

## VR-Blind SERVICES PORTION OF THE COMBINED STATE PLAN

### (a) Input of the State Rehabilitation Council

The Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (NCBVI) is a consumer-controlled agency. Since it is governed by a Board of consumers, there is no State Rehabilitation Council.

### (b) Request for Waiver of Statewideness

All services provided by NCBVI are statewide. There is no request for a waiver.

### (c) Cooperative Agreements with Agencies Not Carrying Out Activities Under the Statewide Workforce Development System

Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (NCBVI) works across the state of Nebraska to establish interagency cooperation with, and utilization of the services of all relevant entities, including entities which are not within the Workforce Development System. NCBVI administrative personnel communicate and cooperate with representatives of the statewide or corporate level of such entities. Counseling and other staff of our District and area rehabilitation offices do so in their areas. There are no State Use Contracting programs in Nebraska.

In each office, NCBVI staff members identify and network with a wide range of professionals in both the public and the private sectors. Doing so serves multiple purposes. NCBVI's VR professionals become well-versed in the resources and opportunities available to blind consumers across Nebraska. They are able to make NCBVI services known to those same entities, to educate them about the tremendous resource available to them from blind and visually impaired community members. In some cases, NCBVI Counselors participate with local Chambers of Commerce, Lions Clubs, Rotary Clubs, Commissions or Area Agencies on Aging, Community Networking Councils, and related organizations.

The United States Rural Development Agency (RDA) administers programs related to self-employment, business opportunities, housing, and other community economic development activities. NCBVI collaborates by providing information to counseling staff about the RDA programs which might benefit their clients. NCBVI VR Counselors also provide information to RDA representatives about efforts to assist blind and visually impaired Nebraskans to access funds available for developing self-employment and business opportunities.

NCBVI works to assure that all the programs of the RDA in Nebraska are made available to clients. We also are available to provide training about NCBVI services, and about blindness, to RDA personnel. With this training they are able to provide reciprocal referrals to persons participating in their programs who might be eligible for services from NCBVI.

NCBVI offices are located in six locations; NCBVI staff work in all communities

across the State of Nebraska. Agency staff members go to where the referrals and clients live, to provide the rehabilitation services specific to each individual. In each area and statewide, they work with local, state, and regional resources available. These include, but are not limited to small business, women's and minority business initiatives, community commercial, recreational and educational programs, religious entities (churches, synagogues, mosques), and private or public organizations are available and relevant to helping blind Nebraskans achieve their employment goals.

The State Use Contracting program is not applicable to NCBVI.

#### (d) Coordination with Education Officials

Consistent with requirements of the Workforce Investment Act, NCBVI coordinates with entities within the WIOA system, including teachers of the visually impaired and education officials, to facilitate the transition of students with disabilities from school to the vocational rehabilitation service system. We have developed a number of strategies to address the seamless transition from school to work for blind students. The most formal is a Cooperative Agreement, signed and updated periodically.

The agreement delineates the responsibilities of the Commission (NCBVI), the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) Special Populations Division, the Nebraska Center for the Education of Children who are Blind or Visually Impaired (NCECBVI), and school districts and Educational Service Units across Nebraska.

Specifically, included in the agreement are provisions for consultations and technical assistance, transition planning, coordinating the IEP and the IPE for roles and responsibilities amongst key individuals, and financial responsibilities, and procedures for outreach. The purpose is to coordinate and promote the cooperation of the programs and services available to students who are blind, deaf-blind and visually impaired during the transition process.

NDE is responsible for assuring that a free, appropriate public education, in accordance with federal and state laws, rules and regulations, to children with disabilities from date of diagnosis to age 21 or graduation. Local school districts and Educational Service Units operate under the structure of NDE and are responsible to fund the education of children with disabilities who are in that particular district. This may include direct provision of educational services in the district itself or at NCECBVI.

In the past, Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (NCBVI) coordinated a statewide Transition Team for Students who are Blind, Deaf-Blind or Visually Impaired. The Team was comprised of NCBVI Counselors, Deputy Director for Vocational Rehabilitation Services, and NCBVI Executive Director; the Executive Director of the Nebraska Foundation for Blind Children; Director of the Nebraska Center for the Education of Children who are Blind or Visually Impaired (NCECBVI);

WinAHEAD (Western Iowa and Nebraska Association on Higher Education and Disabilities); the Parent Training Institute (PTI); teachers for the visually impaired (TVIs); representatives from Nebraska Department of Education, Deaf-Blind Project and other entities for low incidence populations and special education.

The Team was established to promote and develop positive working relationships to assure that children with visual impairments, including multiple disabilities, are provided the best opportunities for education and for transition into adulthood and the world of work. A final work product of the Team is now provided to parents, educators, and other partners throughout the State of Nebraska. The tool, *Opening Doors: A Transition Guide*, provides a continuum of transitional services, recommended practices protocol for all the entities involved, descriptions and prescribed roles of each entity for children in different age groupings (from birth to adulthood). Training has been provided in various settings and will continue to occur as needed.

*Opening Doors* was developed using a facilitated process involving many stakeholders, including service providers, parents, and consumers. It serves to inform all involved about other components of the system, allow stakeholders to better understand each other, and to establish positive working relationships amongst the individuals and entities involved; including outreach to and referral of students with disabilities who are eligible for rehabilitation services.

Staff members of our agency collaborate with educators, parents, and other service providers on an ongoing basis, to assure that children who are blind and have additional disabilities, will receive high quality education and rehabilitation services in all parts of Nebraska. The NCBVI Executive Director is a member of the State of Nebraska Board of Education's Transition Advisory Committee. We collaborate with the Deaf-Blind Project, Parent Training Institute, WinAHEAD, Centers for Independent Living across the state, the Nebraska Center for the Education of Children who are Blind or Visually Impaired, and other entities providing services for children and youth in transition. Particularly in the Omaha and Lincoln School Districts, which have the highest populations and the most students experiencing vision impairments, NCBVI Counselors are systematic in outreach efforts to Teachers of the Visually Impaired. We meet with them in groups, present at TVI training events, and communicate individually with the educators. This effort will be expanded statewide to provide pre-employment transition services (PETS) to all eligible and potentially eligible individuals, and to help educators and employers learn about the PETS services available from NCBVI.

NCBVI counselors attend Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings at school districts throughout the State of Nebraska when appropriate. NCBVI counselors initiate the process of developing Individualized Plans for Employment (IPE) when the young student and the IEP Team exhibit interest in participating in our group programs for blind youth. This occurs at least by age 16 and sometimes by age 14, as established by IDEA and the Rehabilitation Act. For Transition aged

blind students who have not participated in NCBVI's transition programs, new policies have been written to ensure that the IPE is written before the student graduates or ages out of educational services. The Counselor attending IEP meetings will initiate the process for application of vocational rehabilitation services and development of the IPE well before the student leaves the school setting.

Ongoing communication amongst NCBVI, educators, parents, and students, are an important strength to the overall transition efforts in Nebraska. NCBVI counselors and administrators will continue a process of educating educators and service providers about the services we provide to children who are blind.

Students of NCECBVI and those attending school in their local school districts also have the opportunity to participate in specialized NCBVI programs for children and youth. We invite educators to also attend and observe our programs for students. NCBVI youth programs are offered each year. The impact of the events is clear in terms of self-confidence, blindness skills, and elevated expectations. We can see qualitatively that many if not most adults who have attended such programs in previous years, are active, competent members of the workforce and their communities. NCBVI is working to acquire a data management system which will enable us to track results quantitatively as well.

Project Independence (PI) is a five day summer program for pre-transition age students. PI provides counseling on attitudes about blindness, self-esteem building, recreational and social experiences. It enables students to develop and to utilize relevant skills in conjunction with the discussions and activities. The opportunity to be with other blind and visually impaired children is a vital factor to the success of the program participants.

Winnerfest retreats are offered once or twice per school year, from Thursday evening through Saturday noon. Transition aged students from across the state participate in the opportunity for fellowship with blind and visually impaired peers. The curriculum focuses on personal achievement, goal setting, and communication skills. Through videos, role play activities and group discussion, young people explore a variety of topics relative to their everyday lives and to their career aspirations. Participants have the opportunity to learn from and with each other about how to be competent and successful in all aspects of their lives.

WAGES (Work And Gain Experience in the Summer) is a summer employment program for students as they approach high school graduation. WAGES provides students with work experience, peer interaction, and the opportunity to enhance pre-employment and independent living skills. Participants are trained in job-readiness skills, perform actual jobs with businesses in the community, and practice the behaviors needed to maintain employment. WAGES also enhances entities within the workforce system, particularly those participating employers who learn the value of employees who are blind or visually impaired.

In FFY 2015, fifteen percent (15%) of VR funds and fifty percent (50%) of supported employment funds are committed to the provision of pre-employment transition services to blind and visually impaired students and youth in transition between 14 and up to but not including 22 years of age. To that end, a Transition Service Specialist was hired in September 2015 to strengthen the partnership with educational institutions statewide with the objective of making a smooth transition from school to adult life and the world of work possible for more blind and visually impaired students and youth.

NCBVI staff members work with local Workforce Investment Boards and Youth Councils to inform them of the program and to develop the job opportunities for the young blind participants.

