

**WORKFORCE INNOVATION AND OPPORTUNITY ACT
UNIFIED STATE PLAN**

July 1, 2020 – June 30, 2024



SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS FOR CORE PROGRAMS— FLORIDA DIVISION OF BLIND SERVICES

(a) Input of State Rehabilitation Council

The Florida Division of Blind Services (FDBS) partners with the Florida Rehabilitation Council for the Blind (FRCB) in serving individuals with visual impairments. The FRCB is an integral part of helping the Division improve services and achieve its goals by reviewing, analyzing, and advising on policy decisions. The FRCB functions to create a positive impact on the fairness, efficiency, and accessibility of services through the evaluation of consumer feedback and the Division's performance.

In 2019, the FRCB voted on officers and nominated members for committees at the first quarterly meeting held on February 5, 2019. On the second day of this meeting, the Council welcomed six newly appointed members and two reappointed members. As of November 2019, the Council has eleven active voting members and eight vacancies. Robert L. Doyle, Director of the Division of Blind Services, serves as an ex-officio member of the Council. Vacant seats include representatives from advocacy groups, business/industry, State Educational Agency, State Workforce Investment Board, and the Independent Living Council. The Council continues to encourage appointees to apply and monitors action by the Governor's office to encourage timely appointments and reappointments. Recruitment of new applicants focuses on individuals who are passionate, dedicated, and interested in improving the lives of Floridians with visual impairments.

The Council held four business meetings during 2019: February 5-6 (Daytona Beach), May 9-10 (Tallahassee), July 25 (Ocala), and October 25 (Jacksonville). The FRCB is required to hold a public forum at least twice a year; three were hosted in 2019. The public forums give consumers around the state an opportunity to provide input that encourages optimal services. The Council continues to focus on increasing awareness during public forums through collaboration with FDBS and stakeholders in each host district.

The FRCB reviews policies and advises on the implementation of best practices. During 2019, the Council reviewed and provided input on Policy 2.09 (Post-Secondary Education), Policy 2.35 (Competitive Integrated Employment), and Policy 2.05 (Informal/Formal Review Process and Mediation). The Council oversees the development and implementation of the Client Satisfaction Survey (CSS). The FRCB contracts with Dr. Minna Jia, Director of the Florida State University Survey Foundry (FSUSF), to conduct the CSS. Dr. Jia provided the Council with quarterly reports and a written annual report for 2018-2019. Results from the annual report were presented at the quarterly meeting in October 2019. The Council also played an essential

role in the completion of the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA) facilitated by San Diego State University.

The FDBS and FRCB conducted a call on November 6, 2019, to discuss their input for this plan. The Council provided feedback and completed a draft for this section. The dialogue continued at the quarterly meeting on February 6, 2020, with feedback for the rest of the plan. The FDBS values the Council’s time and their review and evaluation of the Division’s services/projects. Their feedback and suggestions are incorporated into each reviewed policy, the CSNA, the evaluation tool, and the Unified State Plan.

(b) Request for Waiver of Statewideness

The FDBS is not requesting a Waiver of Statewideness for this plan.

(c) Cooperation with Agencies Not Under the Workforce System

The FDBS has contracts with 20 Community Rehabilitation Programs (CRPs) and values the services they provide to our clients. The Division’s CRPs directly provide and facilitate vocational rehabilitation services to individuals with blindness and low vision to enable clients to maximize their opportunities for employment and career advancement. The CRPs collectively have 14 contracts for pre-employment transition and transition services, 16 contracts for vocational rehabilitation, and one contract for supported employment. The CRPs provide education; independent living skills; job training; and job development, retention, and placement services to clients who participate in vocational rehabilitation programs. The list of community rehabilitation programs includes:

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| Center for the Visually Impaired | Lighthouse for the Blind of the Palm Beaches |
| Conklin Centers for the Blind | Lighthouse of Broward |
| Elder Care of Alachua County | Lighthouse of Collier, Inc. |
| Florida Center for the Blind | Lighthouse of Manasota |
| Florida Outreach Center for the Blind | Lighthouse of Pinellas |
| Florida School for the Deaf and the Blind | Lighthouse of the Big Bend |
| Florida State College at Jacksonville | Lighthouse of Southwest Florida, Inc. |
| Independence for the Blind of West Florida | New Vision for Independence |
| Lighthouse Central Florida | Tampa Lighthouse for the Blind |
| Miami Lighthouse for the Blind and Visually Impaired | Lighthouse for the Visually Impaired and Blind |

To increase accountability, ensure quality services, and drive outcomes, the Division plans to incorporate common performance measures (or a variant thereof) prescribed by the Workforce

Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) to determine the effectiveness of CRP performance. The CRPs will be responsible for tracking and reporting the number of consumers who obtain employment as a result of receiving their services. Other measures consist of those still employed in the second and fourth quarters after their exit from the program and credential attainment.

(d) Coordination with Education Officials

Executive Order 19-31 outlines actions designed to make Florida number one in the nation in workforce education by 2030, which includes ensuring students are prepared for the jobs of the future. The Division's mission is aligned with the governor's goal for Florida's students and workforce. The activities that follow are aimed at meeting the governor's goal and the Division's mission.

The FDBS has been working jointly with the Division of Career and Adult Education (DCAE) to increase apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship participation for individuals who are blind or visually impaired under the Perkins grant. Under WIOA, FDBS staff began to strengthen the focus on career pathways for clients. This includes assisting clients with earning credentials and certifications in fields consistent with labor market demands. Once the Perkins V plan is approved, the FDBS will work with the DCAE to ensure both plans are aligned in areas where collaboration and partnership will lead to sustainable outcomes for those who are blind and visually impaired.

The Last Mile College Completion Program is designed for students who left college with 12 or fewer credit hours required to obtain a degree. This program creates greater collaboration between the Division and the Florida College System. An early review of the data indicates there are FDBS consumers who may benefit from this program. The Division plans to track the number of consumers eligible and of that number, how many are interested in going back to college. Once identified, the FDBS staff will reach out to those consumers and assist them with their college goals.

FDBS pays post-secondary tuition rates for qualifying consumers. The FDBS counselors work with staff from each college when determining how much of the total cost of tuition the FDBS will sponsor to ensure there is no duplication of funding. The FDBS assists students in navigating the college system, including receiving support through the Office of Student Disability Services.

High school students who participate in work-based learning experiences and career/technical education can earn credits toward graduation requirements. The Division will continue to collaborate with Career and Technical Education and students with visual impairments to encourage dual enrollment and increase student involvement in this program.

The FDBS has a formal interagency agreement with other divisions within the Florida Department of Education that provide transition services to high school students progressing to post-secondary education/training, support services, and/or competitive integrated employment. These agencies agree to meet regularly to share information, ideas, and current initiatives; collaborate on training and special projects; cooperate in planning and budgeting; and support areas of work that are mutually beneficial. The parties included in the formal agreement are the Divisions of Blind Services, Public Schools (DPS), and Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR). This agreement functions as a transition services model for improved collaboration, communication, coordination, and cooperation among the parties included.

To implement the Florida statutes and federal laws/regulations, the FDBS and the Division of K-12 Education agree to coordinate activities in serving students who are blind and visually impaired through the following:

1. The development of the Florida State Plan under Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act;
2. The preparation and implementation of guidelines, policies, rules, and regulations which affect the interests of students with visual impairments through joint planning committees and publications, as appropriate;
3. The development of new programs or the initiation of new services for students with visual impairments;
4. Interchange of information on the monitoring and evaluation of special programs for students with visual impairments;
5. Promotion and provision of training for teachers and FDBS staff who work with students who are blind and visually impaired; and
6. The dissemination of information and other activities to increase public awareness of visual disabilities and services available to students with visual impairments.

Provisions for Development and Approval of Individualized Plans for Employment for Students with Disabilities

The Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) for vocational rehabilitation consumers is completed or updated annually or, as needed, prior to graduation or leaving school for a seamless transition to a student's desired postsecondary outcome. The counselor determines eligibility for vocational rehabilitation services, develops an approved IPE, and sponsors the delivery of necessary transition services to assist the student with planning, preparing for, and achieving competitive integrated employment. The development of the IPE must occur within 90 days.

The average caseloads for VR and Pre-ETS/Transition are 60 and 20, respectively. The average time between application submission and eligibility determination for VR is approximately 31 days. The average time between eligibility determination and IPE development is approximately 14 days.

Information on Formal Interagency Agreements with Respect to:

Technical Assistance and Consultation

The FDBS and DVR will assist in planning for the transition of students with disabilities from school to post-school activities, including Pre-ETS. Technical assistance may be provided through various means, such as conference calls, video conferences, and in-person training opportunities. Each agency shall share in the responsibilities of providing training and technical assistance as requested to students, family members, advocates, educators, counselors, service providers, other state agency staff, and the general public regarding policies and procedures related to transition services, including Pre-ETS. The partners work together to build capacity within local education agencies (LEAs) and vendors to provide quality transition services throughout Florida by providing training, technical assistance, on-site reviews, and consultation. When possible, the partners will conduct joint staff trainings or cross-train staff to ensure operational activities continue to meet the needs of all partners involved.

