

New Mexico Commission for the Blind
2200 Yale Blvd. S.E.
Albuquerque, New Mexico 87106
505.841.8844

January 13, 2020

New Mexico Department of Workforce Solutions
Attn: Mr. John Casado
401 Broadway N.E.
Albuquerque, NM 87102

Dear Mr. Casado:

The New Mexico Commission for the Blind is herein providing our Combined State Plan submission. I am submitting our entire plan as an accessible PDF document.

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION CERTIFICATIONS AND ASSURANCES

a) Certifications

Name of designated State agency or designated State unit, as appropriate New Mexico Commission for the
Blind - DSU

Name of designated State agency

Full Name of Authorized Representative: Greg Trapp

Title of Authorized Representative: Executive Director

States must provide written and signed certifications that:

1. The designated State agency or designated State unit (as appropriate) listed above is authorized to submit the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan under title I of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Rehabilitation Act), as amended by WIOA*, and its supplement under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act.** Yes

2. As a condition for the receipt of Federal funds under title I of the Rehabilitation Act for the provision of VR services, the designated State agency listed above agrees to operate and administer the State VR Services Program in accordance with the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan, the Rehabilitation Act, and all applicable regulations, policies, and procedures established by the Secretary of Education. Funds made available under section 111 of the Rehabilitation Act are used solely for the provision of VR services and the administration of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan; Yes

3. As a condition for the receipt of Federal funds under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act for supported employment services, the designated State agency agrees to operate and administer the State Supported Employment Services Program in accordance with the supplement to the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan*, the Rehabilitation Act, and all applicable regulations, policies, and procedures established by the Secretary of Education. Funds made available under title VI are used solely for the provision of supported employment services and the administration of the supplement to the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan;** Yes

4. The designated State agency and/or the designated State unit has the authority under State law to perform the functions of the State regarding the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement; Yes

5. The State legally may carry out each provision of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement. Yes
6. All provisions of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement are consistent with State law. Yes
7. The Authorized Representative listed above has the authority under State law to receive, hold, and disburse Federal funds made available under the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement; Yes
8. The Authorized Representative listed above has the authority to submit the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and the supplement for Supported Employment services; Yes
9. The agency that submits the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement has adopted or otherwise formally approved the plan and its supplement. Yes

(1) Footnotes

Certification 1 Footnotes

* Public Law 113-128.

** Unless otherwise stated, "Rehabilitation Act" means the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended by WIOA, signed into law on July 22, 2014.

Certification 2 Footnotes

* All references in this plan to "designated State agency" or to "the State agency" relate to the agency identified in this paragraph.

** No funds under title 1 of the Rehabilitation Act may be awarded without an approved VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan in accordance with section 101(a) of the Rehabilitation Act.

*** Applicable regulations, in part, include the Education Department General Administrative Regulations (EDGAR) in 34 CFR parts 76,77,79,81, and 82; 2 CFR part 200 as adopted by 2 CFR part 3485; and the State VR Services Program regulations.

Certification 3 Footnotes

* No funds under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act may be awarded without an approved supplement to the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan in accordance with section 606(a) of the Rehabilitation Act.

** Applicable regulations, in part, include the citations in *** under Certification 2 footnotes

(2) Additional Comments on the Certifications from the State

b) Certification Regarding Lobbying - Vocational Rehabilitation

Certification for Contracts, Grants, Loans, and Cooperative Agreements The undersigned certifies, to the best of his or her knowledge and belief, that:

(1) No Federal appropriated funds have been paid or will be paid, by or on behalf of the undersigned, to any person for influencing or attempting to influence an officer or employee of an agency, a Member of Congress, an officer or employee of Congress, or an employee of a Member of Congress in connection with the awarding of any Federal contract, the making of any Federal grant, the making of any Federal loan, the entering into of any cooperative agreement, and the extension, continuation, renewal, amendment, or modification of any Federal contract, grant, loan, or cooperative agreement.

(2) If any funds other than Federal appropriated funds have been paid or will be paid to any person for influencing or attempting to influence an officer or employee of any agency, a Member of Congress, an officer or employee of Congress, or an employee of a Member of Congress in connection with this Federal contract, grant, loan, or cooperative agreement, the undersigned shall complete and submit Standard Form-LLL, "Disclosure of Lobbying Activities," in accordance with its instructions.

(3) The undersigned shall require that the language of this certification be included in the award documents for all subawards at all tiers (including subcontracts, subgrants, and contracts under grants, loans, and cooperative agreements) and that all subrecipients shall certify and disclose accordingly. This certification is a material representation of fact upon which reliance was placed when this transaction was made or entered into. Submission of this certification is a prerequisite for making or entering into this transaction imposed by section 1352, title 31, U.S. Code. Any person who fails to file the required certification shall be subject to a civil penalty of not less than \$10,000 and not more than \$100,000 for each such failure.

(1) Statement for Loan Guarantees and Loan Insurance

The undersigned states, to the best of his or her knowledge and belief, that:

If any funds have been paid or will be paid to any person for influencing or attempting to influence an officer or employee of any agency, a Member of Congress, an officer or employee of Congress, or an employee of a Member of Congress in connection with this commitment providing for the United States to insure or guarantee a loan, the undersigned shall complete and submit Standard Form-LLL, "Disclosure of Lobbying Activities," in accordance with its instructions. Submission of this statement is a prerequisite for making or entering into this transaction imposed by section 1352, title 31, U.S. Code. Any person who fails to file the required statement shall be subject to a civil penalty of not less than \$10,000 and not more than \$100,000 for each such failure.

Applicant's Organization: New Mexico Commission for the Blind

Full Name of Authorized Representative: Greg D. Trapp

Title of Authorized Representative: Executive Director

SF LLL Form - Disclosure of Lobbying Activities (only if applicable)

(<http://www2.ed.gov/fund/grant/apply/appforms/appforms.html>). If applicable, please print, sign, and email to MAT_OCTAE@ed.gov

c) Certification Regarding Lobbying - Supported Employment

Certification for Contracts, Grants, Loans, and Cooperative Agreements The undersigned certifies, to the best of his or her knowledge and belief, that:

(1) No Federal appropriated funds have been paid or will be paid, by or on behalf of the undersigned, to any person for influencing or attempting to influence an officer or employee of an agency, a Member of Congress, an officer or employee of Congress, or an employee of a Member of Congress in connection with the awarding of any Federal contract, the making of any Federal grant, the making of any Federal loan, the entering into of any cooperative agreement, and the extension, continuation, renewal, amendment, or modification of any Federal contract, grant, loan, or cooperative agreement.

(2) If any funds other than Federal appropriated funds have been paid or will be paid to any person for influencing or attempting to influence an officer or employee of any agency, a Member of Congress, an officer or employee of Congress, or an employee of a Member of Congress in connection with this Federal contract, grant, loan, or cooperative agreement, the undersigned shall complete and submit Standard Form-LLL, "Disclosure of Lobbying Activities," in accordance with its instructions.

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If any funds have been paid or will be paid to any person for influencing or attempting to influence an officer or employee of any agency, a Member of Congress, an officer or employee of Congress, or an employee of a Member of Congress in connection with this commitment providing for the United States to insure or guarantee a loan, the undersigned shall complete and submit Standard Form-LLL, "Disclosure of Lobbying Activities," in accordance with its instructions. Submission of this statement is a prerequisite for making or entering into this transaction imposed by section 1352, title 31, U.S. Code. Any person who fails to file the required statement shall be subject to a civil penalty of not less than \$10,000 and not more than \$100,000 for each such failure.

Applicant's Organization: New Mexico Commission for the Blind

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SF LLL Form – Disclosure of Lobbying Activities (only if applicable)

(<http://www2.ed.gov/fund/grant/apply/appforms/appforms.html>).

d) Assurances

The designated State agency or designated State unit, as appropriate and identified in the State certifications included with this VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement, through signature of the authorized individual, assures the Commissioner of the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA), that it will comply with all of the requirements of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement, as set forth in sections 101(a) and 606 of the Rehabilitation Act. The individual authorized to submit the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement makes the following assurances: The State Plan must provide assurances that:

(1) Public Comment on Policies and Procedures:

The designated State agency assures it will comply with all statutory and regulatory requirements for public participation in the VR Services Portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan, as required by section 101(a)(16)(A) of the Rehabilitation Act.

(2) Submission of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and Its Supplement:

The designated State unit assures it will comply with all requirements pertaining to the submission and revisions of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement for the State Supported Employment Services program, as required by sections 101(a)(1), (22), (23), and 606(a) of the

Rehabilitation Act; section 102 of WIOA in the case of the submission of a unified plan; section 103 of WIOA in the case of a submission of a Combined State Plan; 34 CFR 76.140.

(3) Administration of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan:

The designated State agency or designated State unit, as appropriate, assures it will comply with the requirements related to:

a. the establishment of the designated State agency and designated State unit, as required by section 101(a)(2) of the Rehabilitation Act.

b. the establishment of either a State independent commission or State Rehabilitation Council, as required by section 101(a)(21) of the Rehabilitation Act.

The designated State agency or designated State unit, as applicable (B) has established a State Rehabilitation Council

c. consultations regarding the administration of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan, in accordance with section 101(a)(16)(B) of the Rehabilitation Act.

d. the financial participation by the State, or if the State so elects, by the State and local agencies, to provide the amount of the non-Federal share of the cost of carrying out the VR program in accordance with section 101(a)(3).

e. the local administration of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan, in accordance with section 101(a)(2)(A) of the Rehabilitation Act.

The designated State agency allows for the local administration of VR funds No

f. the shared funding and administration of joint programs, in accordance with section 101(a)(2)(A)(ii) of the Rehabilitation Act.

The designated State agency allows for the shared funding and administration of joint programs: No

g. statewideness and waivers of statewideness requirements, as set forth in section 101(a)(4) of the Rehabilitation Act.

Is the designated State agency requesting or maintaining a waiver of statewideness for one or more services provided under the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan? See Section 2 of this VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan. No

h. the descriptions for cooperation, collaboration, and coordination, as required by sections 101(a)(11) and (24)(B); and 606(b) of the Rehabilitation Act.

i. all required methods of administration, as required by section 101(a)(6) of the Rehabilitation Act .

j. the requirements for the comprehensive system of personnel development, as set forth in section 101(a)(7) of the Rehabilitation Act.

k. the compilation and submission to the Commissioner of statewide assessments, estimates, State goals and priorities, strategies, and progress reports, as appropriate, and as required by sections 101(a)(15), 105(c)(2), and 606(b)(8) of the Rehabilitation Act.

l. the reservation and use of a portion of the funds allotted to the State under section 110 of the Rehabilitation Act for the development and implementation of innovative approaches to expand and improve the provision of VR services to individuals with disabilities, particularly individuals with the most significant disabilities.

m. the submission of reports as required by section 101(a)(10) of the Rehabilitation Act.

(4) Administration of the Provision of VR Services:

The designated State agency, or designated State unit, as appropriate, assures that it will:

a. comply with all requirements regarding information and referral services in accordance with sections 101(a)(5)(D) and (20) of the Rehabilitation Act.

b. impose no duration of residence requirement as part of determining an individual's eligibility for VR services or that excludes from services under the plan any individual who is present in the State in accordance with section 101(a)(12) of the Rehabilitation Act .

c. provide the full range of services listed in section 103(a) of the Rehabilitation Act as appropriate, to all eligible individuals with disabilities in the State who apply for services in accordance with section 101(a)(5) of the Rehabilitation Act?

Agency will provide the full range of services described above Yes

d. determine whether comparable services and benefits are available to the individual in accordance with section 101(a)(8) of the Rehabilitation Act.

e. comply with the requirements for the development of an individualized plan for employment in accordance with section 102(b) of the Rehabilitation Act.

f. comply with requirements regarding the provisions of informed choice for all applicants and eligible individuals in accordance with section 102(d) of the Rehabilitation Act.

g. provide vocational rehabilitation services to American Indians who are individuals with disabilities residing in the State, in accordance with section 101(a)(13) of the Rehabilitation Act.

h. comply with the requirements for the conduct of semiannual or annual reviews, as appropriate, for individuals employed either in an extended employment setting in a community rehabilitation program or any other employment under section 14(c) of the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, as required by section 101(a)(14) of the Rehabilitation Act.

i. meet the requirements in sections 101(a)(17) and 103(b)(2) of the Rehabilitation Act if the State elects to construct, under special circumstances, facilities for community rehabilitation programs

j. with respect to students with disabilities, the State,

i. has developed and will implement,

A. strategies to address the needs identified in the assessments; and

B. strategies to achieve the goals and priorities identified by the State, to improve and expand vocational rehabilitation services for students with disabilities on a statewide basis; and

ii. has developed and will implement strategies to provide pre-employment transition services (sections 101(a)(15) and 101(a)(25)).

(5) Program Administration for the Supported Employment Title VI Supplement:

a. The designated State unit assures that it will include in the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan all information required by section 606 of the Rehabilitation Act.

b. The designated State agency assures that it will submit reports in such form and in accordance with such procedures as the Commissioner may require and collects the information required by section 101(a)(10) of the Rehabilitation Act separately for individuals receiving supported employment services under title I and individuals receiving supported employment services under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act.

c. The designated state unit will coordinate activities with any other State agency that is functioning as an employment network under the Ticket to Work and Self-Sufficiency program under Section 1148 of the Social Security Act.

(6) Financial Administration of the Supported Employment Program:

a. The designated State agency assures that it will expend no more than 2.5 percent of the State's allotment under title VI for administrative costs of carrying out this program; and, the designated State agency or agencies will provide, directly or indirectly through public or private entities, non-Federal contributions in an amount that is not less than 10 percent of the costs of carrying out supported employment services provided to youth with the most significant disabilities with the funds reserved for such purpose under section 603(d) of the Rehabilitation Act, in accordance with section 606(b)(7)(G) and (H) of the Rehabilitation Act.

b. The designated State agency assures that it will use funds made available under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act only to provide supported employment services to individuals with the most significant disabilities, including extended services to youth with the most significant disabilities, who are eligible to receive such services; and, that such funds are used only to supplement and not supplant the funds provided under Title I of the Rehabilitation Act, when providing supported employment services specified in the individualized plan for employment, in accordance with section 606(b)(7)(A) and (D), of the Rehabilitation Act.

(7) Provision of Supported Employment Services:

a. The designated State agency assures that it will provide supported employment services as defined in section 7(39) of the Rehabilitation Act.

b. The designated State agency assures that:

- i. the comprehensive assessment of individuals with significant disabilities conducted under section 102(b)(1) of the Rehabilitation Act and funded under title I of the Rehabilitation Act includes consideration of supported employment as an appropriate employment outcome, in accordance with the requirements of section 606(b)(7)(B) of the Rehabilitation Act*
- ii. an individualized plan for employment that meets the requirements of section 102(b) of the Rehabilitation Act, which is developed and updated with title I funds, in accordance with sections 102(b)(3)(F) and 606(b)(6)(C) and (E) of the Rehabilitation Act.*

(8) Additional Comments on the Assurances from the State

Performance Goals for the Core Programs

* The percentage of program participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the second quarter after exit from the program

Target 35%

* The percentage of program participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the fourth quarter after exit from the program

Target 33%

* The median earnings of program participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the second quarter after exit.

Target \$4,500.00

* Credential attainment rate

Target 10%

* Measurable skill gain

Target 25%

* Effectiveness in serving employers

The New Mexico Department of Workforce Solutions is the lead agency on this measure. The Commission for the Blind has not captured data on this measure, but will look to do so in the future.

Rationale for our performance measure target projections can be found in Description O, State Strategies.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have questions or need additional information.

Sincerely,

Original Signed by

Greg Trapp J.D.

Executive Director

New Mexico Commission for the Blind

Attachments (Descriptions)

* A, Input of State Rehabilitation Council

* B, Request for Waiver of Statewideness

* C, Cooperative Agreements with Agencies Not Carrying Out Activities Under the Statewide Workforce Development System.

* D, Coordination with Education Officials

* E, Cooperative Agreements with Private Non-Profit Organizations

* F, Arrangements and Cooperative Agreements for the Provision of Supported Employment Services

* G, Coordination with Employers

* H, Interagency Cooperation

* I, Comprehensive System of Personnel Development

* J, Statewide Assessment

- * K, Annual Estimates
- * L, State Goals and Priorities
- * M, Order of Selection
- * N, Goals and Plans for Distribution of Title VI Funds
- * O, State's Strategies
- * P, Evaluation and Reports of Progress
- * Q, Quality, Scope, and Extent of Supported Employment Services

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

a. Input of State Rehabilitation Council (Blind)

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; (Blind)

BASIS OF INPUT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Commission and the State Rehabilitation Council developed and approved the methodology for the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment at a meeting held in Albuquerque on August 9, 2018. The methodology included a survey of demographic data, the conducting of public meetings, and focused discussion groups.

The demographic survey results of the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment were reviewed at a special meeting of the Council held in Santa Fe on February 11, 2019. The public meeting portion of the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment was reviewed at a special meeting of the Council held in Albuquerque on May 16, 2019.

The Commission for the Blind conducted six public meetings to gather input on the Combined State Plan as required by 34 CFR 361.20(a). The purpose was to provide the public, including individuals with disabilities, an opportunity to comment on the policies or procedures governing the provision of vocational rehabilitation services under the Combined State Plan prior to their adoption. Prior to conducting the public meetings, the Commission provided notice of the meetings as required by 34 CFR 361.20(d). This included compliance with paragraph 13 of the Open Meetings Act Resolution adopted by the State Rehabilitation Council at the meeting held in Santa Fe on February 11, 2019. Paragraph 13 of the Council's Open Meetings Act resolution states: "Prior to the adoption of any substantive policies or procedures governing the provision of vocational rehabilitation services under the state plan, including making any substantive amendments to policies and procedures, the Commission for the Blind will conduct public meetings throughout the state to provide the public, including individuals with disabilities, an opportunity to comment on the policies or procedures. The public meetings will be advertised in a newspaper of general circulation, posted to the commission web page, and distributed as may otherwise be appropriate."

Notices for all of the public meetings were published in the Albuquerque Journal (a statewide newspaper), placed on the Commission's web page, recorded on the Commission's NEWSLINE for the Blind system, placed on NFB-Newsline, posted in Commission offices, emailed to consumer organizations, emailed to independent living centers, and emailed to interested persons and stakeholders. The information was also sent out on the statewide email list maintained by the National Federation of the Blind of New Mexico. The public meetings were conducted throughout New Mexico to solicit comments from geographically and

ethnically diverse populations. Public meetings were held in Hobbs on October 16, 2019; in Clovis on October 17, 2019; in Santa Fe on November 25, 2019; in Albuquerque on November 27, 2019; in Las Cruces on December 2, 2019; and in Alamogordo on December 3, 2019.

The State Rehabilitation Council met five times during 2019. The Council met in Santa Fe on February 11, 2019. The purpose included review of the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment, review of the Consumer Satisfaction Survey, development and approval of the revised Goals and Priorities, and approval of the Council's Open Meetings Act Resolution.

The State Rehabilitation Council held a special meeting in Albuquerque on May 16, 2019. The purpose included a report on the test Section 107 Monitoring, discussion of the Commission's Allowable Cost Policy and Procedure, a review of the Consumer Satisfaction Survey, and a review of the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment.

The State Rehabilitation Council met in Silver City on August 7 and 8, 2019. During the meeting the Council reviewed and approved the Commission's Strategic Plan for September 1, 2019 through October 1, 2022. The revisions included updating statistics, adding language reflecting the improved state economy, and adding language recommending the importance of serving the aging workforce and providing the VR services that will be necessary to serve increasing numbers of older workers. The Council also discussed the ability of the agency to serve all eligible individuals, and the agency determined that it had the ability to provide the full range of vocational rehabilitation services to all eligible individuals. In addition, the Council also reviewed the ability of the agency to provide all of the required Pre-Employment Transition Services to all eligible students, and the agency determined that it had sufficient resources to provide all of the required Pre-ETS services. The Council also discussed and voted to approve technical revisions to the Manual of Operating Procedures.

The State Rehabilitation Council met in Albuquerque on October 21, 2019. The purpose of the October 21 meeting included receiving a report from the workforce representative to the Council on the Combined State Plan process, discussion of the Commission's portion of the Combined State Plan, review of the goals and priorities jointly developed by the Council and Commission, and discussion of policies at the Orientation Center on harassment, admission, and social media. The meeting also included the approval of the Council Annual Report as required by 34 CFR 361.17(h)(5). In his cover letter for the Annual Report, the Council Chair stated the following: "The Council worked closely with the Commission during the year, including to implement the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act requirement that 15 percent of vocational rehabilitation funds be reserved and spent on provision of Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS). While the Commission for the Blind has not been forced to implement a waiting list for services, the Federal Pre-ETS mandate has resulted in many agencies needing to go on to an Order of Selection. This is an area of critical concern, which the Council will continue to focus on in the coming year." The Annual Report also contained the Goals and Priorities jointly developed and agreed to by the Council and the agency. The Annual Report also reported on employment outcomes for the year, saying: "The Commission successfully placed 23 consumers in employment during the federal fiscal year that ended on September 30, 2019, an increase of eight individuals."

The Council held a special meeting in Albuquerque on December 16, 2019. The purpose of the special meeting was to provide additional opportunity for public comment on the Commission's portion of the Combined State Plan, to review the comments made at the public meetings, to review the comprehensive statewide needs assessment, to develop and approve the Goals and Priorities, to approve the Council comments and input, and to approve the Commission's portion of the Combined State Plan.

The State Rehabilitation Council read and considered each of the Goals and Priorities individually, allowing for thorough discussion and consideration of each Goal and Priority. The Council decided to add four new Goals and Priorities, to keep all but one of the existing Goals and Priorities, and to make minor updates and revisions to the existing Goals and Priorities. The new Goals and Priorities included one on the hiring and retention of VR Counselors, one concerning the provision of VR services to older workers, one concerning the provision of VR services that maintain healthy lifestyles, and one concerning the provision of VR services that support the development of consumer soft skills.

Notice of the Council meetings and copies of the agendas were published pursuant to the New Mexico Open Meetings Act. Meeting notices were published in the Albuquerque Journal, placed on the Commission's web page, placed on Newsline and NFB-Newsline, and distributed by email to consumer organizations and key stakeholders. Notices were also sent out on the statewide email list maintained by the National Federation of the Blind of New Mexico.

COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE COUNCIL

What follows are the approved Goals and Priorities that were developed and approved at the December 16, 2019 special Council meeting, and Council comments and recommendations on each of the Goals and Priorities.

a. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes by proactively working to recruit, hire, and retain qualified vocational rehabilitation counselors, thereby providing greater continuity and consistency in the provision of vocational rehabilitation services.

Council Input and Recommendations: The Council expressed concern over VR Counselor vacancies in the agency, and especially in the field offices. The Council recommended that the agency do all it can to maintain at least 75 percent of the VR Counselor positions filled.

b. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes by providing appropriate vocational rehabilitation services to the growing population of older workers, many of whom will be unable or unwilling to retrain for work in a field different from their current occupations, thereby enabling these older workers to become or remain successfully employed.

Council Input and Recommendations: The Council recognizes that the workforce is aging, and that the population of older workers will require additional VR services, especially related to the provision of assistive technology needed to retain employment, and recommends that the agency works to provide greater support in this area.

c. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes by providing appropriate vocational rehabilitation services that support the maintaining of a healthy lifestyle that is conducive to becoming and remaining successfully employed, thereby enabling a greater portion of agency consumers to become and remain successfully employed.

Council Input and Recommendations: The Council recommends that the agency support a healthy lifestyle due to the recognized association between the maintaining of a healthy lifestyle and successful employment. The Council especially recognizes that there are benefits to mental health and stress reduction that result from the maintaining of a healthy lifestyle.

d. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes by providing vocational rehabilitation training and counseling that is designed to enhance and improve the soft skills of consumers, which are becoming an increasing barrier to agency consumers becoming and remaining successfully employed.

Council Input and Recommendations: The Council is concerned about the lack of appropriate soft skills that are more commonly missing in those persons who are seeking to be employed, and most especially amongst younger workers. The Council is concerned that the acquisition of soft skills is necessary to become and remain employed, and recommends that the agency provide more training and support in this area.

e. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes by partnering and working with community colleges and One-Stop centers to more effectively utilize services available through the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act, Adult, Dislocated Worker, Youth, and Wagner-Peyser programs.