#### (e) Cooperative Agreements with Private Nonprofit Organizations

Most private non-profit vocational rehabilitation service providers in Nebraska do not specifically serve persons who are blind or visually impaired. Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (NCBVI) does work cooperatively with such entities when specific client needs and interests dictate. In such cases, agreements are developed for the provision of relevant services.

Outlook Nebraska, Inc. (ONI) of Omaha is a private nonprofit providing employment and training that allow blind and visually impaired persons to achieve personal and career goals. NCBVI works cooperatively with ONI, Goodwill, and other service providers to serve mutual clients or consumers. In addition to services specific to individuals, NCBVI collaborates on various projects. NCBVI worked with ONI in providing cane travel instruction to all their employees. NCBVI worked with each of three work shifts to demonstrate appropriate cane technique and staff walked all through their work area and break area utilizing canes (Two Point Touch, Shore lining, Pencil Grip, Sighted Guide). Working with ONI management the goal is to make this an annual training event. Training was provided for ONI blind employees on Social Security Benefits, the benefits of earning SGA and understanding Social Security. Also being explored is a workshop on Tasks of Daily Living.

A collaborative project in 2013 was to develop public information materials about 'vision resources' in our area. The Coalition of Vision Resources: The partners are NCBVI, ONI, Radio Talking Book of Nebraska (RTBN), Nebraska Library Commission and Talking Book and Braille Services, Lions Clubs, Nebraska Academy of Eye Physicians and Surgeons, Nebraska. The NCBVI Omaha District Supervisor shared the work product at the state conventions of the Nebraska Academy of Eye Surgeons, Ophthalmologists, and Optometrists in 2013 and 2014.

NCBVI also partners with the Nebraska Foundation for Visually Impaired Children in the provision of assistive technology for blind and visually impaired children under 14 years of age on an ongoing basis.

#### (f) Arrangements and Cooperative Agreements for the Provision of Supported Employment Services

Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (NCBVI) enters into cooperative agreements with other state agencies and providers of supported employment when specific clients are identified as candidates for those services. The agreements are based on a model utilized for the purpose of providing supported employment, including the assurance of long term services. The NCBVI Deputy Director for Client Services has lead responsibility for Supported Employment. He is the point of contact for the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services-Division of Developmental Disabilities (NDHHS-DDD). NCBVI Field Supervisors and Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors typically identify providers of supported employment services and make the necessary contractual arrangements.

Each blind and visually impaired individual with a developmental disability has a case service coordinator employed by the NDHHS-DDD. The case service coordinator is responsible for leading a multi-disciplinary team in the development of an Individualized Program Plan (IPP) for mutual clients served by NCBVI and NDHHS-DDD. When supported employment services are involved, the IPP includes financial support provided by NCBVI and DDD. DDD pays for hourly rates charged by the supported employment service provider; NCBVI provides incentive payments at specific intervals (start of job search, start of employment, 30 days following the start of employment, stabilization, and 90, 180, and 270 days following stabilization). This arrangement is in accordance with the “milestones” model used by the Nebraska general rehabilitation agency to serve clients shared with NDHHS-DDD.

In FFY 2016, NCBVI will work towards establishing a similar partnership with the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services-Division of Behavioral Health (NDHHS-DBH) to extend supported employment services to blind and visually impaired clients with behavioral health disorders.

NCBVI collaborated with the Department of Education, Special Education and Vocational Rehabilitation (Nebraska VR Services) in the development of policies and procedures more clearly delineating the responsibilities of the different agencies and institutions involved and the scope and nature of services available to younger persons with disabilities in transition from school. The Collaborative Agreement between NCBVI, Department of Education - Special Populations, and the Nebraska Center for the Education of Children who are Blind or Visually Impaired, applies to persons who are likely to require supported employment or extended services in the future, as well as those students without this need.

#### (g) Coordination with Employers

The business community is a key customer for vocational rehabilitation. NCBVI professionals in all six offices have active approaches to reaching out to employers

in their areas of coverage. NCBVI staff are engaged with the American Job Centers (AJC) and the WIOA state and local boards. In the metropolitan area of Omaha, NCBVI co-locates two VR Counselors at the local AJC.

VR Counselors and Supervisors are members of employer groups, or business networking organizations, as available in each area. These include local Chambers of Commerce, and other entities established for businesses to connect in a meaningful way.

Employers and Human Resource personnel of companies are invited to tour the Nebraska Center for the Blind. This gives them a chance to learn about the potential capability of blind persons as potential employees and to dispel misconceptions held by many people about blindness.

VR professionals, including Counselors and Technology Specialists in particular are available to spend time at companies to assess the positions or openings, to identify if any accommodations might be needed and to provide information about the various technologies and adaptations that can facilitate employing blind and visually impaired persons in most every occupation.

Information is also provided about the resources available – some directly from NCBVI, such as paying for technology, or from external sources, such as tax supports or benefits to the employer as a result of hiring a person with a disability.

Transition services, including pre-employment transition services (PETS) for students and youth with disabilities are key to life-long successful employment of persons with disabilities. NCBVI has a strong emphasis on building the skills and abilities of blind and visually impaired youth, so that they will be successful.

The WAGES program is an example already in place, others will likely be developed pursuant to PETS requirements in WIOA. Work And Gain Experience in the Summer (WAGES) first focuses on identifying employers who will hire young clients for a nearly full-time job during the summer. Employers involved are encouraged to consider the youth as any employee, with high expectations for performance. NCBVI provides salaries to the clients and consultation and technology to the employers. This and other such programs are effective in the career success of the young clients; they are also instrumental in enabling employers to have direct experience with the benefits of hiring people who are blind. This promotes more opportunities for VR clients of all ages to achieve full-time integrated employment.

#### (h) Interagency Cooperation

NCBVI is very much focused upon clients achieving competitive integrated employment, to the greatest extent practicable. The agency will explore potentials for cooperation and collaboration with the State Medicaid plan under title XIX of the Social Security Act.

NCBVI collaborates with the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services-Division of Developmental Disabilities services (NDHHS-DDD) to identify potential clients, coordinate service plans and share funding for those individuals in the System who are described as blind and visually impaired.

Efforts are in motion to establish a similar relationship with the Department of Health and Human Services-Division of Behavioral Health (NDHHS-DBH). Other mental health services are provided statewide by various entities. NCBVI personnel in each office cooperate with those providers to ensure that mutual clients, or persons who may need both VR and mental health services, will be adequately and appropriately served.

#### (i) Comprehensive System of Personnel Development; Data System on Personnel and Personnel Development

NCBVI staffing complement totals forty-nine point seven five (49.75) FTEs; forty-six full-time staff persons and five permanent part-time staff persons. NCBVI personnel include eleven (11) vocational rehabilitation (VR) counselors; three Field supervisors and one Center supervisor; twelve (12) rehabilitation teachers (orientation counselors); six (6) program specialists (three in technology, one in older blind services, one in transition services, and one is in Nebraska Business Enterprises); and nine (9) vocational rehabilitation technicians.

There are also eight (8) administrative/business personnel including the executive director, two deputy directors, one business manager, one technology manager, two (2) Administrative Assistants, and one business office-time accounting clerk.

The Nebraska Business Enterprise (NBE) program consists of a Team: one Program Specialist (FT), one Accounting Clerk (PT), and part of the time of the VR Deputy Director and two people in the Business Office.

These positions are all included in the total agency staffing, mentioned above.

All NCBVI Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors meet the state standard by having achieved the status of Certified Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor for the Blind (CVRCB). Sixteen (16) staff members hold graduate degrees of a Masters or higher, including one Ph.D. and one J.D.

#### Staffing Levels and Projections

We project the total number of persons served by vocational rehabilitation (all statuses, from applicant through full services) during FY 2016 to total 560. The ratio of applicants and eligible individuals served to personnel will be 12.24 to 1. The current staffing level does enable NCBVI to provide core services to customers. Generally, the number of individuals served each year does not change a great deal.

When numbers of referrals increase, we work to find ways to effectively streamline our processes to enable us to continue meeting customer needs. Budgetary considerations and state regulations which limit personnel per agency prevent us from changing our staffing to any great extent. We do, of course, monitor services to assure that all core services are provided and that all active Individualized Plans for Employment are carried out in full. Policy and procedures are in place to implement Order of Selection should it ever be imminent. As stated, though, to date we are able to manage the number of personnel who will be needed by the Commission to provide vocational rehabilitation services to all eligible individuals.

During the next five years, we project that the number of individuals served including those with significant disabilities, will neither increase nor decrease significantly from the current level. We project vacancies during the next five years, based on potential retirement age and age of the individual, as follows: one (1) Executive Director, one (1) Deputy Director, one (1) Business Manager, one (1) Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor, three (3) Orientation Counselors, and three (3) Voc Rehab Technicians (support staff).

The plan is to consider the needs of the agency as people retire. When any vacancy occurs, we assess client needs statewide, to determine whether to change the staffing patterns. We may decide to move any vacant position to a different location in the State or to put the resources toward a different position.

