

- c.Goals, Priorities, and Strategies
 - [1. Describe how the SRC and the VR agency jointly developed and agreed to the goals and priorities and any revisions; and](#)

The West Virginia Division of Rehabilitation Services (WVDRS) employs many goals to meet the needs of individuals with disabilities, particularly those individuals with the most significant disabilities. Furthermore, WVDRS recognizes those services essential to needs identified in the comprehensive assessment, evaluation of the Designated State Unit's performance on the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) common performance measures to ensure quality services for individuals with significant disabilities, and services vital to the operation and effectiveness of the vocational rehabilitation (VR) program in West Virginia.

For the development of agency goals and priorities, WVDRS followed WIOA guidance in the development of the Combined State Plan and its Two-Year Modification. WVDRS worked closely with the WIOA core partners including WorkForce WV and WV Adult Education. The WVDRS goals and priorities were developed to support the overall state goals and priorities in achieving a well-integrated workforce development system that provided customer-focused services to job seekers in West Virginia.

The West Virginia State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) maintained involvement throughout the development and assessment of agency goals and priorities in a variety of ways and provided WVDRS with valued input and recommendations. WVDRS executive managers, representatives of SRC, the West Virginia Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC), and the Client Assistance Program (CAP) were invited to discuss WVDRS goals and priorities for carrying out the VR and supported employment programs. Additional involvement occurs through WVDRS staff members attending SRC and SILC meetings to share information regarding agency performance, needs assessment, and State Plan activities. The SRC was afforded electronic access to the Program Year (PY) 2026 Two-Year Modification of the VR Portion of the WV Combined State Plan for review. The SRC members discuss WVDRS activities at regularly scheduled meetings and provide input to WVDRS.

- *2. Identify measurable goals and priorities in carrying out the VR and Supported Employment programs and the basis for selecting the goals and priorities (e.g., CSNA, performance accountability measures, SRC recommendations, monitoring, other information). As required in Section 101(a)(15)(D), (18), and (23), describe under each goal or priority, the strategies or methods used to achieve the goal or priority, including as applicable, description of strategies or methods that—*
 - *A. Support innovation and expansion activities;*
 - *B. Overcome barriers to accessing VR and supported employment services;*
 - *C. 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); and

- *D. Improve the performance of the VR and Supported Employment programs in assisting individuals with disabilities to achieve quality employment outcomes.*
- [Narrative for all items above](#)*Draft*

The workforce development system (WDS) of West Virginia believes that its successful activities positively contribute to the ongoing mission of increasing the labor force participation rate. The following are the current standing goals of the WDS.

WDS Goal 1: Work-Based Learning

West Virginia will expand and implement high-quality work-based learning opportunities for youth and adult learners.

WDS Goal 2: Reduce Barriers to Sustainable Employment

West Virginia will increase referrals and integration of services to improve access to supportive services customized for individuals needing education and employment.

WDS Goal 3: Sector Strategies

West Virginia will implement comprehensive sector strategy approaches to reduce skills mismatches and enhance faster labor market attachment while informing education and training priorities.

WDS Goal 4: Integration and Innovation in Service Delivery

West Virginia will implement the Blue Ribbon Franchise Model of workforce service delivery to increase the efficiency of service delivery and effectiveness in serving businesses, workers, and job seekers.

WVDRS is fully committed to coordinate its activities and services with core and community partners to ensure successful completion of the aforementioned goals. The following goals highlight specific focus areas for WVDRS that will also contribute to the overall goals of the West Virginia WDS:

WVDRS Goal 1 – Provide integrated vocational rehabilitation services to West Virginians with disabilities to promote attainment of a high school education or greater in order to increase their ability to move through meaningful career pathways.

- Linked to WDS Goal 1: Work-Based Learning; WDS Goal 3: Sector Strategies; WDS Goal 4: Integration and Innovation in Service Delivery

- WVDRS Goal 1 Benchmark –Increase the number of credentials attained and the Credential Attainment Rate by 5% each program year for PYs 2026-2027

Compared to the national average of 33.7%, West Virginia has a much lower percentage of individuals 25 years and older who have attained a bachelor’s degree (21.8%; from <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/WV,US/EDU685221>). For individuals with disabilities, the percentage is much lower, at 7.3% (from the Annual Disability Statistics Compendium: 2023). While a majority (80.2%) of West Virginians with disabilities age 25 or over have a high school education or higher, nearly one-fifth (19.8%) of this population does not, compared to only 8.3% of the State’s population of 25 or older without a disability (Annual Disability Statistics Compendium: 2023). Close relationships with the WV Adult Education Program (Adult Ed) and the WV Higher Education Policy Commission, as well as State and Local Education Agencies, will help to close this education gap.