Council Input and Recommendations: The Council believes that this is an appropriate goal considering the requirements of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), in particular the requirements to improve cooperation with core partners.

f. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes by working cooperatively with the New Mexico Department of Health so as to develop opportunities for competitive and integrated employment for persons who are blind or visually impaired, which will be accomplished by working in partnership with the Medical Assistance Division, the Developmental Disabilities Supports Division, and the Behavioral Health Services Division.

Council Input and Recommendations: The Council believes that this is an appropriate goal considering the requirements of WIOA, in particular the requirements to improve interagency cooperation. The Council recommends that the agency take specific actions to meet the goal.

g. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes by using the Orientation Center to provide employment preparation training for adults and transition students, including through the addition of an apartment training facility to be constructed adjacent to the Center. The proposed apartment facility will increase the capacity of the Orientation Center, will enable the Orientation Center to provide more realistic training, will eliminate the need to rent costly and less appropriate private apartments, and will reduce the number of instances in which costly out-of-state training will be necessary to meet the needs of consumers.

Council Input and Recommendations: Based on the comments received through the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment, and based on prior Council support of the apartment project, the Council

agreed that this is an important goal and recommends that the agency complete construction of the apartment complex.

h. Increase the number of consumers served through enhanced Outreach Activities; including media outreach, use of paid advertising, through increased collaboration with ophthalmologists and optometrists, and through the use of the Technology for Children program to conduct outreach to school districts.

Council Input and Recommendations: The Council agreed that outreach is an important activity and recommends that this goal should be continued.

i. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes of transition consumers by providing enhanced Pre-Employment Transition Services, including assistive technology where appropriate as a part of an Individualized Plan for Employment, by providing assistive technology through the Technology for Children Program, by conducting increased outreach activities, by conducting educational activities to meet the specific needs of transition students, and by increasing proficient use of Braille and Braille math.

Council Input and Recommendations: The Council agreed that this is a necessary goal in light of new WIOA requirements to reserve and spend at least 15 percent of the VR appropriation on the provision of Pre-Employment Transition Services to students who are blind or visually impaired. The Council recommends that the agency take specific actions to meet the goal.

j. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes achieved by consumers by providing services in a way that genuinely honors the "informed choice" provisions of the Rehabilitation Act, enabling Commission consumers to have the opportunity to obtain employment at higher levels of compensation.

Council Input and Recommendations: The Council agreed that the concept of "informed choice" is fundamental within the public vocational rehabilitation program and recommends that this goal should be continued in the coming year.

k. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes achieved by consumers by providing a quality and expanding Newsline system that gives consumers access to employment listings, business news, and other important information, including through both local Newsline and through NFB-Newsline.

Council Input and Recommendations: The Council agreed that Newsline is critical to the ability of blind and visually impaired New Mexicans to access information, news, breaking news, Spanish-language news, and access job listings, and recommends that the agency continues to make Newsline a priority.

l. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes by innovatively using the Skills Center to meet the needs of vocational rehabilitation consumers and potential vocational rehabilitation consumers, including using it for provision of Pre-Employment Transition Services.

Council Input and Recommendations: Based on new WIOA requirements to reserve and spend at least 15 percent of VR funds on Pre-Employment Transition Services on students aged 14 to 21, plus comments received through the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment, the Council recommends that this remains an important goal for the agency.

m. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes for consumers who are Deaf-Blind through collaboration and partnership with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, with the Community Outreach Programs for the Deaf, and with the Commission for Deaf and Hard of Hearing, including through the delivery of assistive technology to consumers who are Deaf-Blind.

Council Input and Recommendations: The Council recommends that this goal should be continued.

n. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes through the Business Enterprise Program (BEP) by shortening the time required for vendors to complete the required training, including by using Randolph-Sheppard Act training offered by the Hadley Institute for the Blind and Visually Impaired.

Council Input and Recommendations: The Council is in full support of the agency's Business Enterprise Program and recommends that this continue as an important goal for the agency to pursue.

o. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes by strengthening administrative services so as to timely and accurately submit federal reports, to assure compliance with all applicable fiscal regulations, and to comply with all applicable accounting standards.

Council Input and Recommendations: The Council recommends this goal in order to ensure that the agency can access its full allocation of federal funds each year. These funds are necessary to provide high-quality Vocational Rehabilitation services to youth and adults throughout New Mexico.

p. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes by enhancing overall performance and productivity by engaging in activities designed to mitigate and ameliorate the impacts of blindness and visual impairment, and by engaging in outreach and other activities designed to identify additional potential consumers, and by making the public and medical community more aware of Commission services.

Council Input and Recommendations: The Council recommends continuing this Goal.

q. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes for consumers by providing enhanced benefits counseling and guidance to reduce concerns related to the loss or reduction of benefits.

Council Input and Recommendations: The Council recommends continuing the Goal, noting the many benefits of working that outweighs the loss or reduction in benefits.

2. The Designated State unit's response to the Council's input and recommendations; and (Blind)

COMMISSION FOR THE BLIND RESPONSE TO COUNCIL RECOMMENDATIONS:

a. Agency Response: There is a national shortage of qualified vocational rehabilitation counselors, and the agency is engaging in maximum efforts to recruit, hire, and retain qualified vocational rehabilitation counselors. The agency has also recently hired counselors for the Farmington and Las Cruces offices, and currently has 87.5 percent of VR Counselor positions filled.

b. Agency Response: The Commission is committed to serve the increasing population of older workers. The aging population has resulted in an aging workforce, and 50 percent of workers report that they plan on

working beyond age 65. In addition, 25 percent of workers do not plan on retiring. These older workers will require an increasing amount of VR services to remain or become employed, and especially assistive technology services.

c. Agency Response: The Commission recognizes that maintaining a healthy lifestyle can be conducive to obtaining and retaining an employment outcome, and will provide services designed to support healthy lifestyles when such services are necessary to obtaining and retaining employment.

d. Agency Response: The Commission recognizes that having appropriate soft skills is essential to obtaining and retaining employment, and that an increasing portion of consumers are deficient in their soft skills. The Commission will continue to use the Orientation Center and Skills Center to provide instruction in the area of soft skills, and will explore additional ways to enhance instruction in soft skills as a part of Pre-Employment Transition Services.

e. Agency Response: The agency recognizes the benefits of partnering and working with community colleges and One-Stop centers. The agency has been participating in monthly partner meetings that have enhanced the coordination between the Commission and the partners. The Commission will continue to work cooperatively with the partners by designating specific points of contact, by providing appropriate information, and by entering into cooperative agreements where appropriate.

f. Agency Response: The agency will work cooperatively with the Department of Health, with the Medical Assistance Division, with the Developmental Disabilities Supports Division, and with the Behavioral Health Services Division. The agency will designate specific points of contact for each of these entities, will provide information as appropriate, and will enter into a cooperative agreement with the Department of Health.

g. Agency Response: The agency is committed to completion of the apartment complex at the Orientation Center. The proposed apartment project has been fully funded with state appropriations, and construction should start during calendar year 2020.

h. Agency Response: The agency will continue to work to increase and enhance outreach to the identified groups using the recommended methods.

i. Agency Response: The agency will continue to work to increase services to Pre-Employment Transition Students using the identified methods. The agency already seeks to be involved in Individualized Education Plan meetings for students starting at age 14, and the agency operates the Students in Transition to Employment Program in Albuquerque and in Alamogordo. On February 2, 2019, the agency sponsored a workshop on Unified English Braille, and the agency will continue to sponsor Unified English Braille workshops and National Certification in Unified English Braille exams. The agency is also renewing its cooperative agreements with state and local educational officials. The agency has also entered into a Governmental Services Agreement with the New Mexico School for the Blind and Visually Impaired to provide Pre-Employment Transition Services, and has entered into an Intergovernmental Agreement with the New Mexico Central Region Educational Cooperative to provide Pre-Employment Transition Services.

j. Agency Response: The agency continues to provide services in a way that enables consumers to set and obtain high employment goals. This often includes supporting consumers in the attainment of advanced degrees. For the federal fiscal year ending September 30, 2019, the average starting hourly wage for agency consumers was \$16.47.

k. Agency Response: The agency is committed to providing a quality Newslines service, including both local Newslines and NFB-Newslines. The agency will continue to sponsor NFB-Newslines in New Mexico, which provides access to over 400 national publications. The agency will also continue to support local Newslines, which provides access to newspaper information that is not available on NFB-Newslines.

l. Agency Response: The agency is committed to using the Skills Center to meet the statewide needs of vocational rehabilitation consumers, and especially consumers receiving Pre-Employment Transition Services. As a result, the agency used the Skills Center to provide training to participants in the Students in Transition to Employment Program, to provide training in local communities, as well as student and Braille seminars. The Skills Center was also used to provide training to individual students, and was used as a meeting place for programs related to vocational rehabilitation. The agency will continue to use the Skills Center to provide these services.

m. Agency Response: The agency has assigned a vocational rehabilitation counselor to take the lead on services related to consumers who are Deaf-Blind. The agency also works with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation to coordinate provision of services to persons who are Deaf-Blind. The agency works with a variety of other partners, including the Commission for Deaf and Hard of Hearing, the Community Outreach Program for the Deaf, the Helen Keller National Center, and the Deaf-Blind Task Force. The agency also participates in the annual Deaf-Blind Awareness Day at the Roundhouse. The agency will continue these efforts.

n. Agency Response: The agency has adopted the Hadley Institute for the Blind and Visually Impaired as the training provider for BEP vendors, and is working with New Mexico programs to create a local provider so that food preparation and cooking methods can be taught locally. The agency is hoping that an improving state and national economy will allow for additional opportunities in the Business Enterprise Program.

o. Agency Response: The agency recognizes the need to have strong fiscal programs so as to maximize the receipt of federal funds, and to otherwise provide appropriate vocational rehabilitation services to our consumers. To do this, the agency must have in place a sufficient number of qualified fiscal staff to comply with federal fiscal rules, and to appropriately respond to changing fiscal requirements. The agency also proactively works to make sure that the agency is in compliance with applicable fiscal regulations, including through the adoption of the agency Allowable Cost Policy and Procedure.

p. Agency Response: The agency is engaging in new and innovative approaches to provide services and conduct outreach. The agency has a new web page that allows for referrals to be made by health care professionals, and the web page enables members of the public to sign up to automatically be emailed meeting notices, agendas, and minutes.

q. Agency Response: The Commission continues to provide benefits counseling and guidance through the New Mexico Legal Aid Society. The agency has also provided training on benefits to vocational rehabilitation counselors and consumers.

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

The agency concurs with all of the Council's input and recommendations, and does not reject any of the Council input or recommendations.

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 Commission is able to provide services to all applicants and is not requesting a waiver at this time.

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

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.

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;

Because the Agency recognized the need for more services to the deafblind population, a Joint Powers Agreement (JPA) between the Commission for the Blind and the Commission for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Persons (CDHH) had been established. The JPA had provided financial support to fund the National Federation of the Blind Newline program in New Mexico. Newline allows access to over 365 newspapers around the country, enabling deafblind persons to access critical information that they need to live independent lives. In 2009, the CDHH suspended funding of the JPA, but the Commission is working with the CDHH and legislature to restore funding of the JPA. A representative of the CDHH provided training to Commission counselors in June 2015.

A Cooperative Agreement in the form of a Memorandum of Understanding between the agency and the State Public Education Department has been established to facilitate the professional relationship between the two agencies. This agreement facilitates the referral process and coordination of services between the agencies, and among the state's school districts. The Commission for the Blind has the basic responsibility to provide vocational rehabilitation services to all eligible blind residents of New Mexico. The Public Education Department has the basic responsibility to provide an appropriate public education to New Mexico children with disabilities, including those with visual disabilities. The Deputy Director for Vocational Rehabilitation has served on the Statewide Transition Coordinating Council in past years, although the STCC is not currently active. The Agency assures the interagency cooperation with, and utilization of the services and facilities of the Federal, State, and local agencies and programs. This includes programs carried out by the State under section 4 of the Assistive Technology Act of 1998; Programs carried out by the Under Secretary for Rural Development of the Department of Agriculture; Non—educational agencies serving out—of—school youth; and State use contracting programs; to the extent that such agencies and programs are not carrying out activities through the statewide workforce system. The Agency works with the following rehabilitation services providers: Zuni Entrepreneurial Enterprises, Inc.; New Vistas Center for Independent Living; Developmental Disabilities Planning Council; TRESKO; Laguna—Acoma Vocational Rehabilitation; Navajo Nation Office of Special Education & Rehabilitation Services; Jemez Disabilities Project; Tobosa Developmental Services; Goodwill Industries; Department of Health, Developmental Disabilities Support Division; Taos County ARC; Helen Keller National Center; Community Outreach Programs for the Deaf; the NM Commission for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Persons; Albuquerque Center for Hope and Recovery; the Small Business Development Centers located throughout New Mexico; and the New Mexico Council for Purchasing from Persons with Disabilities, through Horizons of New Mexico, their central non-profit agency. Relationships with these organizations run the gamut, including referrals, vocational evaluations, job development, job coaching, transportation, consulting, case management, joint case servicing, deaf blind services, supported employment services, and self—employment services. The agency has representation on the SILC. The Agency will explore ways to build better ties with the IL centers and work with the SILC, in an effort to increase staff and consumer awareness of their activities. A representative of the SILC serves on the Commission's SRC, and as such, will be able to keep the Council up to date on their respective current activities.

The agency regularly interacts with the Governor's Commission on Disability (GCD), with a goal of helping to coordinate state services and programs in a way that maximizes employment opportunities for vocational rehabilitation consumers.

The agency participates on the Ticket to Work Partners group, along with the Social Security Administration, the New Mexico Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, and a number of employment networks that serve ticket holders throughout New Mexico. The group had been meeting in the Commission's Skills Center Lecture Hall, but has not met during calendar 2019.

The Commission works closely with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to support veterans with blindness and visual impairments to obtain, maintain, or advance in employment. Generally, the VA purchases technology and other equipment and the Commission provides education and training support, enabling each organization to leverage its strengths in order to serve the needs of veterans.

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

A member of the Commission's Skills Center staff is a member of the New Mexico Technology Assistance Program Coordinating Council (NMTAP), formed under the Tech Act. The staff member regularly attends and participates in NMTAP events and meetings. Commission also has a memorandum of Understanding with the Governor's Commission on Disability, the agency that administers NMTAP. The Commission entered into a cooperative agreement with the Governor's Commission on Disability under which \$75,000 in Tech Act funding was transferred to the Commission to purchase assistive technology, and to provide demonstrations on that assistive technology.

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

The Commission currently does not have an active partnership regarding programs carried out by the Under Secretary for Rural Development of the Department of Agriculture, but will develop such partnerships in future years.

4. Noneducational agencies serving out-of-school youth; and

The Agency assures the interagency cooperation with, and utilization of the services and facilities of the Federal, State, and local agencies and programs. This includes programs carried out by the State under section 4 of the Assistive Technology Act of 1998; Programs carried out by the Under Secretary for Rural Development of the Department of Agriculture; Non—educational agencies serving out—of—school youth; and State use contracting programs; to the extent that such agencies and programs are not carrying out activities through the statewide workforce investment system. With regard to coordination with education officials to facilitate the transition of students with disabilities from school to the receipt of vocational rehabilitation services, including the provision of pre—employment transition services, the Agency has in place the Students in Transition to Employment program (STEP). The Commission would like to recruit 40 students to participate in the 2020 STEP program, up from the 29 in summer 2019, as a result of expanded support for students with disabilities and youth with the most significant disabilities. These students come from various locations around the state and are recruited through high school counselors, special education departments, and from individuals who have exited their secondary education program and are not currently in a post—secondary program.

5. State use contracting programs.

The Agency assures the interagency cooperation with, and utilization of the services and facilities of the Federal, State, and local agencies and programs. This includes programs carried out by the State under section 4 of the Assistive Technology Act of 1998; Programs carried out by the Under Secretary for Rural Development of the Department of Agriculture; Non—educational agencies serving out—of—school youth; and State use contracting programs; to the extent that such agencies and programs are not carrying out activities through the statewide workforce investment system. The executive director serves on the State Use Council and the director of the State Use agency has briefed the vocational rehabilitation counselor team on several occasions, including during PY 18.

d. Coordination with Education Officials

Describe:

- 1. DSU's plans**
- 2. 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 Commission has put in place plans, policies, and procedures to enable the agency to coordinate with educational officials, and to facilitate the transition of students with disabilities from school to the receipt of VR services, including pre-employment transition services.

The Commission has assigned a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor to serve as the agency Transition Coordinator. The Transition Coordinator is supervised by the Vocational Rehabilitation Program Manager. Together, they coordinate with educational officials on the transition of students. The Transition Coordinator works out of the Albuquerque office, and has a caseload dedicated to transition students who are in Albuquerque and the surrounding Counties. The Commission also has Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors in Farmington, Las Vegas, Las Cruces, and Roswell, and these Counselors serve the transition students residing in these communities and surrounding areas. These counselors are under the supervision of the Vocational Rehabilitation Program Manager, and they also coordinate with educational officials on the transition of students.

The Commission administers the Technology for Children program, which is managed by the Skills Center Coordinator. The Technology for Children program provides assistive technology to blind and visually impaired students for use in their homes. The program is in its 14th year, and the assistive technology is funded by the Department of Health. The program works closely with Teachers of the Visually Impaired, and helps to build relationships with these teachers and their local educational agencies. The program also identifies students who might be eligible for Commission transition services, and facilitates the early participation of the Commission in Individualized Education Program meetings.

The Commission has established relationships with Local Educational Agencies, including formal signed cooperative agreements with school districts and other educational agencies. The purpose is to facilitate the transition of students with disabilities from the receipt of educational and Pre-Employment Transition Services in school to the receipt of vocational rehabilitation services from the Commission. The Commission has signed agreements with Aztec Municipal School District; Bloomfield School District; Carlsbad Municipal Schools; Cloudcroft Municipal Schools; Clovis Municipal School District; Deming Public School District; Española Public School District; Farmington Municipal Schools; Gadsten School District; Gallup-McKinley County Schools; Las Cruces Public Schools; Los Lunas School District; Moriarity-Edgewood School District; Pecos Public Schools; Portales Municipal School District; Roswell Independent School District; and Taos Municipal Schools. These agreements were signed by the agency's Executive Director in meetings with the Special Education Directors or superintendents of each school district. The Commission is actively working to renew these existing agreements. The Commission is also actively working to obtain cooperative agreements with additional school districts, including Albuquerque Public

Schools, Alamogordo Public Schools, and Santa Fe Public Schools. The Commission also has a cooperative agreement with the New Mexico School for the Blind and Visually Impaired.

The Commission signed a Governmental Services Agreement (GSA) with the New Mexico School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (NMSBVI) in May of 2019. Under this GSA, the Commission funds the provision of Pre-Employment Transition Services that are provided by NMSBVI. The purpose is to facilitate the transition of students with disabilities from the receipt of educational and Pre-Employment Transition Services in school to the receipt of vocational rehabilitation services from the Commission.

The Commission has also entered into an Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA) with the New Mexico Central Region Educational cooperative. The purpose of the IGA is to facilitate the transition of students with disabilities from the receipt of educational and Pre-Employment Transition Services in school to the receipt of vocational rehabilitation services from the Commission.

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 Commission has signed a Memorandum of Agreement with the New Mexico Public Education Department. The purpose of the Memorandum of Agreement (Agreement) is to establish a Formal interagency agreement as required by 34 CFR 361.22(e). The Agreement provides for methods of coordination between the Commission and PED to facilitate the transition of students with disabilities from the receipt of educational services, including pre-employment transition services, in school to the receipt of vocational rehabilitation services from the Commission. These methods of coordination also facilitate the development and approval of an Individualized Plan for Employment as early as possible during the transition planning process, but not later than the time a student with a visual impairment is determined to be eligible for the Commission's vocational rehabilitation services leaves the school setting. The Agreement contains the following terms:

The Commission shall coordinate with educational agencies to ensure that services are not duplicated, and that services provided by the Commission do not supplant existing educational agency services.

The Commission shall provide consultation and technical assistance to help PED plan for the transition of students who are blind or visually impaired from school to post-school activities, including Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) and other vocational rehabilitation services. The Commission shall also provide consultation and technical assistance to help local educational agencies, charter schools, the New Mexico School for the Blind and Visually Impaired, and the New Mexico School for the Deaf (collectively referred to as "educational agencies)." This consultation and technical assistance will be provided to help these educational agencies plan for the transition of students who are blind or visually impaired from school to post-school activities, including Pre-ETS and other vocational rehabilitation services.

The Commission recognizes the importance of facilitating the transition of students who are blind or visually impaired from the receipt of educational services to the receipt of vocational rehabilitation services from the Commission. Consequently, the Commission may participate in the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meetings of eligible students referred to the Commission as soon as possible. The Commission may participate in IEP meetings for students starting at the age of 14, and even younger when circumstances make such participation appropriate. This IEP participation may take place in person, or by conference or video call. The information shared during the IEP shall include a description of the Commission's vocational rehabilitation program, eligibility requirements, application procedures, and scope of services that may be provided to eligible students who are blind or visually impaired.

The Commission, in partnership with the New Mexico Department of Health, shall provide assistive technology devices for home use to eligible children who are blind or visually impaired in order to increase capacity and ability to provide Pre-ETS services by building relationships with families, teachers and school districts, and identifying students who are potentially eligible to receive and can benefit from services from the Commission.

The Commission shall coordinate with educational agencies to provide the five required Pre-ETS services set forth at 34 CFR 361.48(a)(2) to eligible blind and visually impaired students. The Commission shall also carry out the four coordination activities set forth at 34 CFR 361.48(a)(4). The Commission shall engage in annual forecasting to determine if it has sufficient funds and resources to provide the five required Pre-ETS services. Should the Commission determine that it has sufficient funds and resources to provide all of the five required Pre-ETS services, the Commission shall provide the nine authorized services set forth at 34 CFR 361.48(a)(3). The Pre-ETS services to be provided by the Commission include the Students in Transition to Employment Program (STEP), which provides students who are blind or visually impaired with paid work-based learning experiences.

Personnel from educational agencies shall provide transition planning for students who are blind or visually impaired that facilitates the development and implementation of their individualized education programs under section 614(d) of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Consistent with its obligations under state and federal law, personnel from PED shall also provide guidance and direction on transition planning to educational agencies for students who are blind or visually impaired that facilitates the development and implementation of their individualized education programs under section 614(d) of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. This shall include methods for the identification of students who may be eligible for Commission services, and methods for making referrals of such students to the Commission.

PED shall designate at least one representative to serve on the Commission's State Rehabilitation Council pursuant to 34 CFR 361.17(b)(3), and as specified at 34 CFR 361.17(b)(1)(x).

PED shall establish and maintain an advisory panel for the purpose of providing policy guidance with respect to special education and related services for children with disabilities pursuant to 34 CFR 300.167. When making panel membership recommendations, PED shall consider representatives with knowledge of and experience in the delivery of Pre-Employment Transition Services, including Pre-ETS Services provided to students who are blind or visually impaired.

The Commission shall maintain an Executive Director who shall be responsible for the overall operation of the Commission, a Deputy Director who is responsible for the administration of the vocational rehabilitation program, a Vocational Rehabilitation Program Manager, and a Transition Coordinator. The Commission shall also employ such other personnel as may be necessary for the provision of Pre-

Employment Transition Services, including a Deputy Director responsible for the Orientation Center in Alamogordo, the Skills Center Coordinator in Albuquerque, the Technology Manager in Albuquerque, and the Technology Specialist Supervisor in Alamogordo.

PED shall employ a Director of Special Education and such other staff as may be necessary for the provision of special education and related services in New Mexico, including the provision of transition services.

PED may include the Commission in transition conferences and such other activities that might further outreach to students who are blind or visually impaired.

The Commission has entered into an agreement with the New Mexico Central Region Educational Cooperative to provide Pre-ETS services to students who are blind or visually impaired. The Commission has also entered into an agreement with the New Mexico School for the Blind and Visually Impaired to provide Pre-ETS services to students who are blind or visually impaired. The Commission will maintain these agreements as appropriate and to the extent that sufficient funding is available.

The Commission shall maintain documentation of its compliance with Section 511 for students and youth with disabilities who are seeking subminimum wage employment, including documentation showing that all required Section 511 counseling has been provided.