<b>Row</b>	<b>Job Title</b>	<b>Total positions</b>	<b>Current vacancies</b>	<b>Projected vacancies over the next 5 years</b>
1	Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors	11	0	1
2	Vocational Rehabilitation Technicians	9	0	3
3	Orientation Counselors (Rehab Teachers)	12	0	3
4	Program Specialists (Technology, Transition, OIB, BEP)	6	0	0
5	Vocational Rehabilitation Supervisors	4	0	0
6	Deputy Directors	2	0	1
7	Business, Personnel, Other	7	0	1
8	Executive Director	1	0	1

There are no institutions of higher education in Nebraska that are preparing vocational rehabilitation professionals. The State law mandating standards for Certified Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor for the Blind (CVRCB) enables NCBVI to hire, train and maintain qualified staff. This is especially important because there is no Master's degree program in Rehabilitation Counseling within Nebraska. It is

extremely rare that our job candidates have a CRC, and rarely do applicants have a Master’s Degree in Rehabilitation Counseling specifically. 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)].

Row	Institutions	Students enrolled	Employees sponsored by agency and/or RSA	Graduates sponsored by agency and/or RSA	Graduates from the previous year
1	0	0	0	0	0

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

Currently, there are two vacancies for pre-existing vocational rehabilitation personnel at Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired. When vacancies occur within our VR positions, NCBVI recruits through local and statewide newspapers, State of Nebraska Personnel services, consumer organizations of blind persons, University graduate programs beyond our immediate geographic area, and related list-serves.

As stated above, 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)]. Nor are there any colleges or universities offering academic programs in vocational rehabilitation at the Baccalaureate or Graduate degree levels. Therefore, there is no coordination or facilitation of recruitment, preparation or retention efforts between the Commission and colleges or universities within Nebraska.

There are, however, some such graduate programs in the Midwest. NCBVI has contacted the university placement offices of nine institutions. All have indicated that they will post any job openings that we transmit to them. During 2014, we began to do this on a routine basis. The goal is to recruit recent graduates to apply for open positions with NCBVI in the future.

**Non-Discriminatory Plan**

NCBVI always strives to be non-discriminatory in hiring, 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 follows federal Affirmative Action guidelines. We 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 encompasses training issues that will maximize the agency's effectiveness and efficiency.

### **Personnel Standards**

Nebraska statute requires a State Certification for Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors for the Blind. This law is the highest standard in Nebraska for the discipline of rehabilitation counseling for the blind. All the NCBVI Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors meet the state standard by having achieved the status of Certified Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor for the Blind. Sixteen staff members also hold graduate degrees of a Masters or higher.

Certified Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor for the Blind (CVRCB) is defined as a person who is certified to practice vocational rehabilitation counseling for blind persons and holds a certificate issued by NCBVI.

Vocational rehabilitation counseling for the blind is defined as the process implemented by a person who operates a comprehensive and coordinated program designed to assist blind persons to gain or maintain remunerative employment, to enlarge 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.

The qualifications to be a certified vocational rehabilitation counselor for the blind in Nebraska are: (a) to have a bachelor's degree from an appropriate educational program approved by the NCBVI Executive Director; (b) to have completed six hundred (600) hours of immersion training under sleep shades (for persons with any functional vision) at the Nebraska Center for the Blind (operated by NCBVI); and (c) to have completed appropriate continued education training credits as approved by the NCBVI Executive Director.

The plan for training newly hired personnel who do not meet the established standards is as follows. New hires for VR Counselor positions must have the bachelor's degree (a) before hire. Training in the immersion setting (b), begins on the first day of the second week of employment. It continues for 600 hours of their employment, that is roughly four (4) months of work time. The time period allowed is sometimes extended if there are interruptions to the training, such as leave needed for illness, vacation, or sometimes meetings that must be attended, etc. The continuing education credits (c) are accrued over time and are reviewed every three years to qualify for certification renewal.

Intensive systematic immersion training of six hundred (600) hours is provided by NCBVI for all newly hired counselors, followed by three months of training specific to the individual's new position. This training provides an orientation to the agency understanding of blindness and the strategy of service delivery that grows out of that understanding. The training includes reading and discussion of many articles

and documents in the blindness field, and skills training in non-visual techniques and technologies through hands-on experiences.

To a lesser degree, paraprofessional or support personnel also receive intensive pre-service training in the office where they will be working at the start of their employment.

Following Center Training, newly hired rehabilitation personnel continue with two to three months of 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. The topics covered include a wide range of policies and procedures, counseling techniques, teaching modalities, etc.

Each Certified Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor for the Blind shall, in the period since his or her certificate was issued or last renewed, complete continuing competency requirements as set forth by NCBVI under the Executive Director's approval.

Annually, each employee and supervisor review performance and plan for individualized training. The goals include activities to enhance abilities in blindness skills, to refresh and deepen understanding of philosophical concepts, to expand professional knowledge within the field of rehabilitation counseling for the blind, and opportunities for training specific to rehabilitation counseling for specific positions. Discussions of philosophical issues are held in local offices and by the Administrative Team in Central office. Employees are also encouraged to spend time with other staff to learn new practices and to stimulate ongoing improvement.

### **Staff Development**

Supervisors have provided data regarding their subordinates' education, including degrees held. As mentioned above, the CVRCB Certification requirement is a Bachelor's degree approved by the Executive Director, and 600 hours of intensive training at the NCBVI Nebraska Center for the Blind. We encourage VR Counselors to pursue additional academic work. NCBVI has six offices across the State of Nebraska. Some of these 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.

Many activities are conducted in the team setting. This enables mentoring of staff less experienced by those with more expertise in a particular area. Individual staff members may also schedule time with others to expand their own knowledge, skills and experience in areas needing to be strengthened.

One example that is proving to be highly productive is training in Motivational Interviewing (MI). The Nebraska Center for the Blind and each district have each scheduled sessions with MI trainers, to develop, expand, and fine tune the MI skills of NCBVI Counselors. These skills helped counselors build more positive working relationships with clients towards the achievement of individualized service goals and objectives.

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. Continuing efforts ensure that all personnel are adequately trained and prepared to meet standards that are based on the highest requirements in the State and to become certified in accordance with State Law. 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.

Funds from several segments of the NCBVI budget are committed to developing personnel, including funding training from the Nebraska Center for the Blind, as well as tuition and related expenses for expanding the capacities of NCBVI staff.

Ongoing training is made available to all staff on relevant and timely topics. Retaining qualified personnel is particularly important because of the investment we make with the intensive Center Training as well as our willingness to reimburse tuition for course work.

Topics of focused training sessions may include, but are not limited to:

1. laws and regulations, including the Rehabilitation Act, Randolph-Sheppard, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, Americans with Disabilities Act, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, and others,
2. methods to help clients of all ages achieve successful employment in high-quality positions with benefits and opportunities for advancement,
3. using data to measure the success of concentrated efforts for achieving goals of high quality employment outcomes,
4. providing effective services to transition-aged persons who are blind or visually impaired, including approaches to outreach and service delivery;
5. ways to work effectively with the increasing number of older individuals who are losing vision but still want or need to be a part of the workforce,
6. serving persons with multiple disabilities, especially deaf-blindness,
7. assistive technology, including non-visual and low vision options,
8. maximizing effectiveness in the group training or counseling setting,
9. Social Security information, including benefits counseling and PASS plan development,
10. supported employment,

11. workplace policies,
12. positive philosophical understandings of blindness,
13. diversity awareness and sensitivity training, especially to working with people from poverty, and
14. additional relevant issues, e.g. transportation, crisis management, etc.

The long-range plan for ongoing development of staff is based upon needs identified by our annual processes for comprehensive statewide needs assessment. The plan is updated and kept current with ideas or issues identified from ongoing client satisfaction surveys, employee requests for additional training on specific topics, and internal data collection from the NCBVI data management system.

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

NCBVI has several employees across the State of Nebraska with bilingual skills in English and Spanish. Independent contracts are established as needed to obtain services from individuals who are able to communicate in the native language of applicants or clients who have limited English speaking ability or in appropriate modes of communication. Contracts have included, but are not limited to American Sign Language, including Tactile Signing for Deaf-Blind individuals, Spanish, French, Turkish, Arabic, Vietnamese, Burmese, Kareni, Swahili and others according to the needs of applicants and eligible individuals.

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

NCBVI coordinates with the Comprehensive System of Personnel Development under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in several ways. NCBVI and a team of educators and other stakeholders established a Protocol for educators and NCBVI counselors, for providing high quality services to blind and visually impaired children and youth in Nebraska. The handbook is titled *Opening Doors: A Transition Guide*. This tool serves as a vehicle for educating parents and families, service providers, educators, and others about the best way for children from birth through transition age, to obtain the education and rehabilitation services that will move them into adulthood successfully.

NCBVI provides information to educators and to VR personnel about training opportunities relevant to personnel development in the fields of both education and vocational rehabilitation. A series of personnel training sessions relating to the handbook were held in a coordinated effort between NCBVI and personnel covered by IDEA. In FFY 2014 and 2015, NCBVI Counselors continued to provide the tool, and instructions as needed, statewide to educators, parents, and other persons involved with educating blind and visually impaired school students within Nebraska.

Additional joint personnel development efforts will be held when specific issues of mutual concern are identified. For example, teachers of blind children from the public school system provide presentations to NCBVI at Staff Meetings. At the NCBVI Annual State Staff Meeting in 2013, a speaker from Nebraska Department of Education/Special Populations gave a presentation on the IEP process and the role of VR Counselors in that process, working with educators, families and students.

