

Statewide Assessment

(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;

(B) who are minorities;

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

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

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

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

(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

Summary Outline of CSNA Methods, Results, Gaps, and Implications for State Plan

The Rehabilitation Act, as amended in 1998, requires each state to conduct a statewide needs assessment every three years. The current triennial needs assessment is statewide and jointly conducted by The Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired (DBVI) and the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC). The activities for the comprehensive statewide needs assessment

(CSNA) were completed during FY 2015. The following summary of the CSNA is being used to develop many of our goals and strategies for FY 2016, 2017 and 2018.

Introduction

The goals of this needs assessment are to determine the vocational rehabilitation needs of individuals in Vermont who are blind or visually impaired including:

- Individuals with most significant disabilities, including their need for supported employment services?
- Minorities?
- Individuals who are blind or visually impaired who have been underserved or underserved by DBVI?
- Individuals who are blind or visually impaired served through other components of the statewide workforce investment system? And;
- The need to establish, develop, or improve community rehabilitation programs within the state.
- Individuals who are youth with disabilities and students with disabilities, including, as appropriate, their need for pre-employment transition services or other transition services.
- Identify the need to establish, develop, or improve community rehabilitation programs within the State; and
- 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

Methodology

Information gathering included the use of:

- Existing disability population statistics including the Cornell Study;
- Disability population estimates from available data including the American Foundation for the Blind;
- Population projections and economic forecasts from federal and state data; Department Of Labor projections by state;

- Existing DBVI data, studies and experience; 911 data, type of service, cost, whether people currently served by DBVI are representative of the racial and ethnic minority distribution of people with disabilities within the state; data provided by CRPs; Counselor input;
- State level statistics from other federal programs; WIA, IEP, 504, Social Security,
- State and local data and reports;
- Stakeholder input: Surveys, focus groups, SRC meetings, interviews, Statewide Town Meetings, Customer-Centered Culture Focus Groups, and public hearings.
- Meetings with the statewide network of Teacher of the Visually Impaired.
- Statewide Customer Satisfaction and Needs Assessment Survey conducted by Market Decisions—spring 2015.
- Review of Journal of Visual Impairment articles by DBVI staff.

Participants included DBVI Staff, State Rehabilitation Council, Vermont Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired (VABVI) Staff, and individuals who are blind or visually impaired from around the state. Dissemination plans included group meetings and individual interviews.

Results

Estimates of number of individuals who are blind or visually impaired in the state potentially eligible for DBVI services include:

Using data from the American Foundation for the Blind

<http://www.afb.org/info/blindness-statistics/state-specific-statistical-information/vermont/235> 12,842

Total

Gender

Male 5,707

Female 7,135

Age

Under 5 48

5-17 839

18-34 1,053

35-64 5,453

65-74 1,406

Working Age Adults

Using additional data from the 2013 Prevalence Report from the American Community Survey-One Year Estimate, DBVI estimates that there are approximately 6,506 Vermonters of working age (18-64) who are blind or severely visually impaired (meaning even with correction they are not able to easily read the newspaper). DBVI provides RSA defined services to approximately 5.3% of these individuals annually (350 in FFY115).

<http://www.afb.org/info/blindness-statistics/state-specific-statistical-information/vermont/235>

Projections for Vermont based on extrapolations from National Data: September 2013 Current Population Survey for all working age adults (16 to 64 years of age) who responded "yes" to the question "Is anyone blind or does anyone have serious difficulty seeing even when wearing glasses?"

<http://www.afb.org/section.aspx?SectionID=15&TopicID=413&SubTopicID=177>

- Of the approximately 12,842 people with vision loss in VT, it is estimated that 6,506 are working age adults (16 to 64 years of age—2013 ACS).
- Using the BLS national survey that shows 56% of those working age adults were not actively looking for work. This means we can estimate that **3,643** (of the 6,506 working age) are identified as "**not in the labor force.**"
- Using the BLS national survey that shows 44% of working age adults are actually considered "in the labor force." This means we can estimate **2,862** (of the 6,506 working age) are included in the "**labor force.**"
- Using the BLS national survey that shows 13.4% of the labor force is unemployed. This means we can estimate **384** (of the approximate 2,862 working age in labor force) **are unemployed.**
- Using the BLS national survey that shows 38% of all working age were identified as employed. This means we can estimate that **2,472** (of the 6,506 working age) are identified as **employed.**

***Employment Data Pertaining to Working Age Adults with Vision Loss (16 to 64 Years of Age)** <http://www.afb.org/info/blindness-statistics/interpreting-bls-employment-data/24>

Vermont Disability Status Report 2013

2013 Disability Status Report: Vermont Visually Impaired

<http://www.disabilitystatistics.org/index.cfm>

(Produced by Cornell from the American Community Survey)

Prevalence of Disability

- All Ages=13,800 (2.2% of 621,100)
- Ages 16-20= 500 (1.1% of 46,100)
- Ages 21-64= 6,100 (1.7% of 366,900)
- Ages 65-74= 1,500 (2.6% of 60,400)

Employed

- Ages 21-64= 2,300 (38.5% of 6,100)

Percentage Not Working but Actively Looking for Employment

- Ages 21-64= 100 (3.0% of 3,700)

Full Time Full Year Employment Rate

- Ages 21-64= 1,900 (30.8% of 6,100)

Median Earnings

- Ages 21-64= \$34,400 (MOE +/-12,370—base population=2,000)

Median Household Income

- Ages 21-64= \$30,200 (MOE +/-15,280—base population=5,000)

Poverty Rate

- Ages 21-64= 1,400 (22.9%—base population=6,100)

SSI Recipients

- Ages 21-64= 1,000 (17.2%—base population=6,100)

High School Diploma Only or Equivalent

- Ages 21-64= 2,000 (33.7%—base population=6,100)

Some College/Associates Degree Only

- Ages 21-64= 2,700 (45.0%—base population=6,100)

Bachelor's Degree or More

- Ages 21-64= 900 (14.5%—base population=6,100)

Health Insurance

- Ages 21-64= 5,600 (93.0%—base population=6,100)

Among working-age people in the US (ACS)

United States Census Bureau. (2015, December 01). State & county quick facts: Vermont. Retrieved from United States Census Bureau website: <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/50000.html>

Vermonters	2014 Estimate	2014 Estimate %	2014 Projected Total with Disability	Percent of Persons with a Disability
Total Population	626562	100.0%	67793	10.8%
White	595234	95.0%	63690	10.7%
Black/ African American	7519	1.2%	1060	14.1%
Native American	2506	0.4%	461	18.4%
Asian	10025	1.6%	461	4.6%
Other race(s)	11278	1.8%	1139	10.1%
Hispanic/ Latino	11278	1.8%	981	8.7%

- 10.7 percent of persons who were White reported a disability.
- 14.1 percent of persons who were Black/African American reported a disability.
- 18.4 percent of persons who were Native American reported a disability.
- 4.6 percent of persons who were Asian reported a disability.
- 10.1 percent of persons who were some other race(s) reported a disability.
- 8.7 percent of persons who were Hispanic/Latino reported a disability.

Based on these data it is estimate that there are 668 individuals with minority background who are visually impaired in Vermont (1% of 67,793).

*The confidence level includes a very large range based on the very low number of people surveyed. The data are, however, useful for overall planning.

Information about DBVI agency resources:

- DBVI currently has a total of 10 staff including four Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors.
- DBVI currently collaborates with CRPs including The Vermont Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired and The Vermont Association for Business, Industry, and Rehabilitation; and Supported Employment programs (i.e. Developmental Services Agencies and Mental Health programs).

Information about the services provided by DBVI agency including type, percentage, and cost of services provide directly by the agency to individuals who are blind or visually impaired.