Transition Planning by FDBS and Educational Agency Representatives for Development and Completion of the Individual Educational Plan

The FDBS or DVR will attend meetings for the development of an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) when invited, with appropriate consent and as resources allow. In collaboration with LEAs, the FDBS will provide or arrange for the provision of Pre-ETS to all students with disabilities who may need these services. The FDBS will develop an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) - in accordance with 34 CFR 361.45 - as early as possible during the transition planning process; however, no later than exit from the school setting.

The FDBS enhanced the AWARE Case Management System to collect and track transition data required by the Rehabilitation Services Administration. The enhancements will enable FDBS to conduct differential analysis and tracking to evaluate agency performance better and identify how to best improve service delivery and outcomes for students with disabilities.

Financial Responsibilities of Each Agency

The parties of the interagency agreement commit to aligning or designing complementary programs, which will assist with the provision of Pre-ETS and other transition services to students with disabilities - including youth with the most significant disabilities - to assist them

in achieving competitive integrated employment. Each partner has financial responsibility for delivering services identified under the respective student plans (e.g., the IPE, IEP, 504). The FDBS sets aside 15% of the yearly federal allotment for client services to fund Pre-ETS for students with disabilities. The FDBS, DVR, and DPS will use the following criteria for determining financial and programmatic responsibilities:

- **Purpose of the service** - Discuss at the state level whether the purpose of the service is related to an employment outcome or education attainment, or if it is considered a special education or related service.
- **Customary services** - Is the service one that the school customarily provides under IDEA part B?
- **Eligibility for services** - Is the student with a disability eligible for transition services under IDEA?

Procedures for Outreach to Students with Disabilities (SWDs) Who Need Transition Services

The FDBS employs a Program Consultant as the central point of contact for the School-to-Work Transition Program. The consultant serves as the liaison for the 67 school districts and the Florida School for the Deaf and the Blind. Transition specialists serve as representatives who work with public high schools statewide and charter schools requesting assistance. Transition specialists provide and coordinate outreach and vocational rehabilitation services to students, school officials, parents, and others involved in transition services.

In addition, the FDBS provides outreach to students with disabilities under the following activities:

1. Coordinating with LEAs, state and community partners, CareerSource, and postsecondary institutions to disseminate information on available services and resources for students with disabilities.
2. Presenting information about services and programs at education conferences and other transition-focused training sessions.
3. Providing printed materials to schools to share with students, family members, and other interested parties.
4. Participating on interagency councils by local staff.

(e) Cooperative Agreements with Private Nonprofit Organizations

The FDBS contracts with private non-profit organizations for specialized services for individuals who are blind. The primary services include: Assistive Technology, Orientation and Mobility (O&M), Braille Instruction, Vocational Rehabilitation, Pre-Employment and Transition Services,

Supported Employment, and Rehabilitation Engineering. The FDBS also has collaborative, non-contractual arrangements with other non-profit organizations that provide referrals, vocational rehabilitation services, and comparable benefits. All vendors/providers must go through a registration and approval process that includes a review of the vendor's qualifications to promote quality services and public safety.

The CRPs are required to hire certified staff to work with individuals who are blind or visually impaired. CRPs providing O&M direct client services must have, at minimum, one full-time qualified or currently Certified O&M Instructor certified by the Academy for Certification of Vision Rehabilitation and Education Professionals (ACVREP), National Orientation and Mobility Certification (NOMC), or endorsed by a qualified state education board. CRPs providing non-O&M, vision-related direct client services must have a minimum of one full-time staff member that meets one of the following requirements:

- Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist (COMS);
- Certified Visual Rehabilitation Therapist (CVRT);
- Teacher of the Visually Impaired (TVI); and/or
- Low Vision Therapist (LVT).

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

The FDBS has a contractual agreement with the Conklin Center for the Blind to identify and provide services for individuals with the most significant disabilities, including youth with the most significant disabilities.

On October 8, 2013, Governor Rick Scott signed Executive Order 13-284, mandating the creation of an interagency cooperative agreement between specific state agencies and other service organizations to ensure the continuation of a long-term commitment to improving employment outcomes for persons with disabilities. CS/HB 7003: Individuals with Disabilities became effective on July 1, 2016. The legislation was codified in Florida Statute as the Employment First Act in section 413.80 of the Florida Statutes. As a result of this legislation, the FDBS entered into an interagency cooperative agreement with other state agencies and organizations to implement Employment First - a national effort to ensure individuals with disabilities are offered employment on a preferred basis. Employment First is consistent with the FDBS belief that individuals with disabilities, even the most significant disabilities, can achieve meaningful employment when provided with appropriate supports. The following is a list of the parties to this agreement:

Agencies for Persons with Disabilities

CareerSource Florida

| | |
|--|---------------------------------------|
| Department of Children and Families | Division of Blind Services |
| Florida Developmental Disabilities Council | Division of Vocational Rehabilitation |
| Florida Association of Rehabilitation Facilities | Department of Economic Opportunity |
| Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services | The Arc of Florida |

(g) Coordination with Employers

Under the interagency cooperative agreement referenced above, the FDBS' coordination with employers is part of a range of activities that includes developing a long-term communications plan to increase employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities by 1) motivating employers to hire, 2) promoting a consistent message of awareness among employers about the value individuals with disabilities bring to the workforce, and 3) informing employers about the resources that are available to assist with their hiring needs.

As part of the collaborative effort with the statewide workforce systems, the Division Director serves on the statewide workforce board and district administrators collaborate with their local boards during visits to workforce centers and other venues. The following strategies are designed to increase partnerships with the statewide workforce investment system and employers in the state of Florida.

- Work with businesses/employers to encourage sponsorship of registered apprenticeship programs
- Increase utilization of online job systems/portals to expose employers to consumers who are ready for employment
- Develop and strengthen employer relationships by providing employer training, support, education, and resources
- Develop mechanisms to maximize job placement effectiveness among FDBS Employment Placement Specialists and contracted service providers
- Create training methods to better integrate individuals with disabilities into the workforce
- Collaborate efforts between multiple agencies and organizations to achieve the intent of the Employment First Act
- Promote service innovation
- Identify baseline employment outcome data for individuals with disabilities and set targets for improvement

The Division plans to utilize and implement these strategies to foster equal access for clients, increase the number of employers hiring clients, generate program awareness, and strengthen infrastructure.

Interagency Cooperation

The FDBS collaborates with the Agency for Persons with Disabilities, the Department of Children and Families, and other state agencies to develop opportunities for competitive integrated employment. Each agency is responsible for completing activities under the cooperative agreement. Activities are coordinated at three levels: Partner (Coalition) Level – advise and make recommendations that inform the work of the state level; State Level – identify barriers that hinder individuals with disabilities from obtaining employment and determine potential solutions; and Local Level – seek training solutions and best practices to close program gaps and improvements. The partners will meet at least twice a year with representatives from each partner agency.

The FDBS works in conjunction with the Florida Rehabilitation Council for the Blind to review, analyze, and advise the Division on its performance of responsibilities under Title IV of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. The Blind Services Foundation of Florida is also a key partner with the FDBS. The Foundation’s purpose is to serve as a Direct Support Organization (DSO) to the FDBS and individuals with visual impairments living in Florida. The Foundation receives proceeds from the Biker’s Care license tags. Funds of the Foundation are used to support programs of the FDBS, to conduct activities, and to initiate developmental projects for the benefit of Floridians who are blind or visually impaired.

(h) Comprehensive System of Personnel Development

Data System on Personnel and Personnel Development

The Division recognizes the Certified Rehabilitation Counselor (CRC) credentials as a standard for counselors. Counselors who wish to obtain certification or acquire CEUs (for standing CRC holders) receive the Division’s support to the greatest extent. The FDBS encourages credential attainment by providing a salary increase to those who have or achieve certification as a rehabilitation counselor.

Personnel must meet the academic requirements described in the “Personnel Standards” section of this document. Personnel information related to hiring and staff records is maintained in the state of Florida’s human resource system, People First. Data is exported from People First indicating staff vacancies and those who are enrolled in the Deferred Retirement Option Program (DROP). Each employee in the DROP system must terminate on a specific date which enables the Division to predict, to the extent possible, when vacancies will occur. Supervisors are notified of employees who are in the DROP system 12 months prior to their term/retirement date.

The following table identifies the number of positions within the Division during SFY 2018-2019. Positions, such as district administrators, assistant district administrators, VR counselors, employment placement specialists, and program administrators, contribute to the coordination of vocational rehabilitation services and consists of those carrying a caseload. Additionally, a number of employees at the rehabilitation center conduct assessments and provide orientation and mobility training, counseling/guidance, and job placement under the VR umbrella. Currently, these totals/positions are sufficient to meet the needs of FDBS to provide vocational rehabilitation services to the blind. Considering factors, such as the retirement of staff who are in the DROP system, staff resignations (turnovers), and the number of clients who will require vocational rehabilitation services, the FDBS projects little to no changes in the number of staff needed to administer program services in 5 years.