NCBVI staff members provide presentations at training sessions of the school system, university and college classes, and other opportunities which arise. We will continue to explore ways to assure success in education and quality employment. One avenue will be collaborating with the WinAHEAD organization (Western Iowa and Nebraska Association on Higher Education and Disabilities). On an ongoing basis, the primary emphasis will be individual communication between NCBVI counselors and parents, teachers and others in the education system.

#### (j) Statewide Assessment

Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (NCBVI) is the Designated State Agency responsible under State law for operating the vocational rehabilitation program for the blind in Nebraska. A governing board, the majority of whom are persons who are blind or visually impaired, appointed by the Governor of the State of Nebraska serves to assure the agency is consumer-controlled. NCBVI undertakes 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.

#### Formal Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA)

During FFY 2013, NCBVI established a contract with the National Research and Training Center on Blindness and Low Vision (NRTC), Mississippi State University Research Unit for a formal Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment to cover the period of 2011 through 2013. The assessment included surveys of blind clients closed either in status 26 or 28, members of NCBVI staff, and employers who have had experience with NCBVI staff and clients. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with other key informants. In addition, existing data from various sources was analyzed, such as the RSA-911 data for NCBVI, American Community Survey data, and Bureau of Labor Statistics labor and economic forecasts. Data gathering began in March 2013 and continued through August 2013. Analysis was conducted primarily during the final quarter of Fiscal year 2013. The full report was provided to NCBVI early in fiscal year 2014.

A plan is in place to contract for a triennial assessment again in the upcoming period. The next Statewide Assessment will cover the period of FY 2015 through FY 2018.

NCBVI worked to understand and assess the study's results. Steps are being taken to move forward on the recommendations of the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment.

Serving consumers with multiple disabilities is a need that grows in complexity and numbers. The agency will work to increase staff members' expertise in a variety of disabilities, including deaf-blindness, brain injury, and others. In addition, it is important to partner with other entities specializing in serving persons with specific disabilities other than blindness. There is a need to increase competitive employment outcomes for clients with multiple disabilities. Caseloads were reviewed to identify clients with multiple disabilities and strategies were developed to more effectively provide the services needed by those individuals.

The population of Nebraska is not tremendously diverse in terms of race and ethnicity, but diversity has been increasing. The agency has a Minority Outreach Plan to assure that contacts are made systematically in every area of the State. The CSNA results show that there is a need to analyze the work being done. It is important to make meaningful contacts with diverse populations, to effectively reach persons who might be eligible for agency services. Materials are being revised to have different languages available, including print, online, and video productions for public use. A translation tool was added in 2014 to the agency website, allowing the user to read all content in a wide range of language options.

There is a need to increase the proportions of people served from minority populations who achieve competitive employment outcomes. The efforts to date have focused on increasing outreach to all Nebraskans. This effort will continue, along with examination of barriers that inhibit successful outcomes. Efforts statewide assure that regardless of race or ethnicity, quality services are provided at referral, application, and throughout the VR process.

Assistance related to employment is another identified need. The needs can be broken into three major areas: career exploration and guidance, searching for and obtaining employment, and working with employers on accommodations and other on-the-job requirements. More specifically, the needs include help with finding a job, finding job leads or contacting employers, working with employers on job accommodations, completing applications, exploring career options, and developing clients' skills for seeking and obtaining competitive employment.

The world of work and life in general require increasing needs for technology related skills and equipment. The highest focus of need from consumer surveys was in this area. Training in access technology is an area of high need, according to the assessment. This is consistent with our ongoing needs assessment with consumers

statewide, described below, which we conduct every year. Employers surveyed also indicated that assistance with technology will help them to hire and retain employees with vision impairments. The Technology Team, led by a Program Manager, works to enhance their own expertise, to train other staff, to provide opportunities for training consumers, and to identify additional opportunities available from external resources.

Another area identified is the importance of partnering with other organizations, agencies, groups, etc. In particular, other components of the statewide workforce development system are key entities with whom to partner. Much is done and will continue to be done throughout the state. Staff members in each geographic area are encouraged to engage in networking opportunities with businesses in their locale. We engage with the Local Workforce Boards in all parts of the State. This helps to assure that we do have knowledge of and interaction with other components of the workforce system statewide. When staff members learn of new entities, or ones that have not worked with NCBVI in the past, the information is shared with other staff and consumers who need it. This agency is strongest when collaborating with and learning from people and groups that may have resources beyond its own.

With the exception of Omaha and Lincoln metropolitan areas, most of the state is rural. There are small and medium-sized towns sprinkled across the state. Still it is critical that we work to ensure our ability to achieve competitive employment outcomes for clients living in rural Nebraska. NCBVI data show that the rates of acceptance for services and competitive employment are actually slightly better for rural-based clients than for urban. However, there may be a perception amongst individuals who feel isolated and unable to connect with employment, leading to a sense that this is an unmet need. It is also not unusual for VR Counselors in the rural areas to be frustrated by limited employment opportunities for their clients. The fact that this need emerged as critical in the survey reinforces the need to strengthen networking efforts, outreach to potential clients and employers, and building skills among agency staff to make sure that all areas of the state are served fully, including rural, urban, and metropolitan.

The Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment also identified some rehabilitation needs of individuals. The top five include instruction using computer assistive technology; training in assistive technology; instruction on low vision aids or devices; cane travel; and exploring career options. Specific to minorities, there may be vocational rehabilitation needs that are different or that need special attention. The top three needs were the same as the general listed above, but also included here are a need for instruction in general and personal home management; help in exploring career options. The only minority group that appears to be underserved by this Assessment are persons of Hispanic origin. One salient point being considered is that population figures for the State include citizens and non-citizens of a variety of immigrant statuses. Our services, as required by State Law can only be provided to persons who are citizens or of qualified immigrant status. Thus,

comparing proportions of persons served with proportions of persons present in the state can be misleading.

For the effort to establish, develop or improve community rehabilitation programs (CRPs), NCBVI collaborates with a wide range of community partners statewide, working together to develop and improve services. NCBVI is an active partner with the Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC). As part of the State Plan for Independent Living, to assure that IL services are available statewide, NCBVI provides 15.5% of the budget for Panhandle Independent Living Services (PILS). This funding is likely to discontinue at the end of FFY 2017 when a new SPIL goes into effect.

Job coaching to Supported Employment clients is provided through contracts with community rehabilitation programs. Agency staff members also work with CRPs and independent living centers to assure that services are coordinated and meeting the needs of Nebraskans with disabilities, especially those who are blind or visually impaired along with multiple disabilities.

NCBVI partners with community rehabilitation programs (Outlook Nebraska, Goodwill, Martin Luther Homes, Community Alternatives of Nebraska, Quality Living) and other entities. Outlook Nebraska, Inc. (ONI) of Omaha is a private nonprofit providing employment and training that allow blind and visually impaired persons to achieve personal and career goals. NCBVI works cooperatively with ONI and other service providers to serve mutual clients or consumers. In addition to services specific to individuals, collaboration on other projects occurs as the need and opportunity arise.

The activities enable NCBVI to inform many persons about the services available to individuals who are blind, thus expanding opportunities to those who are, or who may become, eligible for services of the Vocational Rehabilitation or the Supported Employment program. The agency website is updated continuously and provides information to the public about available services and resources, avenues to apply for services, and ask questions, and so forth. Work is being done to enhance a social media presence with information and updates about NCBVI events, activities, and services.

The agency collaborates with the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services-Division of Developmental Disabilities services (NDHHS-DDD) to identify potential clients, coordinate service plans and share funding for those individuals in the System who are described as blind and visually impaired. Efforts have been initiated to establish a similar relationship with the Department of Health and Human Services-Division of Behavioral Health (NDHHS-DBH) on behalf of blind and visually impaired clients with behavioral health issues. For the most part, job coaching to SE clients is provided through contracts with community rehabilitation programs. DDD provides ongoing funding for the job supports. Contracts with CRPs

and coordination for services all serve to expand, develop and improve such programs across the State of Nebraska.

Part of the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment gathered information regarding this question, from the staff survey and the key informant interviews. One item on the staff survey addressed this, and staff did not consider establishing or developing CRPs within the state to be an important need. This was the lowest rated item for staff in terms of need, with 64.7% indicating there was limited or no need to do this. Four of the key informants indicated they did not know or preferred not to provide an answer about this need. One informant did not see a need to establish CRPs, while another commented on the fact that there are no other organizations in the state which can provide blindness rehabilitation services. Only one key informant felt there is a need to establish additional CRPs, although this was from the perspective of providing a source of employment for consumers rather than from the perspective of providing rehabilitation services to consumers. Overall, the results would indicate that most do not consider the establishment or development of CRPs to be an important need for blind consumers in Nebraska. The only information that supports a need is that two key informants thought that there is a need for other service options (beyond NCBVI providing all services). The fact that NCBVI currently partners with community programs to identify and to address consumer needs may be the reason that developing further such programs is not seen as a high-level need.

#### Ongoing Efforts for Needs Assessments

Throughout each year, NCBVI conducts comprehensive, statewide assessments on an ongoing basis in a number of different formats and settings. Throughout each year, NCBVI holds 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 sessions are conducted jointly with other providers including the general vocational rehabilitation agency, centers for independent living, education, health and human services, etc. Other forums are conducted as a part of our presentations to statewide meetings of consumer or peer support groups of the blind: National Federation of the Blind of Nebraska, American Council of the Blind of Nebraska, Nebraska Association of the Blind, and other more local groups. The NCBVI Board of Commissioners holds quarterly public meetings during which they encourage consumers and interested persons to make comments and suggestions.

