

Unified WIOA Plan for the State of Illinois

Program-Specific Requirements for Vocational Rehabilitation

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

* Sec. 102(b)(D)(iii) of WIOA

a. Input of State Rehabilitation Council

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

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

SRC Comment: Based on the results of the 2017 VR customer satisfaction surveys, SRC members believe that consistency of services and information given at DRS offices is still an area that needs improvement. Survey responders expressed that information given and services provided differed among DRS offices, as well as between counselors in the same office. A Quick Reference Guide was developed and piloted at three DRS offices to aid staff in providing consistent services. DRS offices that tested the Quick Reference Guide received a survey soliciting feedback, however, few have responded at this time. Participants are encouraged to complete the pilot survey. SRC and DRS need to review the survey results and determine the next steps.

The SRC is requesting this Guide continue to move forward at pilot sites and then rolled out to all offices throughout the state. The SRC would like to receive a plan from DRS on how to increase consistency of information given and services provided throughout the state.

The SRC is requesting benchmarks from DRS to show progress toward a goal of providing consistent services throughout the state. Specifically, the SRC is requesting quarterly data in the following areas: (a) Timeliness of case movement; (b) Demographic data on individual disabilities; (c) Caseload size; (d) Information about individual program participants, such as transition youth or veterans; and (e) participation and outcomes for minorities

Based on survey results, the SRC would like DRS to increase the number of VR customers that affirm they received information about the Client Assistance Program (CAP), increase the number of customers who feel that DRS provided appropriate referrals, and improve the timeliness of communication and services.

DRS Response: DRS is committed to the ongoing development and implementation of the Quick Reference Guide. The staff development unit will work with the SRC to ensure that VR counselors receive training in the use of the Guide. Also, revisions will be made to the online casework procedure manual to ensure consistency with language in the Guide. DRS will work with the SRC to develop a quarterly report to the specifications described above. DRS will also work with the SRC and with the CAP administrator to improve awareness of CAP information by VR customers.

SRC Comment: The SRC recommends regular statewide needs assessment and satisfaction surveys to DRS customers, transition students, provider agencies and employees be completed once every two years to determine areas for service improvement. Customer and transition student surveys should seek to determine customer satisfaction, quality of services, customer treatment and service accessibility. Provider surveys should seek to determine areas needing improvement such as partnering, agency interactions, and communication. Staff surveys should seek to determine level of satisfaction with their job and help to determine areas of improvement. The SRC suggests that to ensure accessibility, the availability of multiple survey completion options is necessary, and recommends supplementing online survey administration with

information gathering techniques, such as in-person focus groups or telephone interviews.

DRS Response: DRS agrees that a system of regular survey data collection is desirable for planning and needs assessment purposes. The surveys conducted through the SRC in the last year have provided a valuable baseline for studying trends going forward. DRS is committed to working with the SRC to develop a schedule of surveys and other information collection efforts to create an improved understanding of the environment facing people with disabilities in Illinois.

SRC Comment: SRC members believe several factors impact job placement and retention. In addition to job-related skills, including enhancements such as job coaching and on-the-job training, DRS should incorporate other skills necessary for individuals to not only obtain, but retain employment. These skills could include, but are not limited to independent living skills, interpersonal skills and self-management skills such as efficient communication, planning, coping skills, time management and good nutrition management. DRS has indicated that these services are included in the contract arrangements with community rehabilitation programs. SRC is requesting evidence confirming provisions of these services and a description of how the community rehabilitation programs provide these services.

DRS Response: DRS will work with the SRC as well as community provider representatives to identify methods of service provision that are consistent with achievement of successful employment outcomes for DRS customers.

SRC Comment: Transition services continue to be a priority for SRC. As outlined in a wildly important goal (WIG) from the 2017 SRC/DRS Strategic Planning session, the SRC would like to see an increase in the number of transition students submitting applications for the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program. The SRC would like to work with DRS to determine how to best track transition students throughout the DRS process and tracking successful and unsuccessful transitions to the DRS Counselor for their adult services. What innovative ways is DRS trying to reach out to these students? The SRC feels that the utilization of a DRS services flyer or an e-mail campaign could help in promoting DRS services to other organizations, among other options. The SRC believes that the utilization of the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) social media pages on a weekly basis would help increase familiarity with DRS and DRS services. The SRC recommends that DRS target schools, social security administration, medical professionals and centers for independent living to increase referrals and applications and educate the public about VR.

DRS Response: DRS supports efforts to increase referrals to the VR program, particularly for transition age youth and students with disabilities. DRS will continue to work with the SRC to identify methods such as use of social media to reach out to youth who may benefit from DRS services.

SRC Comment: SRC members recommend increasing the scope of work-based learning experiences for DRS customers and youth with disabilities, including internships, apprenticeships and other non-traditional experiences that increase the skills of the individual and enhance future opportunities for competitive integrated employment. The SRC is requesting DRS provide quarterly data showing the specifics of the opportunities and services provided and how they are being provided, for example, number of internships (i.e., # paid and # unpaid).

DRS Response: DRS agrees that work-based learning experiences are an important component of the service array for students and youth with disabilities. Presently DRS only has the capacity to identify various types of work-based learning experiences within the STEP program. DRS will work with the SRC to identify other reporting options that will provide enhanced information on the use of work experiences.

SRC Comment: SRC members believe that it is important to continue to increase the number of employers working with DRS and community partners. SRC has already seen the progress made through DRS's business engagement initiative. SRC is committed to helping increase the number of meaningful employer relationships. Currently, there are only Employment Specialists in Regions 1, 3 and 5. SRC understands that DRS would like to eventually have three dedicated Business Engagement/Employment Specialists per region. What is DRS's plan for accomplishing this and more immediately having at least one person for Regions 2 and 4? The SRC believes that DRS should consider widening the scope of their Business Engagement trainings to include training sessions with Community Partners. SRC believes that everyone

should have a common approach and message when working with area businesses. Improving communication with Community Partners will only help to improve responses and show that everyone is working towards the same goal.

DRS Response: DRS agrees that additional resources are required to expand our capacity to engage businesses and fulfill the dual customer requirements of WIOA. DRS is in the process of modifying position descriptions with the intent of adding additional business engagement staff to serve more areas of the state. It is anticipated that new staff will be hired in the first part of the next fiscal year.

SRC Comment: The SRC believes that the joint Strategic Planning sessions have been very beneficial. SRC would like to continue to have annual Strategic Planning sessions with DRS that focus on specific measurable goals.

DRS Response: DRS agrees that the strategic planning activities to date have been beneficial and should be continued in some form. DRS will work with the SRC on identifying options for future strategic planning activities.

SRC Comment: SRC members are still concerned with the lack of jobs in rural areas of the state. What methods has DRS used to promote employment in these rural areas? What progress has DRS made in the past two years to help promote economic employment and what is the plan for the upcoming years to continue to increase employment in rural areas? The SRC is requesting quarterly updates regarding the progress of these developments. Also, the SRC is requesting quarterly data in the following areas: (a) Outcomes by each region or district in the state or territory (b) Outcomes and earnings for specific disability population

DRS Response: DRS is aware that job opportunities vary notably in different regions of the state, with rural areas facing particular challenges. DRS works in partnership with the business engagement efforts of other WIOA partners to promote economic development in all regions. DRS will work with the management information team to create a regular report containing the data specified by the SRC.

SRC Comment: The SRC understands that DRS has included short-term job coaching as part of the training modules for counselors regarding the effective use of Community Rehabilitation Program services. Previously, DRS did not have utilization data on this service. Has DRS implemented a system to track if the use of short-term job coaching has increased and if the use of it improved VR outcomes? If DRS still does not have utilization data, when does DRS plan to put something in place to track this information?

DRS Response: DRS has the capacity to track provision of short term job coaching services using the service description codes in the fiscal system. DRS will work with the management information team to create a report to meet the requirements of the SRC.

SRC Comment: Based on the 2017 Satisfaction Survey results, the SRC believes that DRS should address DRS employee concerns. The working alliance between DRS staff and customers is extremely important. Improving experiences and the environment for staff could positively influence customer experiences. The SRC is requesting that a plan to improve DRS employee morale be developed and shared with the SRC.

DRS Response: DRS agrees that important issues were identified in the staff satisfaction survey which require follow up action by DRS administration. DRS will share the details regarding those actions with the SRC as they are developed.

2. the Designated State unit's response to the Council's input and recommendations; and

Responses are incorporated in the previous section.

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

Not applicable.

b. Request for Waiver of Statewideness

When requesting a waiver of the statewideness requirement, the designated State unit must identify the types of services to be provided by the program on a non-statewide basis. The waiver request must also include written assurances that:

1. a local public agency will provide the non-Federal share of costs associated with the services to be provided in accordance with the waiver request;

The Division of Rehabilitation Services maintains a considerable number of Third Party Agreements with other units of government, primarily school districts. These Third-Party Agreements are designed to increase the availability of vocational rehabilitation services to specific populations of people with disabilities. DRS has a contract with each entity that is consistent with Federal regulations (34CFR361.26) and includes the following provisions: (a) the vocational rehabilitation services to be provided are identified; (b) the local agency assures that non-Federal funds are made available to DRS; (c) the local agency assures that DRS approval is required before services are provided; and (d) the local agency assures that all other State plan requirements, including the Order of Selection policy, are applied to persons receiving services through the agreement.

The following is a list of the Third-Party Agreements now in place.

1. William Rainey Harper College

The purpose of this agreement is to provide post-secondary training to students in northern Cook County with hearing impairments, learning disabilities, and other disabilities who are eligible for VR program services. The college is a two-year public community college, which serves the northern part of Cook County. It is located in Palatine, Illinois.

2. The Evaluation and Development Center

The purpose of this agreement with the Board of Trustees of Southern Illinois University at Carbondale is to provide a continuing program of rehabilitation services to individuals with disabilities in Southern Illinois. This agreement provides evaluation and placement, independent living, residential, information and referral, and rehabilitation engineering services to customers eligible for services from the VR program. This program primarily serves the Illinois counties of Franklin, Jackson, Jefferson, Johnson, Perry, Saline, Williamson, and Union.

3. Secondary Transitional Experience Program (STEP)

The purpose of this program is to provide rehabilitation services for customers who are still in secondary school. DRS has 146 contractual arrangements with school districts and cooperatives throughout the state. Of that number 130 are third-party contracts and 16 are not. These arrangements resulted in VR services being provided to 9,284 students in the most recent state fiscal year, and a total of 10,542 as of January 2018. STEP services include: job exploration counseling; workplace readiness training including social skills and independent living skills; counseling on postsecondary educational opportunities; instruction in self-advocacy; and a variety of work-based learning experiences both in the school and in the community. DRS anticipates that approximately 11,000 students will be served in the STEP program in both PY2018 and PY2019.

Schools with Third-Party STEP Contracts in State Fiscal Year 2018 (July 1 2017 to June 30 2018)

Board Of Education, Evanston, IL; Franklin Community Unit School, Franklin, IL; Harlem Consolidated School, Machesney Park, IL; Kankakee Area Special Ed Coop, Kankakee, IL; Seneca High School, Seneca, IL; South Macoupin Association, Stauton, IL; Sycamore CUSD 427, Sycamore, IL; Youth Connection Charter School, Chicago, IL; Aero Special Education Coop, Burbank, IL; Allendale Association, Lake Villa, IL; Alton Community Unit School Dist, Alton, IL; Anna Jonesboro Community, Anna, IL; Arlyn Day School, Wilmette, IL; Aurora West School Dist 129, Aurora, IL; Ball Chatham School Dist 5, Chatham, IL; Belleville Township High, Belleville, IL; Bethalto Unit No 8, Bethalto, IL; Black Hawk Area Special Ed, East Moline, IL; Board Of Education City Of, Peoria, IL; Bradley Bourbonnais Community, Bradley, IL; Cahokia Community School Dist 187, Cahokia, IL; Canton Union School, Canton, IL; Childrens Home Association Of, Peoria, IL; Collinsville Community Unit, Collinsville, IL; Columbia Community Unit, Columbia, IL; Community High Schl Dist 155, Crystal Lake, IL; Community High School Dist 218, Oak Lawn, IL; Community High School Dist 99, Downers Grove, IL; Community Unit District No 203, Naperville, IL; Community Unit School, Woodstock, IL; Community Unit School Dist 200, Wheaton, IL; Community Unit School Dist 300, Algonquin, IL; Community Unit School Dist 308, Oswego, IL; Community Unit School Dist 60, Waukegan,