Strategies and Methods

WVDRS will continue to monitor the educational achievement of all of its consumers, especially those in the transition youth (TY) population. Youth have become a primary focus in vocational rehabilitation and WVDRS will work closely and diligently with State and Local Education Agencies to ensure that its TY population receives the services that it needs, including pre–employment transition services (Pre- ETS) for students with disabilities. Each high school in WV has a WVDRS counselor assigned to it to guarantee the service provision of students with disabilities. A greater emphasis is now being placed for counselors to do outreach with these students and their parents/guardians during their freshman and sophomore years (rather than their junior year, as was formerly practiced) in order to maximize the counseling opportunities.

WVDRS counselors will continue to take part in the Individualized Education Program (IEP) development of students with disabilities when they are invited to do so. Counselors will also stay in contact with educators to discuss and resolve educational difficulties as they arise. WVDRS will also work closely with WV Adult Education, referring consumers as needed, to ensure that individuals with disabilities have an adequate opportunity to obtain a completed high school level education.

WVDRS Goal 2 – Provide integrated vocational rehabilitation services to West Virginians with disabilities, committing to the use of the Employment First framework, to enable them to obtain competitive, integrated employment, including Supported Employment, especially in occupations and careers within emerging industries statewide.

- Linked to WDS Goal 1: Work-Based Learning; WDS Goal 2: Reduce Barriers to Sustainable Employment; WDS Goal 3: Sector Strategies; WDS Goal 4: Integration and Innovation in Service Delivery
- WVDRS Goal 2 Benchmark – WVDRS will continue to increase both the number of consumers successfully closed in competitive integrated employment and in Supported Employment each program year for PYs 2026-2027

From a Bureau of Labor Statistics' October 2023 report, West Virginia had the second lowest workforce participation rate (all individuals, with and without disabilities) among all the states and the District of Columbia, with 55.1% compared to the national average of 62.7%. Individuals with barriers to employment, including those with disabilities, have lower employment/workforce participation rates. Labor force participation among persons with disabilities in West Virginia has been steadily declining in recent years. Since 2010, labor force participation among these individuals is estimated to have fallen from 31.7% (63,609) to 29.7% (50,814) in 2021. As of 2021, labor force participation for persons with disabilities in West Virginia was 11 percentage points below the national rate of 40.7%. West Virginia has a high poverty rate, with 17.9% of residents below the poverty level compared to 11.5% nationally (<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/US/IPE120222>). The poverty rate is especially high for individuals with disabilities, with estimates that 31.3% of West Virginians with disabilities between the ages of 18-64 (53,491 of 171,095) were living in poverty in 2021, the 7th highest rate in the nation, excluding Puerto Rico. Even among those employed, there are still significant numbers of West Virginians who earn below the poverty line.

Workforce WV expects the largest numeric change in employment growth (from 2016 to 2026) to occur in the industries of Health Care and Social Assistance (+19,026; 14.94%), Ambulatory Health Care Services (+9,675; 23.90%), Educational Services (+4,498; 7.52%), Government (+3,996; 5.40%), Construction (+3,701; 12.36%), and Social Assistance (+3,507; 19.67%).

Strategies and Methods

Collaboration with WorkForce WV

WVDRS will maintain regular communication with WorkForce WV to stay abreast of trends in employment, including changes in education and training requirements. This will be accomplished through regular meetings of the workforce development system (WDS), written communications, teleconferences, and other media, as appropriate. WVDRS, particularly through its employment specialists, will also stay informed of emerging careers and occupations via WorkForce WV's Labor Market Information website. WVDRS employment specialists continuously collect employment information from their business contacts. This information, including job orders for open positions, is immediately input into the WorkForce WV's online Mid Atlantic Career Consortium (MACC) system and shared within the WDS.

WVDRS will continue to serve on Business Service Teams (BSTs) with WorkForce WV, Adult Education, local workforce development boards, and other related entities. Through training and standardizing informational materials, when possible, these teams provide a full range of WDS information when making visits to employers. This will allow the WDS to maximize the impact of employer visits and ensure that businesses are aware of all resources available through the WDS.