**Figure 10.01
 Personnel Employed by FDBS**

| Bureau | Positions |
|---|------------------|
| Administrative Office | 17 |
| Fiscal | 8 |
| Information Technology | 6 |
| Operations and Compliance | 12 |
| Business Enterprise | 16 |
| Braille and Talking Book Library | 26 |
| Rehabilitation Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired | 46 |
| Client Services | 159 |
| Total | 290 |

In SFY 2018-2019, the FDBS served 4,854 individuals in the Vocational Rehabilitation Program. In SFY 2017-2018, the FDBS served 4,903 individuals (49 more individuals). The average ratio of clients per counselor was 99 to 1 in the VR Program. A comparison of the previous year indicates a statistically insignificant change in the ratio of clients served per counselor (See Figure 10.02). Data to determine the counselor to client ratio was obtained from the Accessible Web-based Activity and Reporting Environment (AWARE) case management system.

**Figure 10.02
 Counselor to Client Ratio**

| State Fiscal Year | Number served | Ratio (clients served/counselor) |
|--------------------------|----------------------|---|
| 2018 | 4,854 | 89 |
| 2017 | 4,903 | 79 |
| 2016 | 5,038 | 64 |
| 2015 | 5,202 | 75 |
| 2014 | 5,225 | 74 |

**Figure 10.03
 Personnel Serving Vocational Rehabilitation Clients: Vacancy Information**

| Job Title | Total Positions | Current Vacancies | Projected Vacancies (over five years) |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| District Administrator | 10 | 2 | 3 |
| Assistant District Administrators | 13 | 1 | 2 |
| Vocational Rehabilitation Specialist | 53 | 5 | 5 |

Each of the following seven state universities offers a graduate counseling degree that fulfills the educational requirements for Certified Rehabilitation Counselor (CRC) certification with a minimum of other required classes.

- Florida Atlantic University
- Florida International University
- Florida State University
- University of Central Florida
- University of Florida
- University of North Florida
- University of South Florida

Program Data for Institutions of Higher Education

The following information is derived from Florida institutions of higher education that prepare vocational rehabilitation professionals. The information is categorized by institution and type of program.

Institution: Florida International University

Type of Program: Master of Science in Counselor Education – Rehabilitation Counseling Track (MS)

Number and Type of Students Enrolled: The Division was unable to obtain information.

Number of Graduates Eligible for CRC Certification: The Division was unable to obtain information.

Number of Graduates:

- 2012-2017 = 26 MS

Institution: University of South Florida

Type of Program: Rehabilitation and Mental Health Counseling (MA)

Number and Type of Students Enrolled: The Division was unable to obtain information.

Number of Graduates Eligible for CRC Certification: The Division was unable to obtain information.

Number of Graduates:

- 2014 = 41 MA
- 2015 = 50 MA
- 2016 = 22 MA
- 2017-2018 (The Division was unable to obtain information on graduates for these years.)

None of the graduates in the referenced educational programs were sponsored by the Rehabilitation Services Administration. The Division acknowledges that there are many graduate-level counseling related majors at public state universities that qualify graduates for certification as a rehabilitation counselor.

In 2019, the Division pushed for senior rehabilitation specialists to become Community Work Incentive Coordinators (CWIC) to increase knowledge of Social Security benefits and the effects employment has on such benefits. There is a competitive selection process for participation in these trainings and applicants must successfully complete an introductory course. Out of the 15 counselors who applied for the training, five were selected.

All employees of the State of Florida can take up to six credit hours per semester using the Florida Tuition Waiver Program. The FDDB expects employees who do not meet CSPD requirements to take advantage of the state's tuition waiver program or participate in federal grant/stipend programs. When necessary, the FDDB may pay for tuition, e.g., when a state university is not within driving distance, when a staff member is unable to use a tuition waiver for any required courses, etc.

Plan for Recruitment, Preparation, and Retention of Qualified Personnel

The FDBS uses People First for recruiting qualified personnel. Selected candidates must be hired using minimum qualifications with the expectation that standards will be met within a specified period. The Division focuses on recruiting persons with disabilities and referring employment opportunities to disability organizations. However, FDBS remains an equal opportunity employer and hires persons with and without disabilities at all levels of employment.

Salary is believed to be the main factor impacting recruitment and retention. To address this barrier, the Division Director championed higher wages for the Human Services Program Consultant (i.e., VR Counselors) and Rehabilitation Specialists (i.e., Employment Placement Specialists) based on education and tenure. Division leadership intends to address the salaries of other positions in the future. When funding permits, the FDBS awards a \$2,000 pay additive to the base salary of the Human Services Program Consultant, who becomes a CRC during employment. If a Human Services Program Consultant is a CRC at the time of hire, the beginning salary is set at \$2,000 above the base salary. The same applies to Assistant District Administrators and District Administrators having or attaining a credential as a CRC.

The Division works with state universities that provide master's degrees in rehabilitation counseling. Activities include attending board meetings and presenting to college classes, upon request, to share pertinent information related to the Division and recruitment efforts. Clients with Master's Degrees in Rehabilitation Counseling are encouraged to apply for vacant positions.

Personnel Standards

Due to difficulty in hiring individuals who meet current CRC certification standards, the Division routinely hires those who meet the academic standards. The following table illustrates the required qualifications for vocational rehabilitation staff by position title.

Figure 10.04
FDBS Personnel Standards by Position: State Fiscal Year 2018-2019

| Position Title | Minimum Qualifications |
|---------------------------|--|
| Word Processor | One year operating word processing equipment; or two years of secretarial or clerical work; or completion of 720 classroom hours of vocational/technical training in word processing; or possession of a Certified Professional Secretary Certificate; or college education; or vocational/technical training in secretarial science or office/business studies; or high school diploma/GED plus one year of secretarial or clerical experience |
| Senior Word Processor | Two years operating word processing equipment; or three years of secretarial or clerical work; or possession of a Certified Professional Secretary Certificate; or completion of 720 classroom hours of vocational/technical training in word processing plus one year operating word processing equipment; or college education plus one to two years secretarial or clerical experience; or college education plus one year operating word processing equipment; or vocational/technical training in secretarial science or office/business studies at 720 hours rate plus one to two years secretarial or clerical experience; or vocational/technical training in secretarial science or office/business studies at 720 hours rate plus one year operating word processing equipment; or high school diploma/GED plus two years secretarial or clerical experience |
| Staff Assistant | Three years secretarial or clerical experience; or college education plus zero to two years secretarial or clerical experience; or vocational/technical training in secretarial science or office/business studies plus zero to two years secretarial or clerical experience; or high school diploma/GED plus two years secretarial or clerical experience |
| Rehabilitation Technician | Bachelor's degree or high school diploma/GED plus four years of professional or nonprofessional experience in health, social, economic or rehabilitation programs |

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| Rehabilitation Specialist (Employment Placement Specialist) | Master’s degree plus two years of professional experience in health, social, economic; or rehabilitation programs or Bachelor’s degree plus three years of professional experience in health, social, economic or rehabilitation programs; or seven years of professional or nonprofessional experience in health, social, economic or rehabilitation programs |
| Human Services Program Consultant (VR Counselor) | Master’s degree plus three years of professional experience in social, economic, health or rehabilitation programs; or Bachelor’s degree plus four years of professional experience in social, economic, health or rehabilitation programs; or eight years of professional or nonprofessional experience in social, economic, health or rehabilitation programs |
| District Administrator and Assistant District Administrator | Requirements of the VR counselors plus one or more years of supervisory experience |

The Division will provide training for ongoing CEUs, using vocational rehabilitation grant funding. The reimbursement standards, as described below, are addressed in Division Policy 12.12, Comprehensive System of Personnel Development, as required by federal regulations. All personnel are eligible for reimbursement of the following expenses.

- **Tuition** - All individuals seeking further education will be required to use the Department of Education Tuition Waiver, if available. Note that prior approval of payment must be obtained from the Bureau Chief in instances where a course must be repeated.
- **Textbooks and Course Materials** - These expenses include textbooks and other materials required for course enrollment. (Paper, notebooks, computer disks, etc., are not items for which the Division will pay).
- **Additional Training** - Staff may be provided additional training in job-related areas as needed and recommended by leadership. This type of required training will be sponsored by the Division and staff may participate in agreed-upon training during work hours.

The Division will not sponsor Graduate Record Examination (GRE) fees and university application fees. Class assignments incorporated into required work duties (e.g., practicum activities, internships) may be completed during working hours. Completion of other homework assignments (e.g., reading, writing, and research) is not permitted during regular work hours.