Pursuant to 34 CFR 397.31, neither the PED nor any local educational agency in New Mexico will enter into a contract or other arrangement with an entity, as defined in 34 CFR 397.5(d), for the purpose of operating a program under which a youth with a disability is engaged in work compensated at a subminimum wage.

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.

The Agency works with the following non-profit rehabilitation services providers:

NM Division of Vocational Rehabilitation; Zuni Entrepreneurial Enterprises, Inc.; New Vistas Center for Independent Living; Developmental Disabilities Planning Council; TRESKO; Laguna-Acoma Vocational Rehabilitation; Navajo Nation Office of Special Education & Rehabilitation Services; Jemez Vocational Rehabilitation; Tobosa Developmental Services; Goodwill Industries; Department of Health, Developmental Disabilities Support Division; Helen Keller National Center; Community Outreach Programs for the Deaf; the NM Commission for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Persons; Best Buddies; the Small Business Development Centers located throughout New Mexico; and the New Mexico Council for Purchasing from Persons with Disabilities, through Horizons of New Mexico, their central non-profit agency.

The Agency also maintains cooperative partnerships with the Centers for Independent Living throughout the state, and coordinates services through the Statewide Independent Living Council. The Agency has actively worked to expand ties with the IL centers and work with the SILC, in an effort to increase staff and consumer awareness of their activities. A SILC representative serves on the Agency's Statewide Rehabilitation Council, and as such, keeps each respective Council up to date on their respective activities. The Commission's Deputy Director for Independent Living programs has also applied for SILC membership.

The manner in which these agreements are established comes from several methods. The Agency receives input directly from consumers and service providers, either through telephone contact or written referrals and requests. Input is received from Public Hearings, the State Rehabilitation Council, the SILC, and the joint planning ventures with various service providers. Needs assessments studies, consumer surveys, and cooperative meetings are also conducted to gather data and information with respect to establishing cooperative agreements. Cooperative agreements typically do not involve any monetary exchange between the agencies. The staff of each agency agrees to cooperate with each other, and reciprocate in referring consumers for services as appropriate.

The Commission is proud of its relationship with the National Federation of the Blind (NFB). The NFB is the largest organization of blind persons in the United States. The Agency incorporated NFB Newsline as a part of its overall Newsline services in FY 2002, and intends to continue NFB Newsline in PY 2020.

Newsline is an important part of the Commission's outreach program to identify and serve most significantly disabled persons who are minorities, and individuals who have been unserved or underserved by the vocational rehabilitation or supported employment program. Newsline provides access to state and national publications to individuals in all portions of New Mexico, including in the most rural portions of the state. The local Newsline and NFB-Newsline have publications that include newspapers from Albuquerque, Santa Fe, Los Alamos, Farmington, Gallup, Alamogordo, Las Cruces, and Roswell. Newsline also has a Spanish language news category. NFB-Newsline offers prompts in Spanish, and has several Spanish language publications. NFB-Newsline voices can also be customized to meet the needs of individuals who are hard of hearing, and NFB-Newsline offers the ability to download publications for reading on a Braille display. This feature enables individuals who are deaf-blind to access the entire

selection of more than 365 national newspapers and magazines. NFB-Newsline also offers a job search feature that enables job seekers to create custom searches of the CareerBuilder job database.

The Commission works closely with the New Mexico affiliate of the NFB as well. The NFBNM has opened its annual state convention agenda to enable the Commission to make reports on its programs and services and to hold public hearings in order to gather comments on the state plan, strategic plan, and agency services. The NFBNM has membership on the Commission's State Rehabilitation Council, representing blind consumers. During prior years, the NFBNM and Commission co-sponsored employer awards to worthy organizations, recognizing the award-winning organizations at the NFBNM's state convention banquet. The Commission has also had a strong relationship with the American Council of the Blind, another prominent organization of individuals who are blind. As with the NFBNM, the New Mexico affiliate of the ACB has opened its state convention agenda to enable the Commission to make reports and hold public hearings to gather comments on the state plan, strategic plan, and agency services. Representatives of the ACBNM have also served on the Commission's State Rehabilitation Council, although the ACBNM has been only minimally active in the past few years.

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.

In the past, the Agency has worked with the nonprofit organizations listed below for the provision of coordinated supported employment services to consumers who qualify for supported employment. Under the new supported employment provisions of WIOA, the Commission will ensure that: 1. The consumer is engaged in supported employment that is in competitive integrated employment, or in an integrated work setting in which the consumer is working on a short-term basis toward competitive integrated employment; 2. The employment is customized for the individual consistent with his or her strengths, abilities, interests, and informed choice; and 3. Expand the provision of supported employment for up to 24 months prior to the transition to extended services.

Extended services may be provided to consumers after successful case closure in order to maintain job stability. These services may include specialized tools and supplies, specialized training, and costs of needed services not otherwise available from long-term funding sources. Under the new supported employment provisions of WIOA, the Commission will be able to cover the cost of extended services for up to four years for youth with the most significant disabilities. The Commission will work with the providers listed below to expand the nature of Commission-funded extended services to youth with the most significant disabilities.

1. Goodwill Industries of New Mexico, 5000 San Mateo Blvd., Albuquerque, NM. Services included job assessment, job development and placement, intensive on-the-job skills training, and other training and support in order to achieve and maintain job stability. The population served under this agreement included individuals who meet the eligibility requirements of the Commission's supported employment program.

2. LifeROOTS, 1111 Menaul Blvd N.E., Albuquerque, NM; and 1009 Golf Course Road, Suites 105 & 106, Rio Rancho, NM. LifeROOTS provided job assessment, job development and placement, on-the-job intensive skills training, other training and support in order for the consumer to achieve and maintain job stability, the facilitation of socialization and communication with coworkers, and assistance with transportation arrangements. The populations served under this agreement included individuals who meet the eligibility requirements of the Commission's supported employment program.

3. New Vistas Supported Employment Services, 2890 Trades West Road, Santa Fe, NM. Services included job assessment, job development and placement, on-the-job intensive skills training, other training and support in order for the consumer to achieve and maintain stability on the job, facilitation of socialization and communication with coworkers, and assistance with transportation arrangements. The population served under this agreement included individuals who meet the eligibility requirements of the Commission's supported employment program. 5.

4. Tobosa Developmental Services, 1219 West Summit, Roswell, NM, 88201 Tobosa Developmental Services provided job assessment, job development and placement, on-the-job intensive skills training, other training and support in order for the consumer to achieve and maintain job stability, the facilitation of socialization and communication with coworkers, and assistance with transportation arrangements. The populations served under this agreement included individuals who meet the eligibility requirements of the Commission's supported employment program.

5. Zia Therapy Center Inc., 900 W. 1st, Alamogordo, NM. Zia Therapy provided job assessment, job development and placement, on-the-job intensive skills training, other training and support in order for the consumer to achieve and maintain job stability, the facilitation of socialization and communication with coworkers, and assistance with transportation arrangements. The populations served under this agreement included individuals who meet the eligibility requirements of the Commission's supported employment program.

Similar programs in other New Mexico communities will be contacted, as appropriate, to determine their capacity to participate in collaborative efforts regarding the Commission's supported employment program.

6. Bonnie Harbin-Quintana Harbin & Associates, Phone: (505) 450-8969, Harbin_1@msn.com, Services included job assessment, job development and placement, intensive on-the-job skills training, and other training and support in order to achieve and maintain job stability. The population served under this agreement included individuals who meet the eligibility requirements of the Commission's supported employment program.

7. Jacqueline P Beck-Manheimer, Phone: 505-948-9266, JacquelineBM17@gmail.com, Services included job assessment, job development and placement, intensive on-the-job skills training, and other training and support in order to achieve and maintain job stability. The population served under this agreement included individuals who meet the eligibility requirements of the Commission's supported employment program.

8. Center for Function & Creativity, 223 Montano Road NW, Albuquerque, NM 87107, Provided job assessment, job development and placement, on-the-job intensive skills training, other training and support required to achieve and maintain job stability, facilitation of socialization and communication with coworkers, and assistance with transportation arrangements. Individuals served under this agreement are those who meet the eligibility requirements of the Commission's supported employment program.

9. Mandy's Farm, 7511 4th Street NW, Los Ranchos, NM 87107, (505) 503-1141, Provided job assessment, job development and placement, on-the-job intensive skills training, other training and support required to achieve and maintain job stability, facilitation of socialization and communication with coworkers, and assistance with transportation arrangements. Individuals served under this agreement are those who meet the eligibility requirements of the Commission's supported employment program.

10. An Open Door LLC, 2445 Missouri, Suite B, Las Cruces, NM 88001, (575) 382-2107; Provided job assessment, job development and placement, on-the-job intensive skills training, other training and support required to achieve and maintain job stability, facilitation of socialization and communication with coworkers, and assistance with transportation arrangements. Individuals served under this agreement are those who meet the eligibility requirements of the Commission's supported employment program.

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

Historically, the commission has eschewed homemaker closures and physical restoration closures, choosing instead to pursue competitive integrated employment and self-employment exclusively. As a result, the Commission has developed effective employer relationships and placement methods that serve adults, students with disabilities, and youth with the most significant disabilities.

Placements

On-the-job training experiences are an effective approach that can result in permanent job placement. This method also helps to overcome doubts that employers have about employing persons with blindness or visual-impairments. Summer jobs serve the dual purpose of overcoming employer doubts while at the same time providing youth with valuable work experience. Successful efforts at Job retention for longtime employees losing their vision also help to show employers that, with proper blindness skills, work methods, and technology, can perform work effectively.

The Students in Transition to Employment Program (STEP) will continue with its efforts to provide work experience and skills training to blind students during the summer months. STEP continues to provide outreach to recruit students with the most significant disabilities, including students from minority backgrounds, and students who are also unserved or underserved. The STEP program is also operated on a residential basis in Alamogordo, which allows students from even the most economically disadvantaged and rural portions of the state to participate. STEP students are paid during the employment portion of the program. In addition to providing essential job training and experience, this also has the benefit of serving as a significant incentive for many students from economically disadvantaged families, enabling the Commission to reach and attract more individuals into the program. In addition to the residential program in Alamogordo, STEP offers a commuter program that serves students with disabilities within the Albuquerque metropolitan area, and also offers community placements statewide.

The goal of the STEP Program is to give participating students more exposure to the workplace, enabling them to gain a better appreciation of the real-world expectations of employers, to enable them to gain a better understanding of their career options, and to acquire the job skills that will help them to achieve the ultimate goal of becoming employed. The STEP program does this through paid job experience. Job placement will be done based upon availability of work sites and the student's career interests and ability. Students will be paid for up to 25 hours a week at the Santa Fe Living wage rate, (\$11.80 in calendar 2019).

Alamogordo and Albuquerque students will also receive training designed to enhance their employment skills. An emphasis will be placed upon the development of "soft" work skills such as dressing appropriately for the job site, communication with coworkers and supervisors, timeliness and reliability, and the importance of a positive attitude. STEP students will also receive training in how to use popular computer applications such as Word and Internet Explorer by using assistive technology such as JAWS. Students will also have an opportunity to acquire greater literacy by using Braille. Because the ability to travel

independently is essential for successful employment, students will be taught Orientation and Mobility (cane travel).

Students will be taught other essential skills, including how to identify different currency denominations, how to label their clothes and dress appropriately for different job situations, how to shop for groceries, and how to prepare basic meals.

Community-based participants will also receive customized training to serve their individual needs.

Summer employment is a common experience of adults in the workplace. When it comes to the employment of blind and visually-impaired youth, it can be a valuable experience for both the employer and the youth. Although we rarely find blind and visually-impaired youth who are interested in working during the school year, many of them are interested in working during the summer. The Commission has historically been able to fund summer employment opportunities for any youth who were interested, but the Commission will make a greater effort to encourage more youth to take advantage of summer employment opportunities in the future. The Commission supported 29 students in summer employment during summer 2019 and will strive to increase that number to between 40 and 45 in summer 2020. Of course, the Commission will use existing employer relationships and develop new employer relationships to facilitate work opportunities for students who do wish to take advantage of work opportunities after school or on weekends when school is in session. As part of an Intergovernmental Agreement with the New Mexico Central Region Educational Cooperative (CREC), CREC staff will provide job development services to STEP consumers.

Employers

The Commission has relationships with a wide variety of employers across New Mexico. Employers cover the landscape of federal government; state, county, and municipal governments; post-secondary educational institutions; public, charter, and private secondary schools; private non-profit businesses; and private for-profit businesses of all sizes and types.

The Commission will utilize existing relationships and develop new relationships in order to create employment opportunities and work experience opportunities for adults, students with disabilities, and youth with the most significant disabilities in competitive integrated settings and self-employment.

In an effort to increase employment and work experience opportunities in competitive integrated settings, the Commission will reach out to federal contractors. The new rules in Section 503 of the Rehab Act introduce a hiring goal for federal contractors and subcontractors that 7 percent of each job group in their workforce be qualified individuals with disabilities. This is an area of opportunity that has not been fully utilized by the Commission.

The Commission will also partner with business development specialist in one-stop work centers across the state to connect the Commission with employers in those service territories. Such partnerships will serve to improve OJT and permanent placement opportunities for job-ready Commission adults and work experience opportunities for students with disabilities and youth with the most significant disabilities.

The Commission will also assist consumers interested in self-employment to take advantage of provisions of the New Mexico State Use Act. The New Mexico State Use Act, 13-1C-1 NMSA 1978, is an outgrowth of the state's continuing efforts to expand opportunities for its citizens with disabilities. The Act opens state service contracts, including contracts to provide service to the state as business owners and entrepreneurs, to persons with disabilities without their having to competitively bid for the contract -- so long as the services

are provided at fair market pricing. Again, although the Commission has encouraged self-employment, it has not assisted its self-employed consumers to take full advantage of opportunities afforded by the State Use Act. The Commission will partner with Horizons of New Mexico, the program's agent, to facilitate additional opportunities for self-employed consumers. The Commission's executive director serves on the State Use Council.

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

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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;

The Commission regularly surveys consumers to make sure that consumers are participating in the Medicaid program, including and especially as it relates to work incentives that encourage employment. This includes counseling consumers to apply for the Section 1619(b) program when consumers may lose SSI due to work activity, and to encourage consumers to apply for the Working Disabled Individual Category 043 program when the consumer's income is too high to qualify for the 1619(b) program. Of special note is that it was the Commission that came up with the idea of using the Working Disabled Individual category to address the problem of the 24-month Medicare waiting period. The Commission worked with the state Medical Assistance Division in the development of the Medi-Gap portion of Category 043, which provides Medicaid to persons who have lost SSI due to the start of SSDI, and who thereby lost Medicaid coverage. The Commission also works to make sure that consumers who lose SSI due to the start of Disabled Adult Child benefits maintain Medicaid under Public Law 99-643 and Section 1634(d). The Commission also works to make sure that low-income consumers who may be eligible for Qualified Medicare Beneficiaries (QMB) Specified Low Income Medicare Beneficiaries (SLIMB) or Qualified Individual (QI) are receiving QMB, SLIMB, or QI.

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

The Commission has been partnering with the New Mexico Department of Health, Developmental Disabilities Supports Division (DDSD) for many years. DDSD is responsible for overseeing various Medicaid home-and community-based waiver programs that are designed to help people with disabilities live as independently as possible. The Commission participates in the overall plan of services for eligible consumers by providing supported employment services such as vocational evaluation, vocational training, job development, job coaching, and extended services. New WIOA provisions will now enable the Commission to provide supported employment for up to 24 months and to provide up to 48 months of extended services to youth with the most significant disabilities. The Commission also works closely with the Developmental Disabilities Planning Council (DDPC). The DDPC is a key stakeholder, and the agency has included the DDPC in outreach in the development of the Commission's portion of the Combined State Plan.

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

The agency currently does not have a cooperative agreement with the agency responsible for providing mental health services, but the agency does provide training to staff on how to better serve individuals with mental illness and on the resources available. The agency will develop a cooperative agreement with state agencies that provide mental health 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;

The Commission endeavors to maintain caseload sizes of between 50 and 75 cases per counselor. To ensure the ratio of one counselor to 50 - 75 consumers, the Agency employs eight counselors. The Commission serves approximately 400 VR consumers at any one time. The Commission's list of functional position titles, (Full-time Equivalents), current vacancies, and the number of staff expected to retire in the next five years for each is provided below.

Executive Director, 1, 0, 0

Deputy Agency Director II, 1, 1, 0

Deputy Director for Field Services, 1, 0, 0

Program Manager for Vocational Rehabilitation Programs, 1, 0, 0

Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Supervisor, 1, 0, 1

Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor, 7, 2, 0

Program Manager for Assistive Technology, 1, 0, 0

Assistive Technology Specialist, 4, 2, 0

Program Manager for Business Enterprise Program, 1, 0, 0

IL Staff Manager, 1, 0, 0

Rehab/IL Teacher, 8, 1, 2

Deputy Director for Adult Orientation Center, 1, 0, 0

Orientation Center Instructor Supervisor, 1, 0, 0
Orientation Center Instructor, 6, 0, 2
Orientation Center Dormitory Supervisor, 1, 0, 0
Orientation Center Dormitory Workers, 4, 0, 1
Coordinator of Technology for Children, 1, 0, 0
Technical Support Providers, 2, 0, 0
Step Instructors, 0.675, 0, 0,
Business Operations Specialist, 5, 0, 1
Newline Coordinator, 1, 0, 0
Newline Weekend Coordinator, 1, 0, 1,
Maintenance and Repair Worker, 3, 0, 1
Executive Secretary, 1, 0, 1
Secretary, 9, 2, 2
Reader/Driver, 7.6, 3, 3
Deputy Director for Finance and Administration, 1, 0, 0
Accountant/Auditor, 2, 1, 0
Accounts Payable Supervisor, 1, 0, 1
Finance Manager, 1, 0, 0
Financial Specialist, 1, 0, 0
HR, Training, and Labor Specialist, 1, 0, 0
IT Technology Officer, 1, 0, 0

Projections of staff needs in five years based upon current consumer trends would require the continued employment of eight counselors to maintain the present ratio of one counselor for every 50 to 75 cases. The Commission will maintain the present ratio of one counselor for every 50 to 75 cases in order to assure optimum services to consumers. It is apparent that improvements in service delivery will not necessarily

rely upon expanded numbers of staff, but rather upon the qualities and training of personnel in the existing personnel configuration. The Agency will continue to provide annual intensive staff training, as well as periodic training to meet specific identified needs. In addition, the Agency has implemented the Accessible Web-Based Activity and Reporting Environment (AWARE) case management system, which has freed additional time for counselors to serve consumers. Training on the AWARE program began in August of 1999 and is conducted on an ongoing basis. The Agency is serving all consumers that are referred for services, and it is not anticipated that there will be any significant increase in the number of consumers seeking services.

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

The Commission's list of functional position titles, (Full-time Equivalents), current vacancies, and the number of staff expected to retire in the next five years for each is provided below.

Executive Director, 1, 0, 0

Deputy Agency Director II, 1, 1, 0

Deputy Director for Field Services, 1, 0, 0

Program Manager for Vocational Rehabilitation Programs, 1, 0, 0

Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Supervisor, 1, 0, 1

Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor, 7, 2, 0

Program Manager for Assistive Technology, 1, 0, 0

Assistive Technology Specialist, 4, 2, 0

Program Manager for Business Enterprise Program, 1, 0, 0

IL Staff Manager, 1, 0, 0

Rehab/IL Teacher, 8, 1, 2

Deputy Director for Adult Orientation Center, 1, 0, 0

Orientation Center Instructor Supervisor, 1, 0, 0

Orientation Center Instructor, 6, 0, 2

Orientation Center Dormitory Supervisor, 1, 0, 0

Orientation Center Dormitory Workers, 4, 0, 1

Coordinator of Technology for Children, 1, 0, 0

Technical Support Providers, 2, 0, 0

Step Instructors, 0.675, 0, 0,

Business Operations Specialist, 5, 0, 1

Newsline Coordinator, 1, 0, 0

Newsline Weekend Coordinator, 1, 0, 1,

Maintenance and Repair Worker, 3, 0, 1

Executive Secretary, 1, 0, 1

Secretary, 9, 2, 2

Reader/Driver, 7.6, 3, 3

Deputy Director for Finance and Administration, 1, 0, 0

Accountant/Auditor, 2, 1, 0

Accounts Payable Supervisor, 1, 0, 1

Finance Manager, 1, 0, 0

Financial Specialist, 1, 0, 0

HR, Training, and Labor Specialist, 1, 0, 0

IT Technology Officer, 1, 0, 0

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.

The Commission endeavors to maintain caseload sizes of between 50 and 75 cases per counselor. To ensure the ratio of one counselor to 50 - 75 consumers, the Agency employs eight counselors. The Commission serves approximately 400 VR consumers at any one time. The Commission's list of functional position titles, (Full-time Equivalents), current vacancies, and the number of staff expected to retire in the next five years for each is provided below.

Executive Director, 1, 0, 0

Deputy Agency Director II, 1, 1, 0

Deputy Director for Field Services, 1, 0, 0

Program Manager for Vocational Rehabilitation Programs, 1, 0, 0

Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Supervisor, 1, 0, 1

Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor, 7, 2, 0

Program Manager for Assistive Technology, 1, 0, 0

Assistive Technology Specialist, 4, 2, 0

Program Manager for Business Enterprise Program, 1, 0, 0

IL Staff Manager, 1, 0, 0

Rehab/IL Teacher, 8, 1, 2

Deputy Director for Adult Orientation Center, 1, 0, 0

Orientation Center Instructor Supervisor, 1, 0, 0

Orientation Center Instructor, 6, 0, 2

Orientation Center Dormitory Supervisor, 1, 0, 0

Orientation Center Dormitory Workers, 4, 0, 1

Coordinator of Technology for Children, 1, 0, 0

Technical Support Providers, 2, 0, 0

Step Instructors, 0.675, 0, 0,

Business Operations Specialist, 5, 0, 1

Newsline Coordinator, 1, 0, 0

Newsline Weekend Coordinator, 1, 0, 1,

Maintenance and Repair Worker, 3, 0, 1

Executive Secretary, 1, 0, 1

Secretary, 9, 2, 2

Reader/Driver, 7.6, 3, 3

Deputy Director for Finance and Administration, 1, 0, 0

Accountant/Auditor, 2, 1, 0

Accounts Payable Supervisor, 1, 0, 1

Finance Manager, 1, 0, 0

Financial Specialist, 1, 0, 0

HR, Training, and Labor Specialist, 1, 0, 0

IT Technology Officer, 1, 0, 0

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;

The Commission has a Memorandum of Understanding with New Mexico Highlands University, located in Las Vegas, New Mexico, which is offering a degree program in vocational rehabilitation counseling. Two of the agency's current counselors either graduated from the New Mexico Highlands program or have taken graduate courses at Highlands. New Mexico Highlands has 25 students currently enrolled in their rehabilitation counseling program. They graduated seven students during calendar 2019, all of whom are eligible for both the New Mexico Licensed Rehabilitation Counselor and Certified Rehabilitation Counselor certifications. The New Mexico Highlands program is CORE accredited. The MOU with New Mexico Highlands also offers support of intern placements whenever possible, although the agency was unable to host any interns during the past PY. The Commission will continue its positive relationship with New Mexico Highlands University to assure that NMHU students consider employment with the Commission. Graduates from NMHU often include representation from minority populations as well as candidates who speak Spanish. Although the agency encourages its counselor staff to attend the in-state Highlands University program, the agency recognizes that, depending on individual situations, distance education programs offered by other universities may also serve staff education needs. As such, the Commission has also inquired of the counselor training programs at other universities, including the University of North Texas (part of a well-established consortium between the University of North Texas, San Diego State University, and Georgia State University); as well as the counselor program at the University of Arkansas, Little Rock. Two Commission counselors took graduate classes at the University of North Texas program in PY17. Another counselor took graduate courses at the University of Arkansas, Little Rock, during PY16 and PY17. New Mexico State University had sponsored a graduate program in Orientation and Mobility. Two Commission staff members completed the NMSU O and M program. One of these staff members is still with the Commission and provides valuable training expertise for both vocational rehabilitation and independent living consumers. Thirteen students are currently enrolled in the program. Four students graduated in calendar 2019, one of whom tested and received their Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist (COMS) certification. The Commission also recruits Orientation and Mobility Specialists and Rehab Teachers from Louisiana Tech University. Their Orientation and Mobility Specialist program emphasizes non-visual instruction and the Structured Discovery Model. This model is consistent with the training philosophy of the Commission's Orientation Center in Alamogordo. Two students are currently

enrolled in the program. During calendar 2019, nine individuals graduated at the Masters or Certificate level and were eligible to obtain national certification. This would be National Orientation and Mobility Certification (NOMC) or National Certification in Rehabilitation Teaching for the Blind (NCRTB). Three Commission employees hold NOMC certification and four hold NCRTB certification. In addition, eleven Commission employees hold the National Certification in Unified English Braille. The Commission has sponsored seminars and exams leading to certification in Braille competency since 2008. This effort has included school teachers, and as a result, New Mexico now has more Braille certified teachers than any other state.