IL; Community Unit School Dist 95, Lake Zurich, IL; Community Unit School District, Barrington, IL; Cons High Schl Dist 125, Lincolnshire, IL; Cook County High School Dist, Berwyn, IL; County Of Jackson, Murphysboro, IL; County Of Kankakee 5 Manteno, Manteno, IL; Decatur Public School Dist 61, Decatur, IL; Dixon Unit School District 170, Dixon, IL; DuPage High School District 88, Addison, IL; East Alton Wood River Community, Wood River, IL; Eastern Illinois Area Special, Charleston, IL; Edwardsville Community Unit, Edwardsville, IL; Elmhurst Community Unit School Dist 205, Elmhurst, IL; Evanston Township High School, Evanston, IL; Exceptional Children Have, South Holland, IL; Fenton Community High School, Bensenville, IL; Frankfort Community Unit, West Frankfort, IL; Freeport School District 145, Freeport, IL; Galesburg Community Unit School, Galesburg, IL; Geneseo Community Unit School, Geneseo, IL; Glenbard Township High School, Glen Ellyn, IL; Granite City CUSD 9, Granite City, IL; Grayslake Community High School, Grayslake, IL; Hancock-McDonough ROE 26, Macomb, IL; Harvard Community Unit, Harvard, IL; Highland Community School Dist, Highland, IL; Hinsdale Township High School, Hinsdale, IL; Huntley Community School, Algonquin, IL; Indian Prairie Community Unit, Aurora, IL; Jacksonville School Dist 117, Jacksonville, IL; JAMP Special Education Services, Grand Chain, IL; Jersey County CUSD 100, Jerseyville, IL; Johnsborg Community Unit School, Johnsborg, IL; Joliet Twp H S Dist 204, Joliet, IL; Kankakee School Dist 111, Kankakee, IL; Knox-Warren Special Ed Dist, Galesburg, IL; Lagrange Area Dept Of Sp Ed, Lagrange, IL; Lake Forest Community H S Dist 115, Lake Forest, IL; LaSalle-Peru Township High, LaSalle, IL; Leyden High School Dist No 212, Northlake, IL; Lincoln-Way Com High School, New Lenox, IL; Livingston County Special Serv, Pontiac, IL; Lockport Township High School, Lockport, IL; Maine Township High School, Park Ridge, IL; Marengo High School Dist 154, Marengo, IL; Mascoutah Community Unit, Mascoutah, IL; Massac County Unit School Dist 1, Metropolis, IL; Mattoon Community School, Mattoon, IL; McHenry Community High School, McHenry, IL; Mid-State Special Education, Morrisonville, IL; Mid-State Special Education, Morrisonville, IL; Mid-State Special Education, Morrisonville, IL; Mid-Valley Spec Ed Joint Agreement, St Charles, IL; Mt Vernon Township High School, Mt Vernon, IL; Niles Township District 219, Skokie, IL; Northern Suburban Spec Ed Dist, Highland Park, IL; Northwest Sp Ed District, Elizabeth, IL; Northwest Suburban Special, Mount Prospect, IL; Oak Park & River Forest High, Oak Park, IL; O'Fallon Township High School, O'Fallon, IL; Ogle County Educational Coop, Byron, IL; Ottawa Township High School, Ottawa, IL; Perandoe Special Education District, Red Bud, IL; Plainfield School Dist 202, Plainfield, IL; Plano Area Special Education, Plano, IL; Princeton Township High School, Princeton, IL; Proviso Township High School, Maywood, IL; Putnam County Community Unit, Granville, IL; Quincy Public Schools, Quincy, IL; Regional Office Of Education, Bloomington, IL; Rochester Community Unit Schl, Rochester, IL; Roxana Community Unit School, Roxana, IL; Rural Champaign County Special, Champaign, IL; Sangamon Area Sp Ed District, Springfield, IL; School Assn For Special Education, Naperville, IL; School Dist 234 Ridgewood High, Norridge, IL; School District 131, Aurora, IL; School District U-46, Elgin, IL; South Eastern Special Education, Ste Marie, IL; Southern Will County Coop 22, Joliet, IL; Southwest Cook Coop Spec Ed, Oak Forest, IL; Special Ed Dist Of Lake County, Gages Lake, IL; Special Education Association, Bartonville, IL; Speed Special Ed Joint Agreement, Chicago Heights, IL; Springfield School Dist 186, Springfield, IL; Streator Township High School, Streator, IL; Summit School Inc, Elgin, IL; Tazewell Mason Counties Special Education Assn, Pekin, IL; The Hope School, Springfield, IL; Thornton Township H S Dist 205, South Holland, IL; Tri County Special Education, Murphysboro, IL; Triad Community Unit School Dist 2, Troy, IL; Valley View Public Schools, Romeoville, IL; Vermilion Assoc Of Sp Ed, Danville, IL; Wabash & Ohio Valley SE Dist, Norris City, IL; Warren Township High School, Gurnee, IL; West Central IL Spec Educ Coop, Macomb, IL; West Washington Community, Okawville, IL; Whiteside Of Carroll Counties, Sterling, IL; Williamson County Special, Marion, IL; Winnebago County Special, Rockton, IL; Woodford County Special Ed Assoc, Metamora, IL; Zion Benton Township High School, Zion, IL;

2. the designated State unit will approve each proposed service before it is put into effect; and

DRS develops third party agreements through a contractual process that specifies the rehabilitation services to be provided in each case. No services can be provided until the contractor agrees to the terms and conditions established by DRS, including (a) DRS maintains responsibility for establishing program eligibility and development of the IPE, and (b) the contractor must provide period reports of expenditures of non-federal funds.

3. All State plan requirements will apply

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

DRS third party contracts contain the provision that all services provided must be consistent with the Unified State Plan.

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

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

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

General Information on Interagency Cooperation

Illinois DRS maintains cooperative agreements and working relationships with a wide variety of state, local and education entities that provide services to individuals with disabilities. DRS presently has interagency agreements in effect with several other state agencies. DRS has a long-standing agreement with the Illinois State Board of Education regarding the provision of transition services to students with disabilities age 14 and older. This agreement has been revised to comply with WIOA requirements. The revised agreement places greater emphasis on the roles of each party in preparing students for the transition to employment, education and training.

Presently DRS provides VR services to around 10,000 students with disabilities each year through contracts with 151 school systems. DRS provides vocational rehabilitation services to another 1,250 high school students with disabilities outside of the contractual system. DRS also has agreements with 12 state universities and 36 community colleges in Illinois regarding funding for services to students who are VR customers.

DRS has contracts and working agreements with around 135 not-for-profit community rehabilitation programs, which serve about 3,500 VR customers each year, providing vocational evaluation, job placement and supported employment services.

DRS maintains working relationships with the Statewide Independent Living Council, as well as the Illinois Network of Centers for Independent Living, and has contracts with centers for independent living to provide a variety of rehabilitation services.

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

DRS has a longstanding partnership with the Illinois Assistive Technology Project (IATP), the state AT grant recipient. IATP provides a variety of services to Illinois citizens with disabilities, including many who are participants in the DRS VR program. Cooperative activities include joint staff training as well as the use of IATP staff for technology consultation on specific VR cases. DRS also works with IATP staff on general issues involving the accessibility of computer systems throughout Illinois state government. IATP also provides consultation on specific items of assistive technology and their applicability for VR program purposes. DRS has also worked with IATP on innovative approaches to purchasing assistive technology equipment for benefit of VR program customers.

3. Programs carried out by the Under Secretary for Rural Development of the United States Department of Agriculture;

DRS does not have formal interagency agreements with Rural Development Programs operated by the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

4. Non-educational agencies serving out-of-school youth; and

DRS does not have specific agreements with non-education agencies serving out-of-school youth with disabilities. Out-of-school youth are served through contracts that DRS has developed with community rehabilitation program agencies, although the contracts are not targeted at that specific age group. Data for the current state fiscal year through February 2018 show that 41 percent of individuals served were under age 25, thus meeting the WIOA definition of youth with disabilities.

5. State use contracting programs.

DRS does not presently have formal interagency agreements with state use programs operated within Illinois. The state use program in Illinois is coordinated by the Department of Central Management Services, which awards contracts to state use providers and coordinates purchases on behalf of state agencies.

d. Coordination with Education Officials

Describe:

1. DSU's plans

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

The DRS interagency agreement with the State Board of Education identifies financial roles and responsibilities for transition services. This agreement has been re-written and is under review pending signatures by department heads. The overall responsibility for funding a student's educational program lies with the local education authority, with support from the State Board of Education. DRS provides funding for vocational rehabilitation services, both through the STEP program and through general VR caseloads. DRS has contracts with 151 school districts, of which 137 involve the use of school funds as VR matching funds. DRS coordinates and provides support for operational costs of regional Transition Planning Councils. DRS establishes qualifications for personnel it employs, and the State Board establishes qualifications for personnel working for school districts.

Services provided to students with disabilities through STEP or through another arrangement focus on the key elements of pre-employment transition services as defined in WIOA: job exploration counseling; work-based learning experiences, counseling on postsecondary education, workplace readiness training, and instruction in self-advocacy. While STEP places an emphasis on employer-paid work in the community, each of these aspects of transition services are available to students based on individual need.

Since 2009 DRS has worked with schools that have third-party cooperative agreements to ensure that federal VR requirements are followed in the provision of transition services. This has included a contract addendum as well as specific exhibits that are now incorporated into the contract package itself. DRS believes that these measures have resulted in an environment where all parties understand and are in compliance with these requirements.

DRS provides consultation and technical assistance to educational agencies in planning for the transition of students with disabilities from school to post-school activities. This is accomplished through a number of mechanisms. DRS has assigned qualified rehabilitation counselors to act as liaison to every high school in Illinois. A fundamental part of the liaison role is to provide consultation and technical assistance to educators involved in the transition process.

Transition Planning Councils in each area of the state work with school districts to identify students with disabilities needing transition services. Aggregate services needs are reported annually to the State Transition Council. Through the counselor liaison relationships, students with disabilities have ready access to the VR program. DRS counselors provide consultation regarding vocational services and provide general information on disability services available in the community. DRS also sponsors the Next Steps parent-training program to assist families in understanding their children's needs regarding transition services.

Illinois has a committee dedicated to transition issues, the Interagency Coordinating Council, that develops policy and establishes roles and responsibilities. DRS participates on the Council along with the State Board of Education and other state agencies involved in serving youth with disabilities. DRS also coordinates regional Transition Planning Councils, with school and community rehabilitation programs also participating. State law requires that transition planning begin at age 14 ½. DRS assists local schools in building a vocational focus as the student progresses through the school system. The Secondary Transitional Experience Program (STEP) is funded by DRS and provides financial support for students with disabilities during the high school years.

Participation in DRS services for students in transition services, either through STEP or through another arrangement, is incorporated in the IPE during the time the student is in school. An IPE is developed no later than 90 days after the student has been certified as eligible for the VR program. Development of the IPE is coordinated with the development and of the student's Individualized Education Program (IEP) and transition plan.

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

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

The agreement provides that DRS will shall provide consultation and technical assistance to assist educational agencies in planning for the transition of students from school to post-school activities and ensure that local DHS-DRS staff participate in IEP meetings where transition planning occurs. In addition, DHS-DRS shall establish and collaborate with local Transition Planning Committees to outreach to and identify students with disabilities in need of transition services as early as possible in the transition planning process. DRS and the local TPCs will also plan for the availability of community services for students with disabilities before and after exiting secondary education.

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

The agreement provides that DRS and the State Board of Education will cooperatively participate in planning, training, policy development, data collection, and resource identification and dissemination to improve transition planning for students with disabilities. Also, both parties agree to provide technical assistance to local education agency personnel regarding transition planning services for students with IEPs. Transition planning will facilitate the development and completion of IEPs and transition plans in coordination with the IPE for VR services.

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

The agreement describes the role of the State Board of Education to ensure that local education agencies engage students with disabilities and their families in transition planning when it is a mandated part of the IEP process. In addition, ISBE will encourage school districts to annually submit a summary of each eligible student's IEP transition goals and transition services resulting from the IEP team meeting to the appropriate local Transition Planning Committee (TPC). The agreement describes the role of DRS to include providing consultation and technical assistance to assist educational agencies in planning for the transition of students from school to post-school activities and ensure that local DRS staff participate in IEP meetings where transition planning occurs. The agreement also addresses the financial responsibilities of each party.

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

The agreement provides that DRS will collaborate with local Transition Planning Committees to outreach to and identify students with disabilities in need of transition services as early as possible in the transition planning process. DRS and the local TPCs will also plan for the availability of community services for students with disabilities before and after exiting secondary education.

e. Cooperative Agreements with Private Nonprofit Organizations

(Formerly known as Attachment 4.8(b)(3)). Describe the manner in which the designated State agency establishes cooperative agreements with private non-profit VR service providers.

DRS has contractual agreements with non-profit rehabilitation providers to provide services to VR customers. DRS works with the Facilities Advisory Council consisting of provider representatives to discuss issues and identify service needs in an ongoing manner. In 2013 DRS began the process of developing formal contracts in the place of cooperative working agreements with non-profit rehabilitation service providers. This is part of a state-level effort to establish greater consistency in human service contracting. DRS contracts specify the

responsibilities of the service providing agency, the performance basis of the contract, and the rates to be paid to the provider. DRS has contracts with around 135 not-for-profit community rehabilitation programs, which serve about 3,500 VR customers each year, providing vocational evaluation, job placement and supported employment services. DRS maintains working relationships with the Statewide Independent Living Council, as well as the Illinois Network of Centers for Independent Living, and has contracts with centers for independent living to provide a variety of rehabilitation services. DRS develops community service contracts based on an assessment of need at the local level. Counselors and office supervisors work with regional administrators to identify specific areas of need and potential provider agencies qualified to provide services. To the extent possible DRS has utilized one-time funding to establish new service contracts with providers. Depending on performance, contracts are continued using VR funds and are converted to a performance-based methodology.

Illinois has developed an emphasis on performance-based or outcome-based funding for human services. DRS has converted over 85 percent of its VR-funded contracts to a performance basis in the last three years. This means that providers earn payment when individuals are working in the community, with the maximum payment based on the individual achieving at least 90 days of successful employment. DRS believes this method aligns the interests of the individual, the provider and the VR program.