Use of WVDRS Employment Specialists

WVDRS will continue to use its employment specialists to gather information regarding employers at the local level, including information regarding job placements for individuals with disabilities and regarding current and expected employer needs.

WVDRS has an in-house Employer Services Section that specializes in providing employers with disability-related information, services, and pre-screened job seekers. The WVDRS Employer Services Section has nine employment specialists that cover all 55 counties in West Virginia. WVDRS' team of employment specialists provide business owners and employers with critical business options and assistance in staffing, employee retention strategies, education on disability-related issues, job accommodations, and information about financial incentives for employers who hire individuals with disabilities.

Direct contact with employers is a key strategy to identify competitive integrated employment and career exploration opportunities for VR consumers, including students with disabilities.

Employment specialists, therefore, contact employers directly to identify current and future job openings. To facilitate this, WVDRS utilizes labor market information provided by WorkForce WV to identify the top employers in each county; contact is always made with the top ten employers in each county. When meeting with employers, employment specialists provide valuable information, including the WVDRS Employer Resource Guide and employment-related WorkForce WV information. The WVDRS Employer Resource Guide provides the following information:

- *Staffing services*
- *Training programs and incentives for hiring people with disabilities*
- *Financial incentives*
- *Accessibility assessments*
- *Accommodating employees with disabilities*
- *Basic disability etiquette*
- *Attitudinal barriers*
- *Americans with Disabilities Act*
- *Locating a WVDRS office*
- *Where to find additional resources*

The Employer Services Section maintains a database of each WVDRS–employer interaction with VR employment specialists. The information collected includes the business name, contact person, and current job openings by occupation. If needed, a referral to the WVDRS Rehabilitation Technology Unit is made to address workplace accommodations. This list is distributed to field staff to potentially match a job-ready VR consumer with a current job opening. Through positive working relationships, 47 employers, including some of the largest in the state, now send job postings directly to WVDRS' Employer Services Section.

The Employer Services Section also works with employers to better serve transitioning youth with disabilities, including providing career exploration opportunities for students with disabilities. In 2015, WVDRS debuted the Positive Outcomes within Education and Rehabilitation (POWER) program. POWER is a job shadowing program that offers transitioning students, who may be having a difficult time choosing a career path, the opportunity to experience an occupation by spending time with a professional working in the students' vocational goal/career field of interest. The POWER program allows the student the opportunity to experience an occupation prior to committing to training. It guides the student to take a serious, realistic look at the occupation, allowing the student to make a more informed choice.

Assistive Technology

WVDRS will continue to provide rehabilitation technology solutions to individuals with disabilities, as needed, so those individuals can become employed or maintain employment. WVDRS has developed working relationships and agreements for the coordination of activities with the West Virginia Assistive Technology System (WVATS) of the West Virginia University Center for Excellence in Disabilities. WVATS' role is to provide access to and help with the acquisition of assistive technology (AT) devices and services for individuals with disabilities. WVATS also provides device demonstrations, device loans, training, AT information, and technical assistance.

WVDRS has a Rehabilitation Technology Unit which provides AT consultations and solutions to eligible VR consumers with AT needs throughout the state. With the coordination of services between WVDRS and WVATS, assurances are made that needed AT solutions can be provided to individuals with disabilities.

Findings from the 2024 CSNA indicated the need to continue to improve VR services relating to the two most recently added WVDRS goals.

WVDRS Goal 3 – Improve access and availability of transportation options for WVDRS consumers who need transportation assistance to achieve or maintain competitive, integrated employment.

- Linked to WDS Goal 2: Reduce Barriers to Sustainable Employment; WDS Goal 4: Integration and Innovation in Service Delivery
- WVDRS Goal 3 Benchmark – WVDRS will continue to provide transportation services to more consumers each program year for PYs 2026-2027

FY 2024 CSNA findings from field staff surveys indicate a need for continued efforts to increase the availability of transportation throughout the state. Based on responses by stakeholders across the state, including observations and recommendations by the WV State Rehabilitation Council, transportation continues to be an issue and a perceived barrier to employment/training. WVDRS continues to focus on individualized transportation solutions (ITS) to help alleviate the transportation gap while taking into account the wide array of circumstances that West Virginians with disabilities experience. WVDRS counselors also encourage consumers' family members to

assist with reimbursable transportation. WVDRS will continue to make sure that consumers are aware of these options and will continue to identify targeted solutions to the varied transportation issues for West Virginians with disabilities, focusing specifically on ITS.