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

Commission personnel will meet with public and university personnel to review options for enabling the Commission's rehabilitation counselors to meet certification requirements. The current and projected personnel needs for vocational rehabilitation counselors are stable, and are not expected to increase. This projection of personnel needs is based on the implementation of the AWARE case management program and a trend towards stable vocational rehabilitation caseloads statewide. However, the Commission is aware of changing demographics which may impact this, including the aging of the work force and an increasing rate of blind infants and children who have disabilities in addition to blindness. There are currently seven counselor positions, one counselor supervisor that carries a caseload, and one program manager over the VR Counselor team in the vocational rehabilitation program. As previously discussed, the Executive Director of the Commission and his/her designee will continue to meet with university personnel to provide appropriate training to the rehabilitation counselor team. The Agency also actively recruits individuals who come from minority backgrounds or who have disabilities, including posting of job announcements on the "blind jobs" and "Rehab Professionals" list services and other blindness related list services. The agency also provides internships and recruits graduates of the New Mexico Highlands rehabilitation counselor program, which generally includes representation from minority populations as well as candidates who speak Spanish and

Native American languages. The Commission has a Memorandum of Understanding with New Mexico Highlands University, located in Las Vegas, New Mexico, which is offering a degree program in vocational rehabilitation counseling. Two of the agency's current counselors either graduated from the New Mexico Highlands program or have taken graduate courses at Highlands. New Mexico Highlands has 25 students currently enrolled in their rehabilitation counseling program. They graduated seven students during calendar 2019, all of whom are eligible for both the New Mexico Licensed Rehabilitation Counselor and Certified Rehabilitation Counselor certifications. The New Mexico Highlands program is CORE accredited. The MOU with New Mexico Highlands also offers support of intern placements whenever possible, although the agency was unable to host any interns during the past PY. The Commission will continue its positive relationship with New Mexico Highlands University to assure that NMHU students consider employment with the Commission. Graduates from NMHU often include representation from minority populations as well as candidates who speak Spanish. Although the agency encourages its counselor staff to attend the Highlands University program, the agency recognizes that, depending on individual situations, distance education programs offered by other universities may also serve staff education needs. As such, the Commission has also inquired of the counselor training programs at other universities, including the University of North Texas (part of a well-established consortium between the University of North Texas, San Diego State University, and Georgia State University); as well as the counselor program at the University of Arkansas, Little Rock. Two Commission counselors completed the University of North Texas program in 2010 and again in 2018. One other counselor took graduate classes there in 2017. Another counselor took graduate courses at the University of Arkansas, Little Rock, during PY16 and PY17. New Mexico State University had sponsored a graduate program in Orientation and Mobility. Two Commission staff members completed the NMSU O and M program. One of these staff members is still with the Commission and provides valuable training expertise for both vocational rehabilitation and independent living consumers. Thirteen students are currently enrolled in the program. Four students graduated in calendar 2019, one of whom tested and received their Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist (COMS) certification. The Commission also recruits Orientation and Mobility Specialists and Rehab Teachers from Louisiana Tech University. Their Orientation and Mobility Specialist program emphasizes non-visual instruction and the Structured Discovery Model. This model is consistent with the training philosophy of the Commission's Orientation Center in Alamogordo. Two students are currently enrolled in the program. During calendar 2019, nine individuals graduated at the Masters or Certificate level and were eligible to obtain national certification. This would be National Orientation and Mobility Certification (NOMC) or National Certification in Rehabilitation Teaching for the Blind (NCRTB). This would be National Orientation and Mobility Certification (NOMC) or National Certification in Rehabilitation Teaching for the Blind (NCRTB). Three Commission employees hold NOMC certification and four hold NCRTB certification. In addition, eleven Commission employees hold the National Certification in Unified English Braille. The Commission has sponsored seminars and exams leading to certification in Braille competency since 2008. This effort has included school teachers, and as a result, New Mexico now has more Braille certified teachers than any other state.

Other training for rehabilitation professionals in the fields of blindness, deaf-blind and related disabilities such as diabetes has been continually provided by the Agency to existing professional and support staff. It is anticipated that these efforts will enable the Agency to meet federal certification requirements over the foreseeable future. The Commission will provide additional training in key areas, such as those related to transition services, career assessment, and job placement. The agency currently uses a manual system for the tracking of data related to each counselor, their training programs and data directly pertinent to the CSPD requirements. A record of the transcripts and course work completed by each counselor is maintained in a file and is used to track progress in achieving the necessary academic requirements.

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

The New Mexico Commission for the Blind continues to monitor and update the comprehensive system of personnel development each year, to ensure that an adequate supply of qualified rehabilitation professionals and paraprofessionals are available to the Commission. Qualified counselors are those that have earned Certified Rehabilitation Counselor (CRC) certification, are eligible to sit for the CRC examination, or have attained a New Mexico License in Rehabilitation Counseling under the Master's level requirements of the state license, as described below. A. Master's degree in rehabilitation counseling from a regionally accredited college or university. This requirement shall be satisfied by meeting the requirements of Paragraphs (1) or (2) of Subsection A below. (1) A master's degree awarded by a New Mexico college or university must incorporate the New Mexico Public Education Department's approved competencies in rehabilitation counseling. (2) A master's degree awarded by a college or university outside of New Mexico must be for a rehabilitation counseling program approved by the New Mexico Public Education Department. B. Master's degree in school counseling, vocational counseling or other related field and the provisions of Paragraphs (1) or (2) of Subsection B below (1) one (1) year of experience in rehabilitation counseling, or (2) fifteen (15) semester hours of credit in the rehabilitation counseling competency areas of vocational/transition assessment, medical aspects of disability, psychosocial and/or psycho-cultural aspects of disability, case management in rehabilitation counseling, issues and practices in rehabilitation counseling, or placement aspects of rehabilitation counseling. All but one of the VR counselors and VR supervisory staff have at least a Master's Degree. At present, two of the Agency's six counselors have CRC certification, one possesses alternative state licensure and is eligible to sit for the CRC, one will be taking classes under CRCC requirements in order to sit for the CRC, one is eligible for state licensure, and one holds a Bachelor's Degree and will be starting a graduate program in VR Counseling during PY 2020. In addition, the program manager over the VR counselor team also holds both CRC and state licensure. The existing staffing configuration will include current staff as well as new staff hired to fill any positions that should become vacant. As turnover occurs due to retirement or staff leaving their positions, the Agency will make it a high priority to promptly fill any vacant counselor positions with CRC Certified Rehabilitation Counselors. The desired academic qualification for a new counselor is a Master's degree in Rehabilitation Counseling. If the pool of candidates does not include a person possessing the desired qualifications, the minimum degree will be a Bachelor's degree with a requirement that the counselor obtain either CRC certification or alternative state licensure within a maximum of four (4) years of the date of hiring. State licensure was enacted in 2000. The agency has set aside funds for counselor training to help counselors meet academic standards.

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.

The agency's State Rehabilitation Council has affirmed its desire that the agency continue to maintain the above qualifications requirements for its VR counselors. In view of new WIOA requirements, the agency will ensure that professional and paraprofessional personnel have a 21st-century understanding of the evolving labor force and needs of individuals with disabilities.

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

Vocational rehabilitation counselors attend regular bi-monthly training coordinated by the Program Manager for VR Programs. The training regularly addresses technology issues, training center issues, employment services issues, transition, post-secondary education and training, and training on various state and local services. Recent presentations from national, state and local agencies and organizations included Updates to the New Mexico DD Waiver Program; College Success Program with Learning Ally; Mississippi State University NRTC Service to Businesses; Y-TAC Presentation on WIOA; UNM Valencia Career Services Director on Creating Crosswalks from WOWI to Onet; Horizons of New Mexico on Opportunities through the State Use Act; and Guardianship Issues through the Developmental Disabilities Planning Council.

Training on the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act is being provided to emphasize legal requirements for current and newly hired staff, 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. In addition, training will focus on evidenced-based approaches. Content experts from outside the Agency, including from the technical assistance centers around the country, will be secured in areas where Agency staff does not have the knowledge or expertise necessary to provide the training. This will include training on section 4 of the Assistive Technology Act of 1998. Commission professionals spend eight weeks at the agency's Orientation Center receiving immersion training. The training is conducted under blindfold, enabling the staff members to learn the same non-visual techniques that their consumers are learning. This creates a belief on the part of the staff that their blind clients really can travel independently, become literate (Braille literate), organize their households and documents, shop and prepare nutritious meals, and keep themselves clean and well-groomed. Counselors also attend conventions of the two consumer organizations. New counselors who have never attended a national convention are given the option to attend either the ACB or NFB convention. Since the Commission encourages and supports consumer attendance at these conventions for a myriad of reasons, the Commission believes it is essential for counselors to attend so they can speak from personal experience when advising consumers. As for state conventions, counselors have historically been required to attend both conventions initially, then required to attend one or the other in subsequent years. The state ACB affiliate has not sponsored a state convention the past few years. A great deal of learning takes place at both the national and state conventions. The Commission intends to continue this practice in future years. The Commission has a staff of five assistive technology specialists. The Commission provides continuing training in assistive technology to both staff and consumers. The Commission operates a technology training lab in the Albuquerque Skills Center which provides instruction in the use of assistive technology. This training uses a hands-on lab setting to provide instruction in a wide variety of applications, including Microsoft Windows, Word, Excel, Outlook, PowerPoint, and Internet Explorer. The Commission also provides instruction in the use of different types of video magnifiers, Braille

note takers, and in the production of Braille documents through the use of Braille translation software and Braille embossers. Training is also provided on the use of Apple Macintosh computers, iPads, and iPhones. Trainings are made available to consumers, parents of consumers, and school professionals. Consumers attending the Adult Orientation Center in Alamogordo also receive instruction in assistive technology as a regular part of their Center training. The Commission has increased individualized training to consumers through the addition of remote utilities, contract trainers, and distance education trainers. During FY 2011, the Commission began using textbooks that couple instruction in MS Office applications with specific screen readers and screen magnifiers. Historically, Commission staff members have served on all four of the local workforce boards and the Executive Director has served on the State Workforce Board. Recent staff separations have caused a few vacancies on local boards, but those vacancies are expected to be filled with Commission staff during PY 2020. These staff members have received training as a part of their service on the various boards. The VR counselors have also received training on the availability of services through the One-Stops, and on how to assist consumers to access those services in the most appropriate fashion.

B. Acquisition and dissemination of significant knowledge

procedures for the acquisition and dissemination of significant knowledge from research and other sources to designated State unit professionals and paraprofessionals. The Commission participated in a research project with the National Research and Training Center at Mississippi State University. The project was entitled "Effectiveness of an Evidence-Based Approach to Rehabilitation Counselor Training on Working with Businesses." Training took place on-site in Albuquerque in Summer 2018. Commission staff receives training in current research through a

variety of mechanisms, including attendance at the annual state conference of the Association for the Education and Rehabilitation of Persons who are Blind and Visually Impaired (AER), and attendance at the spring and fall meetings of the National Council of State Agencies for the Blind (NCSAB). Commission staff has also received updates on current research through viewing of web casts, Webinars, reading of scholarly journals, and attendance at other relevant conferences.

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.

The Agency provides rehabilitation and independent living services in a State with a large population of persons for whom Spanish is a primary language, and with a significant population of individuals who speak a variety of native languages. The Agency has staff persons who can communicate in some of these languages, and hires interpreters when that is not readily feasible, including a phone-based interpreter service that supports over 150 languages. The Agency has can deliver Braille materials as requested to any consumers throughout New Mexico. Further, the Agency regularly reproduces material on portable media when requested. All Agency word processing software programs can produce text in large print. The Agency also regularly contracts with sign language interpreters whenever there is a need for a sign language interpreter. The agency has experimented with remote video interpreting so as to more-effectively serve deafblind consumers who require sign language support. This is especially effective in rural areas where it is difficult to schedule human interpreters.

Newly hired Agency personnel who work directly with consumers participate in up to two months of intensive training in the skills of blindness at the Commission's Orientation Center, where two of the classes

in the curriculum (Braille and Communications) deal with modes of communication utilized by individuals who are blind.

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.

The Agency coordinates with the State Special Education department in participating in the Public Education Department's CSPD activities in order to coordinate the system of personnel development with the personnel development system under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. When appropriate, joint training will be undertaken between the Commission and the Public Education Department to further the coordination of personnel development. The Agency Executive Director maintains a close working relationship with the Public Education Department.

The State Rehabilitation Council had an opportunity to review and provide input and comments in the development of the CSPD Plan.

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;

Following is a description of the needs assessment process conducted in support of our state plan submission:

Pursuant to 34 CFR Section 361.29, the Commission and the State Rehabilitation Council developed and approved the methodology for the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment at a meeting held on August 9, 2018. The Needs Assessment was discussed at a regular meeting of the Council held on October 22, 2018, and the results were reviewed at a special meeting of the Council held on February 11, 2019, and further reviewed at a special meeting of the Council held on May 16, 2019.

The Statewide Assessment of Rehabilitation Needs of Individuals with Disabilities residing within the State and the need to establish, develop, or improve community rehabilitation programs is conducted jointly by the agency and the State Rehabilitation Council every three years. The assessment process conducted during PY 2018 utilized a variety of sources and methodologies for deriving information about:

a. The rehabilitation needs of individuals with the most significant disabilities and their need for supported employment; b. Individuals with disabilities who are minorities and individuals with disabilities who have been unserved or underserved by the vocational rehabilitation program; c. Individuals with disabilities served through components of the statewide workforce investment system other than the vocational rehabilitation program; and d. The needs of students and youth with disabilities for vocational rehabilitation services, including the needs of students with disabilities for pre-employment transition services.

b. The need to establish, develop, or improve community rehabilitation programs within the State.

ADOPTION OF NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Pursuant to 34 CFR Section 361.29, the Commission and the State Rehabilitation Council developed and approved the methodology for the Needs Assessment Survey at a meeting held on August 9, 2018. The methodology adopted consisted of the following:

1. Survey of Demographic Data

A review shall be conducted of available demographic data, including from the American Community Survey, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, and appropriate data sources.

2. Public Meetings and Town Forums

Public meetings shall be conducted throughout New Mexico, with opportunity provided for submission of written comments. The public meetings shall be advertised in newspapers of general circulation, placed on

the agency web page, placed on Newslines for the Blind and on NFB-Newslines, through emailing lists maintained by consumer organizations, and sent to Centers for Independent Living.

3. Focused Discussions

Focused discussions shall be conducted with key stakeholder organizations, including centers for independent living, consumer organizations, and community rehabilitation programs.

4. Needs Assessment Survey

The following consumer satisfaction survey shall be conducted:

NEW MEXICO COMMISSION FOR THE BLIND 2018 Consumer Satisfaction Survey

Methodology

Commission staff will randomly select a pool of 10 percent of the Commission's consumers who have open cases with signed Individualized Plans for Employment, or who have been closed for any reason within the last year. The contracted survey administrator will assign survey identification numbers randomly to the consumer names to protect anonymity of respondents.

All surveys will be conducted by telephone by the survey administrator between the hours of 9:00 AM and 8:30 PM during weekdays, and between 9:00 AM and 5:00 PM on Saturdays. To avoid calling during the most likely mealtime hours, No calls will be placed between 12:00 PM and 1:00 PM, and between 5:30 PM and 7:00 PM.

The survey contains 11 questions. Of these, 6 are questions with scaled responses, one of which is applicable only to respondents who had graduated from the Orientation Center training program. The rating scale for these 6 questions consists of 6 levels to express the level of satisfaction: very satisfied, satisfied, somewhat satisfied, neutral, dissatisfied and very dissatisfied. The other questions are Yes/No questions, and the final question is an open ended solicitation of a narrative comment from respondents.

Script

Hello. My name is _____, and I have been contracted to conduct a survey for the Commission for the Blind. This survey is to assess the level of satisfaction with Commission services. You were selected randomly for this confidential survey, which will take about 5 minutes to complete. May we begin?

1. Overall, how satisfied are you with the Commission's services?

Very satisfied

Satisfied

Somewhat satisfied

Neutral (neither satisfied or dissatisfied)

Dissatisfied

Very Dissatisfied

2. How satisfied are you that you were able to select and pursue your desired employment goal?

Very satisfied

Satisfied

Somewhat satisfied

Neutral (neither satisfied or dissatisfied)

Dissatisfied

Very Dissatisfied

3. How satisfied are you with the promptness of your counselor's responses to your calls and emails?

Very satisfied

Satisfied

Somewhat satisfied

Neutral (neither satisfied or dissatisfied)

Dissatisfied

Very Dissatisfied

4. How satisfied are you with the technology and technology services you received?

Very satisfied

Satisfied

Somewhat satisfied

Neutral (neither satisfied or dissatisfied)

Dissatisfied

Very Dissatisfied

5. Did you graduate from the Orientation Center in Alamogordo?

Yes

No

Not Yet

Questions 6 and 7 are to be asked only if the consumer said “yes” to question 5.

6. How satisfied were you with the training at the Orientation Center?

Very satisfied

Satisfied

Somewhat satisfied

Neutral (neither satisfied or dissatisfied)

Dissatisfied

Very Dissatisfied

7. Do you believe you are achieving greater success than you would have achieved if you had not graduated from the Orientation Center?

Yes

No

Not sure

8. Are you currently employed?

Yes

No

Question 9 is to be asked only if the consumer said “yes” to question 8.

9. Do you believe that the Commission assisted you in any way to achieve your current employment?

Yes

No

Not sure

10. Do you believe you are currently achieving greater success in your employment, training, or education than you would have achieved if the Commission had not been involved?

Yes

No

Not sure

11. Were you told about the availability of assistance from CAP, or the Client Assistance Program?

Yes

No

Not sure

Respondent Narrative Comments

Is there anything you would like to say or add about your satisfaction with the Commission and its services?

Following is a summary of results of the needs assessment process:

1. Review of Strategic Plan and Demographic data.

The State Rehabilitation Council reviewed the current Strategic Plan, the prior needs assessment, the American Community Survey results for New Mexico for persons who report "serious difficulty seeing," and other appropriate demographic data.

The following needs were identified through this process:

A need for more transition services to youth with disabilities in order to meet the increased population in New Mexico, in particular for the growing population of youth with Optic Nerve Hypoplasia, youth with diabetes, youth who are blind as a result of premature birth, and youth with multiple disabilities.

A need to provide additional transition services to combat the Decreasing rates of literacy among blind youth, including in both print and Braille;

A need to provide additional transition services to upgrade the technology and assistive technology skills required for blind and visually impaired youth to succeed in secondary education, post-secondary vocational training/education, and employment.

A need to provide transition services to address the delayed maturation or "failure to launch" syndrome among blind and visually impaired youth.

A need to provide additional academic, social, and independent living skills to youth.

A need for more services to ethnic and racial minority groups which have a greater likelihood for diabetes, which is the leading cause of blindness in adults.

A need to provide services to adults for a longer period of time as a result of the slow economic recovery in New Mexico.

A need to provide a broader set of services to an increasing population of adults with multiple disabilities.

A need to provide Braille skills to adults who did not get the Braille training that they should have received in elementary and secondary school.

A need for technology and assistive technology training to help adults achieve the proficiency that is required to become and remain employed.

A need to provide older individuals with services that will assist them to become and remain employed.

2. Public Meetings and Town Forums

The Commission and State Rehabilitation Council jointly held public meetings as follows:

- October 16, 2019, in Hobbs
- October 17, 2019, in Clovis
- November 25, 2019, in Santa Fe
- November 27, 2019, in Albuquerque
- December 02, 2019, in Las Cruces
- December 03, 2019, in Alamogordo

Notices were widely distributed, including being published in local newspapers, being posted on Newline for the Blind, being placed on the Commission web page, and being placed on the New Mexico State Government Sunshine Portal. The meetings and town forums were designed specifically for the purpose of soliciting input on statewide needs.

The public meeting and town forum process resulted in the following needs being identified:

A need for collaboration, but strongly against consolidation of services. Commenters expressed an overwhelming call for continuing separate services for the blind in New Mexico. Commenters pointed to a homogenization of services which would not serve blind individuals effectively; an increase of caseload sizes by vocational counselor staff; a reduction in resources available to serve blind persons, whose services generally require more money and longer time horizons; concern that consolidation would lead to more hierarchy, more bureaucracy and less autonomy, resulting in reduced flexibility to direct services where they are needed; reduced expertise; a need to maintain its own identity and its own State Rehabilitation Council; and commenters who pointed to research studies that separate services for the blind are more efficient and more effective than combined services. The National Federation of the Blind is the largest organization of blind persons in the United States and the NFB of New Mexico is a strong affiliate of the national organization. Finally, commenters asked what would be done about the Commission's Independent Living Program, which predominantly serves older individuals who are blind across the state and has nothing to do with vocational training and employment.

A need for a liaison between the Commission and the one-stops.

A need for more blind staff at the Orientation Center.

A need for more teachers who are trained to work with blind students.

A need for more Braille and orientation and mobility services.

A need for more training, both in Albuquerque and throughout the state.

A need for more job certification training.

A need for more services for individuals with both hearing and vision loss.

A need for more outreach to consumers, to parents, and to parents who speak other languages.

3. Focused Discussions

Focused discussions were conducted with key stakeholder organizations, in particular consumer organizations and community rehabilitation programs.

Focused discussions were held with the National Federation of the Blind of New Mexico during their annual convention April 5-7, 2019, in Albuquerque. Almost 200 individuals registered for the convention. Discussions were held with other stakeholder groups throughout Calendar 2019 as well.

A need for an updated curriculum for BEP training, as well as a way to identify and fund new locations for blind business owners.

A need for more technology training at the Orientation Center, as well as a need to coordinate training received at the Orientation Center with projected equipment and software to be received by consumers.

A need to recruit and retain VR counselors, technology specialists, rehab teachers, and staff with specialized experience related to serving individuals who are blind and visually impaired.

4. Consumer Satisfaction Survey

The consumer satisfaction survey was based on a sample size of 10 percent of open and recently closed cases, totaling 34 persons. A contractor was enlisted to conduct the survey.

Thirteen individuals responded, two persons declined to participate, there were eight non-working phone numbers, and she was unable to reach ten individuals after between 7 and 10 attempts. Of the thirteen persons who responded, six answered the open-ended questions. She said that everyone seemed happy, and that there were no dissatisfied or very dissatisfied responses.

Overall, 38 percent reported being very satisfied with Commission services, 38 percent were satisfied, 7 percent were somewhat satisfied, and 15 percent were neutral (neither satisfied or dissatisfied).

The following needs were identified as a result of the survey:

A need to recruit and retain more rehab counselors in order to reduce the need to transfer consumers from counselor to counselor, resulting in more consistent service.

B. who are minorities;

The needs assessment yielded some information related to Commission staff, such as a need for more bilingual staff. There was also data related to minority consumers, those being to provide more services to Latinos and Native American adults and youth. Native Americans often wish to stay close to home, which often means reservations and pueblos which have inadequate infrastructure, jobs, and transportation resources.

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

The needs assessment identified a need for more funding and more staff to reach rural and underserved areas of the state. Data also identified a need for more transportation, education, transition, and employment services; as well as a need to provide more services to older individuals with vision and hearing loss.

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

There was support for collaboration with the one-stops, but against consolidation of the Commission within the workforce development system. The views were consistent among various stakeholders that separate services for blind adults and youth should be maintained. Data also identified a need for increased collaboration with local education agencies, state colleges and universities, and state transportation providers.

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

Needs identified include technology, technology training, math skills, Braille skills, cane travel skills, independent living skills, and work opportunities.