The Division tracks the current educational status of personnel as well as their progress in complying with the CSPD requirements. VR counselors are encouraged to obtain certification from the Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification. Currently, the Division has 15 personnel with a CRC designation and two certified orientation and mobility instructors as of SFY 2018-2019. The following table indicates the CRC eligibility status of staff by position.

Figure 10.05
FDBS Personnel Eligible for CRC - SFY 2018-2019

| Position Description | Vacancies | Not Eligible | Eligible | Total |
|-----------------------------------|------------------|---------------------|-----------------|--------------|
| District Administrators | 2 | 3 | 5 | 10 |
| Assistant District Administrators | 1 | 6 | 6 | 13 |
| Senior Rehabilitation Specialists | 5 | 43 | 5 | 53 |
| Total | 8 | 52 | 16 | 76 |

Staff Development

The Division monitors personnel development needs on an annual basis. Training is funded through the VR basic support grant. The Division based its core training programs on the areas emphasized in the federal regulations: rehabilitation technology, career guidance and counseling, job development, placement, and assessment. Additional training will be provided to ensure that staff has a 21st century understanding of the evolving labor force. The Division collaborates with CareerSource Centers and shares information about its services and the referral process with disability navigators at the CareerSource Centers. The Division will seek opportunities to coordinate training with the Florida Alliance for Assistive Services and Technology (FAAST) by referring clients to FAAST for assistive technology. FAAST demonstrates, trains, and temporarily loans equipment for clients to test.

The assessment of training needs is an ongoing process consisting of ensuring compliance of federal and state mandates and examining individual personnel training requirements related to current job performance, future job requirements, and promotional or career advancement needs. Training is an essential component of the VR program, but it is often complicated by turnover. The Division plans to incorporate a new Learning Management System (LMS) into its training process. The LMS is designed specifically for vocational rehabilitation programs and includes an array of courses to enhance understanding of the rehabilitation process. Several staff members serving in positions with varying roles and responsibilities were chosen to complete online courses offered via the Yes LMS. Based on their feedback, the Division determined this system best fits its needs as it relates to the VR program. Analysis of training needs compiled from performance reviews, the FDBS Strategic Plan, Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment, training evaluations, and surveys indicated continual training is necessary in the following areas:

- Expanding staff knowledge of serving individuals with dual disabilities (where individuals have a primary disability of blindness and a dual disability unrelated to vision)
- Overcoming employment barriers for visually impaired consumers with a criminal history
- Providing rehabilitation counseling for individuals with visual impairment and substance abuse issues and/or psychiatric disorders
- Information on benefits counseling and the Ticket to Work Program

VR counselors also benefit from training in supported employment, identifying appropriate candidates, working through the rehabilitation process with these individuals, and recording accurate information for federal reports. Vocational rehabilitation staff will receive annual training on various aspects of the VR program, including career counseling and assessment. The annual training in October 2019 focused on topics specific to vocational evaluations, case management/documentation, apprenticeship programs, assistive technology, conflict resolution, reading eye medical reports, and virtual career fairs. In addition, the EPS participated in a separate session that focused on job development and placement, on the job training, work experiences, and workers' compensation.

Given that job placement and development are pivotal elements to client success, the Division requires all rehabilitation specialists, senior rehabilitation specialists, and assistant district administrators to participate in three levels of training - assessment, job development, and placement as part of the Employment Outcomes Professional II Training Manual developed by DTG-EMP, Inc.

Training during the assessment level entails eligibility determination, understanding low vision reports and eye disease terminology, and vocational assessment. The assessment level also includes training on developing an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE). For the job development level, training is concentrated on the process of developing jobs, which includes generation of leads, selection for time management purposes, holding face-to-face meetings with employers to identify needs, and closing the deal (actual placement). This level of training incorporates a tool for self-assessment as job developers. The job placement level focuses on training employees to identify the essential elements needed to obtain/maintain a job including motivation, abilities, access to employers, and credibility. In this level, employees learn intervention tools and marketing strategies to manage their caseloads as job developers.

The Division will utilize the rehabilitation technology training program conducted by the FDBS' rehabilitation center for all professional and paraprofessional personnel. This training includes a week-long introduction to rehabilitation technology for blind and visually impaired individuals and incorporates the use of rehabilitation technology in job development activities. Training is provided annually to update existing personnel on new technology issues. The Division is also exploring the use of the Certified Assistive Technology Instructional Specialist

for People with Visual Impairments (CATIS) in lieu of the FDBS rehabilitation technology training for those with CATIS credentials.

Dissemination of Knowledge from Research and other Resources

Knowledge is disseminated via training, conference calls, emails, memos, policies/procedures, and technical assistance. Employees have internet access and are provided with relevant and informative websites. Each district office is required to provide quarterly in-service training for employees on topics such as blindness rehabilitation, informed choice, the Americans with Disabilities Act, and Social Security work incentives. When funding is available, employees are encouraged to attend an array of conferences in the field of rehabilitation or blindness.

Personnel to Address Individual Communication Needs

The Division employs individuals who communicate in the native languages of applicants and eligible individuals. District offices in areas highly-populated with non-English speaking individuals strive to hire personnel who speak the native languages of individuals in the community. The Division will purchase language interpreter services (including sign language) when necessary to communicate with an applicant or eligible individual. Documents such as the Application for Services, Client Rights, Guidelines for Developing an Individualized Plan for Employment, and informational brochures are available in appropriate formats (e.g., large print, Braille, Spanish).

Coordination of Personnel Development under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act

The Division has a cooperative agreement with the Florida Department of Education's Division of Public Schools to coordinate activities for students who are blind and visually impaired. This will be accomplished through the preparation and implementation of guidelines, policies, rules, and regulations that affect the interests of students with visual impairments through joint planning committees and publications, as appropriate. The FDBS will promote and provide training for teachers and personnel who work with students who are blind and visually impaired. Both Divisions share information and coordinate activities to increase public awareness of visual disabilities and services available to students with visual impairments.

(j) Statewide Assessment

The Division commissioned a three-year comprehensive statewide needs assessment (CSNA) to determine the vocational rehabilitation needs of individuals with visual disabilities. The purpose of the CSNA is to identify and describe the rehabilitation needs of individuals with blindness and visual impairments residing in Florida. Dr. Chaz Compton, Project Director of San Diego

State University Interwork Institute (SDSU), led the completion of the CSNA in 2019. The CSNA addressed requirements of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, which states that each state unit and the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) must conduct a comprehensive statewide assessment of the rehabilitation needs of its residents and in particular, needs for supported employment services, needs of minorities and other unserved/underserved populations, needs of persons served through other components of the statewide workforce investment system, and the need to establish, develop, or improve community rehabilitation programs. Interviews were conducted with FDBS staff, community partners, consumers, and businesses. A total of 49 people were interviewed individually and 288 as part of a focus group. The interviews took place from July through September 2018 in each district office. The assessment is driven by the needs in several categories.

- Section I - Overall agency performance
- Section II - Needs of individuals with the most significant disabilities, including their need for supported employment
- Section III - Needs of individuals with blindness or visual impairments from different ethnic groups, including the needs of individuals who have been unserved or underserved by the VR program
- Section IV - Needs of youth and students with blindness or visual impairments in transition
- Section V - Needs of individuals with blindness or visual impairments served through other components of the statewide Workforce Development System
- Section VI - Need to establish, develop, or improve community rehabilitation programs in Florida
- Section VII - Needs of businesses

The CSNA utilizes quantitative data for FFY 2015 through 2017 and qualitative data from FFY 2015 through September 2018. The following details the specific methods used for gathering the data for this assessment. The project team at SDSU reviewed a variety of existing data sources to identify and describe demographic data within Florida, including the total possible target population and sub-populations potentially served by FDBS. Data relevant to the population of Florida, the population of persons with blindness or visual impairments in Florida, the ethnicity of individuals, the number of veterans, income level, educational levels, and other relevant population characteristics were used in this analysis. Sources analyzed include the following:

- The 2016 American Community Survey, 1- and 5-Year Estimates
- U.S. Census Annual Estimates of Resident Population, 2017
- 2018 Social Security Administration SSI/SSDI Data
- The Florida Department of Education
- U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

- Cornell University's disabilitystatistics.org
- DBS case service data compiled at the request of the project team
- The Federal Rehabilitation Services Administration's RSA-911 data for DBS and data submitted and entered into RSA's Management Information System (MIS)

Additional sources used were key informant and focus group interviews and surveys of individuals with visual impairments, FDBS staff, partners, and businesses. The CSNA identified the most relevant and pressing needs of the Division, consumers, and community partners. Strategies developed to address these needs are covered in Section O of this plan.

Overall Agency Performance

- Staff turnover presents a challenge that affects service delivery speed and the continuity of partner relationships. Staff turnover is a common challenge faced by VR agencies across the country.
- The Division needs to more effectively market services to the community and increase the public's awareness of the organization.
- Staff training is an essential need.