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

(Formerly known as Attachment 4.8(b)(4)). Describe the designated State agency's efforts to identify and make arrangements, including entering into cooperative agreements, with other State agencies and other appropriate entities in order to provide supported employment services and extended employment services, as applicable, to individuals with the most significant disabilities, including youth with the most significant disabilities.

For many years DRS has had a number of contracts and cooperative working agreements with community provider agencies to provide both supported employment and extended services to individuals with most significant disabilities. DRS has a standing committee of community rehabilitation programs known as the Facility Advisory Committee which meets regularly to discuss service arrangements, including but not limited to, supported employment and extended services. DRS believes that this group is the best mechanism for communicating with provider agencies and maintaining a grasp of the demand for these services. DRS also has an interagency cooperative team that involves the DHS Division of Mental Health to provide ongoing support services to individuals with serious mental illness.

In PY2018 DRS expects to continue the following levels of funding for supported employment activities. While funding under Title VI-B is uncertain at this time, DRS anticipates providing supported employment services to approximately 125 individuals, with total funding of \$0.95 million, utilizing 30 provider agencies. Supported employment provided with Title I funds: approximately 1,450 individuals, total funding \$4.2 million, approximately 55 provider agencies. Beginning in July 2017 DRS implemented a new performance-based rate structure for supported employment services, and DRS anticipates that the new rate structure will encourage providers to become involved in providing supported employment services. DRS will not be able to provide the same level of extended services as in the past, due to an elimination of state general revenue funding for this program. For PY2019, given the uncertainty of Title VI-B funding, DRS projects serving 115 individuals at a funding level of \$0.95 million utilizing about 40 provider agencies. For Title I DRS expects to serve around 1,600 individuals at a funding level of \$4.8 million using approximately 60 vendor agencies.

In PY2018 and PY2019 no state funds will be available for extended services. DRS continues to pursue additional state funds. In addition, DRS is working to identify other sources of funding for extended services. DRS has worked with DHS Division of Developmental Disabilities to specify circumstances under which individuals can receive long-term extended supports through the DD waiver program. DRS also intends to pursue ongoing changes in its supported employment program. Illinois has seen a trend where the number of individuals participating in its supported employment services has declined in recent years. DRS plans to reverse this trend by focusing on youth with disabilities who require additional support to enter and retain employment. In 2017 DRS converted its supported employment contract arrangements to a performance basis. This model is designed to ensure ongoing support to individuals while promoting the highest level of independent functioning in the workplace.

g. Coordination with Employers

(Formerly known as Attachment 4.8(b)(5)). Describe how the designated State unit will work with employers to identify competitive integrated employment and career exploration opportunities in order to facilitate the provision of:

1. VR services; and

DRS is beginning a new era of relationships with employers. The focus of activities in this era will center on the relationships in each Local Workforce Innovation Area (LWIA), of which there are 22 in the State. DRS has an office supervisor or other manager as member on each local board (LWIB), which presents the single greatest opportunity for interactive communication with employers as well as other workforce business representatives. Each LWIB has developed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to formally describe many of the relationships within the area. This will include mechanisms for sharing information on employment opportunities as well as career exploration and work-based learning opportunities at the local level. In addition, DRS representatives participated in the regional planning process related to WIOA implementation. This process is based on 10 economic development regions (EDRs) around the state. Within each region, extensive data analysis has been conducted to identify employment sectors that are most likely to account for job growth and expansion in the next five years. The employers in these key expansion sectors will be those targeted for the highest level of business engagement, including discussions around establishment of work-based learning experiences, including internships and apprenticeships. DRS staff will work closely with other LWIA business services teams to ensure that services are not duplicated.

DRS participated in the job driven technical assistance program through the Institute for Community Inclusion. The goals of this project are to establish a business engagement strategy and to train VR staff to provide basic business engagement services, including those related to disability awareness, workplace accommodations and benefits of hiring individuals with disabilities. The target for the first year was to establish relationships with 20 employers, which was exceeded with over 35 new business relationships established. While these services will be distinct from representation of specific job candidates, DRS anticipates that provision of business engagement services will result in competitive employment outcomes for its customers.

DRS also worked with other WIOA partner agencies to develop a state integrated business services framework. The framework is designed to ensure that all businesses have a means of contacting a workforce business services representative, and that business services at the local and regional level are coordinated with each other and not duplicative. DRS acts as the consultant to local business teams on all disability-related matters.

The activities discussed above are intended to have a positive impact on VR customers of all ages. Other activities focused specifically on transition age youth will be developed in consultation with other entities, including the Transition Advisory Councils, community rehabilitation program agencies, and service providers working with the WIOA Title I youth programs. For years DRS has relied on its Secondary Transitional Experience Program (STEP) to create work-based learning opportunities for students with disabilities. While this has been an effective practice, there is much less capacity for development of work-based learning opportunities for out-of-school youth with disabilities. DRS believes that the Title I experience in serving out-of-school youth provides a key opportunity for inclusion of youth with disabilities. As noted above, development of these opportunities will take place through a localized planning process and be focused on the growth sectors identified through regional planning.

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

As noted elsewhere in the plan, most efforts surrounding provision of pre-employment transition services to students with disabilities are accomplished through third-party contracts with school districts. These contracts are performance based and emphasize employer-paid community work experiences for students. The arrangements with employers are developed by the third-party contractors rather than by DRS directly. DRS monitors student work experiences through monthly reporting by the contractors, which include hours worked and earnings, if any.

In the current program year DRS has developed pre-employment transition services through contracts with community rehabilitation programs in order to provide work-based learning experiences for students with disabilities. These contracts are limited in scope but to the extent they are successful DRS will consider expanding them to other geographic areas of the state.

DRS has begun exploring other relationships with employers for development of work-based learning experiences. One is through cooperative relationship with the state Department of Commerce, the Title I agency in Illinois. DRS has agreed to partner in development of youth projects that will include a variety of work-based learning experiences in selected industry sectors across the state.

In addition, the new business engagement process being developed by DRS is expected to result in additional opportunities for work-based learning experiences for students and youth with disabilities. This process is targeted at high-growth industry sectors and is designed to respond to needs identified by businesses. This activity will be accomplished in conjunction with the integrated business services effort developed by core workforce partners in Illinois.

h. Interagency Cooperation

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

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

State Medicaid Agency: Department of Healthcare and Family Services (HFS) In the last two years DRS has worked with HFS as part of the Illinois Employment First initiative. This is a multi-agency effort to promote competitive integrated employment for people with disabilities in both the private sector and public sector. To date there has been a special effort to facilitate hiring of people with disabilities within state government. In addition, Illinois is involved in the Vision Quest technical assistance effort sponsored by the Department of Labor Office of Disability Employment Policy. Subject matter experts have worked with Illinois state agencies to review policies and service funding rates to identify opportunities for change that will facilitate employment goals. Additional efforts have focused on policy issues relating to employment options for individuals participating in Medicaid waiver programs administered through HFS and operated by other state agencies.

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

State Agency for Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities: Department of Human Services, Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD) DRS and DDD participate on the State's Employment First Task Force, as well as the DHS employment first team. An initial phase of coordinated activities focused on the Balancing Incentive Program (BIP), which provided one-time funds to Illinois to promote innovative services that will benefit individuals with disabilities, including organizational transformation efforts for community agencies not traditionally offering employment services. At the end of BIP funding both divisions worked with national subject matter experts from Department of Labor Office of Disability Employment Policy to continue organizational transformation efforts and promote competitive integrated employment for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

DRS and DDD have worked to coordinate efforts around supported employment services, in particular looking at policies and rules that may need revision in order to make an effective transition from VR supported employment to DDD supported employment for individuals requiring long-term supports. In addition, DDD and DRS are cooperating to work with employers that hold Dept. of Labor subminimum wage certificates, including development of options for contacting individuals working for subminimum wages and offering counseling around options for pursuit of competitive integrated employment. Many subminimum wage employers have funding relationships with DDD and are thus open to communication from that agency more so than with VR.

DRS and DDD are working in conjunction with the Illinois Council on Developmental Disabilities to finalize and administrative agreement that will make ensure effective service provision to individuals involved with either or both state agencies.

3. the State agency responsible for providing mental health services.

State Agency for Mental Health Services: Department of Human Services, Division of Mental Health (DMH) DRS has enjoyed an effective partnership with DMH for several years. This partnership is centered on provision of vocational services through the Individual Placement and Support (IPS) service model. DRS and DMH have worked with the Psychiatric Research Center to implement a fidelity-based service model that has been shown to be very effective in assisting individuals with serious mental illness in becoming employed. DRS and DMH have a cooperative funding model in which DMH utilized Medicaid funding to the greatest extent possible and DRS provides VR funds to support the vocational aspects of the IPS model.

DRS has worked with DMH to expand IPS services to a youth population and intends to continue expansion to this group through additional pilot projects as funding becomes available. In addition, both agencies intend to participate in evaluation projects that document the effectiveness of IPS as an evidence-based practice. Research suggests that implementation of IPS principles in VR service provision can be of benefit to a wider range of individuals.

DRS and DMH are working with consultants from the Department of Labor Office of Disability Employment Policy to examine service relationships and coordinate funding to enable more individuals with mental illness to participate in vocational services.

i. Comprehensive System of Personnel Development; Data System on Personnel and Personnel Development

(Formerly known as Attachment 4.10)). Describe the designated State agency's procedures and activities to establish and maintain a comprehensive system of personnel development designed to ensure an adequate supply of qualified State rehabilitation professional and paraprofessional personnel for the designated State unit, including the following:

1. Data System on Personnel and Personnel Development

A. Qualified Personnel Needs.

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

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

DRS believes it has sufficient staff on hand to staff the VR program. Each staff category has a normal number of vacant positions, and DRS works aggressively to fill vacancies as soon as possible, in conjunction with DHS personnel managers. There has been little growth in the overall VR caseload in the last several years, which means that DRS has sufficient staff available to serve people with disabilities meeting its order of selection policy and has the capacity to fill vacant positions to continue to meet that level of need. DRS has 210 VR counselor positions with 175 on hand and 35 vacant positions, and 24 rehabilitation and mobility instructors, with 15 on hand and nine vacant positions. These staff are supported by 140 rehabilitation case coordinator positions, of which DRS has 118 on hand with 22 vacant positions. Counselor vacancies are somewhat higher than normal but DRS anticipates that it will be able to fill these positions in the near future and return to a more normal pattern of vacancies. Data as of February 2018 show a total of 23,267 active cases in the DRS VR program. This gives an average of 133 individuals per filled rehabilitation counselor position and 197 per filled case coordinator position. These averages are somewhat higher than historical trends, but will return to a more normal level when additional positions are filled. Specialty counselor positions have a slightly higher vacancy rate, but one that still allows DRS to provide services to select populations. DRS has 30 staff positions for counselors certified to communicate in sign language with six vacancies in this category, as well as 24 counselors fluent in Spanish, and seven vacancies in that category.

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

When fully staffed the number of positions by title will be: rehabilitation counselors 210; rehabilitation case coordinators 140; rehabilitation and mobility instructors 24; field office supervisors 35; field office support 55; staff administrative support 30; business enterprise program for the blind staff 13; central office staff 61; bureau chiefs 2; and assistant bureau chiefs 6.

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

DRS anticipates that its long-term replacement rate will remain roughly the same during the next two years. There have been no major changes to the state hiring or retirement systems and the pace of hiring and separations has been normal. In the last year the state budget process has also returned to a state of normalcy. Based on job application trends, DRS anticipates that sufficient applicants will be available to fill nearly all posted vacancies within a few months. The number of staff on hand and projected annual number of replacements by title are: rehabilitation counselors 210 (20 projected replacements); rehabilitation case coordinators 140 (15); rehabilitation and mobility instructors 19 (4); field office supervisors 40 (5); field office support staff administrative support 30 (4); business enterprise program for the blind staff 13 (2); central office staff 61 (6); bureau chiefs 2 (1); assistant bureau chiefs 6 (1).

B. Personnel Development

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

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

There are five nationally-accredited rehabilitation counselor education programs in Illinois: Adler University, Chicago; Illinois Institute of Technology, Chicago; Northeastern Illinois University, Chicago; Northern Illinois University, DeKalb; and Southern Illinois University, Carbondale.

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

The most recent available data on enrollment in and graduation from the MA programs in rehabilitation counseling at the five universities is shown in the table below. A total of 123 students were enrolled and 48 graduated. The estimated replacement rate for DRS counselors is 20 per year, although the replacement rate will be higher due to the current somewhat larger number of vacancies. While many of these graduates will choose not to work for DRS, DRS believes that these programs make a significant contribution to its ability to hire new staff and replace staff who leave DRS. In Illinois graduates with an MA in rehabilitation counseling who pursue CRC certification are eligible to become licensed as a Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor (LCPC) through the State of Illinois Department of Financial and Professional Regulation

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

The most recent data for rehabilitation counseling graduates by program is: Illinois Institute of Technology, 14; Northeastern Illinois University, 10; Northern Illinois University, 13; and Southern Illinois University, 11. No data is available from Adler University at this time.