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

The assessment indicated a need to expand the agency's Orientation Center in order to serve the growing number of blind and visually impaired individuals in New Mexico. In particular, there is support for the construction of apartments on property adjacent to the dormitory which was donated to the Commission. The apartments would provide an independent living experience that is currently being provided through rental apartments 1.5 miles away. The apartments would enable the Commission to teach real independent living skills, which would be better than the dorms, would attract consumers who currently choose to attend expensive out-of-state training centers which have apartments, would provide a more convenient opportunity for consumers with families to participate, and would provide a fully accessible independent

living opportunity for individuals with physical disabilities. The Commission has received a capital outlay appropriation for the apartments, with construction expected to begin in PY 2020 or 2021.

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.

The needs assessment identified the need to improve the skills of blind and visually impaired youth, in particular in the areas of reading and writing since many are leaving school and do not know how to write a paper; students should be able to stay in their local school district with proper supports; "There is a crisis around braille. Technology can't do it all, students need to learn to read, and research shows changes in the brain when learning to read that help people be more flexible over their lifespan. There are a myriad of things that students who are blind need to learn in order to be successful as adults and they can't learn them in a 6-hour day at school. They need to learn from an integrated system, home services, early intervention, family, school, and sometimes a residential setting, transition services (from the Commission), adult services in addition if needed. We need to address the whole student. In education we say there is an expanded core curriculum around blindness. And students can be at risk if they don't learn the extra specific things." There is research to indicate a lack of effective services in elementary and secondary education today, including literacy, math, technology, independent living, socialization, independent mobility, independent living, expectations, students with Optic Nerve Hypoplasia, and students with multiple disabilities. There is also a need for additional work opportunities for transition-age youth.

k. Annual Estimates

Describe:

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

400

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

A. The VR Program;

370

B. The Supported Employment Program; and

30

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

0

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

0

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.

\$6,781,368 for PY 2020, based on prior expenditures and anticipated needs.

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 described below were jointly developed and agreed to by the Commission for the Blind and our State Rehabilitation Council.

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

In the context of the Agency's mission statement, a goal of the VR Program is integrated, competitive employment, or supported employment placements. The Agency's goal is having blind individuals employed and contributing members of society. The Agency strives to find, in the words of our former Executive Director and former Rehabilitation Services Administration Commissioner, "real jobs for real blind people." The mission of the New Mexico Commission for the Blind is to enable persons who are blind to achieve vocational, economic and social equality by providing career preparation, training in the skills of blindness and above all, promoting and conveying the belief that blindness is not a barrier to successful employment, or to living an independent and meaningful life. The Agency's priorities include serving individuals with the most significant disabilities. As a result of current funding levels, all eligible individuals seeking rehabilitation services are being served. Should funding levels change, the Commission may adopt an Order of Selection, pursuant to applicable provisions of the Rehabilitation Act. Cooperative agreements have been established with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, Aging and Long Term Services Department, Department of Health Developmental Disabilities Supports Division, Governor's Commission on Disability, Public Education Department, and Higher Education Department, New Mexico School for the Blind and Visually Impaired, Commission for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Persons (CDHH), and New Mexico Highlands University. Input received by the State Rehabilitation Council and Commission staff, including the comprehensive needs assessment conducted during PY 2018, as well as a review of new performance indicators under WIOA, identified operational priorities in carrying out the vocational rehabilitation and supported employment programs:

The following goals and priorities were jointly developed and agreed to by the Commission for the Blind and the State Rehabilitation Council. Public meetings were held to gather comments in Hobbs on October 16, 2019; in Clovis on October 17, 2019; in Santa Fe on November 25, 2019; in Albuquerque on November 27, 2019; in Las Cruces on December 2, 2019; and in Alamogordo on December 3, 2019. The Goals and Priorities were reviewed and discussed at a regular meeting of the State Rehabilitation Council held in Santa Fe on October 21, 2019, and approved at a special meeting of the Council held in Albuquerque on December 16, 2019.

a. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes by proactively working to recruit, hire, and retain qualified vocational rehabilitation counselors, thereby providing greater continuity and consistency in the provision of vocational rehabilitation services.

Agency Response: There is a national shortage of qualified vocational rehabilitation counselors, and the agency is engaging in maximum efforts to recruit, hire, and retain qualified vocational rehabilitation counselors.

b. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes by providing appropriate vocational rehabilitation services to the growing population of older workers, many of whom will be unable or unwilling to retrain for work in a field different from their current occupations, thereby enabling these older workers to become or remain successfully employed.

Agency Response: The Commission is committed to serve the increasing population of older workers. The aging population has resulted in an aging workforce, and 50 percent of workers report that they plan on working beyond age 65. In addition, 25 percent of workers do not plan on retiring. These older workers will require intensive training to remain or become employed.

c. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes by providing appropriate vocational rehabilitation services that support the maintaining of a healthy lifestyle that is conducive to becoming and remaining successfully employed, thereby enabling a greater portion of agency consumers to become and remain successfully employed.

Agency Response: The Commission recognizes that maintaining a healthy lifestyle can be conducive to obtaining and retaining an employment outcome, and will provide services designed to support healthy lifestyles when such services are necessary to obtaining and retaining employment.

d. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes by providing vocational rehabilitation training and counseling that is designed to enhance and improve the soft skills of our consumers, which are becoming an increasing barrier to our consumers becoming and remaining successfully employed.

Agency Response: The Commission recognizes that having appropriate soft skills is essential to obtaining and retaining employment. The Commission will continue to use the Orientation Center and Skills Center to provide instruction in the area of soft skills, and will explore additional ways to enhance instruction in soft skills as a part of Pre-Employment Transition Services.

e. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes by partnering and working with community colleges and One-Stop centers to more effectively utilize services available through the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act, Adult, Dislocated Worker, Youth, and Wagner-Peyser programs.

Agency Response: The agency has been participating in monthly partner meetings that have enhanced the coordination between the Commission and the partners. The Commission will continue to work cooperatively with the partners by designating specific points of contact, by providing appropriate information, and by entering into cooperative agreements where appropriate.

f. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes by working cooperatively with the New Mexico Department of Health so as to develop opportunities for competitive and integrated employment for persons who are blind or visually impaired, which will be accomplished by working in partnership with the Medical Assistance Division, the Developmental Disabilities Supports Division, and the Behavioral Health Services Division.

Agency Response: The agency will work cooperatively with the Department of Health, with the Medical Assistance Division, with the Developmental Disabilities Supports Division, and with the Behavioral Health Services Division. The agency will designate specific points of contact for each of these entities, will provide information as appropriate, and will enter into a cooperative agreement with the Department of Health.

g. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes by using the Orientation Center to provide employment preparation training for adults and transition students, including through the addition of an apartment training facility to be constructed adjacent to the Center. The proposed apartment facility will increase the capacity of the Orientation Center, will enable the Orientation Center to provide more realistic training, will eliminate the need to rent costly and less appropriate private apartments, and will reduce the number of instances in which costly out-of-state training will be necessary to meet the needs of consumers. Agency Response: The proposed apartment project has been fully funded with state appropriations, and construction should start during calendar year 2020.

h. Increase the number of consumers served through enhanced Outreach Activities; including media outreach, use of paid advertising, through increased collaboration with ophthalmologists and optometrists, and through the use of the Technology for Children program to conduct outreach to school districts. Agency Response: The agency will continue to work to increase outreach to the identified groups using the recommended methods.

i. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes of transition consumers by providing enhanced Pre-Employment Transition Services, including assistive technology where appropriate as a part of an Individualized Plan for Employment, by providing assistive technology through the Technology for Children Program, by conducting increased outreach activities, by conducting educational activities to meet the specific needs of transition students, and by increasing proficient use of Braille and Braille math. Agency Response: The agency will continue to work to increase services to Pre-Employment Transition Students using the identified methods. The agency already seeks to be involved in Individualized Education Plan meetings for transition consumers starting at age 14, and the agency operates the Students in Transition to Employment Program in Albuquerque and in Alamogordo. On February 2, 2019, the agency sponsored a workshop on Unified English Braille, and the agency will continue to sponsor Unified English Braille workshops and National Certification in Unified English Braille exams. The agency is also renewing agreements with state and local educational officials.

j. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes achieved by consumers by providing services in a way that genuinely honors the "informed choice" provisions of the Rehabilitation Act, enabling Commission consumers to have the opportunity to obtain employment at higher levels of compensation. Agency Response: The agency continues to provide services in a way that enables consumers to set and obtain high employment goals. For the federal fiscal year ending September 30, 2019, the average starting wage for consumers was \$16.47.

k. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes achieved by consumers by providing a quality and expanding Newslines system that gives consumers access to employment listings, business news, and other important information, including through both local Newslines and through NFB-Newslines. Agency Response: The agency is committed to providing a quality Newslines service. The agency will continue to sponsor NFB-Newslines in New Mexico, which provides access to over 400 national publications.

l. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes by innovatively using the Skills Center to meet the needs of vocational rehabilitation consumers and potential vocational rehabilitation consumers, including using it for provision of Pre-Employment Transition Services. Agency Response: The agency is committed to using the Skills Center to meet the needs of vocational rehabilitation consumers, and especially consumers receiving Pre-Employment Transition Services. As a result, the agency used the Skills Center to provide training to participants in the Students in Transition to Employment Program, as well as student and Braille seminars. The Skills Center was also used to provide

training to individual students, and was used as a meeting place for programs related to vocational rehabilitation.

m. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes for consumers who are Deaf-Blind through collaboration and partnership with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, with the Community Outreach Programs for the Deaf, and with the Commission for Deaf and Hard of Hearing, including through the delivery of assistive technology to consumers who are Deaf-Blind.

Agency Response: The agency has assigned a vocational rehabilitation counselor to take the lead on services related to consumers who are Deaf-Blind. The agency also works with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation to coordinate provision of services to persons who are Deaf-Blind. The agency works with a variety of other partners, including the Commission for Deaf and Hard of Hearing, the Community Outreach Program for the Deaf, the Helen Keller National Center, and the Deaf-Blind Task Force. The agency also participates in the annual Deaf-Blind Awareness Day at the Roundhouse.

n. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes through the Business Enterprise Program (BEP) by shortening the time required for vendors to complete the required training, including by using Randolph-Sheppard Act training offered by the Hadley Institute for the Blind and Visually Impaired.

Agency Response: The agency has adopted the Hadley Institute for the Blind and Visually Impaired as the training provider for BEP vendors, and is working with New Mexico programs to create a local provider so that food preparation and cooking methods can be taught locally.

o. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes by strengthening administrative services so as to timely and accurately submit federal reports, to assure compliance with all applicable fiscal regulations, and to comply with all applicable accounting standards.

Agency Response: The agency recognizes the need to have strong fiscal programs so as to maximize the receipt of federal funds, and to otherwise provide appropriate vocational rehabilitation services to our consumers. To do this, the agency must have in place a sufficient number of qualified fiscal staff to comply with federal fiscal rules, and to appropriately respond to changing fiscal requirements.

p. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes by enhancing overall performance and productivity by engaging in activities designed to mitigate and ameliorate the impacts of blindness and visual impairment, and by engaging in outreach and other activities designed to identify additional potential consumers, and by making the public and medical community more aware of Commission services.

Agency Response: The agency is engaging in new and innovative approaches to provide services and conduct outreach. The agency has a new web page that allows for referrals to be made by health care professionals, and the web page enables members of the public to sign up to automatically be emailed meeting notices, agendas, and minutes.

q. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes for consumers by providing enhanced benefits counseling and guidance to reduce concerns related to the loss or reduction of benefits.

Agency Response: The Commission continues to provide benefits counseling and guidance through a contract with the New Mexico Legal Aid Society. The agency has also provided training on benefits to vocational rehabilitation counselors and consumers.

The goals and priorities described above were jointly developed and agreed to by the Commission for the Blind and the State Rehabilitation Council.

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

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

Input received by the State Rehabilitation Council and Commission staff, including the comprehensive needs assessment conducted during PY 2018, as well as a review of new performance indicators under WIOA, identified operational priorities in carrying out the vocational rehabilitation and supported employment programs:

The goals and priorities were jointly developed and agreed to by the Commission for the Blind and the State Rehabilitation Council. Public meetings were held to gather comments in Hobbs on October 16, 2019; in Clovis on October 17, 2019; in Santa Fe on November 25, 2019; in Albuquerque on November 27, 2019; in Las Cruces on December 2, 2019; and in Alamogordo on December 3, 2019. The Goals and Priorities were reviewed and discussed at a regular meeting of the State Rehabilitation Council held in Santa Fe on October 21, 2019, and approved at a special meeting of the Council held in Albuquerque on December 16, 2019.

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

Performance measures have been baseline during PY 2018 and PY 2019 for Title 4 entities. However, the goals and priorities established for PY 2020, including recruiting and retention of Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors, supporting older workers, promoting healthy lifestyles, promoting soft skills training, utilizing community colleges and one-stop centers, working with Department of Health, utilizing Commission Orientation Center, conducting outreach, delivering transition services, promoting informed choice, promoting Newline, utilizing Commission Skills Center, supporting deaf-blind services, supporting the Business Enterprise program, delivering benefits counseling, and improving internal administrative services support the performance measures. All of the goals and priorities factor directly into skill gain, credential attainment, and employer supports, which themselves factor into the quality of employment outcomes achieved by consumers.

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

The agency's last Section 107 Monitoring took place in 2010. Pursuant to that Monitoring, the agency developed and implemented a Corrective Action Plan. The Corrective Action Plan was approved by the Rehabilitation Services Administration, and all corrective action has been completed. The agency anticipates that it may be monitored in Federal Fiscal Year 2020 or 2021. In preparation of being monitored and as a part of the agency internal control process, the agency has contracted with an external fiscal specialist to conduct test monitoring of the Commission. The test monitoring utilizes the most current Federal Monitoring and Technical Assistance Guide (MTAG). The most recent such test monitoring took place March 25 to March 29, 2019. All of the questions on the RSA Monitoring Instrument for Financial Management were covered during the review, and the prior Section 107 Monitoring Report was also reviewed. The SF-425 Federal Financial Reports and the RSA-2 Annual Vocational Rehabilitation Program Cost Reports were also reviewed. A focus area of the review was on Pre-Employment Transition Services. No significant issues were identified during the test monitoring. This test monitoring process has been used to assist the agency to identify and correct potential fiscal issues. The results of this test monitoring were reported at a special meeting of the State Rehabilitation Council held on May 16, 2019. At that same Council meeting, the Commission reviewed the agency Allowable Cost Policy and Procedure.

The agency continues to be audited under the Single Audit process as required by 2 CFR 200.501 Audit Requirements, and pursuant to 2.2.2 NMAC, Requirements for Contracting and Conducting Governmental Audits. It should be noted that the agency has been audited by the Office of the State Auditor (OSA) since SFY 2017, and that the OSA applies a more rigorous review than what is typical of most single audits. The agency has only had minor findings in recent Single Audits. The last Single Audit was for State Fiscal Year 2019. The audit has been submitted to the Federal Audit Clearinghouse in compliance with 2 CFR Part 200.512 Report submission. The agency had one minor finding in the SFY 2019 audit. The finding was 2019-001, and concerned capital assets which were disposed of in prior years and not properly removed from the capital asset listing. The Commission had identified the issue, and has implemented internal controls to ensure that disposed of assets are properly removed from the capital asset listing.

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 Commission believes that it has enough resources to serve all applicants for services and is not on an order of selection.

B. The justification for the order.

C. The service and outcome goals.

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

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

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.

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.

The Commission has set forth as its number one priority the goal of serving individuals with the most significant disabilities, including youth with the most significant disabilities, with a quality employment outcome as the end result. A supported employment outcome for individuals with multiple or severe disabilities is a priority with these individuals being served in competitive integrated settings pursuant to the Olmstead decision and WIOA. Some of these individuals have recently been de-institutionalized and some live in isolated rural settings. The Commission has sought to enhance supported employment placements in the consumer's own community to provide employment in familiar surroundings and close proximity to natural supports. This activity is intended to address the lack of placement options in rural portions of the State. The Commission will continue to work with Community Rehabilitation Programs, Native American VR Programs, consumer organizations, disability groups, advocates and other stakeholders to assess the degree to which current staffing patterns and service delivery activities achieve the goal of improving employment outcomes, in competitive integrated settings, in rural portions of the State. These groups will advise Agency management in designing, as necessary, new Agency service patterns to provide a continuum of services to this population. The Agency will seek to increase the number of supported employment consumers during the next year and will continue to review cases for appropriate identification for supported employment. Services typically identified for these consumers include training, transportation, comprehensive assessments, appropriate assistive technology, job coaching, interpreting, and other vocational services. These services will be provided through purchase of direct services using regular VR funds along with Title VI, Part B funds, as long as those Title VI, Part B funds continue to be available. Extended services have historically been provided through various methods, including the Developmental Disabilities Waiver, the Disabled & Elderly Waiver, the Brain Injury Services Fund, the Working Disabled Individual (Category 043), subsidized employment, Employment-Related Work Expenses, Blind Work Expenses, and by arranging for natural supports. The Agency focuses on developing natural supports through co-workers, family members, and friends whenever possible, and by providing training to potential job coaches, who in turn provide services to enable consumers to obtain and maintain employment. Fortunately, under new provisions of WIOA, the Commission will be able to fund extended services for youth with the most significant disabilities for up to four years. Youth services offered under Supported Employment are determined on an individual basis depending on the needs of the consumer. Services to youth with the most significant disabilities begin at age 14, and include representation by Commission counselors at IEP meetings, support in school-based transition programs for youth age 18-21, and summer job experiences. The Commission provides summer employment experiences for supported employment youth through its Students in Transition to Employment Program, which provides employment and training experiences at its Alamogordo training center, its Albuquerque Skills Center, and community-based placements throughout New Mexico. Another program that will serve youth with the most significant disabilities is the Commission's Technology for Children program, which is also a frequent point of first contact with the agency. This program provides information to the public, parents, and schools about the Commission's vocational rehabilitation program in a way that significantly enhances the agency transition services. It also provides technical assistance and support services that enhance the agency's ability to work cooperatively with school districts. The agency has a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with the Department of Health and the New Mexico School for the Blind and Visually Impaired. The MOA will administer an allocation from DOH of \$80,000, designed to provide assistive technology that, for a disability other than blindness, would be considered durable medical equipment. The staff member who coordinates the Technology for Children program and members of her team will continue to provide

assistive technology support to economically disadvantaged and rural school districts. This individual and a member of her team also speaks Spanish. Transition to extended services (on-going support services and other appropriate services provided by another state agency, a private non-profit organization, an employer, etc.) may be provided for up to four years following case closure. Specific goals for PY 2020 include: 1. At least three closures in competitive integrated settings; 2. Closures averaging at least minimum wage (varies from \$9.00 to \$11.80 per hour); 3. Closures averaging at least fifteen hours worked per week. The goals and priorities described above were jointly developed and agreed to by the Commission for the Blind and our State Rehabilitation Council.

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

The Commission is pleased with the opportunity to provide extended services to youth with the most significant disabilities following the closure of their VR case for a period of up to four years or until the individual turns age 25. The Commission believes this is a particularly beneficial improvement within WIOA. The Commission will use regular VR funds to provide extended services. As the consumer approaches age 25, the Commission will assist in the transition to waiver funding and natural supports for the provision of extended services.

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.

The Commission is pleased with the opportunity to provide extended services to youth with the most significant disabilities following the closure of their VR case for a period of up to four years or until the individual turns age 25. The Commission believes this is a particularly beneficial improvement within WIOA. The Commission will use regular VR funds to provide extended services. As the consumer approaches age 25, the Commission will assist in the transition to waiver funding and natural supports for the provision of extended services.

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.

The Mission of the New Mexico Commission for the Blind is to enable persons who are blind to achieve vocational, economic and social equality by providing career preparation, training in the skills of blindness and above all, promoting and conveying the belief that blindness is not a barrier to successful employment, or to living an independent and meaningful life. The Commission will make every effort to meet and exceed the performance accountability indicators outlined by WIOA. The Commission's efforts are also directed toward accomplishment of the goals and priorities identified in description (l), State Goals and Priorities, and description (n), Goals and Plans for Distribution of Title VI Funds: Services provided to accomplish these objectives include rehabilitation counseling, individualized training, comprehensive blindness training in a residential setting, independent living services provided to vocational rehabilitation consumers, educational and support services, and meaningful opportunities for employment in competitive integrated work settings supported through the provision of assistive technology and other workplace modifications. The Agency also provides career training, training in a variety of blindness skills, and above all, promotes and conveys the philosophy that blindness is not a barrier to employment or any other aspect of a full, meaningful life.

1. The methods to be used to expand and improve services to individuals with disabilities The Commission is committed to expanding and improving services to blind and visually-impaired New Mexicans who are interested in obtaining, retaining, or advancing in employment. The Commission believes that the first step in this process is to build and improve relationships with core partners under WIOA. Partnerships of this kind will serve to leverage resources of each agency. The first benefit of these relationships will be an opportunity to identify additional consumers who might not have been aware of the availability of Commission services and their potential to engage in integrated and competitive employment. This could include supported employment and non-supported employment consumers as well as students with disabilities and youth with the most significant disabilities. It can also include individuals who could benefit from training at the Orientation Center, including those who might benefit from the proposed apartment facility at the Orientation Center. The Commission recognizes that there is a need to expand its assistive technology training services, but is constrained by the lack of qualified trainers with experience in the assistive technology used by persons who are blind or visually impaired. Consequently, the Commission will engage in activities designed to identify additional methods and resources that can help to improve assistive technology training. This will include providing training to existing employees to expand capacity, and use of external contracted trainers who can be brought to New Mexico to provide intensive technology training. When it comes to placements, the Commission has positive relationships with many employers and employment organizations. However, to improve the opportunity for placements in competitive and integrated settings, the Commission will engage in additional work with federal contractors, which now have goals for hiring persons with disabilities. The Commission will also expand support of self-employment goals, which can be the most appropriate option for many individuals. New Mexico has a strong state use law which provides for "qualified individuals" to engage in competitive and integrated work with state and governmental entities. The agency Executive Director is a member of the New Mexico Council for Purchasing from Persons with Disabilities, which administers the state use program.

Accordingly, the Commission will explore ways to more fully utilize the employment opportunities presented by the State Use Act.

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.