Data from 2013 RSA Core Tables:

- Employment at 35 or more hours per week. Vermont =25 and peer average=18.
- Employment at SGA level at 35 or more hours per week. Vermont=25 and peer average=18.
- Average hourly wage. Vermont= \$16.46 and peer average=\$15.87.
- Average hours worked per week. Vermont= 28.19 and peer average=28.18.
- Percent closed with employment at 35 or more hours/week of agency total. Vermont=33.78% and peer average=15.52%
- Average hourly wage. Vermont=\$16.46 and peer average=\$14.61

Data from RSA Basic Measures 2013:

- Percentage of all employment outcomes that were competitively employed. Vermont=71.43% and peer average=89.54%
- Cost per participant. Vermont=\$3,998 and peer average= \$6,940
- Cost per employment outcome. Vermont=\$18,736 and peer average=\$37,232.

RSA Wall Chart 2013:

Rehab Rate: Vermont=83.33% and Blind Average=65.68%

Mean Hourly Wage: Vermont=\$15.97 and Blind Average=\$14.20

Mean Cost per Rehab: Vermont=\$8,093 and Blind Average=\$8.740

Number of Individuals Served and Purchased Service Expenditures by Service Category (FFY 2013 A-2)

Service Category	2014		2015	
	Number of Individuals	Amount	Number of Individuals	Amount
1. Assessment	23	10,309	35	12,879
2. Diagnosis and Treatment of Impairments	116	72,096	119	78,976
3. Vocational Rehabilitation Counseling and Guidance	0	0	1	281
4. Graduate College or University Training	7	11,005	4	1,049
5. Four-Year College or University Training	22	43,133	23	57,024
6. Junior or Community College Training	8	7,129	10	4,085
7. Occupational or Vocational Training	27	22,147	38	50,899
8. On-the-job Training	12	9,817	4	1,324
9. Apprenticeship Training	0	0	0	0
10. Basic Academic Remedial or Literacy Training	4	1,500	0	0
11. Job Readiness Training	83	64,510	68	129,018
12. Disability Related Skills Training	163	54,048	193	86,278
13. Miscellaneous Training	9	4,009	12	19,760
14. Job Search Assistance	0	0	16	5,355

15. Job Placement Assistance	0	0	1	750
16. On-the-job Supports: Time-limited	0	0	6	3,044
17. On-the-job Supports: Supported Employment	4	2,493	0	0
18. Transportation	177	47,838	242	65,571
19. Maintenance	30	14,429	41	24,859
20. Rehabilitation Technology	214	230,782	221	221,108
21. Reader	1	1,788	13	7,672
22. Interpreter	6	13,906	8	14,365
23. Personal Attendant	1	2,363	0	0
24. Technical Assistance	0	0	4	2,705
25. Information and Referral	0	0	1	74
26. Benefits Counseling	0	0	0	0
27. Customized Employment	1	315	0	0
28. Other Services	65	29,886	57	65,854
Service Category Subtotal (Sum of 1 - 28)	973	643,503	1,117	852,930

The type, percentage, and cost of services provided by CRPs to individuals who are blind or visually impaired and who are minorities.

- DBVI contracts with the Vermont Association for Business, Industry, and Rehabilitation to provide job development services for DBVI customers in all four regions of the state (\$90,000 annually).
- DBVI customers have access to supported employment services through an agreement with the General VR agency to access those programs as needed. DBVI now directly receives \$6,000 and the remaining \$30,000 is in the grant directly to General VR as part of the agreement. In 2015, 8 DBVI customers participated in supported employment programs.
- DBVI contracts with the Vermont Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired for Low Vision, Rehabilitation Teaching, and Orientation and Mobility services (\$175,000 annually).

Information about DBVI agency performance including the average number and type of disability served over past three years:

Indicator 1.1

Award FY	Number with Employment Outcomes (Current Year)	Number with Employment Outcomes (Prior Year)	Change in Employment Outcomes: Indicator 1.1	Performance Level to pass 1.1	Passed Indicator 1.1
2011	150	156	-6		0 No
2012	137	150	-13		0 No
2013	138	137	1		0 Yes

Indicator 1.2

Award FY	Number with Employment Outcomes (Current Year)	Number Who Received Services Current Year	Percent with Employment Outcomes After Services: Indicator 1.2	Performance Level to pass 1.2	Passed Indicator 1.2
2011	150	201	74.63	68.90	Yes
2012	137	178	76.97	68.90	Yes
2013	138	172	80.23	68.90	Yes

Indicator 1.3

Award FY	Current Year Minimum Wage	Prior Year Minimum Wage	Number with Competitive Employment Outcomes Current Year	Percent of Employment Outcomes that were Competitive Employment: Indicator 1.3	Performance Level to pass 1.3	Passed Indicator 1.3
2011	\$8.06	\$8.06	100	66.67	35.40	Yes
2012	\$8.15	\$8.06	100	72.99	35.40	Yes
2013	\$8.46	\$8.15	97	70.29	35.40	Yes

Indicator 1.4

Award FY	Number of Competitive Employment Outcomes for Individuals with Significant Disabilities	Percent of Individuals with Competitive Employment Outcomes who had a SD: Ind 1.4	Performance Level to pass 1.4	Passed Indicator 1.4
2011	97	97.00	89.00	Yes
2012	98	98.00	89.00	Yes
2013	96	98.97	89.00	Yes

Indicator 1.5

Award FY	Average Hourly Wage for Individuals with Competitive Employment Outcomes	Average Annual State Wage Current Year (Fiscal Year Wage) (Weighted Average)	Average Hourly State Wage Current Year (Fiscal Year Wage) (Weighted Average)	Ratio of Average Performance Hourly VR Level to pass Wage to 1.5 Average State Wage: Indicator 1.5	Passed Indicator 1.5
2011	\$15.60	\$39,815	\$19.14	0.815	0.590 Yes
2012	\$14.54	\$40,525	\$19.48	0.746	0.590 Yes
2013	\$15.64	\$41,221	\$19.82	0.789	0.590 Yes

Indicator 1.6

Award FY	Primary Support is Own Income at Application	Percent Primarily Self-Supporting at Application	Primary Support is Own Income at Closure	Percent Primarily Self-Supporting at Closure	Difference Between Performance Level to pass Self-Supporting at 1.6 Closure and Application: Ind 1.6	Passed Indicator 1.6
2011	50	50.00	68	68.00	18.00	30.40 No
2012	47	47.00	59	59.00	12.00	30.40 No
	43	44.33	61	62.89	18.56	30.40 No

Indicator 2.1

Award FY	Non-Minorities Exiting the VR Program	Non-Minorities Who Received Services	Non-Minority Service Rate	Minorities Exiting the VR Program	Minorities Who Received Services	Minority Service Rate	Ratio of Minority Service Rate to Non-Minority Service Rate: Indicator 2.1	Performance Level to pass 2.1	Passed Indicator 2.1	Fewer than 100 minorities exiting
2011	95	85	89.5	5	5	100.0	1.118	0.800	Yes	Yes
2012	88	84	95.5	5	4	80.0	0.838	0.800	Yes	Yes
2013	92	78	84.8	8	6	75.0	0.885	0.800	Yes	Yes

Closure Data

Served Rehabs	
2008	355 73
2009	377 75
2010	384 81
2011	401 69

2012	424	68
2013	434	70
2014	394	74
2015	391	90

Customer Satisfaction Data—Key Findings and Discussion:

Goals

- The Customer Quality Assurance Survey is designed to allow customers to provide feedback about the services they have received.
- The survey provides a tool to measure satisfaction with the agency and the services provided.
- The survey is designed to gather information to allow quality improvements.
- This administration allows comparisons to the 2003 and 2011 research and the opportunity to see trends in customer satisfaction.

The Survey Questionnaire

- The survey includes a set of 27 core survey items.
- This instrument was expanded and used during the administration of the 2015 Quality Assurance Survey to include additional items to assess needs not previously explored and how well the Department meets customer expectations.
- Other demographic information about customers was obtained through the sample records provided by VT DBVI.