Consumers are informed that the current NCBVI State Plan is posted on the website and is otherwise available to anyone requesting a copy in alternate format. The public meetings serve as focus groups to solicit consumer input. The event locations and logistics are scheduled to best elicit input from and ideas about the needs of persons with the most significant disabilities, disabled individuals of minority or ethnic background, areas that may be underserved, and those who may be served by other entities such as the Nebraska Workforce System or other partner entities.

During Federal Fiscal Year 2015, NCBVI held or participated in forums in the following Nebraska locations: Omaha, Lincoln, North Platte, and Norfolk. The consumer-controlled Commission Board handles all functions delegated to a 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 explore ideas to determine what will help to improve services provided by NCBVI and when appropriate and possible, to implement new strategies. Frequently, the same types of comments are made; some of which may not have any real way to address as a vocational rehabilitation agency. It is very common for individuals at public forums to have questions specific to services, thus generating referrals. A follow-up response connects the person with NCBVI staff in their area.

The Client Assistance Program provides a report on cases received throughout the year to the Administrative team and Supervisor's team. Cases are reviewed for systemic issues and any current trends about services to clients.

Assessment tools are utilized throughout each year to evaluate service effectiveness. Doing so adds depth to the ongoing statewide needs assessment, as the service evaluations may point to unmet needs not articulated in the more public settings.

In October 2015, a new online client satisfaction survey conducted by Gemini Research and Training (GRT), a private contractor, was initiated to assess the level of satisfaction of vocational rehabilitation clients in statuses 18, 20, 26, and 28. At the same time, online surveys of students of the Nebraska Training Center for the Blind began. For those who cannot fill out the survey via the internet, GRT follows up with a telephone call to assist clients with the survey. Surveys explore the client's perspectives about various aspects of NCBVI services and Center training. Results are shared with the NCBVI Executive Director and Deputy Director of Client Services, appropriate NCBVI personnel, and the Board of Commissioners. In general, most clients are satisfied or enthusiastically positive with the services they received. Occasionally, problems are mentioned. When this occurs, the Deputy Director of Client Services and the Center or field supervisor follow up to address identified problems. These comments help to assure quality services, correct any problems not discovered earlier, and to work on continuous improvement. Person surveyed are assured that their comments are confidential and that they will be used to help evaluate and improve services provided to blind Nebraskans. For current clients, assurance is given that any comments will not impact their service in a negative way; rather, that it will assure that their needs are being met.

Another assessment tool is a basic satisfaction survey, mailed to all independent living clients after case closure. The vast majority of respondents say 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 all counseling staff of issues to which they need to be sensitive. Assessments from persons served through the Independent Living (IL) services also help to assure that the ongoing statewide assessment is comprehensive. The IL track sometimes leads to a person applying for Vocational Rehabilitation services; thus assessing IL services is linked to the overall comprehensive statewide assessment.

#### (k) Annual Estimates

NCBVI projects the total number of persons served by vocational rehabilitation (all statuses, from applicant through full services) during FY 2016 to total 560. The ratio of applicants and eligible individuals served to personnel will be 12.24 to 1. The current staffing level does enable NCBVI to provide core services to customers. Generally, the number of individuals served each year does not change a great deal.

When numbers of referrals increase, the agency identifies ways to effectively streamline processes to enable the staff to continue meeting customer needs. Budgetary considerations and state regulations that limit personnel per agency prevent us from changing our staffing to any great extent. Services are monitored to assure that all core services are provided and that all active Individualized Plans for Employment are carried out in full. Policy and procedures are in place to implement Order of Selection should it ever be imminent. As stated, though, to date there are adequate personnel to provide vocational rehabilitation services to all eligible individuals.

During the next five years, it is projected that the number of individuals served including those with significant disabilities, will neither increase nor decrease significantly from the current level. Projected vacancies during the next five years, based on potential retirement age and age of the individual, are as follows: one (1) Executive Director, one (1) Deputy Director, one (1) Business Manager, one (1) Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor, three (3) Orientation Counselors, and three (3) Voc Rehab Technicians.

#### (l) State Goals and Priorities

Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (NCBVI) is an independent, consumer-controlled Commission. As such, it does not have a State Rehabilitation Council. A Board of Commissioners governs NCBVI, the majority of whom must be blind consumers. Until last year, all Commissioners appointed by the Governor of the State of Nebraska have been individuals who are blind or visually impaired. There is now an appointed Commissioner who is the parent of a blind young adult. The Board of Commissioners works together with the agency Executive Director to develop and agree to annual goals and priorities. The mission of NCBVI

is “Empowering Blind Individuals, Promoting Opportunities, and Building Belief in the Blind.” The agency’s primary priority is to enable persons who are blind and visually impaired, including those who also have multiple disabilities, to achieve their individual goals for competitive employment (including supported employment). The secondary priority is to enable persons who are blind and visually impaired, including those who also have multiple disabilities, to achieve their individual goals to live independently, and to be full participants in their communities. With both priorities, agency personnel work with clients to elevate their personal goals beyond what they might have expected a blind person to be able to achieve. As people learn to understand blindness and learn to utilize the alternative skills of blindness, they develop self-confidence and determination to establish personal goals that embody elevated expectations for themselves and for their future. NCBVI goals are based on factors identified through analysis of the comprehensive statewide assessments, both the contracted research project and the ongoing public forums, and results of federal RSA Monitoring and oversight.

1. Increase the number and percentage of clients achieving competitive employment outcomes.
2. Increase the rehabilitation rate for transition aged clients achieving competitive employment outcomes.
3. Improve the quality assurance system.

Many approaches are in place to achieve the goals and priorities of achieving high-quality successful employment for clients, including those of transition age. 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 things. The overall priority of high-quality employment includes the traditional 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). Older applicants or persons who express interest in Independent Living (IL) programs are encouraged to explore vocational rehabilitation in addition to IL services. Clients of all ages are encouraged to examine whether, if not for blindness, 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 to be employed as a blind or visually impaired person.

The system of Standards and Indicators established by RSA has been the primary benchmark used to measure the extent to which program goals were achieved and as a result, the effectiveness of the overall program. Additional evaluation processes are described in detail in the section on Supported Employment Goals. The primary goal for the SE Program is to develop supported employment situations for persons

who experience the additional involvement of a developmental disability. When competitive employment without ongoing support is not an option, particularly for individuals with developmental disabilities in addition to blindness, supported employment is explored as an option that may be more conducive for that individual. An agreement with the Nebraska Health and Human Services System provides the expertise and resources, including ongoing support, to develop and sustain individualized services. Each individual with a developmental disability has a case manager service coordinator, employed by the Nebraska Health and Human Services, Division of Developmental Disabilities (NHHS-DDD). The case manager is responsible for developing an Individual Program Plan for each client. The Plan normally includes provision for ongoing support from DDD when supported employment is involved. NCBVI generally works with the client (or supported job coaching) for 90 days after stabilization. Using the milestones system; the client remains in active status for about a year after employment. Arrangements are made on a case-by-case basis and mirror the approach in place between the Nebraska general agency (VR) and NHHS-DDD. There are also some persons who could benefit from ongoing support, but who do not have developmental disabilities. For the most part, these individuals have traumatic brain injuries or mental health issues with the onset of disability occurring after age 21. NCBVI works to enhance the potential to achieve employment outcomes in cases that often require maximizing resources and creativity. SE funds are also utilized for training of clients who are Deaf-Blind or have other multiple disabilities. As appropriate, some clients are sent to the Helen Keller National Center (HKNC) for intensive training, not available in Nebraska. In recent years, there have been more Deaf-Blind individuals who have personal goals to become employed, who qualify for Supported Employment and for whom Supported Employment is indicated. In addition to the actual job coaching and ongoing supports, it is crucial for such individuals to enhance their capabilities for productive lives.

#### (m) Order of Selection

At present, NCBVI is not under an Order of Selection. Policy and procedures are in place to implement Order of Selection should it ever be imminent.