The Commission believes that assistive technology is an important way to level the playing field for its blind and visually impaired consumers. The agency has an effective process for evaluating consumers to determine their technology and assistive technology needs and purchasing those items, whether they be needed for home, school, or work sites. The software and hardware cover the landscape of traditional technology, including computers, printers, monitors, scanners, tablets, and smart phones; plus assistive technology that includes magnification, speech output, Braille, optical character recognition, book readers, and accessible smart phone apps. The Commission will evaluate its technology staff to better utilize their respective skills and assign training tasks to those who are particularly skilled in that area. Additionally, the Commission will recruit contract trainers who can provide in-person and remote training. Remote training is necessary since New Mexico is a very large state with a relatively small population. The Commission will continue purchasing subscriptions to digital training materials which pair the software application with the assistive technology solution, such as teaching Microsoft Word 2019 with JAWS (JAWS is a popular screen reading program). Although these textbooks are efficient for the self-starter and also serve as an excellent reference, consumers who are not self-starters need a human option. The Commission will also use resources such as the Hadley Institute for the Blind and Visually Impaired to provide training on specific applications and operating systems. Finally, the Commission will work on expanding assistive technology training provided at the Orientation Center in Alamogordo through the construction of the proposed apartment facility which will attract additional consumers and expand capacity at the Center. The apartment facility will also enable the Commission to provide assistive technology training to consumers during the summer STEP program, during which time the dormitory is occupied by transition students age 14 to 21. PY 2020 marks the fourteenth year of a MOA with the Department of Health and the New Mexico School for the Blind and Visually Impaired. The MOA administers an allocation from DOH of \$80,000, designed to provide assistive technology that, for a disability other than blindness, would be considered durable medical equipment. This initiative serves blind children that are both transition-age and those not yet transition-age. The Coordinator of the Technology for Children program, along with members of her team, are thus able to provide assistive technology support to transition consumers, including those residing in economically disadvantaged and rural school districts. The Coordinator of the Technology for Children program and one of her staff members also speaks Spanish. The agency will promote the program and solicit applications for program services through its annual letter to the special education directors of all 89 school districts in New Mexico; through new MOUs with individual school districts; and through communication with transition specialist, Teachers of the Visually Impaired, and Orientation and Mobility Specialists throughout the state. The Commission also works with Community Outreach Programs for the Deaf to register Commission consumers for the iCanConnect program. iCanConnect is another name for the National Deaf-Blind Equipment Distribution Program (NDBEDP), a federal program designed to provide distance communications technology and training for people with combined hearing and vision disabilities, and to increase opportunities for independence for this underserved population to stay connected with family, friends, service providers, and their communities. There is a wide range of equipment available depending on client needs. Some examples include: Braille devices, Computers, Mobile devices, Phones, and Signalers. A member of the Commission's Skills Center staff serves on the New Mexico Technology Assistance Program (NMTAP) advisory board, publicizing Commission services and providing consultant services regarding specialized technology for the blind and visually impaired. NMTAP offers free services

to New Mexicans with disabilities to help them get the assistive technology services they need. NMTAP is a statewide program designed to increase knowledge of, access to, and acquisition of assistive or adaptive technology for anyone with any disability, of any age, anywhere in the state. Their mission is to help individuals with disabilities enhance their quality of life through the use of assistive technology. To fulfill this mission, the NMTAP staff provides many services to individuals with disabilities, their family members, and service providers, including support to individuals transitioning into higher education, work, or community living. The Commission received a grant of \$75,000 from NMTAP in FY 2014 to outfit its Skills Center. The grant enabled the commission to purchase a variety of computers (both Mac and Windows) and assistive technology, (Braille displays, cameras for optical character recognition systems, note-taking devices, and screen reading and screen magnification software and hardware). The equipment makes it possible for Commission consumers to compare competing products from manufacturers so as to make an informed choice when choosing the technology tools that will work best for their individual situation. The technology is also used to support training in the Skills Center, including specialized workshops for adults/youth and the Students in Transition to Employment summer program for students with disabilities and youth with the most significant disabilities. The Commission operates the Students in Transition to Employment Program (STEP) to provide training and actual work experiences to students and youth who are blind or visually impaired. The Commission will continue to provide the STEP program in Albuquerque, Alamogordo, and through community placements across the state. The Commission recognizes the need to address growing deficiencies in the computer and Braille skills of students attending public schools, and is developing strategies to address these deficiencies. These strategies include topical seminars, classes conducted at the Skills Center, and use of programs such as the Hadley School for the Blind.

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.

The Commission plans to conduct outreach to identify and serve individuals who are minorities, including those who have most significant disabilities, and those who are unserved or underserved. The Agency will focus on the following comprehensive initiatives during the upcoming year: Newsline is an important part of the Commission's outreach program to identify and serve most significantly disabled persons who are minorities, and individuals who have been unserved or underserved by the vocational rehabilitation or supported employment program. Newsline provides access free of charge to state and national publications to individuals in all portions of New Mexico, including in the most rural portions of the state. The local Newsline and NFB-Newsline have publications that include newspapers from Albuquerque, Santa Fe, Los Alamos, Alamogordo, Farmington, Roswell, and Las Cruces, as well as a job search utility that provides blind job seekers with access to the CareerBuilder jobs database. NFB-Newsline also provides publications and prompts in Spanish. NFB-Newsline voices can also be customized to meet the needs of individuals who are hard of hearing, and NFB-Newsline offers the ability to download publications for reading on a Braille display. This feature enables individuals who are deaf-blind to access the more than 400 national newspapers and magazines on NFB-Newsline. Commission counselors, technology specialists, Orientation Center teachers, Business Enterprise Program consultants, and rehab teachers will promote and demonstrate the program to Commission consumers. In an effort to reach out to populations that have been unserved or underserved, the Commission will continue the operation of field offices, four of which are located in rural portions of the state where there is a greater portion of persons who are unserved or underserved. For example, the northwest section of the State is served by the Farmington office, and is primarily rural and includes a large portion of the Navajo, Jicarilla Apache, and pueblo Native American communities. The Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor and Rehab Teacher in Farmington are sensitive to the cultural aspects

of the communities they serve. The Rehab Teacher is himself Navajo and speaks Dine Bizaadthe, the Navajo language. The staff in the Las Vegas office is likewise sensitive to the unique cultural aspects of northern New Mexico, and is fluent in Spanish. This is also the case for the Las Cruces office and southern New Mexico, where the technology specialist is bilingual. The Coordinator of the Technology for Children program and a member of her staff are bilingual, and there are several teachers and employees at the Orientation Center who are bilingual. The Vocational Rehabilitation program will establish a process to review cases that have been closed as unsuccessful. The goal will be to reach out to individuals who have exited the system and inquire if they would like their case re-opened. This will enable the Commission to reach additional individuals who come from minority or unserved or underserved populations, giving them an additional opportunity to receive services. The Commission also has a significant percentage of staff members who speak Spanish, enabling the agency to better reach individuals who are monolingual Spanish speakers, or who speak Spanish as their primary language. The Students in Transition to Employment Program (STEP) will continue with its efforts to provide work experience and skills training to blind students during the summer months, including to students who are from unserved or underserved populations. STEP will continue to engage in outreach to recruit students with the most significant disabilities, including students from minority backgrounds, and students who are also unserved or underserved. The STEP program is also operated on a residential basis in Alamogordo, which allows students from even the most economically disadvantaged and rural portions of the state to participate. STEP students earn a salary during the employment portion of the program. In addition to providing essential job training and experience, this also has the benefit of serving as a significant incentive for many students from economically disadvantaged families, enabling the Commission to reach and attract more individuals into the program. After making 29 placements in Summer 2019, the Commission will strive to place 40 students and youth in summer jobs in 2020. There are 89 school districts in New Mexico, most of which are in economically disadvantaged and rural portions of the state. Most of these districts do not have teachers who are specifically trained to instruct students who are blind or visually impaired. The Commission will continue sending annual letters to special education directors at each of these school districts in order to make them aware of Commission transition services. Rehabilitation counselors will contact local public school transition coordinators, guidance counselors, or other appropriate personnel to identify children age 13 or over with visual impairments. Counselors will also attend transition-related events, where they can meet school personnel from around New Mexico. The Commission will also make parents aware of Commission services by making presentations and distributing information to members of parent organizations, such as the National Federation of the Blind Parents of Blind Children Division. These outreach activities will result in additional contacts with teachers and parents, and increase familiarity with Commission services. The Technology for Children Coordinator will continue to provide services to students from unserved or underserved backgrounds, and to build relationships with school districts that serve students who are unserved or underserved. The Technology for Children program is an important outreach activity, and is also a frequent point of first contact with the agency. It provides information to the public, parents, and schools about the Commission's vocational rehabilitation program in a way that significantly enhances the agency transition services. It also provides technical assistance and support services that enhance the agency's ability to work cooperatively with school districts. The agency has a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with the Department of Health and the New Mexico School for the Blind and Visually Impaired. The MOA will administer an allocation from DOH of \$80,000, designed to provide assistive technology that, for a disability other than blindness, would be considered durable medical equipment. The individual who coordinates the Technology for Children program and one of her staff members also speak Spanish. The Commission recognizes that individuals who are Deaf-Blind are often unserved or underserved, as are eligible individuals who have a hearing impairment. To address this need, the Commission has obtained an affiliate status with the Helen Keller National Center. The Commission will continue to participate in regular meetings held around the state with an HKNC consultant, local/regional school counselors, and community rehabilitation providers. The agency will work to have the

regional representative from Helen Keller travel to New Mexico in PY 2020 to deliver training to Commission counselors. The Agency has also entered into a Joint Powers Agreement and a Memorandum of Understanding with the New Mexico Commission for Deaf and Hard of Hearing to identify and serve eligible individuals who also have hearing impairments. In addition, the Commission has a Memorandum of Understanding with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation on how the agencies will serve this population. The MOU is designed to streamline services and avoid unnecessary service delays. The One-Stop employment system faces special challenges in New Mexico due to the rural nature of the state and the state's very large geographic area. As a result, there are relatively few One-Stop offices that serve the state. The Commission currently has representation on three of the four local Workforce Development Boards in addition to the executive director serving on the state board. Appointment of a commission staff member to the fourth local board is expected during PY 2020. Commission representatives on these boards promote Commission services, represent vocational rehabilitation perspectives, educate board members (especially board members from businesses), help Commission consumers to better access the One-Stop services, and also help to make the employees of the One-Stops more aware of Commission services. The agency has nine Rehab Teacher positions (one is currently vacant), which enables the agency to reduce the geographic coverage of each teacher and improve the quality of service delivery statewide. Rehab Teachers are required to assist and participate in local support groups, which help the Commission to identify and serve persons who are from minority backgrounds, or who are otherwise unserved or underserved. The Commission will continue this support group effort, with a special focus on outreach to Native Americans, rural minority populations, and other areas that contain communities of individuals who are unserved or underserved. Approximately 15 support groups are operating throughout the State, with ongoing facilitation being provided in several groups by consumers or former consumers. The majority of the support groups serve consumers in very rural areas with large populations of persons who are minorities, or who are otherwise unserved or underserved. Examples include Farmington, Silver City, Clovis, and Carlsbad. In addition to the outreach methods identified above, the Commission will research other methods to reach blind and visually impaired youth and adults who could benefit from Commission services. The Commission will also work to expand services at the orientation Center in Alamogordo, which serves many individuals from unserved or underserved backgrounds. Many of these individuals come from rural portions of the state, where they did not receive appropriate blindness skills training from their local schools. The agency will work to expand these services through the construction of an apartment facility at the orientation Center in Alamogordo. This proposed apartment facility will enable the Orientation Center to expand capacity and serve more individuals from unserved or underserved backgrounds.

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).

The Commission recognizes the need to expand and improve transition services. Counselors regularly communicate with special education directors, transition specialists, orientation and mobility specialists, and teachers of the visually impaired in their service territories. The Commission communicates each year with each of the special education directors in the 89 school districts throughout New Mexico and has signed MOUs with 17 of those school districts so far in an effort to improve transition services. Counselors also attend training on transition issues when available. The Deputy Director for Vocational Rehabilitation Programs has served on the Statewide Transition Coordinating Council for many years, and will encourage the STCC to become more active. In an effort to improve its transition program, the commission has reclassified one of its vocational rehabilitation counselor positions into a counselor supervisor position responsible for transition services. Effective with PY 2017, the Commission partnered with the Division of

Vocational Rehabilitation on a contract with the New Mexico Central Region Educational Cooperative (CREC) to deliver pre-employment transition services to high school students across New Mexico. Effective in PY 2019, the Commission negotiated its own Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA) with CREC. Under the agreement, Commission high school-age clients will be included in job exploration counseling, counseling on post-secondary opportunities, self-advocacy training, and job skills training delivered by CREC. CREC job developers will help to place Commission high school students interested in work-based learning experiences, primarily during summers, but also in after-school or weekend jobs during the regular school year. Although the Students in Transition to Employment program has been the centerpiece for providing summer work experiences to students with disabilities and youth with the most significant disabilities, the Commission will work with its counselors, local education agencies, and the business development specialists from one-stop centers to expand work opportunities throughout New Mexico. These opportunities will include job shadowing, after-school, weekend, and summer employment. The commission will also deliver employment readiness workshops throughout the year.

The Commission signed a Governmental Services Agreement (GSA) with the New Mexico School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (NMSBI) in May of 2019. Under this GSA, the Commission funds the provision of Pre-Employment Transition Services that are provided by NMSBVI. The purpose is to facilitate the transition of students with disabilities from the receipt of educational and Pre-Employment Transition Services in school to the receipt of vocational rehabilitation services from the Commission.

Although support of careers requiring post-secondary education, especially graduate education, appears to be an area of newly increased emphasis under WIOA, it has been an emphasis of Commission services for many years. The Commission has identified a trend of an increasing number of blind and visually-impaired students leaving the public school system who are not prepared for post-secondary programs. Consequently, the reading, math, and English literacy classes offered through Adult Basic Education are necessary to prepare these Commission consumers for the post-secondary vocational training and education programs that will ultimately lead to successful careers. The Commission will work with community colleges to ensure that these programs are accessible to blind and visually-impaired students. The Commission will address the five required Pre-Employment Transition Services as follows: a. Job exploration counseling: The commission has historically focused exclusively on employment in competitive integrated settings and self-employment. A large part of the career assessment process is helping the consumer to identify a career that is the best fit for them. The Commission's Career Choice Questionnaire is a template for consumers to research prospective careers, including interviewing individuals currently working in those fields, identifying prospective industry mentors, and job shadowing. The Commission will continue to encourage students and youth to actively research careers in order to find the career that is the right fit. Commission high school clients will also be supported by the CREC IGA and the NMSBVI GSA. b. Work-based learning experiences, which may include in-school or after school opportunities, or experience outside the traditional school setting (including internships), that is provided in an integrated environment to the maximum extent possible; In addition to the Students in Transition to Employment Program (STEP) summer program, the Commission will expand its transition services to support in-school, weekend and after-school work opportunities for students with disabilities and youth with the most significant disabilities throughout New Mexico. The Commission will partner with local education agencies and one-stops to facilitate these work opportunities. Commission high school clients will also be supported by the CREC IGA and the NMSBVI GSA. c. Counseling on opportunities for enrollment in comprehensive transition or postsecondary educational programs at institutions of higher education; The Commission has long-supported careers requiring post-secondary education, including graduate education. The Commission will continue this practice since careers requiring post-secondary education, including graduate education, often command good salaries and good benefits. Commission high school clients will also be supported by the CREC IGA and the NMSBVI GSA. d. Workplace readiness training to develop social skills and

independent living; In addition to a summer job in a competitive integrated setting, The Commission's Students in Transition to Employment Program includes a significant workplace readiness training component. However, in order to expand workplace readiness training services, the Commission will begin offering additional workshops and seminars. The Commission has recently added staff to its Albuquerque Skills Center specifically for this purpose. The Skills Center will offer seminars and workshops for high school students, college students, and parents. Training will be delivered throughout the year, during summers, school breaks, after school, and through distance delivery methods. Topics cover the landscape, including parent participation, MS Windows, Word, PowerPoint, Excel, Outlook, mobile technology, computer operator maintenance, and training on various assistive technology software and hardware; note-taking skills, Braille, math, college success, summer employment preparation, Hadley support days, job readiness, professional dress and appearance, resume writing, job search strategies, mock interviews, Newsline resources (newspapers, magazines, research capabilities, and job search functions); transportation options, and financial literacy. Commission high school clients will also be supported by the CREC IGA and the NMSBVI GSA. e. Instruction in self-advocacy, which may include peer mentoring. Although self-advocacy is a regular part of counseling/guidance services, the Commission will develop a more-structured approach to self-advocacy training in order to provide more consistency in this area. Commission high school clients will also be supported by the CREC IGA and the NMSBVI GSA. Technology will be an added service in support of each of the above approaches. The Commission has observed that many blind and visually impaired high school students are unable to use a computer sufficiently to take and retrieve their own class notes, conduct Internet research, compose and edit writing assignments, prepare PowerPoint presentations, and manage email. Technology training will be enhanced to fill this need using agency staff, contract trainers, and digital self-paced training materials.

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

The Commission plans to build a four unit apartment facility on donated property adjacent to the dormitory at our Orientation Center in Alamogordo and a capital outlay funding request has been approved for its construction. Currently, the dormitory can accommodate up to 15 students. Typical of many dormitory facilities, the Orientation Center dorm provides meal service to students attending the training center. The Commission does rent apartments in a complex approximately 1.5 miles away in order to provide an independent living opportunity for students nearing the end of their center training experience. There is broad agreement that such independent living experiences are essential for center students as they transition from living with parents or family members to living independently. Goals in Building the Apartment Facility: After the proposed apartments have been built, the Orientation Center will increase overall capacity by 3 to 4 individuals at any one time, allowing for as many as 6 to 8 individuals to be served during any one year. This will help further the integration and competitive employment of persons who are blind or visually impaired. After the proposed apartments have been built, the Orientation Center will acquire the ability to provide continued training for up to 3 to 4 adult during the months of June and July when the Orientation Center and dormitory are otherwise being used to provide training to transition students aged 14 to 21 as part of the Commission's Students in Transition to Employment (STEP) program. Because of the particular circumstances required to make such continued training appropriate for adults, it is projected that 2 adults will on the average receive such training in any one year. By receiving such continued training, these adults will be able to graduate sooner and with a higher likelihood of success. This will help further the integration and competitive employment of persons who are blind or visually impaired. After the proposed apartments have been built, the Orientation Center will have an increased number of persons electing to attend training at the Orientation Center rather than decline training or attend more expensive training at an out-of-state training center. It is anticipated that 3 to 4 individuals will elect to attend training each year at the

Orientation Center who would not have otherwise elected to receive training, and that an average of 1 to 2 individuals per year will attend training at the Orientation Center rather than attend an out-of-state training center. Because these persons will be served closer to their homes and families and other sources of natural supports, this will help further the integration and competitive employment of persons who are blind or visually impaired. Results of Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment The Commission for the Blind conducted a Comprehensive Statewide Needs assessment (CSNA) in PY 2018 that identified the need to “improve the Orientation Center in Alamogordo through the construction of an apartment facility.” The CSNA consisted of the following: a. Results from public hearings and town forums, and b. A review of the Commission’s Strategic Plan and a review of relevant demographic data. CSNA Results The Strategic Plan and the demographic data showed an increasing need for additional capacity at the Orientation Center. The Strategic Plan has as a Goal and Priority the building of the apartment facility. The Strategic Plan also identifies a growing population of persons who are blind or visually impaired, and especially of transition age consumers. The demographic data showed a rapidly increasing population of persons who are blind, and especially persons who are under 18. According to the American Community Survey results for the last two years, the population of persons under 18 in New Mexico increased by 34.6% in just one year. This constitutes a dramatically growing population of young persons who will require training at the Orientation Center in the coming years. This is likely due in significant part to the increasing population of persons with Optic Nerve hypoplasia and the increasing rate of children with Retinopathy of Prematurity. In addition, there is a significant one-year increase for persons aged 18 to 64. This increase reflects a growing population of working-age persons who will require training at the Orientation Center. With the population of persons with diabetes growing dramatically, including for Hispanics who have nearly a 50 percent lifetime risk of diabetes, the orientation Center can expect to see increasing numbers of persons with diabetic retinopathy. Reasonableness and Effectiveness In considering the need for apartment facilities, the results of the CSNA were considered with respect to other options for provision of such training. The proposed apartment facility was determined to be an especially effective and reasonable method of providing such training considering the cost of providing out-of-state training to an average of 1 to 2 persons per year who would otherwise decide to receive training at the Orientation Center if the proposed apartment facility is constructed. Because such training costs an average of approximately \$4,000 per month, and because the training typically takes 6 to 9 months, and because such training also requires additional travel and associated costs, the proposed apartment facility is a more reasonable and cost-effective method of providing such training when the long-term costs are considered. In addition, the proposed apartments will eliminate the need to rent a corresponding number of apartments in Alamogordo, saving up to \$3,000 per month in rental expenses alone. The proposed apartments will also be designed and maintained in compliance with modern building codes and accessibility requirements, reducing the potential liability associated with placing students at older and less well-maintained private facilities. This is especially significant since the New Mexico Tort Claims Act has waived sovereign immunity for negligent maintenance, meaning that the Commission for the Blind would have significant liability if a student was injured while staying at a privately rented apartment. As mentioned in the introduction, the Commission currently rents apartments that are 1.5 miles away from the center, requiring additional expenditures for staff time when transporting students, as well as additional vehicle mileage. The proximity of the proposed apartment facility to the center will also translate to more prompt and reliable attendance, making for more efficient training. The proximity of the proposed apartment facility to the existing dormitory also allows for better peer mentoring and socialization amongst students, which is an important aspect of the training. Finally, the proposed apartment facility will allow for the Center to serve a greater number of students, increasing the overall effectiveness of the Center. Fortunately, a capital outlay appropriation from the New Mexico Legislature will enable construction of the apartments to begin during PY 2020 or PY 2021. Strategies The New Mexico Commission for the Blind is the only training center in the country that is certified by both the Commission on Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF) and the National Blindness Professional Certification Board (NBPCB). The Orientation Center will continue to seek accreditation by

CARF. After the apartment facility has been built, the CARF visit and accreditation process will include an examination of the apartment facility. CARF has a strong belief in the integration and competitive employment of persons with disabilities, and the apartment facility will help the Orientation Center to continue to be CARF accredited. The Orientation Center will continue to seek certification from the NBPCB. After the apartment facility has been built, the NBPCB certification process will include an examination of the apartment facility. Because the NBPCB has an especially strong belief in the integration and competitive employment of persons who are blind or visually impaired, the apartment facility will help the Orientation Center to continue to be NBPCB certified as a greater number of students attending the Orientation center will have more opportunities to practice independent living skills. The Orientation Center will explore new and innovative methods of using the apartment facility that will further the integration and competitive employment of persons who are blind, including using the apartment facility to house consumers during the summer who will receive refresher training or other short term instruction on concentrated areas of need, such as technology or orientation and mobility. The Orientation Center will encourage students who have not lived on their own, or who have fears associated with living on their own, to transition into the apartment facility as a way of encouraging and fostering independence. Because such independent living is usually necessary for individuals who are attending a college or university, and since independent travel and lodging is a requirement of many professions, the use of the proposed apartments in this manner will further the integration and competitive employment of persons who are blind or visually impaired. The Orientation Center will engage in specific activities related to the apartment facility that will further the integration and competitive employment of persons who are blind or visually impaired, including using the apartment facility to better meet the individualized needs of persons with disabilities in addition to blindness, including disabilities and medical conditions that might make it difficult for such persons to reside in the dormitory.

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

The Commission has historically performed well on the standards and indicators (SI) that were utilized prior to WIOA. The Commission has reviewed closure data and has identified targets for each of the new WIOA performance measures (PM). The targets and rationale are provided below:

- a. The percentage of program participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the second quarter after exit from the program

Target 35%

This PM is similar to SI 1.2, which was one of the non-primary indicators and that captured data referred to as the rehabilitation rate. As was usually the case in states that place greater emphasis on the quality of employment outcomes, the Commission's performance on this indicator was in the bottom tier of performance. The Commission places a high priority on the consumer's right to exercise informed choice. While this has been important when measuring the quality of employment outcomes, it can result in a situation where the consumer may have a reduced likelihood of achieving a successful employment outcome. It was also a non-primary indicator, meaning that less emphasis was placed on it, whereas the quality of outcomes was a "primary" indicator. This result has also been due to the unique challenges of serving persons who are blind or visually impaired in a state with high levels of economic and social disadvantages, coupled with the considerable challenges associated with a geographically large and sparsely populated state. It is also due to the Commission's desire to serve all eligible blind individuals interested in employment, including providing vocational rehabilitation services to those eligible individuals who face

the greatest barriers to achieving an employment outcome. This includes an unusually large percentage of consumers with secondary disabilities. The Commission welcomes and even solicit consumers with challenging situations, and does not discourage or deflect such individuals from the vocational rehabilitation program. As a result, the Commission believes the target of 35% is appropriate. The Commission will work to identify and address the barriers to employment in a way that will improve performance on this measure.

b. The percentage of program participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the fourth quarter after exit from the program -- This statutory language requires States to measure the employment rate of participants in the fourth quarter after exit from the program without regard to whether those participants were employed in the second quarter after exit from the program. Target 33%

This PM is also similar to SI 1.2, which was one of the non-primary indicators and that captured data referred to as the rehabilitation rate. The Commission will establish a quarterly process for contacting consumers who had been closed rehabilitated as well as those closed non-rehabilitated to verify employment and wages. By doing so, the Commission believes it can identify problems that the employed individual is having on-the-job and successfully intervene to resolve the problems -- at least most of the time. As a result, the Commission believes the target of 33% is appropriate. The Commission will work to identify and address the barriers to employment in a way that will improve performance on this measure.

c. The median earnings of program participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the second quarter after exit. -- This PM measures median earnings at the same time frame as the first PM measures the employment rate of participants:

Target \$4,500.00

This PM is similar to SI 1.5, which measured the starting wages of consumers, except that earnings is a better measure of a consumer's ability to support their families as a result of vocational rehabilitation services received. The Commission historically performed exceptionally well on SI 1.5, and expects to perform well on this PM. The Commission always strives to secure employment outcomes that are commensurate with an individual's education and experience. However, employment outcomes that are less-than-full-time are common for Commission consumers, resulting in lower median earnings than might otherwise be expected. As a result, the Commission believes that the \$4,500 target is appropriate. The Commission will work to identify and address the barriers to employment in a way that will improve performance on this measure.

d. Credential attainment rate; -- Measures post-secondary credential attainment and high school completion of program participants during participation in the program or within 1 year after exit.