The Needs of Individuals with the Most Significant Disabilities, including their Need for Supported Employment

- Transportation was cited most frequently as a significant need of consumers; this is especially true in rural areas where options for public transportation are extremely limited. The lack of available public transportation for individuals with disabilities, including individuals with blindness and visual impairments, is often cited as a significant barrier to employment.
- Assistive technology, independent living skills, and self-advocacy skills training were cited as significant needs of individuals with blindness and visual impairments by those interviewed and surveyed for the CSNA.
- The fear of a loss of SSA benefits affects the return-to-work behavior of individuals with blindness and visual impairments in Florida; this is also a common concern of SSA beneficiaries across the nation.
- Supported employment services are purchased from one primary provider - with the ability to contract with other providers as needed.

The Needs of Individuals with Blindness or Visual Impairments from Different Ethnic Groups, including Needs of Individuals who have been Unserved or Underserved by the VR Program

- The lack of transportation in rural areas was the most frequently cited reason for those areas being potentially underserved.
- The FDBS should examine its outreach and service to Hispanic and Asian individuals to ensure that they are aware of services.

The Needs of Youth and Students with Blindness or Visual Impairments in Transition

- All of the five required pre-employment transition services represent significant rehabilitation needs of students with blindness and visual impairments, with work-based learning experiences being the most significant and important need.
- Youth with blindness and visual impairments need to receive AT early and receive adequate training in its use to maximize the likelihood of their success in postsecondary education.
- Benefits counseling, self-advocacy, and peer mentoring are the needs of youth with blindness and visual impairments.
- Soft skills training was cited repeatedly as a need for youth in transition.

The Needs of individuals with Blindness or Visual Impairments Served through other Components of the Statewide Workforce Development System

- The CareerSource Centers are not effectively meeting the service needs of individuals with blindness and visual impairments throughout the State.
- The relationship between the FDBS and the CareerSource Centers remains primarily one of referral.
- There is a need to effectively track and report co-enrollment of FDBS and CareerSource consumers.

The Need to Establish, Develop, or Improve Community Rehabilitation Programs

- Having one primary CRP that provides a full array of VR services in some districts limits choice and affords few options if a change is needed/desired.
- There is an overall need for more providers in rural areas.
- There is a need for more providers that have experience working with individuals that have a secondary disability of mental illness.

The Needs of Businesses

- Retaining Employment Placement Specialists is a challenge for the Division.

- Employer bias and misconceptions about hiring individuals with blindness and visual impairments is a key barrier to consumers who wish to obtain employment.
- Employers need education about the ability of individuals with blindness and visual impairments to dispel stereotypes and increase belief in the ability of consumers to work and function independently.

(k) Annual Estimates

The FDBS estimates the number of individuals eligible for VR services in the state is approximately 5,500. Of this number, FDBS estimates that approximately 5,000 will receive services under the Title VI, Part B program. Estimates were based on a review of historical information such as the number of individuals served over the past five-year average, average caseload size, number of applications, number of Individualized Plans for Employment (IPEs) written, and number of consumers who continue to require services from one year to the next.

For SFY 2018-2019, the Division spent \$35,540,171 - excluding expenditures for the Supported Employment - for the provision of vocational rehabilitation services. Given the specialized nature of services and the need for specific equipment for individuals who are blind, the cost per person for was \$9,215.26, which was \$409.74 less than the previous year. This cost is based on the total amount of vocational rehabilitation dollars spent divided by the number of individuals served.

For SFY 2018-2019, the Division spent \$1,569,638 for the provision of Supported Employment services. The cost for individuals served under SE was \$10,464.25 per person. This is based on the total amount of supported employment dollars spent divided by the number of persons served under Supported Employment. The FDBS will continue to use basic 110 funds to provide SE services. Greater detail regarding SE is outlined in Section N.

(l) State Goals and Priorities

The goals and priorities are based on the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA), Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), strategic plan, and requirements related to the performance standards and indicators. (See section 101(a)(15)(C) of the Act.) The Division developed the goals described below to ensure blind and visually-impaired Floridians have the tools, support, and opportunities to achieve success. These strategies assist the Division in providing equal access for clients, increasing the number of employers hiring clients, generating program awareness, and strengthening infrastructure. All goals and strategies were derived from stakeholder input, the DOE strategic plan, customer satisfaction surveys, and results of the CSNA. The Division discussed these goals and strategies

with the Florida Rehabilitation Council for the Blind and incorporated feedback received by the Council.

The four goals supporting the Division’s vocational rehabilitation and supported employment programs are aligned with DOE’s strategic plan goals, but have specific strategies for these programs. These goals are 1) Highest Student Achievement, 2) Seamless Articulation and Maximum Access, 3) Skilled Workforce and Economic Development, and 4) Quality Efficient Services.

(m) Order of Selection

The FDBS is not under an Order of Selection currently.

(n) Goals and Plans for Distribution of Title VI, Part B Funds

Pursuant to Florida Statute 413, FDBS is mandated to provide services to individuals who are blind or visually impaired of all ages. The FDBS routinely partners with community rehabilitation programs (CRPs) to provide services that enhance the lives of people with vision loss. The extent of services provided through the CRPs are based, in part, on the types of services available through a specific CRP, the needs of the specific community, and the resources available within the FDBS.

Historically, the FDBS contracted with one community rehabilitation program, the Conklin Center for the Blind, to provide residential supported employment services using basic 110 funds. The Division uses a tracking system to ensure funds are spent appropriately as it relates to Supported Employment (SE) and Pre-employment Transition Services (PETS). The table below depicts the expenditure allocations as follows: Services to all eligible individuals with the most significant disabilities are allocated to half (50%) of the Pre-ETS expenditures (84018). Services to youth with the most significant disabilities between the ages of 14 to 24 (not older than 24) are allocated to half (50%) of the Pre-ETS expenditures (84218). A state match of 10% is required for youth with the most significant disabilities (89218). Since the Division no longer receives direct funding for supported employment, basic 110 funds will continue to be utilized for these types of services.

Figure 10.06
Support Employment Spending Patterns SFY 2018

| Community Rehab Provider | Supported Employment Grant (Title VI) (84018) | Basic Support (82018) | State Funds (Match) (89218) | Total |
|---------------------------------|--|------------------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------|
| Conklin Center for the Blind | \$0 | \$1,028,370 | \$529,477 | \$1,557,847 |
| Authorizations (842xx) | \$0 | \$9,197 | \$0 | \$9,197 |
| Authorizations (892xx) | \$0 | \$0 | \$2,594 | \$2,594 |
| Total | \$0 | \$1,037,567 | \$523,071 | \$1,569,638 |

In the supported employment programs, the FDBS provided services to 150 individuals during the SFY 2018-2019. Of the 150 individuals served, 68 were served by the Conklin Center - with 13 coded as a SE outcome and 20 as a SE placement. The current contract with the Conklin Center expires in October 2020; the Division is exploring the best mechanism to procure and deliver services to consumers historically served by the Conklin Center.

Figure 10.07
Individuals Served by Supported Employment Programs

| Community Rehab Provider | Clients Served | Supported Employment Placements | Supported Employment Outcomes |
|--|-------------------------|--|--------------------------------------|
| Conklin Center for the Blind | 68 | 20 | 13 |
| SE Clients Served via Authorization (Case Services) | 137 | 34 | 26 |
| SFY-2018-2019 Vocational Rehabilitation Supported Employment Services Totals | 150 (unique clients) | 36 (unique clients) | 28 (unique clients) |

(o) State’s Strategies

The FDBS utilizes the strategies listed below to foster success for Floridians who are blind or visually impaired and assist the Division with its vision to create a barrier-free environment for individuals with visual disabilities.

Goal 1.0 Highest Client Achievement

Objective: Coordinate and secure high-quality training, education, work experiences, and partnerships that create opportunities for blind and visually impaired Floridians to obtain and

maintain independence, post-secondary education credentials, and successful employment outcomes.

Strategy 1.1 Secure opportunities for students/youth with disabilities to practice and improve workplace skills.

Strategy 1.2 Ensure clients who are participating in training and education programs are benefiting from them.

Strategy 1.3 Increase the utilization of online job systems/portals to expose employers to job-ready FDBS consumers.

Strategy 1.4 Increase consumer participation in industry certifications, apprenticeships, and post-secondary outcomes/impacts.

Strategy 1.5 Develop and implement an Employment Skills Training Program at the residential Rehabilitation Center.

Goal 2.0 Seamless Articulation and Maximum Access

Objective: Create a comprehensive service delivery system that fosters accessibility and provides positive experiences for blind and visually impaired Floridians enabling them to matriculate from school/training to work. Improve outreach methods to reach more consumers, advocates, providers, employers, and other stakeholders.

Strategy 2.1 Increase the provision of accessibility tools, awareness, and regular follow-up with consumers to ensure equality in educational experiences and vocational opportunities.

Strategy 2.2 Create and implement comprehensive communication and outreach plans.

Strategy 2.3 Increase the number of individuals with significant and most significant disabilities receiving services.