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

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

Each year DRS estimates the number of staff needed to operate the VR program, particularly the number of rehabilitation counselors needed. In addition, DRS works with university programs to estimate the number of students graduating from the programs and to have an understanding of each university's approach to student placement post graduation. The intent is to have multiple applicants for each vacant counseling position. This is generally true in urban areas, but applications are often limited in rural areas. Based on the information available from the university programs and the number of applications for posted vacancies, DRS believes that there are adequate numbers of qualified personnel available to fill all needed rehabilitation counselor positions.

DRS works with the Department of Human Services personnel unit works with DRS to publicize available positions in DRS, attending numerous job fairs likely focusing on minority students and students with disabilities. The State of Illinois has recruiting policies which assist minority individuals in obtaining employment in key positions, and also encourages training and education for current employees. State policy also encourages the hiring of individuals with disabilities, which is utilized by DRS to the greatest extent possible. DRS worked with the state personnel agency to create a position dedicated to monitoring and assisting with the hiring of persons with disabilities in state jobs. In addition to recruitment, DRS works actively to promote the retention of individuals with disabilities and individuals from minority backgrounds. These efforts include those sponsored by the Department of Human Services, of which DRS is a part, as well as through other state government organizations and membership associations. The purpose of these activities is to facilitate the training and professional development of staff from these populations, to promote understanding of the need for a diverse workforce, and to encourage the participation of staff in a variety of cooperative efforts aimed at making a contribution to the organization.

These efforts include: (a) the Upward Mobility program, which is designed to further the careers of state employees from minority backgrounds as well as individuals with disabilities. This program provides support for a variety of training and educational opportunities for staff during the course of their employment with the state. (b) the Interagency Committee on Employees with Disabilities, which engages state employees with disabilities in activities related to promoting the hiring and career advancement of people with disabilities. DRS administration is closely involved in the operations of the ICED. (c) The Illinois Association of Minorities in Government is a membership organization promoting state employment for individuals from minority backgrounds, which is attended by DRS staff. (d) the Illinois Association of Hispanic State Employees holds an annual conference, which focuses on state employees from Hispanic/Latino backgrounds. DRS supports staff attendance at this conference each year. DRS believes that its sponsorship of attendance at these conferences and encouragement of membership in these organizations is a positive step in promoting a diverse workforce and a means of ensuring a high rate of job retention among its employees with disabilities and employees from minority backgrounds. Internships DRS has informal agreements with the four rehabilitation counselor training programs in the state to provide internship and practicum placement options for graduate students. At present DRS is not able to offer paid internships to counseling students. We continue to provide unpaid internships whenever possible, both to support the universities and students as well as to provide a job preview to students interested in working for DRS when they complete their training.

Strategies for Retaining, Recruiting and Hiring Personnel DRS uses several strategies to recruit, hire and retain rehabilitation personnel. Key elements are promotion and publicizing the VR program, locating job candidates, monitoring the state hiring process, and identifying methods to encourage retention of staff. DRS works with the DHS personnel unit to conduct outreach activities to individuals who may be interested in state employment. DHS maintains a regular schedule of job fairs, community events and recruitment initiatives that include a focus on hiring minority individuals. DRS offers unpaid internship and practicum opportunities in its field offices to graduate students from the five rehabilitation education programs. These are arranged with the university faculty and DRS administrators as needed. DRS also makes presentations to undergraduate students to expose them to the field of vocational rehabilitation and provide them with information on graduate

rehabilitation education programs. DRS has an ongoing team composed of staff and administrators that focuses on issues related to hiring and retention of qualified staff. This group attempts to identify strategies that motivate staff to continue their employment, including rewards and recognition for high-level performance.

3. Personnel Standards

Describe the State agency's policies and procedures for the establishment and maintenance of personnel standards consistent with section 101(a)(7)(B) and 34 CFR 361.18(c) to ensure that designated State unit professional and paraprofessional personnel are adequately trained and prepared, including:

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

State Degree Standard. For several years, the Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS) has had the requirement for all new counselors of a Master's degree in rehabilitation counseling or a closely related field. The Master's degree requirement for DRS vocational rehabilitation counselors is supported by state licensing categories as well. The applicable licensing requirement in the state is for a "Licensed Professional Counselor" license, which is issued by the Illinois Department of Professional Regulation. This license is a generic counseling license and is not specifically for vocational rehabilitation counselors. The license requires a Master's degree in counseling, rehabilitation counseling, psychology or related field. For purposes of the Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD), the requirement of a Master's degree in rehabilitation counseling or a related field will be considered the state standard.

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

All DRS staff are expected to participate in training events annually. Annual employee performance evaluations are designed to include training needs and expectations as identified by both the employee and the supervisor. Certain training events sponsored by DRS are mandated for attendance by staff in particular titles, such as rehabilitation counselors and rehabilitation case coordinators. SDS initiates new training activities and also responds to specific requests for training from DRS administrators and field office supervisors. SDS coordinates the New Employee Orientation (NEO) training in which each new DRS staff person participates in the first months of his or her employment. This includes an overview of agency policies as well as a review of how the VR program operates in Illinois.

DRS administration periodically reviews the training objectives of the division to ensure that staff have an understanding of the VR program and the field of rehabilitation that is consistent with current policies and practices, including an understanding of the labor force and the needs of individuals with disabilities. To that end DRS has emphasized training around changes to the Rehabilitation Act brought forth by the passage of WIOA, as well as changes to the workforce system external to the VR program. DRS has cooperated with the state Title I agency to encourage staff participation in weekly webinar presentations by other core and required partner agencies, to ensure a greater understanding of other workforce programs and how they may be of benefit to people with disabilities. The most recent annual regional meetings featured presentations by WIOA partner agencies regarding program offerings and resources available to VR staff as well as job seekers with disabilities. DRS continues to explore additional training opportunities to enhance staff understanding of workforce system services. To the greatest extent possible online training methods are used to hold down costs and provide more immediate impact to DRS staff.

DRS recently established a position description for a new staff position of business services consultant. The purpose of this position is to engage with businesses throughout the state and participate in the state's integrated business services framework. For many years DRS has had a small group of employment resource specialists who worked directly with VR customers and counselors to conduct job development and job placement activities. The remaining staff in these positions will be retained and their activities coordinated with those of the business services consultants. The new business service consultants will work exclusively

with business customers to identify business needs and develop effective responses. DRS anticipates that individuals will be hired into these positions after July 2018.

4. Staff Development

Describe the State agency's policies, procedures, and activities to ensure that, consistent with section 101(a)(7)(C) of the Rehabilitation Act, all personnel employed by the designated State unit receive appropriate and adequate training in terms of:

A. System of staff development

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

The DRS Staff Development Section (SDS) oversees the needs assessment, development, implementation, coordination, monitoring and evaluation of all training programs offered within DRS. SDS has three full-time trainers and a program manager in addition to two support staff. SDS is responsible for providing training to DRS VR staff as well as coordinating training from other sources and maintaining the training data base which tracks the number of training hours for each staff person. The following section lists training courses provided by the Staff Development Section in the last year, as well as statewide conferences attended by DRS staff with financial support from DRS. Training Provided by the DRS Staff Development Section Job Placement and Job Development Strategies; Case Progression and Documentation; Valuing Diversity in the Workplace; Conflict and Stress Management for Professionals; Working Effectively in Teams; Platinum Customer Service; Customer Service and Telephone Skills; Projecting a Professional Image; Sexual Harassment Prevention in the Work Place; Section 590 Subpart C: Training and Related Services (Webinar); Effective Communication & Conflict Management; Dealing with Difficult Behavior in the Workplace; Partnering with Autonomy Works (Webinar); The NET: A Model for Successful Employment Outcomes (Webinar); Team Building and Problem Solving; Case Notes: Styles, Structures and Time Management; Training Provided by External Training Resources Job Placement Skills; Social Security Benefits

Training Conferences Supported by DRS: Illinois Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired; Illinois Association of Agencies and Community Organizations for Migrant Advocacy; Illinois Association of Hispanic State Employees; Latino Mental Health Conference; Statewide Transition Conference.

Ongoing Staff Development - Training Needs Assessment. DRS conducts periodic surveys of field office staff, including supervisors, counselors and case coordinators. Staff are asked about their own training needs as well as their perception of training needs for individuals working in other field positions. The top training requests for field office supervisors was in the area of stress management and dealing with difficult people, as well as disciplinary procedures. For case coordinators, the top requests were in the areas of teambuilding and customer service. For VR counselors the top requests for training were in the areas of counseling skills, caseload management and time management. DRS is developing a plan to prioritize the training requests, develop training events when possible and arrange for external training providers if needed.

DRS provides ongoing training to staff in all areas of counseling, including counseling and guidance. All staff are required to take a five-day New Employee Orientation training course that focuses on the role of the counselor in the counseling relationship. A major emphasis is placed on role-playing various situations where counseling and guidance skills are used. Another major emphasis is on assessment of the individual's rehabilitation needs, beginning with the initial interview. Placement skills are emphasized in training activities including regional meetings held annually, as well as on-site training in field offices. Training focuses on job development skills, communication with employers and preparing customers for job interviews.

DRS makes training available in rehabilitation technology to all staff. DRS employs rehabilitation technology specialists who provide on-site consultation to counselors and assist them in developing plans for provision of rehabilitation technology to VR customers. DRS also has contractual staff who focus on rehabilitation technology issues and provide on-site training and consultation. DRS works in conjunction with the Illinois

Assistive Technology Project, the state's AT grant recipient, to promote understanding of rehabilitation technology needs and identification of technology resources. DRS makes use of the rehabilitation technology program at the University of Illinois at Chicago as both a training resource and a service provider for VR customers.

B. Acquisition and dissemination of significant knowledge

Describe procedures for the acquisition and dissemination of significant knowledge from research and other sources to designated State unit professionals and paraprofessionals.

Dissemination of Research Materials to Staff. The staff development section operates a small library with books and video materials available on numerous topics related to disability and rehabilitation counseling. These materials are distributed to field staff upon request. In the last year the library has added new materials related to job search, job skills and career choice materials to enhance the rehabilitation counselor's access to research materials. DRS makes use of its intranet system to provide linkages to research sources and other new information relating to the field of rehabilitation. DRS supports staff participation in disability-related conferences within the state so that staff can learn about new developments in the rehabilitation field including presentations on research from university professionals as well as rehabilitation practitioners. In addition, key categories of staff such as rehabilitation counselors for the deaf and mental health specialist counselors, participate in regional and statewide groups that share current research relevant to their fields of study. The DRS initiative on for individual placement and support services for persons with mental illness involves sharing research findings in a structured way with staff.

Training Technology. As noted above, a major emphasis in DRS has been the effort to obtain up-to-date interactive technology to facilitate training events and limit time and expense associated with travelling to training events. DRS has made use of an RSA quality grant to purchase video equipment, laptop computers and microphones to establish the capability for two-way interactive video in all offices across the state. Testing of the technology has been successful and training events will be scheduled soon using the equipment. DRS has also worked with contractors to develop online training modules in key areas of VR casework. The idea is that counselors will be able to take training on key topics and improve their knowledge of important concepts directly from their office computer. DRS has also worked to implement standard webinar training events with visual presentation of materials along with spoken narration. Real time captioning is available as needed as an accommodation for webinar users. The staff being trained can interact with the presenter by responding to questions ("polling") and by texting in questions. All webinar training events are followed up with an online participant survey that provides feedback on the training. DRS has used this methodology for webinars with over 2,000 participants in the last three years. Staff response to webinar technology for training has been very positive and DRS anticipates utilizing this format more often in the future.

5. Personnel to Address Individual Communication Needs

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

Communication with Diverse Populations DRS maintains rehabilitation counseling staff with expertise in communicating with diverse populations. A group of Rehabilitation Counselors for the Deaf (RCDs) are employed throughout the state. These individuals are fluent in sign language and conversant with deaf culture and provide the full range of vocational rehabilitation services to individuals who are deaf. The Bureau of Blind Services employs rehabilitation counselors and rehabilitation instructors who are professionally qualified to provide rehabilitation services to individuals who are blind or visually impaired. DRS strongly encourages the use of Braille as part of training for individuals who are blind. In addition, rehabilitation counselors and rehabilitation case coordinators are employed who are qualified to communicate with individuals whose primary language is Spanish. Staff are tested in order to qualify for bilingual positions. DRS also works with individuals whose primary language is one other than English, Spanish or sign language. While the numbers of such individuals is relatively small, it is equally important to be able to communicate effectively with them about their rehabilitation needs. The Illinois Department of Human Services maintains a computerized resource directory, which includes information on translation services for a variety of languages, including

Polish, Vietnamese and Arabic among others. DRS counselors can link with these resources to provide translation services. DRS has also piloted the use of a telephone-based translation service which can provide instant translations in over 100 languages and which requires only the use of two telephones. When professional translators are not available, DRS works with family members or volunteer translators from community or religious organizations who can assist the individual.

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

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

Coordination of the CSPD and Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Relationship to IDEA: DRS staff provide services annually to thousands of young people with disabilities, most of whom receive services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Approximately 10,000 young people participate in the Secondary Transitional Experience Program (STEP), which provides work experience during the high school years. The Next Steps program provides advocacy training to parents of students with disabilities. Part of the Next Steps training program includes providing information on the importance of transition planning. DRS staff who work with high school students participate in training offered by the Illinois State Board of Education and its Transition Systems Change project. DRS maintains an administrative liaison position with the State Board to facilitate communication about transition issues, including available training options. Also, DRS has staff who serve on the Education of Students with Disabilities Advisory Committee. There is no direct connection between DRS training efforts and the personnel development plan under IDEA. DRS staff are closely involved in the statewide network of Transition Planning Councils (TPCs), which consist of rehabilitation and education professionals, as well as employers and school administrators. The purpose of the TPCs is to facilitate transition from school to work and to identify local issues that affect transition. DRS staff are involved with the schools in their communities and frequently attend training events sponsored by schools.

j. Statewide Assessment

(Formerly known as Attachment 4.11(a)).