Target 10%

The Commission has historically encouraged pursuit of careers requiring post-secondary vocational training and education, including graduate education. Commission consumers, however, sometimes need more time to achieve post-secondary college degrees at the Associate's, Bachelor's, Master's, and Doctorate levels. Reasons vary from needing more time to acquire the blindness skills necessary to be successful in post-secondary education environments, resulting in more semesters where the consumer is taking less than a full course load while ramping up to a full course load; breaks to get blindness skills training; and breaks to address medical or secondary disabilities. In addition, other than receipt of a secondary school diploma, the formula for this performance measure does not award credit for degrees other than the final degree earned prior to employment. Although apprenticeship programs are not limited to crafts and trades occupations any

longer, crafts and trades occupations are still the predominant fields for apprenticeship programs. Such programs can lead to excellent careers with excellent pay and benefits. However, blind and visually impaired individuals very rarely enter these fields. In addition, apprenticeship programs often do not take nearly as long to complete as post-secondary degree programs. Taken together, this means that the time spent by Commission consumers in post-secondary education can often be longer, while relatively few of these individuals complete their post-secondary programs and enter employment each year. As a result, the Commission believes that the target of 10% is appropriate. The Commission will work to identify and address the barriers to employment in a way that will improve performance on this measure.

e. Measurable skill gain: -- Measures the percentage of participants who, during a program year, are in education or training programs that lead to a recognized post-secondary credential or employment, and who are achieving measurable skill gains, which the Departments are defining as documented academic, technical, occupational or other forms of progress, toward the credential or employment.

Target 25%

The Commission has historically encouraged pursuit of careers requiring post-secondary vocational training and education, including graduate education. Commission consumers, however, sometimes need more time to achieve post-secondary college degrees at the Associate's, Bachelor's, Master's, and Doctorate levels. Reasons vary from needing more time to acquire the blindness skills necessary to be successful in post-secondary education environments, resulting in more semesters where the consumer is taking less than a full course load while ramping up to a full course load; breaks to get blindness skills training; and breaks to address medical or secondary disabilities. Generally, this means that a smaller percentage of Commission consumers enrolled in post-secondary education programs are able to successfully complete the number of semester hours necessary to get credit for a Measurable Skill Gain each program year. As a result, the Commission believes that the target of 25% is appropriate. The Commission will work to identify and address the barriers to employment in a way that will improve performance on this measure.

f. Effectiveness in serving employers: The State partners have chosen two approaches for this measure:

1. Employer penetration Rate; and
2. Repeat business customers.

The New Mexico Department of Workforce Solutions is the lead agency on this measure. The Commission for the Blind has not captured data on this measure, but will look to do so in the future.

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

The Commission believes that the primary way it can assist other components of the statewide workforce development system to assist persons with disabilities is to make them aware of Commission programs through training and technical assistance, and to identify specific points of contact within the Commission. These points of contact, training, and technical assistance will enable workforce partners to refer prospective clients to the Commission when necessary, and for such referrals to be handled more efficiently and with less delay due to questions of eligibility.

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

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

Input received by the State Rehabilitation Council and Commission staff, including the comprehensive needs assessment conducted during PY 2018, as well as a review of new performance indicators under WIOA, identified operational priorities in carrying out the vocational rehabilitation and supported employment programs:

a. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes by proactively working to recruit, hire, and retain qualified vocational rehabilitation counselors, thereby providing greater continuity and consistency in the provision of vocational rehabilitation services.

Agency Response: There is a national shortage of qualified vocational rehabilitation counselors, and the agency is engaging in maximum efforts to recruit, hire, and retain qualified vocational rehabilitation counselors.

b. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes by providing appropriate vocational rehabilitation services to the growing population of older workers, many of whom will be unable or unwilling to retrain for work in a field different from their current occupations, thereby enabling these older workers to become or remain successfully employed.

Agency Response: The Commission is committed to serve the increasing population of older workers. The aging population has resulted in an aging workforce, and 50 percent of workers report that they plan on working beyond age 65. In addition, 25 percent of workers do not plan on retiring. These older workers will require intensive training to remain or become employed.

c. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes by providing appropriate vocational rehabilitation services that support the maintaining of a healthy lifestyle that is conducive to becoming and remaining successfully employed, thereby enabling a greater portion of agency consumers to become and remain successfully employed.

Agency Response: The Commission recognizes that maintaining a healthy lifestyle can be conducive to obtaining and retaining an employment outcome, and will provide services designed to support healthy lifestyles when such services are necessary to obtaining and retaining employment.

d. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes by providing vocational rehabilitation training and counseling that is designed to enhance and improve the soft skills of our consumers, which are becoming an increasing barrier to our consumers becoming and remaining successfully employed.

Agency Response: The Commission recognizes that having appropriate soft skills is essential to obtaining and retaining employment. The Commission will continue to use the Orientation Center and Skills Center to provide instruction in the area of soft skills, and will explore additional ways to enhance instruction in soft skills as a part of Pre-Employment Transition Services.

e. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes by partnering and working with community colleges and One-Stop centers to more effectively utilize services available through the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act, Adult, Dislocated Worker, Youth, and Wagner-Peyser programs.

Agency Response: The agency has been participating in monthly partner meetings that have enhanced the coordination between the Commission and the partners. The Commission will continue to work

cooperatively with the partners by designating specific points of contact, by providing appropriate information, and by entering into cooperative agreements where appropriate.

f. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes by working cooperatively with the New Mexico Department of Health so as to develop opportunities for competitive and integrated employment for persons who are blind or visually impaired, which will be accomplished by working in partnership with the Medical Assistance Division, the Developmental Disabilities Supports Division, and the Behavioral Health Services Division.

Agency Response: The agency will work cooperatively with the Department of Health, with the Medical Assistance Division, with the Developmental Disabilities Supports Division, and with the Behavioral Health Services Division. The agency will designate specific points of contact for each of these entities, will provide information as appropriate, and will enter into a cooperative agreement with the Department of Health.

g. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes by using the Orientation Center to provide employment preparation training for adults and transition students, including through the addition of an apartment training facility to be constructed adjacent to the Center. The proposed apartment facility will increase the capacity of the Orientation Center, will enable the Orientation Center to provide more realistic training, will eliminate the need to rent costly and less appropriate private apartments, and will reduce the number of instances in which costly out-of-state training will be necessary to meet the needs of consumers.

Agency Response: The proposed apartment project has been fully funded with state appropriations, and construction should start during calendar year 2020.

h. Increase the number of consumers served through enhanced Outreach Activities; including media outreach, use of paid advertising, through increased collaboration with ophthalmologists and optometrists, and through the use of the Technology for Children program to conduct outreach to school districts.

Agency Response: The agency will continue to work to increase outreach to the identified groups using the recommended methods.

i. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes of transition consumers by providing enhanced Pre-Employment Transition Services, including assistive technology where appropriate as a part of an Individualized Plan for Employment, by providing assistive technology through the Technology for Children Program, by conducting increased outreach activities, by conducting educational activities to meet the specific needs of transition students, and by increasing proficient use of Braille and Braille math.

Agency Response: The agency will continue to work to increase services to Pre-Employment Transition Students using the identified methods. The agency already seeks to be involved in Individualized Education Plan meetings for transition consumers starting at age 14, and the agency operates the Students in Transition to Employment Program in Albuquerque and in Alamogordo. On February 2, 2019, the agency sponsored a workshop on Unified English Braille, and the agency will continue to sponsor Unified English Braille workshops and National Certification in Unified English Braille exams. The agency is also renewing agreements with state and local educational officials.

j. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes achieved by consumers by providing services in a way that genuinely honors the "informed choice" provisions of the Rehabilitation Act, enabling Commission consumers to have the opportunity to obtain employment at higher levels of compensation.

Agency Response: The agency continues to provide services in a way that enables consumers to set and obtain high employment goals. For the federal fiscal year ending September 30, 2019, the average starting wage for consumers was \$16.47.

k. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes achieved by consumers by providing a quality and expanding Newsline system that gives consumers access to employment listings, business news, and other important information, including through both local Newsline and through NFB-Newsline.

Agency Response: The agency is committed to providing a quality Newsline service. The agency will continue to sponsor NFB-Newsline in New Mexico, which provides access to over 400 national publications.

l. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes by innovatively using the Skills Center to meet the needs of vocational rehabilitation consumers and potential vocational rehabilitation consumers, including using it for provision of Pre-Employment Transition Services.

Agency Response: The agency is committed to using the Skills Center to meet the needs of vocational rehabilitation consumers, and especially consumers receiving Pre-Employment Transition Services. As a result, the agency used the Skills Center to provide training to participants in the Students in Transition to Employment Program, as well as student and Braille seminars. The Skills Center was also used to provide training to individual students, and was used as a meeting place for programs related to vocational rehabilitation.

m. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes for consumers who are Deaf-Blind through collaboration and partnership with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, with the Community Outreach Programs for the Deaf, and with the Commission for Deaf and Hard of Hearing, including through the delivery of assistive technology to consumers who are Deaf-Blind.

Agency Response: The agency has assigned a vocational rehabilitation counselor to take the lead on services related to consumers who are Deaf-Blind. The agency also works with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation to coordinate provision of services to persons who are Deaf-Blind. The agency works with a variety of other partners, including the Commission for Deaf and Hard of Hearing, the Community Outreach Program for the Deaf, the Helen Keller National Center, and the Deaf-Blind Task Force. The agency also participates in the annual Deaf-Blind Awareness Day at the Roundhouse.

n. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes through the Business Enterprise Program (BEP) by shortening the time required for vendors to complete the required training, including by using Randolph-Sheppard Act training offered by the Hadley Institute for the Blind and Visually Impaired.

Agency Response: The agency has adopted the Hadley Institute for the Blind and Visually Impaired as the training provider for BEP vendors, and is working with New Mexico programs to create a local provider so that food preparation and cooking methods can be taught locally.

o. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes by strengthening administrative services so as to timely and accurately submit federal reports, to assure compliance with all applicable fiscal regulations, and to comply with all applicable accounting standards.

Agency Response: The agency recognizes the need to have strong fiscal programs so as to maximize the receipt of federal funds, and to otherwise provide appropriate vocational rehabilitation services to our consumers. To do this, the agency must have in place a sufficient number of qualified fiscal staff to comply with federal fiscal rules, and to appropriately respond to changing fiscal requirements.

p. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes by enhancing overall performance and productivity by engaging in activities designed to mitigate and ameliorate the impacts of blindness and visual impairment, and by engaging in outreach and other activities designed to identify additional potential consumers, and by making the public and medical community more aware of Commission services.

Agency Response: The agency is engaging in new and innovative approaches to provide services and conduct outreach. The agency has a new web page that allows for referrals to be made by health care professionals, and the web page enables members of the public to sign up to automatically be emailed meeting notices, agendas, and minutes.

q. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes for consumers by providing enhanced benefits counseling and guidance to reduce concerns related to the loss or reduction of benefits.

Agency Response: The Commission continues to provide benefits counseling and guidance through a contract with the New Mexico Legal Aid Society. The agency has also provided training on benefits to vocational rehabilitation counselors and consumers.

B. support innovation and expansion activities; and

The agency supports the funding and program activities of the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC). The Agency assumes all costs incurred for all regularly scheduled meetings, subcommittees and special meetings. This includes expenses related to securing meeting facilities, members' travel and per diem expenses, interpreters, clerical support, office supplies, and materials. The Agency provides a staff person who prepares the agendas, minutes, and other materials as necessary for each scheduled meeting. The Agency provides a staff person to schedule and make all necessary arrangements for Public Hearings. The SRC is active in providing input into the Agency's State Plan, Manual of Operating Procedures, and other matters pertaining to the Agency's program of activities. The Commission has sponsored NFB Newline. This is an augment to our existing Newline for the Blind. NFB Newline enables our consumers to read over 400 national and international newspapers and magazines, four of which are Spanish-language publications, plus New Mexico newspapers, enhancing their ability to access information that is essential for success in both the academic and professional environments, as well as improving the quality of employment outcomes. The agency has also created the Skills Center, a training site to meet the needs of vocational rehabilitation consumers and potential vocational rehabilitation consumers. The agency is scheduling a variety of activities in the Skills Center. These activities include meetings, workshops, seminars, and other training events such as the summer Students in Transition to Employment Program. The Commission has recently added staff to its Albuquerque Skills Center specifically for this purpose. The Skills Center will offer seminars and workshops for high school students, college students, adults, and parents. Training will be delivered throughout the year. To meet the particular needs of transition students, training will be scheduled during summers, school breaks, after school, and through distance delivery methods. Topics cover the landscape, including parent participation, MS Windows, Word, PowerPoint, Excel, and Outlook, mobile technology, computer operator maintenance, and assistive technology hardware and software; Braille, math, note-taking skills, college success, STEP prep, Hadley support days, job readiness, professional dress and appearance, resume writing, job search strategies, mock interviews, Newline resources (newspapers, magazines, research capabilities, and job search functions); transportation options, and financial literacy. The Commission has adopted a policy to support consumer attendance at the

division/special interest group meetings and relevant seminars/workshops held during national consumer organization conventions. In order to receive the support, the consumer's vocational goal must be directly related to the particular division/special interest group meeting. The Commission, with the support of the SRC, believes that attendance at related division/special interest group meetings and relevant seminar/workshops can enhance the consumer's ability to achieve their vocational goal. Benefits would include learning about current developments in their field, meeting and networking with individuals who are successful in their fields, learning about the use and accessibility of career-specific technology, learning how blind and visually impaired individuals in the field use assistive technology successfully, and learning techniques that would enable them to succeed in their vocational training/education program and ultimately in their chosen field. The Commission also supports annual attendance at the state conventions of both consumer organizations. PY 2020 will mark the fourteenth year of a MOA with the Department of Health and the New Mexico School for the Blind and Visually Impaired. The MOA administers an allocation from DOH of \$80,000, designed to provide assistive technology that, for a disability other than blindness, would be considered durable medical equipment. This initiative serves blind children that are both transition-age and those not yet transition-age.

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 Commission has adopted policies that prohibit discrimination, including discrimination based on gender, race, national origin, color, disability, and age. The Commission Outreach efforts also comprise a major portion of overcoming identified barriers relating to equitable access in participation of programs and services. Newline is an important part of the Commission's activities that overcome barriers and has increased access to the printed word, including announcements of the meetings of the Commission and State Rehabilitation Council. Newline also provides access to information required during university study, information related to particular professions or occupations, information of interest to the business community, and employment ads. NFB-Newline has several Spanish publications as well as a job search utility. NFB-Newline voices can also be customized to meet the needs of individuals who are hard of hearing, and NFB-Newline offers the ability to download publications for reading on a Braille display. This feature enables individuals who are deaf-blind to access the entire selection of more than 400 national and international newspapers and magazines. New Mexico is mirroring the nation in experiencing a serious problem relating to a lack of appropriate Braille instruction for students who are blind or visually impaired. Due to the rural and economically disadvantaged nature of the state, this problem is even more serious in New Mexico. As a result, the agency is finding that an increasing number of blind children are entering the vocational rehabilitation program without adequate Braille or literacy skills. This problem constitutes a significant barrier for these children in terms of their ability to equitably participate in the Commission's vocational rehabilitation and supported employment programs. This barrier is a new development that is largely related to the shift away from residential schools, and is therefore prevalent in the younger generation of blind persons. Accordingly, The Commission's Technology for Children program is an important part of the Commission's strategy to overcome this barrier. By providing assistive technology to blind and visually impaired children, these children are being given the tools necessary to acquire Braille and literacy skills. The Commission has also recently added staff to its Albuquerque Skills Center and will be delivering additional programming to address this need. With regard to language barriers, approximately 40% of the Agency's staff is bilingual. This makes it possible in most cases for the agency to directly communicate with consumers in their own language. If an interpreter is needed, in either American Sign Language or other language, the agency secures the services of an appropriate interpreter. When human interpreters are not available on-site, the Commission utilizes a phone-based interpreter service with support for more than 150 languages. The Agency also regularly contracts with sign language interpreters whenever

there is a need for a sign language interpreter. The agency has been experimenting with video remote interpreting so as to more-effectively serve deaf-blind consumers who require sign language support. This is especially effective in rural areas where it is difficult to schedule on-site interpreters. The Commission has created a video describing the Orientation Center, which is available in both a captioned and Spanish language format. The Agency is ADA compliant. All facilities of the Agency are wheelchair accessible and free of physical barriers for the mobility impaired. TDD and TTY devices are in place for persons who are deaf or hearing impaired. All Agency materials are available in accessible formats, or staff is available to assist individuals with completion of any necessary state forms. The Agency makes every effort to fully comply with whatever needs or desires the consumer may have. The Agency employs several reader-drivers for Agency staff who require this accommodation. Reader/drivers are also available to transport consumers to job interviews and other related appointments as necessary. The Agency has identified a vocational rehabilitation counselor to take the lead on services related to clients who are Deaf-Blind. The agency also has a cooperative agreement with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, and coordinates provision of services to persons who are Deaf-Blind. The agency works with a variety of other partners, including the Commission for Deaf and Hard of Hearing, the Community Outreach programs for the Deaf, the Helen Keller National Center, and the Deaf-Blind Task Force. The agency also participates in the annual Deaf-Blind Awareness Day at the Roundhouse. The agency will work cooperatively with the Department of Health, with the Medical Assistance Division, with the Developmental Disabilities Supports Division, and with the Behavioral Health Services Division. The agency will designate specific liaisons and points of contact for each of these entities, will provide information as appropriate, and will enter into a cooperative agreement with the Department of Health. The agency is committed to using the Skills Center to meet the needs of vocational rehabilitation clients. As a result, the agency used the Skills Center to provide training to Students in Transition to Employment Program in 2018 and 2019, and will continue this activity in 2020. Beginning in summer 2016, the Commission began offering its STEP One program. STEP one is designed to serve students who have significant disabilities in addition to blindness or visual impairment. This program is designed for consumers who might not be able to handle the rigorous STEP work and training schedule. The STEP One program will offer two half-days of training with a lower student to teacher ratio that will allow for more one-on-one training. It will also offer a work schedule that would meet the individual needs of each consumer. A workplace readiness aide will be hired to support each of the students in the STEP One program as necessary. The Skills Center was also used to provide support in the area of Braille and technology training, as well as to function as a meeting place for programs related to vocational rehabilitation. The agency continues to refer vocational rehabilitation clients to receive independent living services, recognizing the need for clients to be able to function independently to become employed. The agency recognizes the benefit of providing training at the Orientation Center that is realistic and appropriate to the individual needs of clients, and has received a capital outlay appropriation to build apartments that can be used to provide more realistic and appropriate training. The agency is engaging in new and innovative approaches to provide services and engage in outreach. The agency has improved its web page and the way in which notices of meetings are communicated, and has developed an entirely new web page that has a more modern appearance, and that will allow for referrals to be made by health care professionals through the web page.

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.

The Commission for the Blind conducted a comprehensive series of strategic planning discussions, town forums, and public hearings in PY 2019. This was done in partnership with the State Rehabilitation Council. The Commission has identified areas of future need, and identified new and innovative approaches to the meeting of existing needs. Of prime concern is a projected dramatic increase in blindness due to the aging of the population, as well as the newer trend of significant increases in the number of blind children, and the need to serve this population through vocational rehabilitation services. According to the 2016 American Community Survey, there are 67,313 persons in New Mexico who report having serious difficulty seeing, even when wearing glasses or contact lenses. Of that number, 4,471 are under age 18; 31,750 are 18 to 64; and 31,092 are 65 and Older. Increase in blind children is due to Optic Nerve Hypoplasia, which has increased 600% in the last 30 years. The Commission is actively preparing for an increase in the number of vocational rehabilitation consumers entering the program with Optic Nerve Hypoplasia (ONH). ONH is now the leading cause of blindness in children, and it often causes cognitive impairment and developmental delays in addition to blindness. **GOALS AND PRIORITIES** The Commission has made the following progress with regard to meeting the goals and priorities identified in the PY 2018/2019 State Plan:

a. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes by partnering and working with community colleges and One-Stop centers to more effectively utilize services available through the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act, Adult, Dislocated Worker, Youth, and Wagner-Peyser programs.

Results and Progress: The agency will work cooperatively with the identified partner entities by designating specific liaisons and points of contact, by providing information, and by entering into cooperative agreements where appropriate.

b. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes by working cooperatively with the New Mexico Department of Health so as to develop opportunities for competitive and integrated employment for persons who are blind or visually impaired, which will be accomplished by working in partnership with the Medical Assistance Division, the Developmental Disabilities Supports Division, and the Behavioral Health Services Division.

Results and Progress: The agency will work cooperatively with the Department of Health, with the Medical Assistance Division, with the Developmental Disabilities Supports Division, and with the Behavioral Health Services Division. The agency will designate specific liaisons and points of contact for each of these entities, will provide information as appropriate, and will enter into a cooperative agreement with the Department of Health.

c. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes by using the Orientation Center to provide employment preparation training for adults and transition students, including through the addition of an apartment training facility to be constructed adjacent to the Center. The proposed apartment facility will increase the capacity of the Orientation Center, will enable the Orientation Center to provide more realistic training, will eliminate the need to rent costly and less appropriate private apartments, and will reduce the number of instances in which costly out-of-state training will be necessary to meet the needs of consumers.

Results and Progress: Fifteen adults and ten Students with Disabilities were served at the Orientation Center during PY 2018. The proposed apartment project has been funded through a capital outlay appropriation from the New Mexico Legislature. The agency has obtained architectural drawings of the proposed apartments, and is working with the Facilities Management Division with the goal of beginning construction during PY 2020 or PY 2021.

d. Increase the number of consumers served through enhanced Outreach Activities; including media outreach, use of paid advertising, through increased collaboration with ophthalmologists and optometrists, and through the use of the Technology for Children program to conduct outreach to school districts.

Results and Progress: The agency will continue to work to increase outreach to the identified groups using the recommended outreach methods. Counselors visit ophthalmologists in their territories to ensure that the medical community is aware of the Commission and the services that are provided.

Another important outreach activity is the Technology for Children program, which is also a frequent point of first contact with the agency. The Technology for Children program provides information to the public, parents, and schools about the Commission's vocational rehabilitation program and services in a way that significantly enhances the agency transition services. It also provides technical assistance and support services that enhance the agency's ability to work cooperatively with school districts, including assisting in the establishment of cooperative agreements with the Commission. The agency has a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with the Department of Health and the New Mexico School for the Blind and Visually Impaired. The MOA administers an annual allocation from DOH of \$80,000, designed to provide assistive technology that, for a disability other than blindness, would be considered durable medical equipment. The Technology for Children program places a special emphasis on providing assistive technology to economically disadvantaged and rural school districts. The Coordinator of the Technology for Children program and a member of her staff also speaks Spanish.

To further enhance the number of consumers and improve transition services, the Commission has signed 17 cooperative agreements with New Mexico school districts. These school districts include Aztec, Bloomfield, Carlsbad, Cloudcroft, Clovis, Deming, Española, Farmington, Gadsden, Gallup-McKinley County, Las Cruces, Los Lunas, Moriarty-Edgewood, Pecos, Portales, Roswell, and Taos.

The agreements were signed by the Executive Director in meetings with the Special Education Director of each school district. The Commission is also actively working to obtain cooperative agreements with additional school districts, including Albuquerque Public Schools, Alamogordo Public Schools, and Santa Fe Public Schools. The Commission also has a cooperative agreement with the New Mexico School for the Blind and Visually Impaired.

e. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes of transition consumers by providing enhanced Pre-Employment Transition Services, including assistive technology where appropriate as a part of an Individualized Plan for Employment, by providing assistive technology through the Technology for

Children Program, by conducting increased outreach activities, by conducting educational activities to meet the specific needs of transition students, and by increasing proficient use of Braille and Braille math.