#### (n) Goals and Plans for Distribution of Title VI Funds

The primary goal for the Supported Employment (SE) program of NCBVI is to develop appropriate individualized SE placements for blind and visually impaired persons with developmental disabilities. It is also the goal of NCBVI's SE program to develop appropriate individualized SE placements for blind and visually impaired persons with significant secondary disabilities including brain injury, mental illness, hearing impairment, or other multiple disabilities occurring after consumers have reached the age of 21. Each blind and visually impaired individual with a developmental disability has a case service coordinator employed by the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Developmental Disabilities (NDHH-DDD). The case service coordinator is responsible for developing an

Individualized Program Plan (IPP) for mutual clients served by NCBVI and DDD. When supported employment services are involved, the IPP includes financial support provided by NCBVI and NHHS-DDD. NHHS-DDD pays for hourly rates charged by the supported employment service provider; NCBVI provides incentive payments at specific intervals (start of job search, start of employment, 30 days following the start of employment, stabilization, and 90, 180, and 270 days following stabilization). This arrangement is in accordance with the milestones model used by the Nebraska general rehabilitation agency to serve clients shared with NHHS-DDD. The NCBVI Deputy Director described the milestone model as applicable to NCBVI clients at a statewide gathering of 30 local field office supervisors coordinated by NHHS-DDD in November 2012. The NCBVI Lincoln district supervisor and vocational rehabilitation counselors and the NCBVI Deputy Director for Independent Living Services also met with NHHS-DDD supervisors and case service coordinators from various local field offices in southeastern Nebraska, and work continues to establish working relationships with NHHS-DDD local field offices in other parts of the state. One supported employment case has been closed successfully since the milestones model was initiated. Some blind and visually impaired persons with non-developmental disabilities, primarily those with traumatic brain injuries, mental health issues, or other significant disabilities occurring after age 21 might benefit from supported employment services; however, state funding for support extending beyond eighteen (24) months to such persons is not available in Nebraska. In such cases, the Deputy Director, Supported Employment Administrator, works with the NCBVI Counselor involved to identify possible resources for the ongoing support (i.e., PASS plans, natural supports, personal resources). Continued training regarding Supported Employment services is provided to NCBVI counselors, statewide. The total funds projected for FY 2016 is expected to be \$30,000. At least 50% will be allocated to persons in the pre-employment transition services categories. Concerted efforts will assure efficiency so that the limited funding will be as effective as possible. As appropriate, additional funding will be available from Title I funds. SE services were provided to 20 clients in FY 2015; it is feasible that the number served in 2016 will be 25. Overall, NCBVI Management staff work to implement creative strategies to most effectively utilize Supported employment funds to maximize the benefit for those individuals in the program's target population.

Project SEARCH is a joint effort between NCBVI, VR (NE-G), school districts, hospitals and other businesses in several communities. Project SEARCH is not specifically supported employment, but it is designed to benefit people with developmental disabilities in transition. Additional Project SEARCH programs were added during the past year. These partnerships between NCBVI, VR, schools and businesses are expanding. New projects include a major hotel and hospitals. Outreach to transition aged persons with multiple disabilities will enable us to identify youth who are appropriate for this opportunity and to provide the vocational preparation and experience that will serve them well into adulthood.

(o) State's Strategies

Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired are to increase the number and percentage of clients achieving competitive employment outcomes; increase the rehabilitation rate for transition aged clients achieving competitive employment outcomes; and to improve the quality assurance system. NCBVI utilizes strategies identified in the text above and in WIOA to achieve these goals and priorities, to support innovation and expansion activities, and to overcome barriers to accessing NCBVI's vocational rehabilitation and supported employment programs.

There are six physical offices throughout the State of Nebraska, to reach blind and visually impaired persons in their home communities. Vocational Rehabilitation staff travel their catchment areas to meet with referrals and clients, to educate the general public, including employers, and to reach out to individuals who may need our services. There is an increasing emphasis upon providing effective services to the transition population, particularly pre-employment transition eligible persons. From the RSA perspective, as well as this agency, it is crucial to increase successful outcomes for clients who begin rehabilitation services from the age of 16 (or 14 where appropriate) through age 24. NCBVI closely reviews all transition cases closed without achieving employment outcomes. Through this process, approaches and services are analyzed, to determine how successes for transition clients can be increased. At the same time, case reviews are conducted on all transition cases closed that did achieve employment outcomes. The level and types of services provided and the success achieved are examined based upon benchmarks established by RSA and WIOA common measures, to be determined. Workshops are provided in various locations around Nebraska to spotlight the capabilities of blind individuals. The agency partners with other agencies, consumer organizations, communities, and groups; including Disability Rights Nebraska, Nebraska Assistive Technology Partnership (ATP), the Statewide Independent Living Council, Workforce Development Councils, educational entities, hospitals, multi-cultural centers, community rehabilitation programs (Goodwill, Martin Luther Homes, Community Alternatives of Nebraska, Quality Living), and a wide range of other entities. The activities enable NCBVI to inform many persons about the services available to individuals who are blind, thus expanding opportunities to those who are, or who may become, eligible for services of the Vocational Rehabilitation or the Supported Employment program. The agency website is updated continuously and provides information to the public about available services and resources, avenues to apply for services, and ask questions, and so forth. In 2016, the employment conferences for clients will be continued. The conferences are an effective approach to expand and improve efforts to secure high quality employment outcomes for job ready consumers and to enable pre-employment services clients to gain skills and resources for achieving employment. Included in the conferences are motivational speakers, sessions on resume writing, interviewing and related skills, technology demonstrations, mock interviews with local business people, and a job fair with local businesses present. Employers have an opportunity to meet blind job candidates in a setting conducive to exploring the options for both blind consumers

and for business representatives. Clients learn and practice many skills necessary to succeed in the world of work. Instructional videos developed and produced by NCBVI are now being used by clients, for self-study on blindness skills, between appointments with Rehabilitation Counselors and Teachers. Over the past several years, staff training included intervention strategies promoting greater effectiveness working with people with Traumatic Brain Injury, Deaf-Blindness, autism, and other significant disabilities. These activities will enable more blind consumers to obtain employment and to be full participants in their families and communities. Every year, NCBVI conducts comprehensive, statewide assessments on an ongoing basis. Throughout each year, NCBVI holds 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 providers (e.g. the general vocational rehabilitation agency, centers for independent living, education, health and human services, etc.). Other forums are conducted as a part of our presentations to statewide meetings of consumer or peer support groups of the blind: National Federation of the Blind of Nebraska, American Council of the Blind of Nebraska, Nebraska Association of the Blind, and others. The NCBVI Board of Commissioners also holds quarterly public meetings during which they encourage consumers and interested persons to make comments and suggestions. In addition to the ongoing work to hear from the public about services and needs, we now have the results of the formal Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment, completed in FFY 2014. The results are consistent with our less formal, ongoing assessments, validating the information that is received from both approaches.

Consumers are informed that the current NCBVI State Plan is posted on the website and is otherwise available to anyone requesting a copy in any format. The forums serve as focus groups to solicit consumer input. The event locations and logistics are scheduled to best elicit input from and ideas about the needs of persons with the most significant disabilities, disabled individuals of minority or ethnic background, areas that may be underserved, and those who may be served by other entities such as the Nebraska Workforce System or other partner entities. The following strategies work toward achieving the third goal (Improve the quality assurance system): each fiscal year, a percentage of Title I funds are used to develop and implement innovative approaches to expand and improve services. During recent years, Innovation and Expansion funds were allocated to further our ability to manage data systematically. The NCSAB data management system, eForce, has been live since April 9, 2009. Each year, training sessions were conducted for NCBVI personnel to operate the system, both inputting data and accessing information. Additional programming and training efforts were required to fully utilize the system, on an ongoing basis as the system was developed and refined.

As with any data management system, facets needing to be fine-tuned have become evident. The programming and training costs have been funded with a combination of Title I Innovation and Expansion and Social Security Reimbursement funds. Day to day enhancement of the system and provision of the service are specific areas for

which resources are needed. New, major additional requirements from RSA for 911 data collection have been implemented, relating to medical coding and other reporting elements. The new regulations, pending further regulations related to WIOA, and an effort to link system with the State of Nebraska fiscal system has led to the decision to purchase a proprietary data system. NCBVI is in the process of a Request for Proposals for competitive bid. This should generate proposals from major software entities for consideration. Plan for starting with a new system is projected at October 1, 2016. Work with the data management system will address all goals. Data management will enable NCBVI to analyze the effectiveness of all parts of the system. These can then be used the data based results to add value to overall efforts of the agency, achieve established goals, and to identify future needs and challenges.

#### (p) Evaluation and Reports of Progress: VR and Supported Employment Goals

The mission of Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (NCBVI) is “Empowering Blind Individuals, Promoting Opportunities, and Building Belief in the Blind.” The Commission’s primary priority is to enable persons who are blind and visually impaired, including those with multiple disabilities (i.e., hearing impairment, brain injury, mental illness) to achieve their individual goals for competitive employment (including supported employment). A secondary priority is to enable persons who are blind and visually impaired, including those who also have multiple disabilities, to achieve their individual goals to live independently and to be full participants in their home communities. Particular emphasis is given to the provision of pre-employment transition services to blind youth ages 14 years and up to but not including age 22.

NCBVI goals are based on factors identified through analysis of comprehensive statewide assessments, the contracted research projects, and ongoing public forums.

2016 State Plan program goals for NCBVI are extensions of the goals identified on the 2014 State Plan:

1. Increase the number and percentage of clients achieving full-time (31+ hours per week) competitive employment outcomes.

Fifty (50) VR clients were closed in Status 26 during FY 2015, indicating that employment goals were achieved, compared to seventy-two (72) in FY 2014. In FY 2015, 54% of cases closed in Status 26 achieved full-time employment, compared to 52.77% achieving full-time employment in FY 2014. Our goal specifically focused on employment with more than 31 hours per week. While the goal of increasing the percentage of status 26 closures achieving full-time employment in FY 2015 was met, the goal of increasing the number of status 26 closures achieving full-time employment in FY 2015 was not.

(2) Increase the ratio of average hourly earnings of clients who become employed compared to average earnings in the state.

The average hourly wage of cases closed in status 26 during FY 2015 was \$15.08. Using the most recent Department of Labor (DOL) estimates for the average overall hourly wage for Nebraska in the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter of 2015 (\$19.99), the ratio of average hourly wage of cases closed in status 26 with DOL estimates is .75. The average hourly wage of cases closed in status 26 during FY 2014 was \$15.67. Using DOL estimates for the average hourly wage for Nebraska at the end of FY 2014 (\$19.69), the ratio of average hourly wage of cases closed in status 26 with DOL estimates of the average overall hourly wage in Nebraska is .79. Goal number 2 was not met.