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

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

Needs Assessment Framework. In the current program year DRS has worked closely with the State Rehabilitation Council to establish a needs assessment framework that will be utilized in the coming years to regularly collect key data that will inform DRS program decisions. An online needs assessment survey with separate transition and adult services components was developed jointly by DRS and the SRC in last 2017. Data from this survey have not yet been analyzed. DRS has agreed to work with the Council on other needs assessment activities, including focus groups and community forums as part of a coordinated effort.

DRS and the SRC have worked together on other key data gathering projects in PY2017. These included: an employee engagement survey; a customer satisfaction survey; and a survey of community rehabilitation program agencies. In addition, both parties participated in a strategic planning forum in the fall of 2017 to focus on joint efforts that will benefit people with disabilities in the state.

Data obtained in these surveys were generally similar to previous efforts by DRS and the Council in prior years. The overall level of customer satisfaction with DRS remained more or less unchanged at around 80 percent, with about 63 percent giving DRS services high quality ratings (excellent or very good). About 76 percent of customers said that they would recommend DRS services to a friend, a drop from figures obtained in previous surveys. VR counselors were rated as usually available by 86 percent of respondents, and 76 percent said that participation in DRS services contributed to an improvement in their quality of life. There was some uncertainty expressed about whether VR counselors consistently provided information on the Client Assistance Program to new customers. In open-ended comments, some respondents expressed concern that VR staff do not consistently respond quickly to requests for information.

The community provider survey indicated a generally strong relationship between DRS and the provider community, with 46 percent indicating that their working experience was very positive or outstanding. There was some concern expressed about timely responses to provider questions as well as concerns about the degree to which policies are implemented consistently across the state. For example, only 30 percent of providers had positive ratings for the degree to which DRS staff return paperwork in a timely fashion. However, 51 percent of providers gave DRS positive (very good or outstanding) ratings for accepting input and ideas from provider agencies, while 63 percent of respondents gave positive ratings for their relationship with VR counselors. Respondents were least satisfied with the quality of referrals received from DRS (31 percent positive ratings) and with responsiveness in handling referrals (30 percent). Thus, while the overall relationship with providers is positive, there are specific changes that need to be addressed by DRS management.

Stakeholder Representation

DRS has two representative groups of stakeholders: The Facility Advisory Committee, consisting of representatives of community rehabilitation program agencies; and the STEP Advisory Committee, consisting of representatives of school districts that provider pre-employment transition services to students under third-party cooperative agreements with DRS. These groups each meet regularly with DRS senior managers to identify program concerns and express needs that have been identified in their local communities. In the Facility group considerable discussion has gone into the need to change the nature of supported employment contracts from an hourly basis to a performance basis. FAC representatives participated in development of the new program model and advised on the fiscal payment structure. The FAC serves as a primary source of information on the need for supported employment services for individuals with most significant disabilities.

The STEP committee has served as an important source of input on the need for expansion of pre-employment transition services in various areas of the state. In the last two years several new STEP contracts have been developed with local school districts through input provided through this mechanism. The STEP group reports regularly on issues and concerns relating to working with employers to establish work-based learning experiences for students.

Statistical Analysis

The most fundamental statistic relating to service needs is the lack of population growth in Illinois. The population has dropped by 80,415 or 0.62 percent from 2014 to 2017, ranking third lowest in the nation during that time period. To some extent Illinois is experiencing population change similar to other states in that the number of residents in rural areas is declining while the population of older residents is growing. Population change varies greatly by race and ethnicity. The white, non-Hispanic population dropped by 3.4 percent between 2010 and 2016, a reduction of nearly 270,000 people. The African American population was generally unchanged in that time period, increasing by less than one percent. The Latino population increased by 7.3 percent in that time period, roughly by 150,000 people. The largest increase was for the Asian population, which grew by 20 percent or about 117,000 people. The category of individuals identifying themselves as belong to two or more racial categories declined by 16 percent or around 45,000 individuals.

The impact of an aging population is seen in the relative changes for various age groupings from 2013 to 2017 (data from the Disability Statistics Compendium). The population under age five declined by 5.5 percent, and within that group the number with a reported disability decreased by 29 percent. The school age population (age 5 to 17) dropped by 4.2 percent, with a decline of 9.6 percent in the number of school age children with a reported disability. It should be noted, though, that the number of students reported as receiving special education services (the state child count) increased by one percent during that time period. The working age population (age 18 to 64) declined by 1.4 percent, with the number reporting a disability increasing slightly by 0.7 percent. However, the number of working age persons with a disability who were employed increased by 7.7 percent between 2013 and 2017. The population age 65 and older increased by 10.7 percent during that time period, and the number of older individuals reporting a disability increased by 6.9 percent.

Special Education Data

Overall the population covered in the state child count data for age 6 to 21 declined by 3.7 percent from the fall of 2011 to the fall of 2015, the most recent data available. There are 2,725,494 individuals in the age group,

with 258,906 receiving special education services. While the overall population declined, the number receiving services rose by 2,893 or 1.1 percent in that time period.

The largest category of students is listed as having a specific learning disability, with 103,534 students in that group. From 2011 to 2015 the number in the SLD category declined by 4.4 percent. The next largest category is speech and language impairment with 37,399 students, a category which declined by 15.7 percent in this time period.

Large percentage increases were observed for students in the other health impairment category, which grew by 24.3 percent to 33,997 students. The number of students in the autism category increased by 30.6 percent to 21,077 students. The number of students classified as having a developmental delay grew by 55.9 percent to 18,301 students. Students listed as having multiple disabilities increased by 21 percent to 2,458 individuals.

In addition to the specific learning disability and speech and language impairment categories noted above, decreases were observed for students in the intellectual disability category, by 10 percent to 16,867 students and in the orthopedic impairment category by 24.3 percent to 1,123 total students. The number of students served in a regular classroom environment grew by 2.3 percent to 204,191 students or 78.9 percent of all students in special education.

It is uncertain whether these changes represent a change in the distribution of disability in the school age population or a change in utilization in disability categories to more closely reflect the service needs of the students being classified. For purposes of future VR service needs, it is important to note that four categories of students likely to be classified as having a most significant disability are intellectual disability, other health impairment, autism, and multiple disabilities. Between 2011 and 2015 the number of students in these categories increased by 10,126 or 15.8 percent to a total of 74,399 students. So while the overall number of students in special education in Illinois has remained flat in the most recent four year comparison, the number of greatest concern to VR has shown a significant increase.

B. who are minorities;

Data from the Disability Compendium shows that 35.7 percent of all working age persons in Illinois with disabilities are employed. However, there is considerable variability by race in terms of likelihood of employment. Among white working age persons with disabilities 38.5 percent are employed, while 34.7 percent working age Latinos with disabilities are employed and 44.3 percent of working age Asians with disabilities. However, only 24.6 percent of working age African Americans with disabilities report being employed, a clear disparity compared to other groups. As the ongoing DRS needs assessment process unfolds consideration will be given to identifying racial disparities and addressing them through program initiatives.

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

Needs of Individuals Who Have Been Unserved or Underserved by the VR Program DRS maintains an ongoing effort to identify and serve deaf-blind individuals. This effort is coordinated by the DRS deaf services unit with the assistance of the Bureau of Blind Services. DRS works with audiologist and vision professionals to develop referrals for VR services. In the last four years the number of deaf-blind individuals served at the Chicago training facility for the blind has grown significantly, as has the overall number of deaf-blind persons served in VR. While the overall number of deaf-blind individuals remains small, DRS believes that it will continue to increase the proportion of those individuals who receive VR services through its outreach efforts.

DRS is involved in an ongoing effort to implement a system of individual placement services (IPS) programs, formerly known as evidence-based supported employment programs, for individuals with serious mental illness. The IPS model is designed to provide employment services that are tailored to the specific needs of this population, which have traditionally been underserved by VR programs nationally. To further the DRS commitment to the IPS model, DRS intends to continue gradual expansion of IPS services as funding allows. DRS is actively engaged through its transition services in working with individuals with autism and autism spectrum disorder. In the last decade the number of students in special education with these diagnoses has grown significantly, which has led to a gradual increase of autism cases in the DRS VR program. DRS works

with advocacy groups and service providing agencies to identify service options and job placement strategies that will meet the needs of this group.

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

DRS has cooperated extensively with the state Title I agency around disability initiatives from that agency funded by the Dept. of Labor. This involves local area cooperation, and in many cases joint enrollment of individuals in Title I and VR services. The extent to which this model will be expanded beyond these pilot areas is currently unknown, but to date the level of cooperation has been very helpful in serving the individuals identified. Regional and local planning efforts in the workforce system have included specific components addressing how each one stop center will serve individuals with disabilities and how their needs will be accommodated.

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

While additional needs assessment data have yet to be analyzed, DRS believes it has an accurate picture of transition and pre-employment transition needs for students with disabilities. This is based on prior needs assessment surveys and data gathered from transition age students in the 2017 VR customer satisfaction survey. As noted above, DRS relies on ongoing relationships with STEP schools as an information source, expanding services when additional needs are identified. DRS also worked with the Illinois Network of Centers for Independent Living to respond to needs identified by their member agencies. In the current program year DRS has contracted with eight CILs to provide pre-employment transition services to students with disabilities, focusing on self-advocacy training as well as job readiness training, particularly in the area of independent living skills training. DRS also developed contracts with community rehabilitation programs to provide work-based learning experiences to students with disabilities in the Chicago area. These projects are being evaluated to determine whether additional projects should be established elsewhere in the state.

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

DRS believes that the system of community rehabilitation programs in the state is adequate to meet the needs of vocational rehabilitation program customers. Very few comments were made in the online needs assessment conducted in FY2013 regarding a need to establish or expand the CRP system. Some suggestions were made to expand non-vocational day habilitation programs, but that is not a service option appropriate for VR funding. DRS meets regularly with a statewide committee of CRP representatives (the Facility Advisory Council) to improve services provided by CRPs in Illinois.

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

As noted above the results of the most recent needs assessment survey are pending. DRS believes that gradual expansion of pre-employment transition services is appropriate, particularly in areas where services are limited and in high-need areas such as the city of Chicago. The efforts described above to expand beyond the STEP program model and incorporate centers for independent living and community rehabilitation programs into the pre-employment transition services system are indicators that DRS is making serious attempts to identify and meet these service needs.

k. Annual Estimates

(Formerly known as Attachment 4.11(b)). Describe:

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

To estimate the number of possibly eligible individuals in the State DRS uses disability data from the U.S. Census Bureau as compiled in the Disability Statistics Compendium. Using the most recent Census data on disability prevalence and the most recent estimate of the Illinois population, DRS estimates that there are

679,900 individuals with disabilities in the state aged 16 to 64 who are possibly eligible for the VR program. Of that number, DRS estimates that there are 530,400 who would qualify for services under the DRS order of selection policy, and 149,000 who would not be likely to meet the State's order of selection policy. In addition, DRS estimates that there are 77,200 individuals with disabilities who are possibly eligible for VR services under Title VI, Part B.

Of the 530,400 likely to qualify under the policy, DRS estimates that there are 183,000 who would be in the most significant disability category, 122,400 who would be in the very significant disability category, and 224,500 that would be in the significant disability category.

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

A. The VR Program;

In the VR program DRS estimates that 41,500 individuals will be served in PY2018 and that 43,000 individuals will be served in PY2019.

B. The Supported Employment Program; and

In the supported employment program, DRS estimates that 125 individuals, all in the most significant disability category will be served in PY2018 and 120 individuals in PY2019.

C. each priority category, if under an order of selection;

In the VR program DRS estimates that 21,900 individuals in the most significant disability category will be served in PY2018, along with 15,775 individuals in the very significant disability category and 3,825 individuals in the significant disability category. No services will be provided to individuals in the category of individual with a disability. For PY2019, DRS estimates that 22,100 individuals in the most significant disability category will be served, along with 16,500 in the very significant disability category and 4,400 in the significant disability category for a total of 43,000 persons served. No services will be provided to individuals in the category of individual with a disability.

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

DRS estimates that there are possibly 149,000 individuals who would be eligible for VR services but not be in an open category of the order of selection policy.

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

For PY2018 DRS estimates that \$112,000,000 federal VR funds will be available, along with \$30,350,000 in non-federal funds for a total program budget of \$142,350,000. With an estimated 41,500 individuals to be served this equals \$3,430 in total funds per person served, with \$2,699 in federal funds and \$731 in non-federal funds.

For the most significant disability category the average total cost is expected to be \$3,760, with \$2,959 in federal funds and \$802 in non-federal funds. Total spending for the most significant disability category is estimated to be \$82,350,000, where \$64,792,980 are federal funds and \$17,557,020 are non-federal funds.

For the very significant disability category the average total cost is expected to be \$3,106, with \$2,444 in federal funds and \$662 in non-federal funds. Total spending for the very significant disability category is estimated to be \$49,000,000, where \$38,553,200 are federal funds and \$10,446,800 are non-federal funds.