Strategy 2.4 Increase outreach services to underserved and unserved populations.

Goal 3.0 Skilled Workforce and Economic Development

Objective: Assist blind and visually impaired Floridians with obtaining, maintaining, and advancing in competitive integrated employment.

Strategy 3.1 Develop and strengthen employer relationships by providing employer training, support, education, and resources.

Strategy 3.2 Increase successful employment outcomes, including self-employment outcomes for transition-age youth, adults, and seniors receiving services through FDBS.

Strategy 3.3 Create successful job outcomes in the Business Enterprise Program.

Strategy 3.4 Support FDBS consumers in becoming self-supporting.

Strategy 3.5 Strengthen statewide collaborative partnerships with core partners.

Strategy 3.6 Develop mechanisms to maximize job placement effectiveness among FDBS Employment Placement Specialists and contracted service providers.

Goal 4.0 Quality Efficient Services

Objective: Create an accountable and exemplary division workforce that ensures high-quality services.

Strategy 4.1 Increase staff development and continuing education.

Strategy 4.2 Incorporate elements of the common performance measures into employee expectations and evaluations.

Strategy 4.3 Increase opportunities for data sharing and improve data validity and integrity.

Strategy 4.4 Decrease federal and state audit findings.

Strategy 4.5 Develop strong fiscal policies and procedures to promote responsible stewardship of available resources and addresses WIOA requirements.

Strategy 4.6 Strengthen contract language to ensure increased contractor accountability, improve resource allocations, address WIOA regulations, and encourage maximum achievement of consumer independence.

Strategy 4.7 Strengthen contract monitoring activities and procedures/protocols to reflect new requirements.

Strategy 4.8 Develop a Return on Investment (ROI) methodology for DBS programs.

Strategy 4.9 Improve employee workplace environment.

Strategy 4.10 Improve library services by obtaining customer feedback.

(p) Evaluation and Reports of Progress

Vocational Rehabilitation Program Goals

The Division modified its state goals and priorities to better align with the agency's strategic plan. All goals for the VR program were determined using information from the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment, customer satisfaction survey, program data, leadership strategies, and other documentation. Input from the Florida Rehabilitation Council for the Blind and stakeholders, consumer and employee feedback, and the RSA monitoring report were also considered during goal development. For the current approved plan period (July 2016-June 2020), the goals described below drive the Division's activities and service delivery for the VR program.

Goal 1: Highest Client Achievement

Strategy 1.1 Secure opportunities for students and youth with disabilities to practice and improve workplace skills.

Pre-employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) were included in the 2017-2018 VR contracts. By adding these services, the FDDB provides students and youth with disabilities opportunities to participate in work-based learning experiences, apprenticeships, and internships to improve workplace skills.

Strategy 1.2 Ensure clients participating in training and education programs are benefiting.

The Division collaborates with CareerSource Florida and the Division of Public Schools to provide opportunities for training, education, and workplace activities. Details of these activities are outlined in the agreement between the Division of Blind Services, Division of Public Schools, and Division of Vocational Rehabilitation. In this plan period, the Division will assist consumers who may benefit from the Reverse Transfer Initiative. Reverse transfer is defined as the process of retroactively granting associate degrees to students who had not completed the requirements of an associate degree before they transferred from a two-year institution to a four-year institution but have since completed the requirements.

Strategy 1.3 Increase the utilization of online job systems/portals to expose employers to job-ready FDDB consumers.

Employees who provide VR services are trained on how to use Talent Acquisition Portal (TAP) throughout the state. The utilization of this resource is captured in a monthly report. The FDDBS works with the Abilities Work staff to increase employer relationships and placements, such as connecting employers referred by the Abilities Work help desk to the Division's job-ready clients.

Strategy 1.4 Encourage and track industry certifications, apprenticeships, post-secondary outcomes/impacts, and explore expanded employment opportunities.

The Bureau of Business Enterprise (BBE) tracks Continuing Education Units (CEUs), food manager certifications, and vendor licensures.

Strategy 1.5 Develop and implement an Employment Skills Training Program at the residential rehabilitation center.

A team of professional staff determined the Pre-Employment Program (PEP) Model, developed by Dr. Karen Wolffe, best meets the needs of the Division's clients ages 14 to adulthood. The purpose of this program is to increase the number of blind and visually impaired individuals preparing to enter competitive integrated employment through highly comprehensive and coordinated vocational rehabilitation services provided at the Florida Rehabilitation Center. Services include but are not limited to pre-employment training, career counseling, job readiness training, work experience opportunities, job shadowing, advocacy, self-awareness, and exposure to post-employment. The program is unique in establishing an action plan and follow-up for each client that involves the client, home-base counselors, and rehabilitation center staff. The PEP at the residential rehabilitation center began in 2016. Classes are conducted quarterly to increase the employment rate for visually impaired youth and adults. There were 21 PEP graduates in 2018. Of which, five were employed, five were enrolled in college, three were in work experiences, and eight were actively seeking employment.

Goal 2: Seamless Articulation & Maximum Access

Strategy 2.1 Increase the provision of accessibility tools, awareness, and regular follow-up with consumers to ensure equality in educational experiences and vocational opportunities.

The Division strengthened its relationship with the Lighthouses to ensure appropriate and client-specific assistive technology is consistent with the needs of all clients and is reflected in the Individualized Plan for Employment. The FDDBS monitors contracts with the Lighthouses and solicits client feedback via satisfaction surveys.

Strategy 2.2 Create and implement comprehensive communication and outreach plans.

The FDBS began development of comprehensive communication and outreach plans. Due to vacancies in key positions, the plan was not completed. The FDBS retained this goal for the upcoming plan period and has key staff in place to accomplish this goal. Data from the CSNA will be used to create marketing strategies to reach under-served and unserved populations.

Strategy 2.3 Increase the number of individuals with significant and most significant disabilities receiving services.

The Division served 4,541 individuals with significant and most significant disabilities. This represents a decrease of 31 from the prior year.

Figure 10.07
Clients Served by Service Category

| Service Categories | Clients Served (SFY 2018-2019) |
|--|--------------------------------|
| College students | 516 |
| None (regular FDBS vocational rehabilitation clients) | 3,476 |
| Supported employment | 78 |
| Transition (including Pre-Employment Transition) | 535 |
| Total | 4,854 |

Strategy 2.4 Increase outreach services to underserved and unserved populations.

Each district identifies the unique underserved populations in their area. Each month, the identified unserved and underserved populations are targeted to increase services to these populations. The District Administrators maintain a log of activities relating to underserved populations. Outreach activities are included in the monthly report submitted to the Program Administrator, who maintains a log for statewide analysis and record-keeping purposes. The chart below depicts an increase in the number of clients served in all minority categories except Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander.

Figure 10.08
Change in Number of Clients Served in Minority Groups

| Minority Group | SFY 2014 | SFY 2015 | SFY 2016 | SFY 2017 | SFY 2018 | Difference from previous year |
|---------------------------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|-------------------------------|
| African-American | 1,136 | 1,453 | 1,829 | 1,442 | 1,419 | -23 |
| Hispanic | 635 | 877 | 1,156 | 933 | 956 | +23 |
| Asian | 58 | 70 | 87 | 70 | 59 | -11 |
| Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islanders | 14 | 13 | 9 | 9 | 3 | -6 |

Strategy 2.5 Ensure client IEP goals are consistent with transportation resources.

The Division created a list of transportation vendors based on feedback from each district office. This list serves as a resource to all districts and is updated as needed.

Goal 3: Skilled Workforce & Economic Development

Strategy 3.1 Develop and strengthen DBS employer relationships through employer outreach, support, education, and resources.

The Division provides Employment Placement Specialists with marketing tools/toolkit to use when meeting with potential employers and CareerSource Florida staff. Employers receive education regarding FDBS programs/services with the goal of increasing opportunities for clients seeking employment. The Division recognizes businesses that provide an increased number of employment opportunities to consumers. Each district holds an annual open house for employers and potential employers. Consumers who are employed or seeking employment are invited to attend. Each district nominates at least one employer for the joint agency statewide exemplary employer event in October. The Director gives plaques to those awarded as exemplary statewide employers. This is an annual process.

Strategy 3.2 Increase successful employment outcomes, including self-employment outcomes for transition-age youth, adults, and seniors.

When comparing SFY 2017-2018 to SFY 2018-2019, the Division boasts a respectable number of successful outcomes. Closures decreased by one from 854 to 853, which represents a minor change. The Division strengthened its relationship with community rehabilitation programs and local employment networks in job placement related services. VR counselors and EPS staff use the Talent Acquisition Portal (TAP), an online platform that connects persons with disabilities

seeking employment to businesses who are actively hiring. The following table represents the wage earnings of FDBS consumers over the last five years.