Data Collection

- Data collection began on February 5th and was completed on March 11th, 2015.
- A total of 150 VT DBVI customers completed the survey by telephone or by mail.
- The survey response rate was 62.7%.
- The Respondent Cooperation Rate was 88.8% (the percent of respondents with which we had some form of contact who completed the survey).

- The Respondent Refusal Rate was 6.4% (the percent of respondents with whom we had some form of contact who refused to participate).
- The percentages reported are within plus or minus 6% that would be found if all clients of the Vermont Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired were interviewed.

Data Analysis

The survey data has been weighted to reflect the actual population of customers based on:

- Age
- Gender
- Case Status (open or closed)
- Disability/Impairment Category
- The results from analysis using the weighted data can be generalized to the population of all VT DBVI customers.
- The results can be accurately compared to those from the 2003 and 2011 surveys.

Summary of Survey Results

Comparing Results

- **The charts provide results comparing 2003, 2011 and 2015.**
- **Each trending chart provides the combined scores for the highest two answer categories. For example, a chart presenting the percent satisfied with an aspect of DBVI service would show the present of customers answering either satisfied or very satisfied.**

Customer Satisfaction

New Skills and Knowledge

- **95.5% of customers were very satisfied or satisfied with the choice of services available**
- **97.3% of customers were very satisfied or satisfied with the choice of service providers.**
- **96.1% of customers were very satisfied or satisfied with their choice of a vocational goal.**
- **97.0% of customers were very satisfied or satisfied with the information they were given about the choices they had.**
- **Almost nine-out-of-ten (89.6%) DBVI customers believed delivery of services met or exceeded their expectations**
- **9% of customers indicated they were aware of services in other areas that could be implemented in Vermont. These included a wider range of programs offered, transportation services and increased training opportunities.**
- **DBVI customers were most likely to report learning mobility skills, computer and technology use skills and cane skills.**
- **DBVI customers most often indicated gaining skills in using magnifiers, computer and technology skills and in using zoom programs.**

Customer Attitudes and Opinions

- **In 2015, 97.5% of customers were very satisfied or satisfied with their control and involvement in the vocational rehabilitation experience.**
- **8.1% of customers indicated they had experienced problems with the agency or the services provided by the Vermont Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired.**
- **Among those experiencing problems, 81.6% indicated that the agency worked to resolve the problem.**
- **In 2015, approximately one in three customers offered suggestions for service improvement.**
- **30% of customers indicated that all their needs were being met while 21% saw the need for transportation services and 8% for employment services.**
- **Customers were most likely to feel their needs were not being met because of funding issues (30%) and issues related to living in rural areas (18%)**

- **To solve the problems of their unmet needs, customers most often suggested more transportation options (19%) and more or better information (19%)**

New Behaviors and New Circumstances

- **79.8% of customers indicated that the services they received helped them become more financially independent.**
- **93.7% of customers indicated that the services they received helped them become more generally independent.**
- **94.1% of customers agreed that they were better off, overall, as a result of the services they received from DBVI.**
- **Forty-five percent of customers were working full or part time.**
- **88.7% of customers indicated that the agency helped them reach their job goals.**
- **Among those customers who were working, 90.5% were very satisfied or satisfied with their job in 2015.**
- **The service that working DBVI customers were most likely to believe helped them get or keep their job was job coaching and support.**
- **Asked what worked best in helping them prepare for their job, customers were most likely to say adaptive equipment (30%) and counseling (22%).**
- **The types of careers sought by non-working customers were varied.**
- **Non-working customers who felt they needed more services in order to find a job were most likely to request general job search help or computer training.**

How Well Did We Treat the Customer?

- **In 2015, 98.5% of customers indicated that the Vermont Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired staff treated them with dignity and respect.**
- **96.0% of customers found the agency office very or somewhat accessible to someone with their type of disability.**
- **96.0% of customers indicated that the staff was very or somewhat helpful in helping them to achieve their vocational rehabilitation goals.**

Are Our Actions Meeting Standards?

- **92.2% of customers indicated that the services provided met their expectations.**
- **90.8% of customers indicated that the services provided through the Vermont Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired compared favorably to the services offered through their ideal program.**
- **98.6% percent of customers would tell their friends with similar disabilities to go to the Vermont Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired for help.**
- **85.6% of customers indicated that the services provided through the Vermont Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired felt the results they got met or exceeded their expectations.**
- **G. Are Our Actions Timely and Correct?**
- **95.7% of customers were very satisfied or satisfied with the time it took counselors to answer their questions or address their concerns.**
- **95.3% of customers indicated that it was very or somewhat easy to contact their vocational rehabilitation counselor.**
- **93.5% of customers agreed that VT DBVI provided services as promptly as they felt were necessary.**

Other Items

- **88% of customers found completing the application for vocational rehabilitation services very or somewhat easy.**
- **75.2% of customers indicated that they were informed that they could address problems with the Client Assistance Project.**

Discussion

- **The overall conclusion that can be drawn from this research is that the large majority of customers are satisfied with VT DBVI overall, are satisfied with the services they are receiving, and most have not experienced problems.**
- **Most measures of satisfaction are 90% or greater.**
- **A majority of customers feel that their counselors and other staff are there to help them.**
- **As we found in 2003 and 2011, customers did not identify any systemic problems with VT DBVI or the services it provides.**

- **Positive responses rose above already high levels measured in 2011 on almost all measures.**

Summary of the Number Specific Satisfaction Measures Showing an Increase or Decrease in Satisfaction among Customers (of 22 total).

Some of the Positives

- **The level of overall satisfaction among all is still extremely high; exceeding 90% on three separate measures of overall satisfaction.**
- **Satisfaction of specific measures of quality also remains very high. Satisfaction increased from the already high levels observed in 2011 on 19 of 22 measures.**
- **Client satisfaction is improving with the information they receive about services.**
- **Clients are also seeing the benefits of the services provided as evidenced by an increase in the percentage of clients indicating the services helped them become more financially independent and the percentage indicating services helped them become more independent in general.**
- **The percentage of clients reporting problems has declined since 2011. Further, among those indicating they experienced problems, the percentage reporting the Division did work to resolve the problem(s) has increased since 2011, continuing the trend started in 2003.**
- **While customers raised some concerns or issues, these were for the most part minor issues.**

Areas for Possible Improvement

Most customer issues, concerns, or problems focus on issues of:

- **Communication (the ability to reach counselors and other Division staff).**
- **Issues with staff (staff not listening to their concerns or having counselors switched).**
- **Issues of support (the need for more guidance or the perception that services are of little value).**
- **A desire for expanded services (more counselors and staff to help meet needs)**
- **In general, these are the same types of issues and concerns raised by clients in 2011.**

Financial independence and the clients achieving their job goals represent the factors about which clients are the least satisfied, as in 2011. Those not satisfied mentioned:

- **They did not receive needed help.**
- **They experienced financial hardship.**
- **The need for additional assistance in finding employment.**

Summary of Changes in Satisfaction Measures from 2011 to 2015--Areas of Focus for Quality Improvement

(Based on client comments, % of all customers reporting any problems)

- **Issues with forms or other paperwork (44%) – This reflects that customers felt that the forms they were required to complete were either too complicated or that they needed assistance from Division staff to complete them properly.**
- **Communication (24%) - Difficulties in communicating with the staff, their counselor did not return calls or was not available, their counselor did not follow-up, time lags in getting services and appointments.**
- **Access (20%) - The customer felt that DBVI facilities, locations, offices or operating hours made it more difficult for them to access services and help.**
- **Staff Issues (17%) - Their counselor would not listen or dismissed concerns, their counselor did not understand their needs or abilities, their counselor was too busy – the customer was pushed aside, staff needed to be more understanding of their needs and situation, staff is overworked, their counselor left and/or they were switched to another counselor.**