Results and Progress: On February 2, 2019, the agency sponsored a workshop on Unified English Braille and will be sponsoring a National Certification in Unified English Braille exam during PY 2019. The state of New Mexico now has 29 persons with NCUEB certification (eleven Commission staff and 18 K-12 teachers), giving New Mexico the highest portion of NCUEB certified teachers in the nation.

The Commission and the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) have agreed that the MINIMUM appropriate age for provision of Pre-Employment Transition Services in New Mexico is 14, unless special or extraordinary circumstances exist that make an earlier age appropriate. Should special circumstances exist that make an earlier age appropriate, the minimum age for the provision of Pre-Employment Transition Services shall be 10 years of age. Should extraordinary circumstances exist that make an even earlier age appropriate, the minimum age for the provision of Pre-Employment Transition Services shall be 8 years of age.

The Commission has sought to be involved in Individualized Education Plan meetings for transition consumers starting at age 14 for many years. The agency also operates the Students in Transition to Employment Program in Albuquerque, Alamogordo, and through community placements throughout New Mexico.

Beginning in PY 2017, the Commission partnered with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation on a contract with the Central Region Education Cooperative (CREC) to deliver pre-employment transition services to high school students across New Mexico. Under the agreement, Commission high school-age clients were included in job exploration counseling, counseling on post-secondary opportunities, self-advocacy training, and job skills training delivered by CREC staff. CREC job developers helped to place Commission high school students interested in work-based learning experiences, primarily during summers, but also in after-school or weekend jobs during the regular school year.

Effective in PY 2019, The Commission entered into its own Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA) with CREC. The purpose of the IGA is to facilitate the transition of students with disabilities from the receipt of educational and Pre-Employment Transition Services in school to the receipt of vocational rehabilitation services from the Commission.

Additionally, the Commission signed a Governmental Services Agreement (GSA) with the New Mexico School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (NMSBVI) in May of 2019. Under this GSA, the Commission funds the provision of Pre-Employment Transition Services that are provided by NMSBVI. The purpose is to facilitate the transition of students with disabilities from the receipt of educational and Pre-Employment Transition Services in school to the receipt of vocational rehabilitation services from the Commission.

f. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes achieved by consumers by providing services in a way that genuinely honors the "informed choice" provisions of the Rehabilitation Act, enabling Commission consumers to have the opportunity to obtain employment at higher levels of compensation.

Results and Progress: The Commission uses a number of tools to "inform" the career choice of consumers, including career assessments, the Career Choice Questionnaire, job shadowing, and on-the-job training experiences. The Career Choice Questionnaire guides consumers in researching careers that they have identified, helping them to ultimately select a career that is the best fit for themselves. The Commission encourages and supports careers requiring graduate education and careers in self-employment.

g. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes achieved by consumers by providing a quality and expanding Newsline system that gives consumers access to employment listings, business news, and other important information, including through both local Newsline and through NFB-Newsline.

Results and Progress: The Commission has provided access to NFB-Newsline, including in coordination with the Commission for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Persons. NEWSLINE for the Blind continues to grow yearly, relying on a staff of one and over 100 volunteers. The Agency incorporated NFB Newsline as a part of Newsline services in 2002, and intends to continue NFB Newsline in PY 2020. Newsline is an important part of the Commission's outreach program to identify and serve most significantly disabled persons who are minorities, and individuals who have been unserved or underserved by the vocational rehabilitation or supported employment program. Newsline provides access to state and national publications to individuals in all portions of New Mexico, including in the most rural portions of the state. Newsline started with 200 listeners in the Albuquerque area in 1991, and has grown to more than 5000 listeners. The local Newsline and NFB-Newsline have publications that include newspapers from Albuquerque, Santa Fe, Los Alamos, Alamogordo, Farmington, Las Cruces, and Roswell, and recently added the Gallup Independent. NEWSLINE also has a Spanish language news category. NFB-Newsline offers prompts in Spanish and has several Spanish language publications, including the recent addition of Cnn News in Spanish. NFB-Newsline voices can also be customized to meet the needs of individuals who are hard of hearing, and NFB-Newsline offers the ability to download publications for reading on a Braille display. This feature enables individuals who are deaf-blind to access the entire selection of more than 400 national newspapers and magazines.

h. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes by innovatively using the Skills Center to meet the needs of vocational rehabilitation consumers and potential vocational rehabilitation consumers, including using it for provision of services to transition students.

Results and Progress: The Skills Center was dedicated in April 2012 and has been used to host a number of events over the years. The Student Transition to Employment Program (STEP) is a summer employment and training program for youth between the ages of 14 and 21. STEP utilized the Skills Center during the summers of 2018 and 2019 and will continue as the training location for the Albuquerque STEP program in coming years. The Skills Center also hosted a number of meetings and trainings for blind entrepreneurs for the Business Enterprise Program, including entrepreneur trainings, facility selection evaluations, Committee meetings, and the semi-annual meetings of BEP blind entrepreneurs. The facility was also used for vocational evaluations and testing, student seminars, Braille seminars, and college prep workshops. The Skills Center was also used as a meeting place for the State Rehabilitation Council and for programs related to vocational rehabilitation. Additional staff was added during PY 2016 and 2017 in order to expand VR-related trainings to be offered at the Skills Center.

During 2013, the agency's executive director began discussions with the Governor's Commission on Disability (GCD), the administrator of the New Mexico Technology Assistance Program (NMTAP), to allocate NMTAP funds to the Commission for the Blind. The allocation of \$75,000, was used to purchase a variety of Computers (including Macintosh), Pearl cameras, note-takers, Braille displays, Braille embossers, Braille translation software, screen readers, optical character recognition packages, and magnification hardware/software. The purpose of the technology acquisition was twofold: 1. To demonstrate options available to VR consumers when it comes to technology; and 2. To train consumers on the use of the chosen technology. The actual funding and acquisition took place in FY14. New equipment and software was purchased in Summer 2018 and Summer 2019 in order to keep the Skills Center Technology Lab current.

i. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes through the provision of independent

- ii. living training to vocational rehabilitation consumers, including through the proposed apartment training facility at the Orientation Center.

Results and Progress: VR consumers have options for receiving necessary independent living skills training: they can receive it in their home communities by rehab teachers assigned to each community, receive services at our residential training center in Alamogordo, or receive training at out-of-state training centers. The Skills Center in Albuquerque is also increasing capacity to deliver needed training. Technology training can also be delivered remotely. In these ways, VR consumers throughout New Mexico can receive the VR-related independent living skills training that they need.

In each case, counselors refer consumers to the rehab teachers, specifying the VR-related tasks that need to be completed so that the rehab teachers can develop lessons that will build the skills necessary to complete those tasks.

The Staff Manager who supervises the Independent Living Program possesses both National Orientation and Mobility Certification (NOMC) as well as National Certification in Unified English Braille (NCUEB). The Rehab Teachers are the front line staff providing the initial instruction in Orientation & Mobility for vocational rehabilitation consumers. The Commission also contracts with private O&M instructors as necessary to meet the needs of vocational rehabilitation consumers across the state. The Commission has also provided professional O&M training to the teachers at the Orientation Center.

The agency recognizes the benefit of providing training at the Orientation Center that is realistic and appropriate to the individual needs of consumers, and will be building apartments that can be used to provide more realistic and appropriate training beginning in PY 2020 or PY 2021. The agency also hosted independent living trainings at the Skills Center during PY 2018. One of these trainings focused on IOS and Android smart phones, enabling rehab teachers to then teach VR consumers how to more-effectively use their personal smart phone technology.

- j. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes for consumers who are Deaf-Blind through collaboration and partnership with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, with the Community Outreach Programs for the Deaf, and with the Commission for Deaf and Hard of Hearing, including through the delivery of assistive technology to consumers who are Deaf-Blind.

Results and Progress: The agency has assigned a vocational rehabilitation counselor to take the lead on services related to consumers who are Deaf-Blind. The agency also works with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation to coordinate provision of services to persons who are Deaf-Blind. The agency works with a variety of other partners, including the Commission for Deaf and Hard of Hearing, the Community Outreach Program for the Deaf, the Helen Keller National Center, and the Deaf-Blind Task Force. The agency also participates in the annual Deaf-Blind Awareness Day at the State Capitol.

The Commission maintains good working relationships with the Commission for Deaf and Hard of Hearing, as well as the Community Outreach Program for the Deaf (COPD). The goal is to support the needs of deaf-blind consumers in the state. An important part of the relationship is ICanConnect, which is a part of the National Deaf-Blind Equipment Distribution Program (NDBEDP). The Commission entered into an agreement with COPD to administer the program in New Mexico. Also, in 2006, the Commission entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with the New Mexico School for the Blind and Visually Impaired designed to further enhance transition services for students who are Deaf-Blind. The Commission also serves on the New Mexico Deaf-Blind Task Force, which brings together stakeholders to discuss ways to improve services to deaf-blind individuals in the state. During PY 2018, the Commission utilized these

MOUs to provide enhanced services to deaf-blind consumers. NFB Newslines will also provide deaf-blind persons with access to a variety of New Mexico newspapers, including those in Farmington, Las Cruces, Albuquerque, and Roswell.

k. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes through the Business Enterprise Program (BEP) by shortening the time required for vendors to complete the required training, including by using Randolph-Sheppard Act training offered by the Hadley Institute for the Blind and Visually Impaired.

Results and Progress: The agency has adopted the Hadley Institute for the Blind and Visually Impaired as the training provider for BEP vendors, and is working with New Mexico programs to create a local provider so that food preparation and cooking methods can be taught locally.

l. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes by strengthening administrative services so as to timely and accurately submit federal reports, to assure compliance with all applicable fiscal regulations, and to comply with all applicable accounting standards.

Results and Progress: The agency recognizes the need to have strong fiscal programs so as to maximize the receipt of federal funds, and to otherwise provide appropriate vocational rehabilitation services to our consumers. To do this, the agency must have in place a sufficient number of qualified fiscal staff to comply with federal fiscal rules, and to appropriately respond to changing fiscal requirements. To that end, the Commission has hired additional staff, provided additional training to existing staff, and is improving its case management capacity for the VR Program and the BEP Program.

m. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes by enhancing overall performance and productivity by engaging in activities designed to mitigate and ameliorate the impacts of blindness and visual impairment, and by engaging in outreach and other activities designed to identify additional potential consumers, and by making the public and medical community more aware of Commission services.

Results and Progress: The agency is engaging in new and innovative approaches to provide services and conduct outreach. The agency has a new web page that allows for referrals to be made by health care professionals, and the web page enables members of the public to sign up to automatically be emailed meeting notices, agendas, and minutes.

The agency has worked to improve training designed to minimize the impact of blindness and visual impairments on consumers. One initiative was designed to improve the effectiveness of IL teachers who work with VR consumers. Training at the residential training center was also improved in two ways: first by improving the physical plant to provide a more modern and pleasant learning environment; and second by improving the effectiveness of the training itself. The agency improved the ability of consumers to gain necessary technology skills by providing instructional materials to each consumer. The materials provide step-by-step instruction on the use of Microsoft Office applications paired with the specific access technology (screen reader or screen magnifier) used by the consumer. The instructional materials are also provided in Word, text, html, audio, and audio/visual formats, meaning that each consumer can access the instructional materials in a format that is most effective for

them. The agency continues to promote the Technology for Children program, which, in addition to providing needed assistive technology, often serves as an important first contact to the agency for blind and visually-impaired children and youth who will later become consumers of the agency. The Commission regularly participates in the annual New Mexico Academy of Ophthalmology conference in Albuquerque.

Counselors also visit ophthalmologists in their territories to ensure that the medical community is aware of the Commission and the services that are provided.

n. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes for consumers by providing enhanced benefits counseling and guidance to reduce concerns related to the loss or reduction of benefits.

Results and Progress: The Commission continues to provide benefits counseling and guidance through the New Mexico Legal Aid Society. The agency has also provided training on benefits to vocational rehabilitation counselors and consumers. In addition to the training, counselors received a desk reference which contains valuable information regarding each program as well as sample letters that can be used to report earnings. The agency continues to utilize a comparable benefits survey, designed to identify benefit program eligibility for eligible VR consumers.

The goals and priorities described above were jointly developed and agreed to by the Commission for the Blind and the State Rehabilitation Council.

STRATEGIES Effective strategies focus on meeting the needs of consumers, both in terms of State Plan Goals and Priorities and WIOA performance measures. Establishing a firm and reassuring foundation of monthly income and medical insurance is important to the fundamental job-readiness of each consumer, so the Commission contracted with New Mexico Legal Aid to provide assistance to consumers that needed help with guidance and counseling with respect to SSI and SSDI work incentives. A great deal of emphasis is placed on consumers possessing skills that will help them overcome their vision loss, and the Commission encourages attendance at the Orientation Center. All interested consumers are taken on a tour of the center by their counselor. Those who choose not to attend the center are provided training in their own communities by the Commission's Independent Living Teachers. Counselors spend a great deal of time and effort assisting the consumer to identify their own career goal, and counselors ask that consumers research identified career goals to determine whether a contemplated career is a good fit. The research also helps to solidify the path (vocational training, education, licenses, certifications,) that are necessary to achieve the career goal. The Commission recognizes careers requiring graduate education, working hard to utilize comparable benefits where appropriate. For example, counselors make a particular effort to utilize the Free Application for Federal Student Aid to access Pell and other grant funding to cover costs for college undergraduates. Effective use of comparable benefits, especially school grants, means that more money is available for services with no comparable benefit options, such as assistive technology. Use of assistive technology is encouraged and resources are made available to purchase needed hardware and software tools and provide necessary training. On-the-job (OJT) placements of three-six months are used whenever appropriate, such as to help employers overcome any doubts they may have about employing a blind or visually-impaired individual. **SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT** Supported employment cases continue to be a high priority. During PY 2018, the Commission served 29 supported employment consumers and achieved three employment outcomes in integrated/competitive settings. The Commission continues to work closely with family members, community organizations, and other state agencies in an effort to provide the most comprehensive services possible. The Commission has worked closely and creatively with each of these groups to fund and deliver training services, transportation services, job development services, job coaching services, and a variety of other ongoing services.

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

- * Staff shortages and duty reassignments have impeded the Commission's ability to pursue some of the desired relationships with WIOA partners, the Department of Health, the Medical Assistance Division, the Developmental Disabilities Supports Division, and the Behavioral Health Services Division. Position reclassifications and filling of positions should create more capacity in PY 2020 that will enable the Commission to accomplish these objectives.
- * The proposed apartment project at the Commission's Orientation Center has been funded through a capital outlay appropriation. The agency has obtained architectural drawings of the proposed apartments, and is working with the Facilities Management Division to accomplish the construction.
- * The small number of Students with visual impairments and the rural nature of New Mexico, coupled with the restrictive scope of allowable Pre-ETS services, have impeded the agency's ability to spend the entire Pre-ETS reserve. Agreements were negotiated with the Central Region Education Cooperative (CREC) and the New Mexico School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (NMSBVI) that enabled the Commission to provide more Pre-ETS services to blind and visually impaired Students across New Mexico during PY 2019 and will enable the Commission to deliver even more Pre-ETS services during PY 2020 and PY 2021.

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 PY 2018 State Plan identified the following goals: 1. At least three closures in integrated settings; 2. Closures averaging at least \$7.50 per hour; 3. Closures averaging at least fifteen hours worked per week. During PY 2018, the Commission served 29 supported employment consumers at some point during the year and achieved three employment outcomes in integrated/competitive settings. The average wage for the three closures was \$9.38 per hour with an average of 6.3 hours worked per week. The Commission continues to work closely with family members, community organizations, and other state agencies in an effort to provide the most comprehensive services possible. The Commission has worked closely and creatively with each of these groups to fund and deliver training services, transportation services, job development services, job coaching services, and a variety of other ongoing services.

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

A number of factors impeded our ability to meet our goals in PY 2018, including the following:

- * Counselor staff shortages: The agency has had a significant turnover of counselors in the past five years, having lost nine counselors for a variety of reasons. In addition to undertaking a significant training effort for new counselors, the agency has not been able to fill all of the positions as quickly as would be preferred. This has been due to new hiring procedures implemented by the state. As a result, existing staff have been required to cover larger caseloads and larger geographic areas, leading to less contact time for each consumer. This also means less time to conduct job development for job-ready consumers.
- * Ineffective job developers: The agency has found only limited success employing private job developers. Even job developers that have been successful in placing VR consumers of the general agency have had only limited success placing consumers of the Commission. Job development has thus fallen to Commission

VR counselors, and, as noted above, current Commission counselors are by-and-large very inexperienced as a group and over-extended due to staffing shortages.

* Consumers no longer interested in work: Often, consumers that would otherwise require supported employment services say they are interested in work and a VR case is opened. Unfortunately, their interest is often the result of suggestions and pressure from family members or service providers. Despite offers of support in the process of transitioning to employment, their interest in employment sometimes wanes as they come to understand the changes that are forthcoming when employment becomes part of their regular schedule.

* Many supported employment youth: Currently, the agency has 16 consumers coded supported employment, 11 of whom are youth with the most significant disabilities, 5 of whom are in the 14-21 age group. We expect some of these consumers will participate in our summer Students in Transition to Employment Program (STEP) as well as our STEP One program, specifically designed for youth that might require additional supports.

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

Data in this section is currently being collected using the AWARE case management system from Alliance Enterprises.

* The percentage of program participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the second quarter after exit from the program * The percentage of program participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the fourth quarter after exit from the program * The median earnings of program participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the second quarter after exit. * Credential attainment rate * Measurable skill gain * Effectiveness in serving employers

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

The Commission has engaged in several innovation and expansion activities in PY 2018. The funding of these activities exceeded the 1.5% of 110 dollars generally allocated to innovation and expansion efforts. These activities will continue in PY 2020. The agency supports the funding and program activities of the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC). The agency recognizes that the SRC is an integral and valuable partner in its efforts to provide services to vocational rehabilitation consumers. The Agency assumes all costs incurred for all regularly scheduled meetings, subcommittees and special meetings. This includes expenses related to securing meeting facilities, members' travel and per diem expenses, teleconference meetings, interpreters, clerical support, and office supplies and materials. The Agency provides a staff person who prepares the agendas, minutes, and other materials as necessary for each scheduled meeting. The Agency provides a staff person to schedule and make all necessary arrangements for Public Hearings and town forums. The SRC is an equal partner in the development of the State Plan, and actively provides input for the Manual of Operating Procedures, agency policies, Orientation Center, and other matters pertaining to the Agency's programs and activities. The Commission sponsors NFB Newslines. This is an augment to the existing NEWSLINE for the Blind. NFB Newslines enables consumers to read over 400 national newspapers, five of which are Spanish-language publications, plus New Mexico newspapers, enhancing their ability to rapidly access information that is increasingly essential for success in both the academic and professional environments. A capital improvement appropriation of \$750,000 from the New Mexico Legislature was used to support the initiative to transform the Employment Development Center into a skills

training site to meet the needs of vocational rehabilitation consumers, as well as potential vocational rehabilitation consumers. The agency is scheduling a variety of activities in the Skills Center. These activities include meetings, workshops, seminars, and other training events such as the summer Students in Transition to Employment Program. The Commission has adopted a policy to support consumer attendance at division/special interest group meetings and seminars/workshops held during national consumer organization conventions. In order to receive the support, the consumer's vocational goal must be directly related to the particular division/special interest group meeting or seminar/workshop. The Commission, with the support of our SRC, believes that attendance at related division/special interest group meetings and seminar/workshops can enhance the consumer's ability to achieve their vocational goal. Benefits would include learning about current developments in their field, meeting and networking with individuals who are successful in their fields, learning about the use and accessibility of career-specific technology, learning how blind and visually impaired individuals in the field use assistive technology successfully, and learning techniques that would enable them to succeed in their vocational training/education program and ultimately in their chosen field. PY 2018 marked the twelfth year of a MOA with the Department of Health and the New Mexico School for the Blind and Visually Impaired. The MOA administers an allocation from DOH of \$80,000, designed to provide assistive technology that, for a disability other than blindness, would be considered durable medical equipment. This initiative serves blind children that are both transition-age and those not yet transition-age. A total of eleven children were served by this initiative in PY 2018.

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.

Supported employment services may include a comprehensive assessment as provided under the basic vocational rehabilitation program, job site assessment, and other evaluations to determine possible benefits from supported employment to consumers with the most significant disabilities, including youth with the most significant disabilities. Additional supported employment services include job development, placement and intensive job skills training, social skills training, regular observation and supervision of the individual, and regular contact with the employer, consumer, parent, family members, guardians, advocates or other authorized representatives of the individual and other suitable professionals. The utilization of natural support systems as well as the provision of appropriate services under the basic vocational rehabilitation program is available to supported employment consumers. Extent of Services: The adult services offered under Supported Employment are determined on an individual basis depending on the needs of the consumer. Supported employment services generally do not extend beyond a 24-month period of time, an increase of six months as a result of WIOA. However, in some unusual circumstances, Supported Employment Services may be extended if it is determined appropriate and agreed upon in the IPE. To be determined appropriate, there must be a reasonable basis to believe that ongoing supports can be obtained within a relatively brief period of time, and that a disruption or loss of employment would be avoided by the continued provision of Supported Employment Services for a short period of time. Transition to extended services (on-going support services and other appropriate services provided by another state agency, a private non-profit organization, an employer, etc., generally via waiver programs), may occur prior to reaching the 24 month limit if the individual has stabilized on the job. In the event that the consumer requires additional job development/placement services after a successful closure, support will be made available for additional training, work tools, and job development services through a post-employment services plan. The Commission will use regular VR funds to provide supported employment services. As the consumer approaches the 24-month limit for supported employment services, the Commission will assist in the transition to waiver funding and natural supports for the provision of extended services. Like adult services, the youth services offered under Supported Employment are determined on an individual basis depending on the needs of the consumer. Services to youth with the most significant disabilities begin at age 14, and include representation by Commission counselors at IEP meetings, support in school-based transition programs for youth age 18-21, and summer job experiences. The Commission provides summer employment experiences for supported employment youth through its Students in Transition to Employment Program, which provides employment and training experiences at its Alamogordo training center, its Albuquerque Skills Center, and community-based placements throughout New Mexico. Beginning in summer 2016, the Commission began offering its STEP One program. STEP one is designed to serve students who have significant disabilities in addition to blindness or visual impairment. This program is designed for consumers who might not be able to handle the rigorous work and training schedule of the regular STEP program. The STEP One program will offer two half-days of training with a lower student to teacher ratio that will allow for more one-on-one training. It will also offer a work schedule that would meet the individual needs of each consumer. A workplace readiness aide will be hired to support each of the students in the STEP One program as necessary. Another program that will serve youth with the most significant disabilities is the Commission's Technology for Children program, which is also a frequent point of first contact with the agency. The Technology for Children program is intended to help the Commission

identify potentially eligible consumers, specifically youth with the most significant disabilities. The purpose is to provide assistive technology that will help lessen the significance of the disability or reduce any developmental delay that may be present. The agency has a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with the Department of Health and the New Mexico School for the Blind and Visually Impaired. The MOA will administer an allocation from DOH of \$80,000, designed to provide assistive technology that, for a disability other than blindness, would be considered durable medical equipment. Through the Technology for Children Program, youth with the most significant disabilities who are too young for regular VR services would be able to receive assistive technology which would otherwise not be provided by a school district since it is primarily purchased for use at home. The individual who coordinates the Technology for Children program, along with her staff, will continue to provide assistive technology support services to economically disadvantaged and rural school districts, enabling them to benefit from her extensive assistive technology experience and thereby benefiting all of the youth with the most significant disabilities in those school districts. The individual who coordinates the Technology for Children Program, along with one of her staff, also speaks Spanish. The Commission is pleased with the opportunity to provide extended services to youth with the most significant disabilities following the closure of their VR case for a period of up to four years or until the individual turns age 25. The Commission believes this is a particularly beneficial improvement within WIOA. The Commission will use regular VR funds to provide extended services. As the consumer approaches age 25, the Commission will assist in the transition to waiver funding and natural supports for the provision of extended services.

2. The timing of transition to extended services.

The Commission is pleased with the opportunity to provide extended services to youth with the most significant disabilities following the closure of their VR case for a period of up to four years or until the individual turns age 25. The Commission believes this is a particularly beneficial improvement within WIOA. The Commission will use regular VR funds to provide extended services. As the consumer approaches age 25, the Commission will assist in the transition to waiver funding and natural supports for the provision of extended services.