(3) Increase the rehabilitation rate for transition aged clients in FY2015 over the previous fiscal year.

The rehab rate for transition-aged clients in FY 2015 was 45.45%; in FY 2014, it was 28.57%. Goal 3 was met.

NCBVI is committed to the provision of rehabilitation services to blind and visually impaired children and youth and their families as early as possible in the child's development. Special programs such as Project Independence for children between the ages of five and fourteen stress the importance of self-confidence and independence using the alternative skills of blindness. Programs for blind and visually impaired teens such as WAGES (Work And Gain Experience in the Summer) and Winnerfest provide valuable work experiences and opportunities for developing interpersonal skills needed for success in later life. Other programs such as technology fairs and the College Workshop also help blind and visually impaired students make the transition to life after high school. In the coming year, NCBVI will increase efforts promoting more job opportunities for blind and visually impaired youth in their home communities throughout the school year.

In September 2015, NCBVI hired a Transition Services Specialist to strengthen the relationship between NCBVI and schools statewide on behalf of blind and visually impaired students. Fifteen percent (15%) of funds allocated to NCBVI for vocational rehabilitation services are dedicated to providing pre-employment transition services to blind and visually impaired youth between the ages of 14 and up to but not including 22; 50 percent (50%) of funds for supported employment services are committed to providing pre-employment transition services to blind and visually impaired youth in the same age group.

Increasing the number of blind and visually impaired youth in transition achieving their individual employment goals is a major objective for NCBVI in FY 2016. Transition-aged clients are encouraged to elevate their expectations for personal achievement. This can translate to higher education, often delaying their ultimate employment. It may take more years to reach that goal, but when they do, it will be in a career that will pay well, have benefits, and the chance for promotions. We are

in the process of examining all 28 closures, including those for Transition clients. We will determine if there is any difference between those who choose to continue their education and those who do not. We also will explore any commonalities among cases closed unsuccessfully. There may be strategies which can be used to improve the employment outcomes and the resulting rehab rate.

#### (4) Improve the quality assurance system.

In October 2015, NCBVI issued an RFB requesting bids to replace the client database management system, eForce, to a system that will be more comprehensive and effective on all levels of the process, such as establishing electronic reminders of service deadlines; ways for staff to communicate with each other about client needs and case service activities; mechanisms for administrators to review work that is done, accomplishments made, and to assess gaps in either the data management system itself or the agency's service delivery system. As there is more time using the new system, the Commission will be better able to track effectiveness of programs and in other ways, assure that high quality services are provided to accomplish successful outcomes for clients.

To achieve the goals and priorities of achieving high-quality successful employment for clients, NCBVI is using many approaches. Each situation is individualized, thus the strategies and solutions for each client is unique. This approach is productive in many ways. It helps each individual client to clarify personal goals and then to achieve those goals. It 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. It also helps rehabilitation staff by reinforcing creative, individualized thinking, which in turn stimulates creative thinking for the next client who walks in the door.

Clients are encouraged to examine whether, if not for blindness, 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 leads to employment goals for individuals who otherwise would not have believed that they could be successful in the job market as a blind or visually impaired person.

NCBVI has developed workshops for clients that give a jump-start toward competitive employment. They also serve to educate business people about the features and benefits involved with hiring blind job candidates, the capabilities of blind individuals, and technology related to blind persons in the workplace. These events have been highly effective in the short term and are expected to garner additional benefits over time.

During FY 2015, NCBVI entered into a contract with Abilities Fund, a private non-profit organization specializing in training for people with disabilities in preparation for self-employment. It is expected that this partnership will expand self-employment options for more blind and visually impaired consumers.

The upturn in the national economy over the past couple of years has created a more favorable labor market; however, there are still pressures which make getting a job more difficult for individuals who are blind or visually impaired. It is hoped that the overall economic situation in Nebraska and across the country will continue to improve during 2016.

Every year, NCBVI evaluates the effectiveness of its vocational rehabilitation program in several different ways; using data and input from Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA), employers, consumers and the general public, staff members, the Client Assistance Program, and private or other public entities with whom the agency collaborates. Most important, service recipients are asked for their evaluation of services provided at several stages of their program.

The needs of Nebraskans who are blind or have visual impairments are identified on a statewide basis through public forums and meetings, surveys of clients after completion of Center training, after case closure, and changes at statuses 18 and 20. There is ongoing communication with the NCBVI Governing Board of Commissioners (four of five of whom are blind) and the agency's accessible website. Work continues with the resultant feedback, to best address identified needs and to modify procedures for the future. The public forums held throughout the year continue to confirm and reinforce findings of that formalized needs assessment.

In 2013, NCBVI initiated a contract for a statewide needs assessment with the National Research and Training Center on Blindness and Low Vision (NRTC), Mississippi State University Research Unit. The assessment includes surveys of blind clients who were closed either in status 26 or 28, members of NCBVI staff, and employers who have had experience with NCBVI staff and clients. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with other key informants. In addition, existing data from various sources were analyzed, such as the RSA-911 data for NCBVI, American Community Survey data, and Bureau of Labor Statistics labor and economic forecasts. Some of the more important research findings of the statewide needs assessment issued in FY 2014 were as follows:

#### Services to consumers with multiple disabilities

Several data sources indicated that services to consumers with multiple disabilities need improvement. According to the RSA-911 analyses, consumers with multiple disabilities were competitively employed at a significantly lower rate after receiving services than other consumers. In the consumer survey, respondents who had multiple disabilities reported a greater need for services in many areas compared to those with blindness or visual impairment only. In terms of services for which a need remained after the completion of their rehabilitation program, respondents with multiple disabilities had similar or higher remaining needs in all areas. They reported a higher remaining need (compared to those without multiple disabilities) in 47.4% (n=9) of the services asked about. Almost all staff (94.7%) indicated that improving services to consumers with multiple disabilities was a moderate or critical need. This item had the fewest number of people who did not consider it a

need (only one staff person rated this as limited or no need). Four of the eight key informants identified persons with multiple disabilities as a group that was unserved or underserved by NCBVI. One key informant mentioned that counselors tended to not have knowledge about other disabilities, and there was a need for them to have this knowledge in order to serve this group appropriately.

In terms of suggestions by participants about how to better serve this population and meet their needs, four key informants indicated that it is important for NCBVI to partner with other agencies or organizations that have some expertise with the additional disabilities of this group. Three staff members mentioned that additional training or professional development about other disabilities was needed, and two staff members suggested partnering with other professionals or organizations that have expertise with other disabilities.

### Services to minorities

Several data sources also indicated that services to minorities could be improved. In RSA-911 analyses, there were significant differences by race/ethnicity in both acceptance rates and competitive employment. Whites were significantly more likely than other races/ethnicities to be accepted to receive services and also to be closed with competitive employment. Specifically, Whites were competitively employed at a rate of nearly double the rate for African Americans (51.2% and 25.9%, respectively). Competitive employment rates were also lower for Hispanics (33.3%) and for American Indians (10%). The majority (57.9%) of staff respondents indicated that services to consumers with diverse racial or ethnic backgrounds was a critical (31.6%) or moderate (26.3%) need for improvement.

Across multiple data sources, there were indications that improvement of services to non-English speaking individuals is needed. Those of Hispanic origin were under-represented in percentages who received services by NCBVI compared to the percentages of their population in the state. Key informants and staff respondents indicated that there are various barriers associated with serving non-English speaking consumers. These issues included cultural barriers, language or communication issues, and outreach concerns. Improving the availability of materials for non-English speaking consumers was indicated as either a critical or moderate need by 73.7% of staff respondents. Staff and key informants suggested that the use of local translators can create a perceived threat to confidentiality among non-English speaking consumers, especially in small communities. One recommendation provided was to contract with non-local translators by phone when possible. Another respondent suggested that specific steps need to be taken beyond what is outlined in the Minority Outreach Plan. Suggested actions to potentially improve services include making all materials and outreach brochures available in Spanish and reaching out to communities to learn about cultural issues that may discourage individuals from contacting the Commission.

### Employment-related assistance

Employment-related assistance was another area of need identified by several data sources. This was one of the most common rehabilitation needs identified by key informants, for all people who are blind or visually impaired and for those with the most significant disabilities. Consumers indicated a remaining need, after receipt of services, for many employment-related services. The services included assistance with finding a job (39.3% reported still needing help in this area), finding job leads or contacting employers (38.5%), assistance working with employer to provide accommodations (34.8%), filling out a job application (33.3%), exploring career options (26.7%), support from counselor to raise career expectations (24%), improving interview skills (21.4%), and guidance in developing a resume (11.8%). More than one quarter of the consumer respondents (28.2%) indicated that they did not achieve their employment goal. However, it is relevant to note that when reporting on barriers experienced to employment, the top five barriers identified are not things that can be directly influenced by the agency.