Specific Comments and Concerns

(% of all customers reporting problem)

- **FORMS - Needed help in filling out forms (29%)**
- **CONDITION - Eyesight (18%)**
- **STAFF - Changing counselors, switching too much, causes problems (13%)**
- **COMMUNICATION - Get voicemail have to leave message, never answered the phone (10%)**
- **ACCESS - Mobility in building, offices small, hard getting around (8%)**
- **CONDITION - Trouble reading and writing, skipping words, education (8%)**

- **EFFECTIVE - Long time to get things going, process slow (8%)**

In Summary

- **Customers are very satisfied overall with the Division, its staff, and the services it provides.**
- **The results suggest improvement in addressing client problems and concerns.**
- **Satisfaction is increasing in terms of financial independence and independence in general.**
- **Overall, customers did express some concerns, but these do not seem to represent major problems. Largely these are related to issues of communication between staff and customers, support, and employment.**

SRC Involvement in Planning and Evaluating Town Meeting, Performance Data, and Customer Satisfaction Information

(Timeline: June 2012 to December 2015)

June 2012 (Combined DBVI and SRC Meeting)

In June 2012, the DBVI Staff and the State Rehabilitation Council had an all-day in-person meeting. The focus was to use a process called Customer-Centered Culture as a framework for continuous improvement. The group determined that this approach would result in good communication with customers, eliminate ambiguity with good communication to find out what a person really wants. There is a strong focus on the customer, empowerment, and a commitment to improvement.

This process uses a specific set of questions designed to find the “Voice of the Customer.” This is achieved by asking specific questions about the product identified for improvement. For this meeting, the DBVI Staff and the SRC used the following questions to explore improvement opportunities for our current approach developing an Individual Plan for Employment (IPE).

The groups gave their input to answer questions that a satisfying (**IPE**) is one that:

1. Will result in ...
2. Will not result in ...

3. “Is” ...
4. “Has” ...

The SRC identified their expectations that a satisfying IPE Results IN:

A job, independence, pride, growth, results, and self-esteem.

The SRC identified their expectations that a satisfying IPE Will Not Result IN:

Confusion, dependence, discouragement, ambiguity, unemployment, frustration, waiting; or unrealistic expectations.

The SRC identified their expectations that a satisfying IPE is on that IS:

Achievable, realistic, independence promoting, growth promoting, and empowering.

The SRC identified their expectations that a satisfying IPE Has:

Mentoring, clarity, mutual agreement, a timeline, motivation, training, support, and hope.

DBVI agrees with these expectations and explained how their counseling process incorporates these expectations. DBVI also agrees that this exercise was a good reminder of guiding principles while developing IPE's.

DBVI and the SRC also identified the next Customer-Centered Culture product to discuss was the need for a “Welcome Packet.” This work began immediately by developing a DBVI team to work on the development and seek regular feedback from the SRC. The first step involved several sessions to test assumptions about whether a Welcome Packet was actually needed or did DBVI customers already have clear understand of what they can expect from DBVI. This was tested by surveying staff to ask about the types of support that was requested by participants during the last year. They were asked to identify specific requests that were not blindness or employment related. The results were clear that there were a significant number of requests that were outside of our mission. This confirmed the decision to move forward with the development of the packet.

April 2013 (SRC Meeting)

A presentation by DBVI staff was made to the SRC and input requested about developing the Welcome Packet. The hypothesis was explained that a Welcome Packet would help participants better understand the type of support they can expect on their path to employment. This would also reduce requests that are not rehabilitation or employment-focused.

The SRC provided their input to the 4 key questions.

A successful welcome packet will result in:

SRC Responses:

- Information that you can access
- A clear understanding of scope
- Language that can be understood by everyone—all levels
- Engaging the person who's reading it
- Examples of successes of others
- What the agency provides

A successful welcome packet does not result in:

SRC Responses:

- Confusion
- Misperception
- Inaccessibility
- Frustration

A successful welcome packet is:

SRC Responses:

- Referable
- Accessible
- Comprehensive about other services
- Welcoming
- Inviting

- Positive
- Explanation of what the agency provides
- Clearly written
- Engaging
- Jargon-free (acronym-free)
- steps for the future
- Free of acronyms
- Clear
- Forward looking

DBVI took this input and went to work on further development which included similar discussions with DBVI customers to identify the Voice of the Customer for the packet.

June 2013 (Combined DBVI and SRC Meeting)

DBVI brought a prototype of the Welcome Packet to the SRC for their input. One of the first suggestions and one that was adopted quickly was a new name. The SRC felt strongly that a better title was a “Guide to DBVI Employment Services.” All agreed. Another key suggestion was to have the lay out as a pocket folder with a core section in the middle that all participants receive. Then have inserts that can be customized and given when appropriate. For example, all participants do not need the insert about services for transition age students. There was also a suggestion for some user friendly language and a request to take out the list of jobs currently held by people who recently exited the program. They didn’t want to limit how people think about their job possibilities. The SRC also voted on the criteria items from the 4 key Customer-Centered Culture questions they developed earlier in the year about their expectations. This gave DBVI solid feedback about content that needed to be changed. There was a clear message that it needed to be shorter and have more user friendly language.

December 2013 SRC Meeting

The SRC reviewed the first batch of closure surveys. The questions included two major categories of questions. First category of questions: Is a person better off from receiving services from DBVI? What skills did you gain from working with DBVI? Do you have enough hours in your current job? Do you make enough money in your current job? Second category of question: how were you treated? Did you receive services in a timely way? Last question: did working with DBVI meet your expectations?

The results were discussed and agreed to make a final analysis at the next meeting when all results were included.

February 2014 (SRC Meeting)

Here are some of the SRC observations about the closure survey.

- SRC noticed that many consumers already have jobs when working with DBVI (more consumers who receive help maintaining services).
- SRC noticed that many consumers answered that they don't use assistive technology, even though they probably do and just don't realize it.
- Wondering if consumer first names should be excluded from the survey. In addition, sometimes a counselor's name was mentioned in a negative context.
- Noted that some consumers sounded disgruntled when they stated that they, "did all the work"—but yet they were supported. This seems like an example of a desired outcome.
- Suggestion that Question #2 should be re-worded to include, "If you have a job—how did DBVI help you keep it?" It seemed that many consumers already had a job, but needed help maintaining their current job.
- Noted that someone said DBVI helped "saved their life," they had breast cancer etc. This consumer is possibly giving DBVI too much credit.
- SRC wondered why Question #5 and Question #6 were both included, as they felt there was a lot of overlap between the two.
- Noted that most people received something from DBVI that helped them with their skills.
- Wondering if we were to eliminate names from the survey--could there be an instance when the counselor's name is needed if client is working with multiple counselors?

June 2014 (Combined DBVI and SRC Meeting)

DBVI and the SRC discussed how to best conduct Town Meetings in each region as part of our statewide needs assessment. All agreed that we would use the 4 key questions from Customer-Centered Culture to learn the voice of the customer in key areas. It was also agreed that SRC members would make sure to attend the Town Meeting in their region and some will attend all four.

Town Meeting Dates

Rutland (September 12, 2014)

Burlington (September 17, 2014)

Springfield (September 25, 2014)

Montpelier (October 15, 2014)

October and December 2014 (SRC Meeting)

The SRC discussed Town Meeting results. Results showed that there is a need for assistance coordinating transportation- self-advocacy. There was support for teaching participants how to be independent and solve transportation problems. Some regions use a transportation planning form that might be useful for all DBVI customers statewide. There was also support to create an infrastructure for peer-to-peer support for BARD users and technology.

April 2015 (SRC Meeting)

The SRC discussed DBVI goals, strategies, and customer satisfaction results. Many ideas were discussed about the best ways to engage high school students early and how to help them build pre-employment transition skills.