Strategies and Methods

Transportation is an ongoing issue for West Virginians with disabilities, due to the rural nature of the state. A large proportion of the State's inhabitants live far away from jobs, agency offices, and other resources. WVDRS continues its commitment to reduce transportation barriers for consumers with disabilities and to focus on individual transportation solutions (ITS) to satisfy immediate transportation needs. To help reduce these barriers, WVDRS counselors will encourage planning for transportation needs early in the development of a consumer's rehabilitation program. At application, counselors will identify transportation issues and focus on finding solutions to include in the consumer's Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE). This will ensure that the ability of consumers to reach their vocational goal is not impeded by preventable transportation barriers.

Transportation issues also will be addressed by the standard instrument prescribed for routine use by supervisors and quality assurance staff in case reviews. Beyond ITS, WVDRS will continue to assign responsibility to a staff member in each branch office to maintain a list and working knowledge of local transportation options and will continue to participate in local and state initiatives to coordinate and expand transportation resources.

WVDRS Goal 4 – Continue to build collaborative relationships with community providers [including Community Rehabilitation Programs (CRPs), Independent Living, and other community providers] to enhance the availability of services to WVDRS consumers.

- Linked to WDS Goal 2: Reduce Barriers to Sustainable Employment; WDS Goal 4: Integration and Innovation in Service Delivery
- WVDRS Goal 4 Benchmark – WVDRS will maintain quarterly meetings with CRPs, and other service providers, as appropriate, at the district level during PYs 2026-2027

VR consumers require specialized services provided by CRPs statewide to achieve an integrated, competitive employment outcome. Responses from the CSNA indicate there still is a need for WVDRS to continue to improve collaborative relationships with all community providers. Findings from the CSNA point to a need to focus efforts on specific geographic areas within the state where miscommunication between community providers and WVDRS counselors continues. WVDRS will increase its focus on the provision of services for consumers with most significant disabilities under a Supported Employment Individualized Plan for Employment, especially for those who reside in rural areas.

Strategies and Methods

A large amount of the success that WVDRS has in its mission to enable and empower individuals with disabilities to work and to live independently hinges on its relationships with CRPs. In general, WVDRS has good working relationships with the various CRPs throughout the State. However, CSNA results suggest that improvements can be made, particularly in

specific geographic areas. To facilitate this improvement, WVDRS has established a number of strategies to put into action:

- *Continue to educate field staff, especially the new counselors, about CRPs and their services. Use of the new 'CRP Locator' tool (a web-based, user-friendly vendor guide) and counselor CRP site visits will increase awareness of available service options, which will help to maintain collaborative relationships with CRPs and enhance the availability of services to WVDRS consumers.*
- *Continue to maintain regular communications between WVDRS and community providers in each district and at the state level. Each WVDRS district will continue to host joint meetings with WVDRS district and branch office staff and CRPs in those districts to provide opportunities for CRP representatives and WVDRS personnel to discuss local service needs of WVDRS consumers, particularly to enhance service availability in rural areas. Subsequent to each meeting, the local WVDRS office will be required to send a brief report to the CRP Program Manager. This process will allow all parties involved in the expansion of community-based services to be kept informed of progress and issues. WVDRS will continue to examine the information and recommendations collected from various meetings between CRP and WVDRS staff members.*
- *Increase focus on the provision of services for consumers with most significant disabilities under a Supported Employment Individualized Plan for Employment, especially for those who reside in rural areas.*

Progress on communication will continue to be made as the WVDRS acquires more understanding of the issues and barriers facing the CRP and WVDRS staff members in their service provision to persons with significant disabilities in WV. Ongoing communication activities with CRPs also will include:

- *An email listserv with all current vendors that will be updated periodically and utilized to send out training opportunities, policy changes, and general updates when needed.*
- *WVDRS counselors in each district will continue to be assigned as liaisons to each CRP and will continue to be required to complete a monthly update regarding the CRP. They will collect this information by visits and/or phone calls. Having CRP liaisons that regularly discuss service-related issues specific to the local service area(s) will aid in maintaining collaborative working relationships and enhancing the availability of services to consumers.*
- *Two rehabilitation specialists covering all districts in the state will provide technical assistance to CRPs and WVDRS staff. They will make site visits to CRP and WVDRS district and branch offices. During these visits, they will provide technical assistance and schedule training and other meetings that need to occur. They will serve as a communication link when issues arise and make themselves available to attend the*

communication meetings and transition team meetings.