For the significant disability category, the average total cost is expected to be \$2,876, with \$2,263 in federal funds and \$613 in non-federal funds. Total spending for the significant disability category is estimated to be \$11,000,000, where \$8,654,800 are federal funds and \$2,345,200 are non-federal funds.

No services will be provided to individuals in the category of individual with a disability and no funds will be expended

For PY2019 DRS estimates that \$112,000,000 federal VR funds will be available, along with \$30,350,000 in non-federal funds for a total program budget of \$142,350,000. With an estimated 43,000 individuals to be served this equals \$3,310 in total funds per person served, with \$2,604 in federal funds and \$706 in non-federal funds.

For the most significant disability category the average total cost is expected to be \$3,726, with \$2,932 in federal funds and \$794 in non-federal funds. Total spending for the most significant disability category is estimated to be \$82,350,000, where \$64,792,980 are federal funds and \$17,557,020 are non-federal funds.

For the very significant disability category the average total cost is expected to be \$2,970, with \$2,337 in federal funds and \$633 in non-federal funds. Total spending for the very significant disability category is estimated to be \$49,000,000, where \$38,553,200 are federal funds and \$10,446,800 are non-federal funds.

For the significant disability category, the average total cost is expected to be \$2,500, with \$1,967 in federal funds and \$533 in non-federal funds. Total spending for the significant disability category is estimated to be \$11,000,000, where \$8,654,800 are federal funds and \$2,345,200 are non-federal funds.

No services will be provided to individuals in the category of individual with a disability and no funds will be expended

I. State Goals and Priorities

The designated State unit must:

1. Identify if the goals and priorities were jointly developed

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

The goals and priorities in this Plan were jointly developed and agreed to by DRS and the State Rehabilitation Council. Any revisions to the goals and priorities were jointly reviewed and agreed to by DRS and the SRC.

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

Goal 1: Competitive Integrated Employment Outcomes DRS has revised the goals in this section based on current performance levels. DRS plans to increase the number of competitive integrated employment outcomes achieved each year, beginning with 5,600 in PY2017, then 5,950 in PY2018 and 6,300 in PY2019.

Goal 2: Median Earnings Two Quarters After Program Exit The best estimate of current performance is median quarterly earnings of \$2,343. DRS plans to increase the median earnings achieved by individuals exiting the VR program to \$2,460 in PY2016, \$2,595 in PY2017, \$2,750 in PY2018 and \$2,930 in PY2019.

Goal 3: Employment Retention at Two Quarters After Program Exit The best estimate of current performance is 49.1 percent for all persons exiting the VR program. DRS plans to increase the employment retention percentage to 52.5 in PY2016, 55.0 in PY2017, 57.5 in PY2018 and 60.0 in PY2019.

Goal 4: Employment Retention at Four Quarters After Program Exit The best estimate of current performance is 45.7 percent for all persons exiting the VR program. DRS plans to increase the employment retention percentage to 48.0 in PY2016, 50.0 in PY2017, 52.5 in PY2018 and 55.0 in PY2019.

Goal 5: Educational Achievement

This measure includes all program participants who earn a secondary diploma, post-secondary degree or other credential while participating in the program of within one year after program exit. The best estimate of current performance is 5,050 individuals meeting this criterion, with 4,250 completing a secondary diploma, 600 earning a post-secondary degree and 200 earning some other type of credential. DRS plans to increase the number of people making educational achievements to 5,260 in PY2016, 5,470 in PY2017, 5,680 in PY2018 and 5,900 in PY2019.

Goal 6: Post Secondary Training Skill Gains This measure includes all program participants who are engaged in post secondary training leading to a degree or credential and who are making measurable skills gains during the program year. The best estimate of current performance is 2,500 individuals meeting this criterion. DRS

plans to increase the number of people achieving measurable skills gains in postsecondary training to 2,650 in PY2016, 2,800 in PY2017, 2,950 in PY2018 and 3,150 in PY2019.

Goal 7: Students with Disabilities Exiting Into Postsecondary Training This is a measure of the number of students with disabilities who graduate from high school and enter post-secondary training programs within the first year after leaving school. The best estimate of current performance is that about 4,000 students exit DRS STEP services each year and about 700 enter post-secondary training. DRS plans to increase the number of students participating in post-secondary training to 750 in PY2016, 825 in PY2017, 900 in PY2018 and 1,000 in PY2019.

Goal 8: Establish a Business Engagement Team within DRS In PY2016 DRS plans to establish a business engagement team, consisting of employment resource specialists, rehabilitation counselors and field office supervisors. The team will establish new relationships with at least 20 employers and achieve 50 employment outcomes for VR customers at those businesses. DRS will work in conjunction with the Job Driven VR Technical Assistance Center to develop a business engagement strategy and provide training to participating staff to increase the effectiveness of their engagement with employers. This goal has been extended for the next two program years, with 50 new business engagements and 100 employment outcomes anticipated in PY2018 and 65 new business engagements and 125 employment outcomes in PY2019.

Goal 9: Continue Expansion of Innovative Program Options In PY2018 and PY2019 DRS plans to continue expansion of several innovative program options which have been evaluated following a set of pilot projects. These include customized employment services, individual placement and support (IPS) services for diverse populations, and Project Search sites. Evaluation of the pilot projects suggests that the majority of the projects have performed at a level sufficient to justify ongoing support through DRS VR funds.

Goal 10: Expand Performance Funding DRS has converted many of its community contracts to a performance basis in the last four years. DRS plans to continue to process of converting contracts for job placement and supported employment to a performance basis, achieving a level of 90 percent performance-based contracts with community vendors in PY2018 and 95 percent in PY2019.

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

Goals and priorities contained in this Plan are based on an analysis of DRS performance on program standards, as well as other available information on the operation and effectiveness of the VR program, including reports from the SRC and findings and recommendations from monitoring activities conducted by RSA under Section 107 of the Act. In addition, the goals and priorities reflect the most recently completed statewide needs assessment and are based on the performance accountability measures of section 116 of WIOA.

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

Goals and priorities contained in this Plan are based on an analysis of DRS performance on program standards, as well as other available information on the operation and effectiveness of the VR program, including reports from the SRC and findings and recommendations from monitoring activities conducted by RSA under Section 107 of the Act. The goals and priorities are based on the most recently completed statewide needs assessment.

B. the State's performance under the performance accountability measures of section 116 of WIOA; and

Goals and priorities contained in this Plan are based on an analysis of DRS performance on program standards, as well as other available information on the operation and effectiveness of the VR program, including reports from the SRC and findings and recommendations from monitoring activities conducted by RSA under Section 107 of the Act. The goals and priorities are based on the performance accountability measures of section 116 of WIOA.

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

Goals and priorities contained in this Plan are based on an analysis of DRS performance on program standards, as well as other available information on the operation and effectiveness of the VR program, including reports

from the SRC and findings and recommendations from monitoring activities conducted by RSA under Section 107 of the Act.

m. Order of Selection

Describe:

1. Whether the designated State unit will implement and order of selection. If so, describe:

A. The order to be followed in selecting eligible individuals to be provided VR services.

The priority of categories to receive VR services under the DRS order of selection policy are:

1. Individuals determined to have the most significant disabilities;
2. Individuals determined to have very significant disabilities;
3. Individuals determined to have significant disabilities; and
4. Individuals determined to have disabilities.

For PY2018 and PY2019 the categories of most significant disability, very significant disability and significant disability will be open to services, unless a determination is made by the DRS Director that circumstances require a change in the categories open to service.

The priority categories established under this rule are based solely on the definition of “individual with a significant disability” defined in the Rehabilitation Act (section 7 (21) (A)) and in regulations (34CFR361.36(d)(2) and 34CFR361.5(b)(31)).

Categories of Eligible Individuals

a) Pursuant to the provisions of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended (29 USC 701 et seq.), DHS–DRS has established the following Order of Selection for the priority of provision of services to eligible individuals which counselors must follow when purchasing services for customers:

- 1) those individuals determined to have the most significant disabilities;
- 2) those individuals determined to have very significant disabilities;
- 3) those individuals determined to have significant disabilities; and
- 4) individuals determined to have disabilities.

b) For the purposes of administering services under the order of selection, the Director of DHS–DRS will determine at the beginning of each fiscal year, or more often as necessary, which of the categories under subsection (a) will be open for service.

c) Eligible individuals in a closed category under subsection (a) may choose to be placed on a waiting list for services.

Criteria for Disability, Significant Disability, Very Significant Disability and Most Significant Disability

Documentation of the determination that an individual has a most significant disability, a very significant disability, a significant disability or a disability must be in the individual’s VR case file, as well as documentation concerning the evaluation of his or her rehabilitation potential.

a) Prior to determining the significance of an individual’s disability, it must be determined that he or she:

1) has a disability, or a combination of disabilities, that causes a substantial physical or mental impairment that is similar, but not limited to, the following list of disabilities:

- A) amputation,
- B) arthritis,

- C) autism,
- D) blindness,
- E) burn injury,
- F) cancer,
- G) cerebral palsy,
- H) cystic fibrosis,
- I) deafness,
- J) head injury,
- K) heart disease,
- L) hemiplegia,
- M) hemophilia,
- N) respiratory or pulmonary dysfunction,
- O) intellectual disability,
- P) mental illness,
- Q) multiple sclerosis,
- R) muscular dystrophy,
- S) musculo–skeletal disorders,
- T) neurological disorders (including stroke and epilepsy),
- U) paraplegia,
- V) quadriplegia (and other spinal cord conditions),
- W) sickle cell anemia,
- X) specific learning disabilities, or
- Y) end stage renal failure disease;

2) has a disability, or a combination of disabilities, that seriously limits his or her functional capacities, as listed in Section 553.150 of this Part; and

3) requires VR services over an extended period of time.

b) If an individual meets the requirements of Section 553.140(a), then the following criteria must be met to determine the significance of his or her disability:

1) To be considered an individual with a most significant disability, he or she must be an individual who has a disability that seriously limits three or more of his or her functional capacities and who requires multiple VR services over an extended period of time.

2) To be considered an individual with a very significant disability, he or she must have a disability that seriously limits two of his or her functional capacities and must require multiple VR services over an extended period of time.

3) To be considered an individual with a significant disability, he or she must have a disability that seriously limits one of his or her functional capacities and must require multiple VR services over an extended period of time.

4) To be considered an individual with a disability, he or she must have a disability that results in an impediment to employment, but which does not seriously limit his or her functional capacities.

c) An individual who has been determined eligible for disability benefits pursuant to Title II (SSDI) or Title XVI (SSI) of the Social Security Act is considered to be presumed eligible for VR services and an individual with a significant disability, unless the analysis of his or her functional limitations and service needs, as described above, place the individual into a higher category of the order of selection.

Determination of Serious Limitation to Functional Capacities

a) For the purpose of determination of the degree of significance of disability, functional capacities shall include:

1. mobility – the physical ability of an individual to move from place to place and move the body into certain positions. This includes such activities as: walking, climbing, kneeling, stooping, sitting, standing, and similar activities;
2. self-care – the ability of an individual to perform activities related to his or her health and hygiene. This includes such activities as: grooming, bathing, eating, housekeeping, medical management, and money management;
3. self-direction – the ability of an individual to organize, control and regulate his or her own personal, social, and work life. This includes such activities as: maintaining schedules and routines, following directions and established rules, organizing activities for oneself, and adjusting to changing circumstances;
4. work skills – the ability of an individual to demonstrate skills necessary to perform jobs that exist in the current employment market, regardless of demand for the particular occupation or the individual's prior work experience. This includes such activities as: learning and maintaining work skills, cooperating with others in a work setting, using adequate decision making and problem-solving skills, and using academic skills commonly required in the workplace;
5. work tolerance – the ability of an individual to consistently and adequately perform a job based on the physical, emotional, environmental, and psychological demands of a specific work environment. This includes such activities as: maintaining performance on the job regardless of changes in environment such as cold and heat, demonstrating the strength and endurance to perform the job in question, and working the schedule typical of other employees in the same job;
6. interpersonal skills – the ability of an individual to establish and maintain appropriate relationships with other individuals in the work place. This includes such activities as: engaging in necessary work-related communications, demonstrating behavior that is appropriate and acceptable in the work environment, cooperating with others in a team setting, and showing understanding and tact in dealing with others; and
7. communication – the ability to convey and receive information efficiently and effectively. This includes such activities as: hearing and understanding ordinary spoken language; making one's self understood in ordinary conversation; writing or printing short notes and communications; and reading and correctly interpreting short notes, signs, and instructions.

b) A serious limitation to a functional capacity shall exist when the rehabilitation counselor determines that the customer, because of his or her disability, has functional limitations in performing the major components of the activity or activities listed in subsections (a)(1) through (7) or needs accommodation to perform the activity.

c) The rehabilitation counselor shall use the criteria of consistency and substantiality when evaluating the degree of limitation to functional capacity. Consistency means that the individual's disability always or almost always limits the individual's functioning. Substantiality means the individual's disability has a major, significant impact on functioning and that the individual cannot perform the activity or finds it very difficult to perform the activity.

B. The justification for the order.

Illinois DRS has operated under an order of selection since 1979. Illinois changed its order of selection policy in April 2013. The overall purpose of the policy is to reflect the priorities of the agency and provide for an equitable distribution of resources to individuals with most significant disabilities.