The SRC also discussed the results of the recent statewide random survey conducted by Market Decisions and agreed to consider the results while giving input at the upcoming June meeting to update the DBVI goals and strategies. The survey results included:

Customer Satisfaction: Results of a statewide random survey (conducted by Market Decisions) of all DBVI customers in 2015 indicated:

- 95%--Overall, percentage of customers satisfied with the DBVI program.
- 95%--Customers satisfied with the services they received.
- 96%--Customers indicated that the staff were very or somewhat helpful in helping them to achieve their vocational rehabilitation goals.
- 94%--Customers indicated that the services they received helped them become more generally **“Independent.”**
- 94%--Customers agreed that they were **“Better Off,”** overall, as a result of the services they received from DBVI.

June 2015 (DBVI and SRC Combined Meeting)

DBVI and the SRC went through each of the DBVI Goals and Strategies. Their input was based on Closure Surveys, Town Meetings in each region of the state, and the results of a formal statewide random survey conducted by Market Decisions. DBVI staff took turns presenting each DBVI goal and strategy and the SRC gave their input about each.

Each DBVI Staff presentation included:

1. Bring the strategy to life by giving the SRC an understanding of what it is. Be creative.
2. Talk about ways people are Better Off because of this strategy and actions?
3. Talk about our commitment to deliver services well (timely, useful, accurate, holistic, respect) for this specific strategy?

Discussion questions for SRC and DBVI Staff:

1. What are the challenges for improvement?
2. What works to do better, including no-cost and low-cost ideas?

The suggestions from the discussion have been incorporated into the new 2016 DBVI Goals and Strategies document. Some of the highlights include:

- A recommendation to create a video that shows people who are blind using technology and functioning successfully at work. The target audience is employers to demonstrate how these skills would add value to their workforce.
- Find ways to promote DBVI's website so people have more access to information.
- Find ways to collaborate for transportation options to some of the larger employers.
- DBVI should help vocational centers understand the capabilities of students who are blind. Maybe create a video that shows someone working successfully in a kitchen. Find more ways for people to get short-term training and certification in fields of interest.

-

October 2015 (SRC Meeting)

The SRC was updated on the status of the Workforce and Innovation Opportunity Act and the Unified Plan. Also discussed was DBVI's commitment to Results-Based Accountability. RBA addresses 2 key questions for the people we serve.

1. Are people better off because they worked with us? (Have their circumstances improved? Do they have new skills?)
2. Have we delivered services well to you? (Was your counselor easy to reach, etc.)

The SRC also reviewed DBVI's Framework of goals and measures. This Framework brings together DBVI's key goals, measures, and products that will help us achieve the results. This is discussed in detail in the goals and strategies sections.

Pre-Employment Transition Skills Planning--Statewide Meeting of Teachers of the Visually Impaired and DBVI Counselors

Meeting with DBVI and VABVI—Agenda & Discussion

March 14th, 2014

Vermont Technical College, Randolph

- Intro to DBVI Guide to Employment Services
 - Review Referral Form
 - Review Action Steps Forms (What's missing?)
 - Input about two new forms
 - DBVI and VR Duel Cases Discussion
 - Role of TVI, VRT and DBVI in having dual General Voc Rehab cases and DBVI Voc Rehab cases open at the same time
1. How do TVIs and VRTs support these students to receive the Supported Employment opportunities from General Voc Rehab without losing vision services when they exit the high school program?
 2. What role does DBVI play in making sure these children and young adults do not fall through the cracks?

- IL Program Description for birth to age 16
- The Role of VRTs in providing IL skills through getting Secondary Transition Skills into the IEP
- Need for TVI and DBVI to work together to advocate for teams to include these goals in the IEP

1. What role does a VRT play in securing these skills to be on the IEP?

- Stephanie will share Transition resources from a recent conference

DBVI Questions for TVI's and ASP's:

- Discussion about LEA responsibilities for purchasing and training for assistive technology
- Discussion about LEA responsibility for special placements like the new Perkins work experience program
- What are the school's responsibilities for:
 1. Purchase equipment?
 2. Provide extended or additional training?
 3. Provide needed vocational skill training?
 4. Provided needed independent living skill training?
- How can DBVI help the TVI?
- What issues do TVI's need help in advocating at the school?
- What assistive technology training do students get?
- What IL skills are students being taught?
- Is the Transition Checklist Current?
- Are TVI's using it?
- What's the purpose of the checklist and how is it used?

- Who are you completing it for (LEAP, school, summer employment plan, or DBVI)?

Town Meeting Questions

In fall 2014 DBVI held 4 Town Meetings in each region of the state. Below is a list of the questions and a summary of responses. The dates for the events were:

Rutland (September 12, 2014)

Burlington (September 17, 2014)

Springfield (September 25, 2014)

Montpelier (October 15, 2014)

Please share your ideas about how DBVI can better assist blind and visually impaired Vermonters in the following areas:

(All ages including Transition)

“You Can Achieve Your Employment Goals: DBVI Can Help!”

- Assistive Technology Instruction for Employment
- O+M Instruction for Employment
- Low Vision Instruction for Employment
- Rehabilitation Therapy Instruction for Employment
- Adjustment to Blindness Session for Employment
- Build Employment Skills through Work Experiences
- Topics you would like to explore with your peers (Consumer-Driven Event)
- Guidance and Counseling for Employment with DBVI Counselor
- Vocational Assessment
- Interpersonal Skills for Employment (Soft Skills Instruction)

- Job Development
- Job Search Session
- Work Site Assessment
- Interview Preparation
- Resume Development
- Access to Information using DBVI Website

General Questions

1. What services are most helpful for people who are blind or visually impaired to achieve your employment goals?
2. How can DBVI better serve the needs of Vermont's citizens who are blind or visually impaired to achieve your employment goals?

Questions about Reaching More People

3. Are people with multiple disabilities being served by DBVI?
 - a. How can we reach people with multiple disabilities?
 - b. What things can we do to improve outreach to people with multiple disabilities?
 - c. What additional services would be helpful for people with multiple disabilities in terms of achieving employment outcomes?
4. What groups of individuals with blindness or visual impairments are not being served adequately?
 - a. How can we reach the underserved groups?
 - b. What things can we do to improve the outreach to the underserved groups?
5. Are minorities with disabilities being served by DBVI?

- a. How can we reach minorities with disabilities?
- b. What steps can DBVI take to improve outreach to minorities with disabilities?
6. How can DBVI better serve the needs of individuals who would benefit from supported employment services?
7. How can DBVI better educate employers and the general public about blindness and visual impairment?

Serving You Better

8. How can DBVI help you to:
 - function more independently in the workplace?
 - learn/know about your disability and how it affects you?
 - understand your employment options better?
 - become better able to interact with others in the workplace?
 - make decisions about work including types of jobs, number of hours, environment, balancing benefits considerations?
 - know how to get and keep a job?
 - have a job that you want?
 - get the training you need?
9. What current DBVI services are most helpful for you in adapting to vision loss?
10. What current DBVI services have been/are most helpful for you to get a job?
11. Which of the following DBVI services have you used:
 - Informational Interviews
 - Company Tours
 - Job Shadows

__Job Trials

__Volunteer Experiences

__Work Experiences

__On-The Job Training

12. How have these experiences been helpful to you? Not helpful?

13. Have you felt properly prepared going into these experiences?

14. Do you have ideas about ways you could be better prepared for these experiences?

15. How can we better educate employers regarding visual impairments?

Results of staff meeting discussion to debrief on the voice of the customer and what DBVI staff heard at Town Meetings (12/11/14)

Customer Centered Culture:

1. Anyone in the region talk about specific/desired products and outcomes
2. The process/acquisition of any of our products – timely, difficult,
3. Character of the products
4. Additional products or new products consumers were looking for

What did you think of assistive training instruction:

- Peer to peer type of work- group work
- The individuals need to be specifically trained about these products

- Ambassador idea about products: clients bringing in their products or canes and demonstrate to the employers about how they get around.