Figure 10.09
FDBS Performance Standards and Indicators

| | FFY 2014 | FFY 2015 | FFY 2016 | FFY 2017 | FFY 2018 |
|--|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Average Number of Hours Worked Per Week | 29.64 | 28.98 | 27.76 | 28.94 | 29.96 |
| Average Hourly Wage | \$13.54 | \$13.96 | \$12.98 | \$13.85 | \$14.61 |
| Average Weekly Wage | \$399.85 | \$403.56 | \$384.61 | \$405.21 | \$441.62 |
| Projected Average Annual Earnings at Placement | \$20,792.15 | \$20,984.93 | \$19,999.86 | \$21,070.72 | \$22,964.30 |
| Average Case Cost | \$6,931.53 | \$7,982.29 | \$8,288.05 | \$9,625.00 | \$9,215.26 |

Strategy 3.3 Create successful job outcomes in the Business Enterprise Program (BEP).

The Division determined one of the most important measurements of a successful BEP is the percentage of recently licensed vendors remaining at their first facility for at least 12 months. This measure demonstrates training adequately prepared new licensees to start at a facility and stay. It is also a good indicator of the individual’s perseverance and on-the-job skills development.

Figure 10.10
Outcomes in Business Enterprise Program

| | SFY 2014-15 | SFY 2015-16 | SFY 2016-17 | SFY 2017-18 | SFY 2018-19 |
|--|------------------|--------------------|------------------|-------------------|--|
| Gross Sales | \$20,971,054 | \$21,756,454 | \$22,057,794 | \$22,526,780 | \$23,767,126 |
| Gross Profit | \$11,194,406 | \$11,812,329 | \$12,055,980 | \$12,312,635 | \$13,017,849 |
| Average Vendor Earnings | \$61,499 | \$64,717 | \$70,049 | \$69,340 | \$73,618 |
| Number of New Clients Licensed | 13 | 9 | 7 | 8 | 7 |
| Number of Clients Awarded Their First Facility (regardless of the year licensed) | 10 | 9 | 6 | 10 | 10 |
| Number of Licensed Vendors with Facilities | 118 | 121 | 115 | 118 | 119 |
| Number of New Vendors Awarded Facilities with One Year in BEP | 9 of 10 (90%) | 7 of 9 (77.78%) | 6 of 6 (100%) | 7 of 8 (87.5%) | Not available until end of SFY 2019-20 |
| Percent increase (decrease) from previous year | 10.00% | (12.22%) | 22.22% | 12.50% | Not available until end of SFY 2019-20 |

Note: Clients who are licensed are not always awarded their first facility during the same state fiscal year.

Strategy 3.4 Support FDBS clients in becoming self-supporting.

The Independent Living Program (ages 18-54) and Older Blind Program provide services to train visually impaired individuals on orientation and mobility, cooking, and other support (e.g., job placement, supported employment, purchase of adaptive equipment, etc.) to foster independent living goals of clients. These programs served 493 and 3,414 individuals, respectively for SFY 2018.

Strategy 3.5 Strengthen statewide collaborative partnerships with core partners.

The Division established multiple MOUs/interagency agreements with core partners. Each outlines the roles and responsibilities of each agency.

Strategy 3.6 Develop mechanisms to maximize job placement effectiveness among Employment Placement Specialists (EPS) and contracted service providers.

All EPSs are required to attend Employment Outcome Professionals II training conducted twice a year. The EPSs are also armed with a toolkit with resources on building relationships with employers and other pertinent information. In 2019, an EPS desk manual was created for additional training and tools. The Abilities Work Help Desk supports the Employment First initiative. The FDBS partners with this resource for referrals from businesses interested in hiring individuals who are blind or visually impaired. The Division maintains contact with the National Employment Team (the NET) and its southeast subcommittee to connect with businesses on a national and regional level. These partnerships will continue during the new plan period.

Strategy 3.7 Support and track successful employment outcomes for blind Floridians with significant and most significant disabilities.

Successful employment outcomes are tracked on a monthly basis. The Business Consultant compiles this data and sends a monthly report to district staff to motivate everyone to strive toward meeting the Division's goal. Clients who are ready for employment are tracked via the AWARE case management system. The information is pulled from AWARE and put into a bi-weekly report in QPIS.

Strategy 3.8 Adopt and Modify the Vermont Progress Employment Model.

The Division tested the Vermont Model in a limited number of districts. The model will not be implemented statewide. However, strategies of the model were instrumental in expanding employment outcomes for some of the most difficult to place clients.

Strategy 3.9 Identify an approach to expedite eligibility and service delivery to individuals who are at risk of losing employment.

Policy 2.16 Timeliness of Services was revised in 2019 to expedite the provision of services for clients at risk of losing employment. As a result, communication with employers has increased and the EPS have a faster placement process. Marketing materials have been rebranded and are distributed to field staff upon request.

Goal 4: Quality Efficient Services

Strategy 4.1 Increase staff development and continuing education. Figure 10.10 illustrates the dates and types of training provided in 2019.

Figure 10.11
FDBS Training Offered in 2019

| Date | Training Description |
|--------------------|---|
| January 24, 2019 | WINTAC |
| February 4-7, 2019 | New Employee Training |
| May 6-9, 2019 | New Employee Training |
| April 2019 | FRCB Evaluation Committee Meeting |
| May 2019 | Staff Development and Self Study |
| June 11-14, 2019 | Introduction to Social Security Disability |
| July 22-26, 2019 | FRCB Meeting and District Administrator’s Meeting |
| July 22-26, 2019 | WINTAC (Career Pathways) |
| July 22-26, 2019 | Policies and Apprenticeships |
| Aug 13-15, 2019 | New Employee Training |
| Oct 1-4, 2019 | Statewide VR Comprehensive Training |
| Nov 5-7 2019 | New Employee Training |

Strategy 4.2 Align DBS policies and procedures to new WIOA requirements.

All policies in the Bureau of Client Services were reviewed and revised as appropriate to include WIOA requirements in 2018. The Bureau has a policy team that meets monthly to review policies as an ongoing process. Policies are updated as necessary.

Strategy 4.3 Increase opportunities for data sharing and improve data validity and integrity.

The State Wage Data Sharing agreement with core partners was signed on July 31, 2019. The purpose of this agreement is to establish and implement operating conditions and procedures

related to access to wage data for performance accountability. The core partners have a separate data sharing agreement that establishes conditions, safeguards, and requirements under which the parties agree to exchange confidential information with each other for the purpose of administering their respective programs. This agreement was executed in September 2019.

Strategy 4.4 Decrease federal and state audit findings.

The Division has a quality assurance protocol specific to program services. The protocol activities include remote desk and district onsite reviews to identify and resolve potential issues prior to federal/state audits. Monthly case reviews aim to achieve a compliance rate of 96%, exceeding the standard compliance rate of 90%. Details of findings from case reviews are shared with staff and additional training opportunities are provided as requested. This process decreases audit findings and allows additional training in areas of quality assurance related to authorizations. The division monitors compliance during quarterly case reviews and provides vocational rehabilitation staff with ongoing feedback and training. The RSA conducted an audit of the FDBS in April 2017.

Strategy 4.5 Develop strong fiscal policies and procedures to promote responsible stewardship of available resources and address WIOA requirements.

The Division has a case service allocation protocol that determines district allocations and ensures dollars are spent appropriately. To address appropriate allocation disbursements, FDBS evaluates historical expenditure data (e.g., number of clients served, services provided, contractual agreements in regions, business enterprise program expenditures, self-employment opportunities, and social change). Policies for prior approval and internal control were implemented in 2019.

Strategy 4.6 Strengthen contract language to ensure increased contractor accountability, improve resource allocations, address WIOA regulations, and encourage maximum achievement of consumer independence.

The Division implemented Pre-ETS contracts with CRPs requiring employer outreach activities and work experiences.

Strategy 4.7 Strengthen contract monitoring activities and procedures/protocols to reflect new requirements.

Strategy 4.8 Develop a Return on Investment (ROI) methodology for DBS programs.

Strategy 4.9 Improve employee work-place environment.

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The Division applied employee onboarding and mentoring processes statewide. Employees drafted desk manuals for succession planning and to capture organizational knowledge. Figure 10.13 represents the current Federal Standards and Indicators and the Division’s performance on these standards.