C. The service and outcome goals.

In PY2018 DRS expects to serve 41,500 individuals. It is expected that the total number will be distributed as follows: persons with a most significant disability: 21,900; persons with a very significant disability: 15,775; and persons with a significant disability: 3,825.

For PY2018 DRS expects to achieve 5,950 rehabilitated closures. It is expected that the total number will be distributed as follows: persons with a most significant disability: 2,735; persons with a very significant disability: 2,620; and persons with a significant disability: 595.

In PY2019 DRS expects to serve 43,000 individuals. It is expected that the total number will be distributed as follows: persons with a most significant disability: 22,100; persons with a very significant disability: 16,500; and persons with a significant disability: 4,400.

For PY2019 DRS expects to achieve 6,300 rehabilitated closures. It is expected that the total number will be distributed as follows: persons with a most significant disability: 2,900; persons with a very significant disability: 2,775; and persons with a significant disability: 625.

D. The time within which these goals may be achieved for individuals in each priority category within the order.

The time period for the goals described above includes Program Year 2018, beginning July 1, 2018 and ending June 30, 2019 and Program Year 2019, beginning July 1, 2019 and ending June 30, 2020.

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

The DRS order of selection policy establishes priority for individuals with a most significant disability. Presently this is one of three categories of the order of selection policy now open for service. Financial estimates allow for services to individuals in all three categories to take place through PY2018 and PY2019. Consistent with longstanding policy, if financial circumstances change, other categories of the order of selection policy will be closed to services until only the most significant category remains open, at which time all new cases will be individuals in that category. It is not anticipated that such financial circumstances will arise as no similar situation has taken place in more than a decade. However, the policy in place is sufficient to ensure that individuals in the most significant disability category will have priority going forward in such an event.

2. If the designated State unit has elected to serve eligible individuals, regardless of any established order of selection, who require specific services or equipment to maintain employment.

DRS does not plan to implement an exemption to the order of selection process based on specific service needs in order to retain employment.

n. Goals and Plans for Distribution of title VI Funds.

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

While funding related to Title VI-B is uncertain at present, DRS provides the following projections for use of those funds. For PY2018, the Supported Employment Program (SEP) has set forth the following goals using Title VI, Part B funds. 1. Serve customers recently placed into supported employment in a manner consistent with federal regulations, with an emphasis on moving as many individuals as possible into natural supports at the conclusion of ongoing support services. 2. Continue to expand the scope of those who receive services to include persons who are deaf-blind, persons with traumatic brain injuries, persons who are mentally ill, persons with significant hearing impairments and other persons with the most significant disabilities. 3. Develop new mechanisms for funding paid extended services, including cooperative agreements with other state agencies and local units of government. 4. Evaluate the most effective means of achieving employment outcomes for individuals traditionally served in supported employment services. 5. Ensure that no less than 50 percent of the Title VI Part B grant funds are used for long-term support services to youth with disabilities. For PY2018, DRS will serve and employ 125 persons in supported employment utilizing Title VI Part B funds.

In the most recent state fiscal year, DRS served 114 individuals in supported employment using Title VI Part B funds and an additional 1,146 using other funds. For PY2019 DRS will serve and employ 115 individuals in supported employment utilizing Title VI Part B funds.

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

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

DRS has developed a contract monitoring mechanism to ensure that Title VI Part B funds are available to youth with disabilities and that at least 50 percent of grant funds are available to individuals in that category. In addition, a reporting system has been developed to ensure that no individual participates in services funded with Title VI part B funds for longer than 48 months.

Activities to be carried out for individuals receiving extended services include provision of ongoing support services at the job site or at another location, facilitation of natural supports at the job site, and regular contact with employers and other individuals supporting the worker in order to reinforce and stabilize the job placement. Other supports will be made available as needed, including assistive technology where appropriate.

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

DRS has also worked with the state developmental disabilities agency and the state mental health agency to explore funding options for youth with the most significant disabilities who may exhaust support services utilizing Title VI Part B funds. It is expected that most individuals in that category will be eligible for services funded through one of the Medicaid waivers operated by those agencies. The Illinois Employment First effort is a mechanism to support additional cooperation between VR funded and Medicaid waiver funded employment programs for people with most significant disabilities. DRS and the state agency serving individuals with intellectual disabilities have agreed in principle to facilitate referrals of individuals requiring longer term paid supports. DRS is also committed to continuing expansion of customized employment services as an option for youth with the most significant disabilities. DRS hopes to be able to build on experience from recent pilot projects for customized employment for individuals with intellectual disabilities. Ongoing discussions with the state developmental disabilities agency on include exploring options for customized employment projects.

o. State's Strategies

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

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

DRS is pursuing several strategies to continually increase the number of employment outcomes, including: development of a business engagement strategy; establishment of stronger partnerships with local workforce boards; increasing business partnerships through the NET and other approaches; providing job placement training to all VR counselors; continuing an emphasis on establishing performance based contracts with community provider agencies; providing personal organization training to VR counselors; establishing outreach efforts to increase referrals to the VR program; and implementation of customized employment methodologies. DRS is following three main strategies to increase median earnings. The first is to increase the number of individuals enrolled in university and community college programs. These individuals have higher earnings than those with less education.

A second strategy is to identify individuals with work experience who may benefit from return-to-work services through the VR program. DRS has one community provider contract that focuses on return-to-work and it has higher than average earnings for the individuals it serves. The third strategy is expanded participation in the CSAVR Talent Acquisition Portal (TAP).

Since 2016 the number of postsecondary students served by DRS has increased by 40 percent. In addition to supporting degree programs, DRS will work with local workforce partners to ensure that certificate programs relating to expanding sectors are a focus for individuals seeking post-secondary vocational training. DRS intends to conduct outreach to rehabilitation hospitals, orthopedic clinics, physical therapy clinics and other professionals who are likely to be in contact with individuals who have disabilities and a work history but who are currently not working. DRS will work with the communications office to develop materials that will effectively communicate a message about how the VR program can benefit the individuals served by these professionals.

The Talent Acquisition Portal (TAP) is focused on individuals with work experience who are seeking employment with larger, corporate-style employers who have structured hiring processes and make use of online systems to identify job candidates. DRS staff have worked closely with the national TAP development team and currently have over 500 customers who have enrolled in the system. DRS is pursuing a number of activities relating to transition services.

DRS is establishing contracts with community agencies to conduct outreach activities to identify minority individuals who may benefit from VR services. In addition, DRS continues to develop its relationship with the Chicago Public Schools, the third largest school district in the United States. DRS anticipates that enrollment, particularly of minority youth, will be greatly increased through these efforts. A recent focus of activity has been on working with community rehabilitation agencies to identify work-based learning opportunities for CPS students. This has been an aspect of transition services in Chicago that was developing at a slow rate and it was determined that additional resources were needed.

DRS intends to pursue opportunities to work with local workforce boards to increase participation of youth with disabilities in work-based learning experiences targeted at out-of-school youth. There is a substantial overlap between the DRS population of youth with disabilities and the Title I population defined as out-of-school youth. Employer engagement efforts directed at creation of work-based learning experiences for young people should benefit those in both service categories to the greatest extent possible.

DRS has three approaches to expanding the number of business partnerships. The first is continuation of participation in the National Employment Team (the NET), an effort coordinated by the national CSAVR team. The employers targeted through this effort are national or multi-state employers who are looking to use VR agencies as a resource in identifying potential job candidates. The second approach is the creation of a business engagement team based on a business engagement strategy. DRS is working with the job driven VR technical assistance center in developing this strategy and training staff in its implementation. The businesses targeted in this approach will be those identified through the sector analysis conducted as part of the State's WIOA regional planning process. This will be coordinated with other workforce partner agencies through the integrated business services model adopted in Illinois. Finally, DRS will increase employer engagements through establishment of a workforce unit staffed by a team of business service consultants to be hired in PY2018.

DRS intends to continue development of innovative program options, including customized employment and individual placement and support (IPS) services. One strategy is continued involvement with national technical assistance resources, including subject matter experts made available through the DOL Vision Quest program. To date this has proven to be a valuable resource in that it provides objective analysis and recommendations affecting a number of state agencies serving people with disabilities. DRS is also continuing its cooperative relationship with the Psychiatric Research Center in developing and evaluating program expansion of IPS services to individuals with intellectual disabilities as well as to youth with serious mental illness.

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

DRS recognizes the importance of assistive technology services in meeting the needs of individuals with disabilities. It is the intention of DRS to provide a broad range of AT services at all stages of the rehabilitation process, and to make the services available on a statewide basis. Toward this end, DRS provides training to staff on AT services, both at the initial staff training and on an ongoing basis. DRS employs technology specialists and arranges for contractual staff to be available to work with VR counselors to identify customer

needs, locate AT providers, write plans and provide AT services. Staff are available to provide on-site consultation with VR counselors as well as on-site evaluation of customer needs. DRS also has a central office purchasing specialist that works one-on-one with VR counselors to arrange purchasing of AT equipment and maximize use of VR funds. DRS also works closely with the Illinois Assistive Technology Project (the state AT grant recipient) to educate people with disabilities about AT products and services as well as demonstrate products that may be of use to individuals with disabilities. DRS provided a large award of ARRA funds to enable IATP to upgrade and modernize assistive technology supporting its services. DRS initiated the loan to own program for distribution of assistive technology equipment in order to provide necessary devices to VR customers in a more timely fashion. This effort involves making larger purchases of frequently used assistive technology devices and transferring them to a customer as needed, rather than initiating a separate purchase for each individual. This has significantly reduced the amount of time required to deliver assistive technology equipment to customers, enabling them to move forward with their service plan sooner. The technology team is also working closely with rehabilitation instructors to identify AT solutions to promote competitive integrated employment for blind individuals who require extensive preparation for employment.

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

DRS recognizes that many groups do not have access to the VR program to the same degree as others. DRS has a number of strategies to address these needs and improve access.

Individuals with disabilities who are minorities are served by DRS at a rate that reflects their proportion of the state population. However, it is acknowledged that minority individuals with disabilities, including those with the most significant disabilities, face additional barriers to employment and access to the labor market. DRS works with community providers that have a strong connection to particular minority communities, including the African-American, Latino and Asian communities. Providers in these communities provide services in a culturally appropriate manner and have access to employment both within minority communities as well as in the general labor market. Recent expansion of contractual services with providers representing the Asian communities in the Chicago area have been particularly successful in increasing employment for that population. DRS also makes its services available to non-English speakers, either through employment of bilingual staff or through a translation service. In PY2017 DRS established new performance-based contracts with six community agencies across the state for outreach to minority communities.

DRS employs specialist staff for services to deaf-blind individuals, a low-incidence disability with a high need for vocational assistance. DRS specialists work in consultation with VR counselors to provide services to deaf-blind customers, including training and job placement. In recent years DRS has worked closely with Helen Keller National Center, the primary resource in the US for deaf-blind services. This has included staff training and presentations as well as utilizing HKNC expertise in designing training environments for deaf-blind individuals served by DRS. DRS is currently working with HKNC to develop support services for deaf-blind individuals to increase their opportunities for sustaining competitive integrate employment.

An assessment of staff training needs identified a strong need for training in the medical aspects of disability for VR counselors and supervisors. DRS has developed an arrangement with an external online training entity to provide training on medical aspects as well as other topics such as low-incidence disabilities of interest to rehabilitation counselors. DRS continues in its efforts to implement a system of individual placement and support services (IPS) programs, also known as evidence-based supported employment programs, for individuals with serious mental illness. The IPS model is designed to provide employment services that are tailored to the specific needs of this population, which have traditionally been underserved by VR programs nationally. This has been a major undertaking involving extensive cooperation with the DHS Division of Mental Health, community providers, and university consultants. A number of new agencies have received placement contracts from DRS and a special evaluation process is underway. Fidelity reviews have proven to be a very strong tool for improving and shaping IPS services at the service provider level.

4. The methods to be used to improve and expand VR services for students with disabilities, including the coordination of services designed to facilitate the transition of such students from school to

postsecondary life (including the receipt of VR services, postsecondary education, employment, and pre-employment transition services).

DRS is committed to improvement and expansion of services to students and youth with disabilities, building upon its existing strong level of support for that age group. For example, in the previous state fiscal year 58.1 percent of all persons served in the DRS VR program began receiving services prior to age 21, as were 44.9 percent of persons achieving a competitive employment outcome. Although this represents a high level of involvement, there is still room for improvement and achievement of greater levels of effectiveness. While a variety of pre-employment transition services are being provided through existing arrangements with third party providers, DRS has begun to pursue new options for pre-employment transition services outside the framework of the longstanding STEP effort. The business engagement process now underway is expected to identify internships and other learning experiences in growth sectors that would otherwise not be available to students with disabilities. In the current program year DRS established contracts with independent living centers to provide pre-employment transition services to students with disabilities, focusing on self-advocacy and independent living skills training.

DRS also believes that the ongoing expansion of its partnership with the Illinois Department of Commerce (the state Title I agency) will be beneficial for students and youth with disabilities. One component is the set of Disability Employment Initiative (DEI) projects funded by the U.S. Department of Labor. These projects involve a variety of approaches to providing work experiences to youth with disabilities. In addition, DRS and Commerce are partnering on a set of innovative youth projects that will involve joint funding of work experiences and other approaches to employment for youth with disabilities. At present the proportion of in school and out of school youth to be served is unknown, but it is anticipated that many of the individuals served will be students with disabilities.