- *Conduct site visits to ensure that community providers continue to meet WVDRS standards and requirements.*
- *Increase the service provision of acknowledged vendors and work with community providers to expand their service areas to enhance the availability of community services within needed areas.*
- *Continue to conduct Transition Team meetings at the district level with WVDRS, WV Department of Education, and CRP staff members. The meetings will be held to promote interagency collaboration by allowing staff from each agency/CRP to become familiar with the different eligibility requirements and service definitions across agencies.*
- *Continue to conduct cross training and face-to-face meetings with community partners at the local level.*
- *Continue to assign liaison responsibilities to staff members and provide them guidance about the purpose of WVDRS participation in community events.*
- *Monitor the WVDRS counselors/supervisors/managers' perception of the quality of CRP services through a survey instrument.*
- *Monitor and assess the impact of the Quality Assurance Unit on the counselor's case management practices by using data generated from the quality assurance specialists' review of cases.*

For the development of agency goals and priorities, WVDRS followed WIOA guidance in the development of the Combined State Plan. WVDRS worked closely with the WIOA core partners, including WorkForce WV and WV Adult Education. The WVDRS goals and priorities were developed to support the overall state goals and priorities in achieving a well-integrated workforce development system that provided customer-focused services to job seekers in West Virginia.

The West Virginia SRC maintained involvement throughout the development and assessment of agency goals and priorities in a variety of ways and provided WVDRS with valued input and recommendations. WVDRS executive managers, representatives of SRC, the West Virginia SILC, and the CAP were invited to discuss WVDRS goals and priorities for carrying out the VR and supported employment programs. The Executive Directors of the SRC and SILC attend monthly WVDRS EMG meetings to discuss various ongoing issues affecting the agency and are privy to the current goals, objectives, and strategies pertaining to specific agency issues. Additional involvement occurs through WVDRS staff members attending SRC and SILC meetings to share information regarding agency performance, needs assessment, and State Plan activities. The SRC was afforded electronic access to the PY 2024 State Plan for

review. The SRC members discuss WVDRS activities at regularly scheduled meetings and provide input to WVDRS.

To foster a customer-focused approach to VR services, WVDRS works with the WV State Rehabilitation Council and Statewide Independent Living Council and uses Innovation and Expansion (I&E) resources to support the activities of these groups. As appropriate, WVDRS will continue to use I&E funds to discover, generate, and improve upon service delivery processes to individuals with disabilities. Additionally, with the emphasis on Pre-ETS to students with disabilities now in place by WIOA, there are significant opportunities for discoveries that can be made using I&E resources.

WVDRS acknowledges the legal requirement to report on the performance accountability indicators under Section 116 of WIOA. However, data collection on the performance accountability indicators is only beginning, making a full report of WVDRS performance impossible at this time. As WVDRS moves forward in its task to place individuals with disabilities into competitive, integrated employment in PY 2026, it will continue to collect and monitor participant data to generate reports on:

- 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 from the program;
- The percentage of program participants who obtain a recognized postsecondary credential, or a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent, during participation in or within 1 year after exit from the program;
- The percentage of program participants who, during a program year, are in an education or training program that leads to a recognized postsecondary credential or employment and who are achieving measurable skill gains toward such a credential or employment; and
- The indicators of effectiveness in serving employers.

For PY 2024, WVDRS achieved the following performance on the performance accountability indicators under section 116 of WIOA:

- The percentage of program participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the second quarter after exit from the program – 69.6%
- The median earnings of program participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the second quarter after exit from the program – \$7,800
- The percentage of program participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the fourth quarter after exit from the program – 67.6%

- The percentage of program participants who obtain a recognized postsecondary credential, or a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent, during participation in or within 1 year after exit from the program – 25.0%
- The percentage of program participants who, during a program year, are in an education or training program that leads to a recognized postsecondary credential or employment and who are achieving measurable skill gains toward such a credential or employment – 65.2%