Menu of options: expert training, independent study

- Products to bring and teach employers to understand the assistive equipment

O&M Instruction:

Overall good, nothing to mention

Low Vision Instruction:

- Positive comments to Ira

Rutland- more information about the list of the products and be more informed about the services

Rehabilitation Therapy Instruction:

- Overall good, nothing to mention

Adding/Coordinating Transportation

- Besides Springfield, all other areas find it difficult to set up volunteer drivers
- SSTA pays more for volunteer drivers

- Change our policy for what we pay to VABVI

Consumers are at a place where they do not even ask for transportation

Competitive pay

- Pay for mileage plus driving time

Adjustment to Blindness Session for Employment:

Consumers feel hopeful and have adjusted well to blindness

Outreach for a timely referral- educating different providers in the community

Sees DBVI as being there, not just paperwork

Work Experience/Progressive Employment:

Positive comments

Resume building

Showing/educating employers about their skills even with their disability,

Opportunity to prove what the consumer is capable of— Also shows the consumer if they like the job

Preparing for job interviews

More opportunities to get a job with the work experience

Work Experience: the concept has improved and grown over the years and makes it more formulized.

VABIR response:

- Turnaround time for the work placement, ex. Geoff, O&M Instruction
- Technology guidelines for the workplace/work experience
- Proprietary software that does not work

Consumer-Driven Events:

Educating young people
Networking opportunities for individuals with similar disabilities

Create a system of volunteers

Social events

Guidance & Counseling for Employment w/ Counselor:

-Positive

Vocational Assessment:

Setting up a Resource and Cafe in Burlington about technology training

Ways to develop their skills and know their abilities are or what they need to improve

Job shadows

Collaborate with others about this idea and how to grow and create options for consumers

VABIR opinion is that it helps to know what they are selling or advertising to the employers

Pre- job shadow

Creating an edge

Interpersonal Skills:

Speakers: job development, benefits of working, advertising best qualities, strengths of people, peer groups to discuss these qualities

Another opportunity to explore collaboration

Other topics:

Work at home opportunities and how do you identify legit quality experiences

Limited job opportunity, has to have specific skill set to be successful in the position

Matching the skills

Simulation Kits to teach employers

Offering seminars for job development

Legit work at home jobs

DBVI Vocational Rehabilitation Services Needs of:

Individuals who are blind or visually impaired, including their need for supported employment.

These needs are identified through Town Meeting focus groups, staff interviews, SRC input, and relevant journal articles.

- The most critical service needs of people who are blind or visually impaired (Journal of Visual Impairment and Blindness --August 2008—Volume Number 8--Critical Issues Confronting the Blindness Field: Can Providers and Consumers Agree? By Carl R. Augusto) are:
- Safe and easy travel,
- Access to information and the environment,

- Access to assistive technology,
- Employment in accordance with one's interests and qualifications, and
- Society's reaction to blindness.
- The major barriers to employment are:
 - Employers' attitudes,
 - Transportation,
 - Fear of Blindness,
 - Lack of High Quality Job Training,
 - Individual adjust to blindness,
 - Lack of job-ready skills, and
 - Fear of losing benefits.
- In addition, many important employment related needs (Journal of Visual Impairment and Blindness-- Overcoming Barriers to Employment: Strategies of Rehabilitation Providers—By Adele Crudden, William Sansing, and Stacy Butler) include:
 - Ensuring that customers fully understand how working will have a positive impact on his or her finances and benefits status and makes a decision that it is worthwhile to engage in employment.
 - Creating job clubs for promoting appropriate work behavior and increasing knowledge about employment options.
 - Promoting peer support as a powerful force in assisting DBVI customers through the training and employment process.
 - Making sure DBVI customers are competent in discussing their skills, qualifications, and visual impairment with employers.
 - Providing high-quality training in adaptive skills and assistive technology are vital aspects of preparation for employment.
 - The need for a transitional period to full-time employment during which they engage in progressive employment including volunteer work, part-time work, work experiences, or on-the-job training.

- Educating employers about visual impairment and how it affects functioning.
- Creating opportunities for increased contact between employers and persons who are visually impaired.
- Sharing testimonials and newspaper articles of success stories.
- Doing presentations each month to describe the whole process and the benefits of hiring a blind person.
- Offering training about the Americans with Disabilities Act to employers.
- Finding ways to keep valued older employees.
- Providing community education days.
- Facilitating educational activities particularly targeted for October because it is National Disability Awareness Month.
- Taking tours and publicly recognizing businesses that employ visually impaired persons.
- Facilitating employer mentoring programs and breakfast meetings.
- Developing long-term relationships with employers, particularly those with large businesses.
- Sharing success stories about competent blind people on the job and publicize them many ways. Include consumer organizations in these efforts.
- Providing on-the-job training programs and job coaches to promote positive integration into the workplace.
- Making sure everyone has practice interviews so the person is ready.
- Encouraging job seekers to volunteer information about how they perform specific activities and their transportation options. Answering the unasked question is important because what the employer is imagining probably is not accurate.
- Participating in efforts to improve the overall transportation system.
- Providing consumer's transportation expenses for at least 60 days after the Customers are employed.
- Encouraging customers to relocate (when needed) and network with co-workers and community agencies to hire drivers.

- Encouraging customers to car pool, meet somebody, post messages on bulletin boards, run an ad in the newspaper and try to find somebody in community.
- Involving the employer in advocating for the creation, modification, or expansion of transportation programs. Systems change when employers also advocate for more transportation options.
- DBVI has a need for continued access to Supported Employment programs within the state. Each DBVI region identifies individuals who can benefit from this service and works directly with the General VR agency and the community providers to make sure individual needs are met. DBVI has an agreement that the majority of DBVI Supported Employment finding goes directly to the General VR agency and DBVI customers have access to those services as needed. This arrangement has been very successful for many years.

Transportation Needs

- JVIB article “Transportation Issues: Perspectives of Orientation and Mobility Providers”, November-December 2015, suggests
- More active rehabilitation practitioner participation in assisting consumers locate employment-related transportation is suggested, and evaluating the effect of that assistance would prove helpful.”
- JVIB article “Transportation: An Electronic Survey of Persons Who Are Blind or Have Low Vision”, November-December 2015,
- The most frequently cited barriers for visually impaired individuals regarding transportation are: the availability of public transportation, travel time, cost, safety issues, and stress associated with transportation.

Recommendations from these articles to help support clients deal with transportation issues are:

- Provide quality O&M especially on the use of fixed- route public transportation; identifying, screening, and hiring of drivers; finding a carpool and negotiating arrangements; provide clients with information about transit systems and resources about other transportation possibilities, engage clients in problem-solving discussions to generate transportation options; sharing of client success stories and innovative strategies implemented to overcome transportation barriers.
- DBVI counselors, VABVI O&M instructors, and VABIR employment consultants together help clients develop effective transportation plans to access employment opportunities. DBVI transportation plans contain many of the strategies discussed above including financial support for the first 60-days. These plans are very effective in helping consumers obtain and maintain employment in our rural state.

- In an effort to continue to support consumers around transportation issues DBVI could survey consumers to obtain information on effective transportation solutions and share with other consumers. Showcase success stories on creative transportation solutions.
- DBVI could explore the use of Uber as an additional resource for consumer transportation needs.