DRS has initiated an effort to provide supported employment services, including customized employment services where appropriate, to students with disabilities prior to their exiting high school. While such referrals have taken place in the past, the number of referrals was small and the level of coordination between DRS, the school and the community provider agency were limited. Data from the DRS case management system is being utilized to identify students likely to benefit from supported employment services with sufficient time prior to school exit to facilitate mutual service provision. DRS is also expanding the number of contract arrangements with centers for independent living to provide counseling on self advocacy and development of independent living skills. A limited number of such arrangements has been in place for some time, but the new requirements under WIOA for these elements of pre-employment transition services has presented this category of service as an opportunity for expansion.

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

Illinois has a well-developed network of community rehabilitation programs across the state, as well as an active trade association for those organizations. DRS does not believe that new community rehabilitation programs need to be developed at this time. DRS remains in contact with these organizations through ongoing discussions with the Facility Advisory Council, which has a rotating membership of program directors, who meet regularly with DRS administrators. The program manager for contracts as well as the bureau chief for field services attends meetings. The VR Director is closely involved with discussions about CRP services, both with the trade association as well as individual CRP directors. DRS also has specific liaison relationships between VR counselors and community rehabilitation programs in their service area. In addition, DRS has project officers who monitor contracts with community rehabilitation programs and are very knowledgeable regarding the service capacity of the agencies and the needs of their customers. These organizational arrangements provide a high level of communication about service needs as they relate to community rehabilitation programs. DRS believes that community rehabilitation program agencies will continue to play an important part in the overall system of services in Illinois. DRS anticipates that the overall percentage of outcomes associated with CRPs will remain relatively stable, and that an increase in employment outcomes overall will mean an increase in employment outcomes associated with CRPs. While DRS continues to emphasize the need for counselors to pursue direct placements whenever possible, this does not mean a reduction in the number of outcomes associated with community provider agencies. Making effective use of

both state and private resources is the most certain way to continue to achieve quality results for DRS customers.

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

Increased median earnings. As noted elsewhere in this plan, DRS is following three main strategies to increase median earnings. The first is to increase the number of individuals enrolled in university and community college programs. These individuals have higher earnings than those with less education. A second strategy is to identify individuals with work experience who may benefit from return-to-work services through the VR program. DRS has one community provider contract that focuses on return-to-work and it has higher than average earnings for the individuals it serves. The third strategy is expanded participation in the CSAVR Talent Acquisition Portal (TAP). Each of these approaches is designed to identify individuals with higher expected earnings and gradually increase the proportion of these individuals served by DRS. Increased employment retention. Employment retention is a function of an appropriate match between the job and the individual, as well as a satisfactory level of earnings. Full time work is associated with a higher level of employment retention than is part time work. Consequently, DRS counselors are encouraged to emphasize full time work to the greatest extent possible for VR customers. Also, as noted above, DRS is attempting to increase enrollment in university and community college programs. Individuals with that level of education are much more likely to engage in full time employment.

Increased achievement of postsecondary education credentials. DRS is engaged in an effort to expand enrollment in university and community college programs. As this effort continues we should observe increased performance on the training-related WIOA measures. To improve data quality, DRS has made modifications to its online case management system. These changes will result in improved tracking of measurable skill gains and achievement of degrees and credentials by customers pursuing postsecondary training.

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

DRS will use a localized strategy for assisting other components of the workforce system in working effectively with persons with disabilities. As noted elsewhere, DRS staff serve as members of local workforce boards and have the capacity to focus attention on disability-related issues. Concerns specifically related to program accessibility will be addressed at the local level with support from the DRS central office rehabilitation technology unit. In addition to local staff resources DRS will reach out to independent living centers in responding to accessibility concerns. DRS will also work with its Title I agency to provide training to both DRS and local workforce staff on disability issues through webinars and other mechanisms. A key focus will be utilizing the Section 188 Disability Reference Guide developed by the DOL Office of Disability Employment Policy. This guide focuses on the concept of universal access and presents disability issues in the context of local workforce centers. DRS believes that training built around this resource will make a valuable contribution to program access for people with disabilities. DRS will also pursue a strategy of expanding methods of communication, including electronic and computer connections, between DRS offices and local workforce centers. DRS is working with the Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership to develop an electronic means of making referrals between DRS and workforce centers, increasing program efficiency and accountability while reducing barriers to participation for VR customers. In addition, state level plans are underway to enhance data sharing capability for all core workforce partners.

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

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

The goals established in this plan are consistent with DRS needs assessment activities described in this plan. The goals are closely aligned to WIOA reporting requirements, focusing on employment retention and earnings, essential objectives of the VR program. The strategies described in this plan are focused on making progress toward those goals. DRS believes that the focus on employment, earnings and educational achievement are consistent with the needs of people with disabilities throughout the state.

B. support innovation and expansion activities; and

DRS continues to solicit suggestions from staff and stakeholders about service needs that can be the focus of innovation and expansion activities. This process was used to develop new projects serving transition age youth, for example, as well as expansion of IPS services. To the extent possible, one-time funds were used as start-up funding for these new projects, with significantly lower performance expectations than for ongoing programs. These were considered to be pilot projects and were evaluated for effectiveness prior to conversion to standard contract formats. Projects which were consistent with agency priorities and which represented the possibility of long term benefit were selected for funding. These have focused on outreach to minority communities, services to transition age youth, and expansion of IPS programs. Efforts have been made to determine the likely course of the project after the initial start-up phase is concluded. A secondary effort has centered on effective marketing approaches in working with businesses and customers. DRS developed a short (1 minute 40 seconds) online video which is targeted at a general audience and which describes a variety of VR services and emphasizes options for making a referral to the DRS program. DRS believes this presentation is consistent with current communication patterns and presents a great opportunity for increasing referrals to the program. DRS has also expanded its presence on social media as a means of promoting the VR program to potential customers.

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

The major barrier to participation in the vocational rehabilitation and supported employment program for individuals with disabilities concerns access to services. Because these programs are targeted at individuals with disabilities, there is no general barrier to participation on the basis of disability status. Rather, specific barriers arise when an individual is unable to participate in a program or communicate his or her needs to program staff. DRS provides a variety of access methods to individuals with disabilities, including the use of Braille and large print, sign language, computer assisted real time captioning and other specialized assistive technology. All DRS office locations are physically accessible, as are all program locations and public meeting sites. Individuals who do not speak English are provided with translation services in order to participate in the vocational rehabilitation program. Every effort is made to eliminate these types of barriers to participation.

p. Evaluation and Reports of Progress: VR and Supported Employment Goals

Describe:

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

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

DRS began reporting data on the WIOA performance measures in July 2017 and consequently data is not available at this time to address performance relative to the goals established in the plan. In terms of competitive integrated employment outcomes DRS fell short of the goals established in the 2016 planning document, achieving only 4,990 outcomes rather than the 5,900 target. DRS believes this was due to staff vacancies during the program year which have since been largely filled. DRS has since adjusted the goals for program years 2017, 2018 and 2019 to reflect the previous performance drop in the baseline.

In terms of median earnings two quarters after program exit, DRS observed an increase from \$2,343 in 2015 to \$2,887 in 2016. While this is a considerable increase in percentage terms the dollar value is not particularly significant at \$544 per quarter or \$181 per month. Data from subsequent quarters will establish whether there is a positive trend for quarterly earnings for individuals exiting the VR program.

For employment retention, data for 2016 show that 54.4 percent of individuals exiting the program were working and reporting earnings after two quarters, and that 43.5 percent were working and reporting earnings after four quarters. As with the earnings data, data from subsequent quarters will be needed to determine a trend on these measures.

For educational achievement, DRS does not have complete data to determine success. In PY2016 4,722 individuals receiving transition services graduated from high school. Information on postsecondary graduation is forthcoming.

Data is not yet available on measurable skill gains for postsecondary training. .

DRS exceeded its goal regarding establishment of a business engagement team. DRS provided training to approximately 50 field staff in PY2016 and established relationships with over 75 businesses. DRS will continue expansion of engagement efforts in the coming program years.

DRS was able to expand individual placement and support (IPS) services for diverse populations in PY2016 and PY2017. However, the number of Project Search sites remained the same with five provider agencies under contract in PY2017. DRS continues efforts to identify provider agencies interested in provision of customized employment but there are no agencies under contract to date specifically for this service. Some agencies with supported employment contracts report providing some version of customized employment but it is uncertain whether the service model being utilized is consistent with the definition of customized employment.

DRS has continued to expand performance-based funding with implementation of a new model for supported employment in PY2017. There are 54 providers with performance-based supported employment contracts currently in place.

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

To some degree performance in PY2016 was limited by staff vacancies and having a cohort of relatively new staff. While DRS had five years of continuing increases in the number of competitive employment outcomes achieved, the most recent year showed a disappointing decrease. DRS believes that the drop-in performance in PY2016 was not indicative of agency capacity. Performance in PY2017 to date show that competitive integrated employment outcomes are likely to exceed prior year performance by approximately seven percent.

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

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

The goal for PY2016, was to serve and employ 150 persons in supported employment utilizing Title VI Part B funds. This goal was not achieved. In PY2016 DRS served 1,260 individuals in supported employment, with 114 served using Title VI Part B funds and 1,146 served using other funds. DRS believes that addition outreach efforts will contribute to success in achieving supported employment goals in the coming program years.

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

DRS has spent the last few years studying the supported employment issue and implementing changes to the contracting and funding structure behind the program. It is clear that DRS and at least some providers had different perspectives on the purpose and intent of the supported employment program. DRS made efforts to ensure that supported employment services were targeted only to those for whom the service is appropriate resulted in a drop in total persons served from 2012 to 2014. Since 2015 the number of individuals receiving supported employment services has increased and DRS looks to build on that increase in the coming program years. The new performance-based contracting system is designed to align the interests of DRS, the provider and the customer so that individuals begin employment and receive appropriate supports that are gradually decreased until the individual achieves optimal independence.

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

DRS began reporting data on WIOA core program measures in July 2017 and consequently many of the measures cannot be reported at this time due to insufficient data.

Employment retention two quarters and four quarters after program exit. Data for individuals exiting the program (either successfully or unsuccessfully) in 2016 show that 54.4 percent were employed during the second quarter after program exit. In addition, 43.5 percent of individuals exiting the program were employed during the fourth quarter after program exit.

Median earnings two quarters after program exit. Data for individuals exiting the program in 2016 showed median earnings of \$2,887 two quarters after program exit. This is higher than the figure of \$2,343 identified a year earlier.

Educational achievement. Data is not available on this measure at this time.

Measurable Skill Gains. Data is not available on this measure at this time.

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

DRS initiated a limited number of innovation and expansion projects in the last year. DRS continued its assistive technology open-ended loan program in order to make commonly-used items of assistive technology equipment available to VR program customers as quickly as possible. DRS also worked with the state protection and advocacy authority to implement a pilot project to conduct outreach to youth with disabilities who were involved with the juvenile justice system. DRS also worked with two centers for independent living to conduct outreach to the Latino population in the Chicago metro area.

q. Quality, Scope, and Extent of Supported Employment Services.

Include the following:

1. The quality, scope, and extent of supported employment services to be provided to individuals with the most significant disabilities, including youth with the most significant disabilities.

In the last several years DRS has seen a reduction in the total number of persons served in supported employment, although the current trend is toward increased participation. There was a decrease of 25 percent in the number of persons receiving supported employment services through DRS from 2012 to 2014. However, the number of persons served has increased by 8 percent from 2015 to 2017. During that same time period the number of employment outcomes achieved by individuals participating in supported employment rose by 12.5 percent. This positive trend is encouraging but DRS intends to engage in efforts to increase participation in supported employment in the next two program years. There is still a need for this service and the primary task is identifying individuals who have a strong likelihood of benefitting from supported employment services.

In PY2017 DRS implemented a new performance-based contracting system for supported employment. This was developed in conjunction with provider representatives and increased the effective payment rate by 16 percent. The goal is to ensure that individuals become employed and receive necessary supports that are gradually reduced over time to achieve maximum independent functioning on the job. DRS is also working with the state developmental disabilities agency to increase referrals to the supported employment program. This includes outreach to DD system case management entities in developing referrals to DRS supported employment.

DRS is also committed to dedicating substantial resources to provision of supported employment services to youth with disabilities. For many years DRS has supplemented the Title VI Part B grant funds with VR grant funds for supported employment contracts. For most providers there was no distinction between the contracts based on funding. In 2015 DRS began utilization of Title VI Part B funds for supported employment customers younger than age 25, as well as more closely tracking the total number of months of supported employment services. Current data indicates that about 30 percent of individuals participating in supported employment are younger than age 25. While the availability of Title VI Part B funds is uncertain in the coming program years, DRS continues its commitment to serve youth with most significant disabilities in supported employment going forward.

2. The timing of transition to extended services.

For several years DRS has not had access to state general revenue funds to provide long-term extended services for individuals completing time-limited supported employment services, whether using Title VI Part B funds or VR grant funds. DRS has focused on developing natural supports in the workplace as a form of unpaid extended services for individuals completing supported employment services. Completion of the program is defined as reduction of paid on-the-job supports to the minimum possible level.

DRS intends to complete agreements with the state developmental disabilities agency and the state mental health agency to provide long-term extended supports for individuals who have completed supported employment services through the VR program.