nationwide.