Several items on the staff survey addressed employment-related services. The two items that were identified as having the greatest needs were Improving placement services by developing and strengthening relationships with employers and community organizations and improving services that enable consumers to learn more about career options (both identified by 84.2% of staff as a moderate or critical need). Also considered a moderate or critical need by most staff were improving job placement services to help clients find or maintain employment (78.9%) and improving training for consumers on job seeking skills (68.4%). Some suggestions related to improving services in these areas were: doing more on-the-job training, use of professionals to help with career exploration, use of career assessments, providing more opportunities for bringing employers and job-ready consumers together, all staff being involved in networking with employers, and having one staff person in each district specialize in placement activities.

#### Assistive technology

Training in assistive technology, including computer assistive technology, was the highest area of need reported by consumers in their survey. After completing their rehabilitation programs, a number of consumers reported a remaining need for training in this area. Of the people who reported that they initially needed the service, 20.8% (n=11) for assistive technology and 14.8% (n=8) for computer assistive technology reported still needing the service after completion of their programs. Four of the seven consumers who indicated a remaining need after services (to the open-ended question) indicated a need in this area. In addition, 33.3% of employers who completed the survey indicated that providing assistance with assistive technology would help them in hiring or retaining people who are blind or visually impaired, and two key informants identified assistive technology as an important rehabilitation need.

Most staff also considered items associated with improving assistive technology to be important needs. Improving the assistive technology training to consumers was rated the second highest in terms of critical need (36.8% of staff rated as critical and

42.1% rated it as a moderate need). A large majority of staff (84.2%) also believed that offering more in-service training for staff who provide assistive technology to consumers and providing more assistive technology support to employers were moderate or critical needs. Staff provided several suggestions for improving services related to assistive technology. Several recommended additional, ongoing training in use of assistive technology for all staff (not just the tech staff). Two suggested group training classes for consumers. One suggested that better teamwork was needed between VR/OC counselors and technology staff.

#### Partnering with other organizations

Across multiple data sources, many respondents suggested that several needs could be addressed by partnering with other agencies and organizations. According to respondents, collaboration with resources external to NCBVI has the potential to address several issues, particularly those related to expertise and funding constraints. Staff members and key informants suggested partnering with other agencies, consumer groups, and experts to improve service to those with multiple disabilities by providing staff training, learning from successful organizations, and sharing costs and caseloads. Specifically, some individuals suggested partnering with experts in mental health, memory loss, and brain injury associations.

Respondents suggested that partnering with organizations would also improve services to other special populations such as the older blind, transition age youth, non-English speaking consumers, and those living in rural areas. For example, key informants suggested that NCBVI could better serve older blind consumers, by reaching out to senior centers, community centers, the Department of Aging, and state independent living centers. Respondents also suggested that partnerships should be established with schools and educators beginning as early as pre-school, with direct communication with TVIs, which would develop better relationships to later serve transition-age youth.

In addition to these partnerships, some respondents noted the benefits of strengthening partnerships with community organizations, non-employment related agencies (such as housing, transportation, and Medicaid), advocacy groups, the Nebraska Partner Council, and low vision clinics. Most respondents suggested that partnering with other organizations is a viable way to better serve hard to reach consumers and to improve services with limited funding. Some respondents suggested that partnering with agencies in rural areas, or hiring paraprofessionals, would improve outreach and services to those living in those communities. Collaboration with other agencies was also suggested as one way to improve services to non-English speaking consumers by learning how cultural and language barriers are being addressed by other community agencies. While most respondents were in favor of improving and developing partnerships, one individual cautioned that “sometimes too many agencies working together can create delays and miscommunication.”

#### Services for consumers in rural areas

A large majority of staff indicated that enhancing services in rural areas was either a moderate (47.4%) or critical (42.1%) need, making it the most critical area for improvement of all items on the staff survey. In addition, one key informant stated that reaching consumers in rural areas is a problem. However, analyses with RSA-911 data did not indicate a significant difference in acceptance rates or competitive employment rates based on rurality. Though not significantly different, highest acceptance and competitive employment rates were among those living in rural areas (86.8% and 50% respectively), while those living in urban areas had the lowest acceptance and competitive employment rates (75.2% and 45.3% respectively). To evaluate whether people living in rural areas might be underserved (under-represented), percentages of consumers served in rural, urban, and metro areas were compared to percentages for the entire population of the state, and no differences were found.

Despite lack of evidence from secondary data sources (RSA-911 and state population data), staff and one key informant perceived services to consumers in rural areas to be an important area needing improvement. A variety of suggestions for improving services to consumers in rural areas included increasing outreach efforts in these areas, increasing presence by providing more counselors and visits to clients in those areas, promoting self-employment, and partnering with other agencies or contracting with professionals within rural communities.

NCBVI has studied and assessed these research findings in conjunction with other methods for gathering data in the establishment of priorities for improving VR services to blind and visually impaired individuals and in the consideration of future practice and policy.

As noted above, NCBVI will be switching to a new, more comprehensive client data management system. This will enable us to achieve our goal to improved quality assurance with a systematic assessment of progress of all aspects of service delivery. The system will be customized to our environment and fine-tuned to provide the data-analysis components which we will find most useful in the future.

Work to implement a new database management system will address all four goals and enable NCBVI to analyze the effectiveness of all parts of the client services system. We can then use the data based results to add value to our overall efforts, achieve established goals, and to identify future needs and challenges.

#### (q) Quality, Scope, and Extent of Supported Employment Services

Supported Employment (SE) is an employment option available to individuals with the most significant disabilities receiving services from NCBVI. An individual with the most significant disability is defined in rule (Title 192 Nebraska Administrative Code, Chapter 1) as an individual with a severe visual impairment or combination of visual, physical, or mental impairments which profoundly limits one or more functional capacities (such as mobility, communication, self-care, self-direction,

interpersonal skills, work tolerance, or work skills) in terms of an employment outcome; and an individual whose vocational rehabilitation can be expected to require extensive or intensive SE services for at least twelve months.

SE requires the provision of a job coach for the initial, intensive training; and requires long-term, intermittent support to insure the individual is successful on the job. This long term support is provided for as long as the person has the job.

NCBVI provides financial support of SE services using Title IV Subtitle G funds only if the placement is expected to meet the following conditions:

1. The placement is community-based.
2. The consumer is integrated into the workforce with other non-disabled individuals.
3. The consumer earns minimum wage or better.
4. The need for ongoing support is expected to continue indefinitely.

NCBVI works in partnership with the Department of Health and Human Services-Division of Developmental Disabilities (NDHHS-DDD) in the provision of SE services to blind and visually impaired individuals with developmental disabilities. Each individual with a developmental disability has a case service coordinator, employed by NDHHS-DDD. The case service coordinator is responsible for developing an Individual Program Plan for each client. The Plan includes provision for the ongoing financial support of SE services provided by NDHHS-DDD after NCBVI support is discontinued. Over the past few years, NCBVI has been using a milestones system for financial support of SE services provided by private vendors. The milestone approach mirrors the model used by the general agency (Nebraska VR Services). Using this model, the client will remain in an active status for about a year after the start of employment. The arrangements are made on a case-by-case basis.

NCBVI collaborated with the Department of Education, Special Education and Vocational Rehabilitation in the development of policies and procedures more clearly delineating the responsibilities of the different agencies and institutions involved and the scope and nature of services available to younger persons with disabilities in transition from school. The Collaborative Agreement between NCBVI, Department of Education/Special Populations, and the Nebraska Center for the Education of Children who are Blind or Visually Impaired, applies to persons who are likely to require supported employment in the future, as well as those students without this need. Particular emphasis is placed on the provision of pre-vocational transition services for blind and visually impaired students in need of SE services between the ages of 14 and up to but not including the age of 22.

Financial support by NCBVI for supported employment services is limited to 24 months unless there are compelling reasons to believe that extending NCBVI support will result in a more successful placement. For example, supported employment services may be provided by NCBVI for longer than 24 months in those

cases involving consumers between the ages of 18 and 22. Developmental Disabilities (DDD) does not pick up the cost of supported employment services until individuals have reached the age of 22. In such cases, NCBVI will extend services for longer than 18 months until the age of 22 is reached. In those cases in which the consumer has a developmental disability, long-term financial support after NCBVI's support is discontinued is typically provided by NDHHS-DDD.

Efforts are currently underway to establish a partnership with the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services-Division of Behavioral Health (NDHHS-DBH) similar to the one between NCBVI and NDHHS-DDD using the milestone approach for providing SE services. The partnership with NDHHS-DBH is expected to expand SE service opportunities to blind and visually consumers with behavioral health issues.

A small number of blind and visually impaired consumers with significant, non-developmental secondary disabilities occurring after age 21 might benefit from SE services. Generally, however, funding for services extending beyond eighteen (24) months to such persons is not available in Nebraska. In such cases, the Deputy Director of Client Services and the immediate supervisor of field services works with the NCBVI Counselor involved to identify possible resources for the ongoing support, such as developing a PASS (Plan to Achieve Self Sufficiency) or personal resources. The Deputy Director also provides statewide training and information to NCBVI personnel regarding the SE program.

NCBVI has service contracts with a number of providers in the Nebraska Developmental Disabilities system and with private providers of job coaching and related services. Contracts are developed on behalf of individuals with the most significant disabilities with both private and public providers who are actively seeking suitable work placements for them in integrated settings. The total amount of Title IV Subtitle G funds that we project to expend in FY 2016 is \$30,000. We expect to provide SE services to approximately 30 clients in FY 2016.