Employer Attitudes

Employer Knowledge of and Attitudes Toward Employees Who Are Blind or Visually Impaired
Michele Capella McDonnall, Jamie O'Mally, and Adele Crudden

- Most employers have limited or no knowledge about how blind or visually impaired persons perform routine job tasks.
- Providing education to employers and human resources professionals about job accommodations, including where to find additional information, is necessary and would be an appropriate strategy to use when interacting with employers.
- Disability awareness training and assistive technology were two of the top five strategies identified by employers that would be helpful in hiring persons with disabilities.
- There are multiple theories about how attitudes are formed and changed, and many of them propose a link between knowledge and attitudes.
- These two questions from the article can help guide our outreach efforts:
 - What level of knowledge do employers have about how someone who is blind or visually impaired can perform specific job functions (that is, knowledge about job accommodations or available assistive technology)?
 - Do employers know where to seek help with accommodating someone who is blind or visually impaired?"

Kelly, S. M. (2013). Labor Force Participation Rates among Working-Age Individuals with Visual Impairments. *Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness*, 107(6), 509-513.

- “As the present study demonstrates, less than half (or approximately 39%) of working-age adults with visual impairments participated in the labor force compared with nearly three fourths (or approximately 74%) of the general working-age population during the measured four-year time period. This means that while approximately three-fourths of the general working-age population participated in the labor force at any given point during the four-year time period, less than half of those working-age individuals with visual impairments were actively involved in the labor force.”

· “Looking ahead, employment prospects indicate a somewhat substantial increase in labor force participation among the U.S. workers (BLS, 2012). This increase in labor force participation does not necessarily include individuals with visual impairments who, as demonstrated by the present study, can experience a far more difficult time getting into and staying in the labor force.”

Lynch, K. A. (2013). Survey Reveals Myths and Misconceptions Abundant Among Hiring Managers About the Capabilities of People Who Are Visually Impaired. *Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness*, 107(6), 408-410.

· “The survey results were disappointing. They indicated a majority of managers mistakenly believed there were few jobs in their organizations that visually impaired people could successfully perform. They also thought it was more expensive to hire someone with impaired vision compared to someone without a disability. The majority of managers made it a lower priority to recruit, train, and retain employees with disabilities than to recruit, train, and retain executives, senior managers, young employees, and minorities.”

· “Assistive technology continues to close the gap between people who are visually impaired and sighted, and, today, these tools are more sophisticated and cost-effective than ever.”

· “Training plays an important role in allowing people who are visually impaired to develop the critical skills to secure and maintain employment, and to advance in their careers.”

Wolffe, K. E., Ajuwon, P. M., & Kelly, S. M. (2013). Working with Visual Impairment in Nigeria: A Qualitative Look at Employment Status. *Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness*, 107(6), 425-436.

· This study highlights “...the importance of education and access to employment for people with visual impairments.”

· “Practitioners are reminded of the importance of working closely with families to help them help their children acquire skills and the belief that they can work.”

Pre-Employment Transition Skills

Individuals who are in high school who need Pre-Employment Transition Skills

Cmar, J. L. (2015). Orientation and Mobility Skills and Outcome Expectations as Predictors of Employment for Young Adults with Visual Impairments. *Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness*, 109(2), 95-106.

· “Youth with visual impairments attend postsecondary school at high rates, yet these individuals have low rates of employment.”

- “Results suggest that independently traveling to places outside the home, using public transportation, and arranging airplane or train trips predict post-school employment for youths with visual impairments.”
- “Positive self-beliefs about work for pay, financial self-support, and independent living were also associated with employment.”
- “Professionals can support students in gaining these vital skills by providing community experiences, positive role models, and verbal encouragement.”
- “Research-based predictors of employment should be considered when planning transition services for adolescents with visual impairments.”

Connors, E., Curtis, A., Wall Emerson, R., & Dormitorio, B. (2014). Longitudinal Analysis of Factors Associated with Successful Outcomes for Transition-Age Youths with Visual Impairments. *Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness*, 108(2), 95-106.

- “Transition-age youths with visual impairments have higher rates of unemployment than their peers without impairment, and factors associated with success after graduation have been examined; however, it is unknown whether these factors remain influential across the first decade after exiting high school.”
- “Specific year exiting high school, paid work experience during high school, and high school completion were shown to be predictive of successful outcomes (as measured by post-high school employment or enrollment in post-secondary school or both).”
- “Completion of high school and paid work experience during high school are critical to long-term success for up to eight years post- high school.”
- “Professionals and families should encourage and support students with visual impairments to complete high school and to seek paid employment opportunities during high school.”

Kelly, S. M. (2011). The Use of Assistive Technology by High School Students with Visual Impairments: A Second Look at the Current Problem. *Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness*, 105(4), 235-239.

- “It has been established with a nationally representative sample that less than half the students with visual impairments were using the assistive technology that they needed to be using. It can now be added that this finding applies to U,S, students with visual impairments regardless of their primary or secondary grade levels.”
- “...the use of assistive technology significantly predicted the likelihood of youths eventually getting paid jobs.”
- “In this era of digital information sharing, too much is lost by not completely addressing what has become an increasingly better-defined problem—the gap between those with access to information technology and those without it.”

McDonnall, M. C. (2010). The Employment and Postsecondary Educational Status of Transition-Age Youths with Visual Impairments. *Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness*, 104(5), 298-303.

- “Many youths with visual impairments are obtaining some work experience in high school and postsecondary school, but only a few are consistently working.”
- “Youths with visual impairments but without secondary disabilities were more likely to attend two-year colleges.”
- “Although some youths with visual impairments were more likely to attend postsecondary school, they were less likely to be employed after high school.”
- “The subpopulation of youths with visual impairments who do not attend postsecondary school may be most in need of extensive transition services to assist them in moving to adult roles in the community.”

McDonnall, M. C. (2011). Predictors of Employment for Youths with Visual Impairments: Findings from the Second National Longitudinal Transition Study. *Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness*, 105(8), 453-466.

- “As was found in other recent studies, early work experiences and the number of work experiences were important predictors of employment for youths with visual impairments.”
- “One hypothesis is that multiple work experiences result in a stronger network of people who can assist the youth in finding a job. Using personal contacts (a network) in a job search is commonly considered the best way to obtain employment. Furthermore, research has shown that most jobs are found through acquaintances, rather than close friends and family members, and that the more diverse and expansive a person’s network is, the more likely that this network will result in a successful job lead (Luecking, Fabian, & Tilson, 2004).”
- “Another variable that was identified as a significant predictor of employment at both levels was transportation difficulties ... Youths in this study who reported that transportation was easy or somewhat easy had odds 2.4 times greater of being employed than did those who reported difficulties with transportation.”
- Post-secondary education was “...the strongest predictor of working full time for youths with visual impairments, since those who had completed a postsecondary program had odds three times greater of being employed.”
- “The estimated effect for peer social skills was large: Those who were invited by friends to social activities had 3.5 times greater odds of being employed than did those who were not. The importance of social skills to employment is obvious for everyone, visually impaired or not.”

McDonnall, M. C., & Crudden, A. (2009). Factors Affecting the Successful Employment of Transition-Age Youths with Visual Impairments. *Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness*, 103(6), 329-341.

- “The results indicate that having multiple employment opportunities throughout school would be valuable for positive vocational rehabilitation outcomes of youths with visual impairments.”
- “Youths with visual impairments and the professionals who work with them should be cognizant of their academic achievement levels. This factor was strongly associated with employment outcomes, and prior research has shown it to be more important than educational level in terms of achieving a competitive employment outcome (Hayward & Schmidt-Davis, 2003).”
- ” Self-determination and locus of control are personal factors that could be influenced in youths with visual impairments ... A primary way to influence these factors is to provide youths with opportunities to make decisions and support for doing so.”
- “Youths with visual impairments should be given the opportunity to experiment with different types of assistive technology to determine what will be most helpful to them and should be provided with the training and equipment that will assist them to function in their school or work environment or both.”
- “Providing work experiences is a common activity of transition programs, and the findings of this research support the importance of this activity. In addition to providing work opportunities, a goal of the transition program should be to teach youths job-seeking skills and provide opportunities to obtain jobs using these skills.”