Figure 10.13
Performance Standards and Indicators

| | Successful VR Closures | Number Found Employed Second Quarter after Exit Date | Percent Found Employed Second Quarter after Exit Date | Median Earnings for Clients Found Employed Second Quarter after Exit Date | Number Found Employed Fourth Quarter after Exit Date | Percent Found Employed Fourth Quarter after Exit Date | Median Earnings for Clients Found Employed Fourth Quarter after Exit Date | Number Obtained Post-secondary Credential (While in Program or within One Year of Exit Date) | Percent Obtained Post-secondary Credential (While in Program or within One Year of Exit Date) | Number Found Employed by Same Employer One Year after Exit Date | Percent Found Employed by Same Employer One Year after Exit Date |
|--------------------|------------------------|--|---|---|--|---|---|--|---|---|--|
| SFY 2016-17 | 840 | 471 | 56.07% | \$16,924 | 436 | 51.90% | \$17,544 | 61 | 7.26% | 320 | 38.10% |

Figure 10.14
Additional Performance Standards from FDBS' Long-Range Program Plan

| Approved Performance Measures FY 2019-20 | Approved Prior Year FY 2018-19 Standard | Actual Prior Year FY 2018-19 Standard | Approved FY 2019-20 Standard | Requested FY 2020-21 Standard |
|--|--|--|---|--|
| Number (percent) of Rehabilitation Customers Gainfully Employed at least 90 Days (regardless of the wage earned) | 747 68.3% | 888 (63.16%) | 747 (68.3%) | 747 (68.3%) |
| Number (percent) of Rehabilitation Customers Placed in Competitive Employment (at or above minimum wage) | 654 (4.3%) | 881 (9.91%) | 654 (4.3%) | 700 (0%) |
| Projected Average Annual Earnings of Rehabilitation Customers at Placement | \$16,500 | \$23,588 | \$16,500 | \$20,000 |

Innovation and Expansion

Innovation and expansion funds were used in FFY 2018-2019 to support the Florida Rehabilitation Council for the Blind (FRCB). The following table illustrates expenses for all FRCB meetings during this period.

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Figure 10.15
FRCB Meeting Expenses

| Expense Category | Oct 2018 | Nov 2018 | Dec 2018 | Jan 2019 | Feb 2019 | March 2019 | April 2019 | May 2019 | June 2019 | July 2019 | Aug 2019 | Sept 2019 | Total |
|----------------------------|--------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|------------------|--------------------|-----------------|------------------|--------------------|
| Council Travel | \$2,242.61 | \$0 | \$0 | \$810.88 | \$5,734.72 | \$0 | \$1,190.55 | \$4,594.93 | \$0 | \$6,595.24 | \$0 | \$0 | \$21,168.93 |
| Client Satisfaction Survey | \$13,500 | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$13,500 | \$27,000 |
| Advertising | \$76.72 | \$0 | \$26.32 | \$0 | \$56.70 | \$0 | \$26.88 | \$60.06 | \$0 | \$25.34 | \$0 | \$0 | \$272.02 |
| Venue Meeting Space | \$1,342.00 | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$2,074.00 | \$0 | \$1,994.49 | \$0 | \$0 | \$5,410.49 |
| Supplies | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$63.30 | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$108.00 | \$0 | \$0 | \$171.30 |
| Interpreters | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$1,755.00 | \$0 | \$0 | \$2875.00 | \$0 | \$1,800.00 | \$0 | \$0 | \$6,430.00 |
| Total | \$17,161.33 | \$0 | \$26.32 | \$810.88 | \$7546.42 | \$63.30 | \$1,217.43 | \$9,603.99 | \$0 | \$10,523.07 | \$0 | \$13,500 | \$60,452.74 |

A summary of FRCB's accomplishments and activities for the 2019 calendar year include:

- Governor Rick Scott announced six appointments and two reappointments on January 4, 2019.
- The Council maintained its mission and focused on strategic planning that is closely aligned with the priorities of the Florida Division of Blind Services.
- The Council reviewed FDBS policies and provided advice on the implementation of best practices.
- The Council elected a new Chairperson, First Vice-Chairperson, and Second Vice-Chairperson at the first quarterly meeting held in February 2019.
- The Council elected new members to serve on the Evaluation and Planning Committees.
- The Council continued to strengthen its working relationship with other councils within the state as required under Sec 105 of the Rehab Act. This included collaborating with the Florida Rehabilitation Council (FRC) during committee week in January 2019, and providing handouts to Legislators to increase awareness of the services provided by the FDBS.
- The Council served as an effective vehicle for cultivating meaningful partnerships between the FDBS and other stakeholders.
- The Council conducted four public forums at each of its quarterly business meetings.
- Council members participated in both the NCSRC spring and fall training conferences.
- The Council continued to oversee the development and implementation of the Client Satisfaction Survey (CSS).
- The Council provided feedback for the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment facilitated by San Diego State University Interwork Institute.
- The Council recognized employers who hire individuals with visual disabilities by presenting each with a plaque during the quarterly meetings. The following employers were recognized for 2019: Disability Solutions & Merry Maids, Sodexo, Taxes Untangled, and Challenged Enterprises.

FRCB Meeting Dates and Locations

- October 17-19, 2018 - Miami
- February 5-6, 2019 - Daytona Beach
- May 9-10, 2019 - Tallahassee
- July 25-26, 2019 – Ocala

Quarterly Meeting Agenda Items

- Welcome, Introductions, and Pledge of Allegiance

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- Adoption of agenda
- Director’s report: Division of Blind Services updates
- District administrator’s report
- Employer recognition
- Local Community Rehabilitation Program (CRP) report
- Client Satisfaction Survey data updates
- Division of Blind Services state plan updates
- Vocational rehabilitation employment outcome updates
- New committee appointments
- Bureau of Business Enterprise updates
- FDBS budget report and legislative updates
- Blind Services Foundation updates
- Updates on outreach to underserved/unserved populations
- Strategic plan discussions
- Policy reviews of policy numbers 2.09 Post-Secondary Education and Training; 2.35 Competitive Integrated Employment; and 2.05 Review Process and Mediation

Other accomplishments for the VR program for 2018 and 2019 included the following.

- Assisted 856 consumers in obtaining competitive integrated employment (successful closures) in SFY 2018-2019
- Served over 10,000 consumers in the VR program
- Trained all VR staff on new policies and WIOA regulations
- Improved contracts with service providers
- Strengthened relationships with local CareerSource regions through the development and execution of MOUs and infrastructure funding agreements
- Developed a process for referring clients to online tools, such as the Talent Acquisition Portal (TAP), Employ Florida Marketplace (EFM), and Ability Works
- Identified approach to expedite eligibility and service delivery to individuals who are at risk of losing employment
- Provided Employment Placement Specialists with a marketing toolkit to use when meeting with potential employers and CareerSource staff. Employers received education regarding programs/services
- Re-established the quality assurance team to conduct random case reviews to increase compliance and quality assurance
- Created new policy and procedures entailing new legislation on Workers’ Compensation coverage for consumers participating in work-based learning experiences
- Updated the AWARE case management system with new modules for documenting work experience, work history, and education to assist with resume development and increase employment-related skills
- Completed sustainability study (fee study)

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

The FDBS has elected to defer supported employment (SE) funds to the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation due to administrative burden. However, the Division provides residential services to individuals with the most significant disabilities who require ongoing support to meet their employment goals via a contract with one vendor (the Conklin Center). The Division also issues authorizations to ensure continued services for all consumers via other providers throughout the state. These services are funded using basic 110 funds. SE is provided singly or in combination and assists eligible individuals in gaining and maintaining competitive integrated employment.

Quality

The Division is committed to providing quality services to this population. Individuals are supported in making employment choices consistent with their strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities, and interests. Human services program consultants (i.e., vocational rehabilitation counselors) help individuals pursue goals detailed in the Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) by using supported employment resources to the individual's best advantage. As appropriate, consumers and families are actively involved in the assessment, planning, and decision-making throughout the service delivery process. Services are evaluated for effectiveness and improvements are made as necessary.

The Division provides ongoing training for staff and assesses/updates policies and processes to ensure efficient services. The quality assurance team conducts quality assurance reviews consisting of onsite and remote desk reviews. The reviews focus on include adherence to state policies, compliance with federal regulations, sufficient case documentation, IPE development timelines, plan amendments and required signatures, eligibility determination, activities tied to the IPE, approval of authorizations, etc. The quality assurance team remains current on all federal and state regulations.

Scope

Assistance to this population is comprised of an intensive array of services - conducted in person - for blind and visually impaired individuals who require complex services, including youth with the most significant disabilities. These services are provided for a time period not to exceed 18 months but can be extended under special circumstances with the consent of the individual in order to achieve objectives of the rehabilitation plan. Services are individually designed around the needs and desires of the consumer and may include:

- Individual assessment

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- Job coaching and development
- Assistive technology, including repair and maintenance
- Intensive on-the-job training
- Employability and social skills training
- Transportation assistance
- Money management
- Follow-up services with employers and trainees
- Formal and informal worksite related expectations (e.g., time and attendance, dress, communication)

Extent

Services are provided based on available resources. Community service providers are responsible for funding ongoing support services. The amount of services provided is determined by the statewide needs assessment, analysis of performance data, and data provided by agency partners (Agencies for Persons with Disabilities, CareerSource Florida, Department of Children and Families, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation).

Transition to Extended Services

Transition occurs a minimum of 90 days after “stabilization,” which is defined as stabilized in employment at or above minimum wage with 20% or less support in the workplace from program staff for a period of 90 days. A consumer is “successfully rehabilitated” when job placement is maintained for 60 days after transitioning to extended services.