McDonnall, M. C., & O'Mally, J. (2012). Characteristics of Early Work Experiences and Their Association with Future Employment. *Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness*, 106(3), 133-144.

• “Early work experiences are a key predictor of future employment for transition-age youths with visual impairments.”

• “Professionals and parents should emphasize the benefits of early employment to youths with visual impairments. Youths should be encouraged to obtain multiple work experiences during high school while keeping in mind that longer job tenure is also positively associated with future employment.”

• “Professionals should particularly encourage youths who receive SSI benefits to obtain early work experiences and should inform them and their families about incentives that allow them to retain benefits while working.”

Miller, J. (2014). Meeting the Expectations of the Workplace in the School place. *Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness*, 108(6), 495-499.

- “Although transition services technically begin at age 16, transition needs to be considered in a broader context. Expectations of the workplace are best understood when students are given an opportunity to work. Being a student is work. Additional work opportunities can include performing chores. These skills can be incorporated into the educational environment as early as kindergarten.”

Zhou, L., Smith, D. W., Parker, A. T., & Griffin-Shirley, N. (2013). The Relationship Between Perceived Computer Competence and the Employment Outcomes of Transition-aged Youths with Visual Impairments. *Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness*, 107(1), 43-53.

- “The findings indicate the importance of computer competence for youths with visual impairments to achieve successful transitions.”
- “Computer training should be a key component of the vocational preparation of transition-aged youths with visual impairments. In addition, special attention should be given to youths with multiple impairments to help them catch up in both computer use and employment.”

Individuals who are blind or visually impaired and are minorities

- The key service needs for reaching out to individuals who are blind or visually impaired and who are minorities (Strategies for Reaching Out to Minority Individuals with Disabilities—By Fabricio E. Balcazar, Ph.D., Principal Investigator Developing the Capacity of Minority Communities to Promote the Implementation of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)--University of Illinois at Chicago) are:
 - Making sure your agency can provide the services they need.
 - Utilizing a diverse research team or diverse staff to deliver services to the target population.
 - Building personal relationships with members of the target community.
 - Becoming a part of the local network.
 - Building consumers’ strengths.
 - Being persistent and do not let consumers go when they fail to comply.
 - Being willing to listen. If we want to reach out, we should be able and willing to listen.
 - Utilizing members of the target community in outreach efforts.
 - Meeting people where they are instead of waiting for them to come to you.
 - Utilizing multiple channels of communication to disseminate information in the target community.
- DBVI has identified the need to continue outreach and to extend 5-hours/week for the job developer in Burlington to expand these efforts.

Underserved and Underrepresented

DBVI counselors assess the following needs based on analysis of the suggestions in Assume Nothing! - A Monograph from the 38th Institute on Rehabilitation Issues to Address Underserved Populations, Including Individuals Who Are Deaf-Blind

Rehabilitation Services Administration U.S. Department of Education

Cultural training for staff from consultants on DB culture and someone from Alliance of Africans Living in Vermont or Vermont Refugee Resettlement Program for ethnic minorities. DBVI need to truly understand the beliefs and values about work and “independence” and disability held by people from these cultures. (pages 23 & 28)

- Get a DB person or a person of color on the SRC (top of page 17)
- Lack of services for DB people. Someone in the state should provide DB leadership for services. (p 31)
- Initiate a DB targeted “town hall meeting” (p 33)
- Create a partnership with VR to assist individuals who are deaf-blind seeking employment.
- Assign specific staff to take the lead for underserved and underrepresented populations.
- Add cultural humility/ cultural competency training
- Consider outreach for All strategies in each region.

The DBVI Director attends regular meeting with the Agency of Human Services work group to address the needs of individuals with Limited English Proficiency. This group assesses and identifies needs and then creates strategies that are shared across AHS. These resources are archived at:

<https://inside.vermont.gov/agency/AHSIntra/LEP/Pages/LEP.aspx>

They include:

- Interpretation and Translation service available to all AHS staff.
- Tools for working with LEP clients
- Specialized training for communicating across cultures, and; communicating effectively through an interpreter.
- DBVI data shows a need to increase the percentage of transition age students that receive services.
- The Key Predictors of Employment Success for Transition Age Youth (Journal of Visual Impairment and Blindness--Predictors of Employment for Youths with Visual Impairments:

Findings from the Second National Longitudinal Transition Study—By Michele Capella McDonnell) include the importance of:

- Early successful paid work experiences.
- Many different work experiences that the youth find on their own.

• DBVI's Learn, Earn, and Prosper (LEAP) summer employment program is designed to create a positive paid work experience for thirty blind and visually impaired youth in Vermont over the past 5 years.

Individuals who are blind or visually impaired served through other components of the statewide workforce investment system (other than the DBVI program), as identified by such individuals and personnel assisting such individuals through the components.

• DBVI has worked closely with the Department of Labor (DOL) to develop a new unified plan under WIOA. DBVI met with DOL and the Workforce Investment Board to develop a common mission and goals for the plan. DBVI expects individuals who are blind and visually impaired to participate in training opportunities through DOL and the Agency of Education through collaboration with both.

What are the needs to establish, develop, or improve Community rehabilitation programs (CRPs) in the state?

- DBVI has identified a need to establish specific goals with CRPs. For example, DBVI has identified a need to establish outcome targets with the Vermont Association for Business, Industry, and Rehabilitation for the number of job placements in a year through job developers.
- DBVI has identified a need to work with Vermont Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired to establish Customer Satisfaction targets in the areas of timeliness, accuracy, and usefulness of services toward employment.

Gaps between service needs and current services provided to:

Individuals who are blind or visually impaired and who are minorities.

- Build personal relationships with members of the target community.
- Become a part of the local network.
- Build on customers' strengths.

Individuals who are blind or visually impaired.

- The need to improve communication and expectations.
- The need to make paperwork more user friendly.
- The need to provide peer support opportunities.
- The need to fully understand customer expectations.
- The need for more support to meet employment goals.

- The need for more detailed information.
- The need for transportation to DBVI regional offices.
- The need to evaluate (unsuccessful 28) closures.
- The need to expand employer outreach and marketing efforts.
- The need to increase consumer earnings.
- The need to streamline and automate case work for DBVI staff and customers.
- The need to create a biannual staff satisfaction survey.
- The need for consumer driven events.

Individuals who are blind or visually impaired and served through other components of the statewide workforce investment system (other than the VR programs)

- The need to better collect data showing blind or visually impaired customers receiving services through other components of the WIA system.

Gaps Identified by SRC:

- Timeliness of technology and training – when needed.
- More counselors, technology trainers, and staff.
- Educate Employers.
- Allow longer work experiences.
- Create social networking opportunities.
- Create soft skill and job readiness trainings.
- More employment assessments – assessing client interests and abilities that match with employment.
- Higher wage jobs.
- Work more with colleges.
- Work more with VR.
- Work with Tech Ed to find more opportunities.
- Do goal setting with community partners (VABVI, VABIR, etc.) – show community partners DBVI goals and have them help us through collaboration.
- Increase transportation options.
- Create career building workshops.
- Reach people in their 50-60's who want to work.
- Increase strategies to reach people in the North East Kingdom.
- PR Campaign (could be strategy) – combination of letting customers know that DBVI is here and available as well as letting employers know who DBVI is. For example, being visible in the community to both consumers and employers. Boost visibility. Possible adding a staff person.
- Collect success stories.
- Find out what businesses need and train people to do the work.
- Expand opportunities in Randolph Shepherd Program.
- Create opportunities for staff to attend conferences.

Implications for the State Plan:

- See updated **State Goals and Priorities for the Vocational Rehabilitation and Supported Employment Program.**

DBVI has identified the following strategies to implement goals and priorities.

- See updated **State's Strategies.**
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