

TITLE IV – VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION (VR) PROGRAM

- General quarterly updates since the October 2021 GWDB Meeting:

As reported last quarter, the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program partnership between VR's Bureau of Services to Individuals who are Blind and Visually Impaired, and Blindconnect in Las Vegas was granted through the Fund for a Healthy Nevada Grant. The goal was to develop and provide tailored soft skills and job seeking skills training to its clients - Nevadans with disabilities who are blind or visually impaired. The program is doing great, training curricula has been developed and the first cohort of students is in the program now.

These students are learning professionalism; developing a good work ethic; when and how to disclose disability; oral and written communication; assessing the need for accommodations; teamwork and collaboration skills; interpersonal effectiveness; verbal and nonverbal cues; and critical thinking or problem-solving.

In conjunction with Blindconnect in Las Vegas, VR is also sponsoring a series of videos for the newly blind to provide instruction on basics like how to walk with guide and how to safely move in a new environment. Other videos will include basics like laundry, hygiene, and cooking. These videos are posted on the Blindconnect and VR YouTube channels as a service to the public.

Grant funding for SFY 2022 and 2023 from the Fund for a Healthy Nevada is \$116,000. This grant will additionally draw another \$428,600 in federal funds into the Vocational Rehabilitation program.

Unfortunately, VR was not awarded the large federal grant from the Disability Innovation Fund with the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA). From review of the recipients, most awardees appear to have been already doing the programs which they were applying for, and just seeking grant funds to expand and promote their programs.

VR met with the State's Department of Administration/Human Resources to discuss the 700 Hour Program and concerns that we had based on feedback from State offices. Many State hiring agencies still do not understand the 700 Hour Program. Many still confuse it as a training program and do not understand that successful candidates should be brought into permanent positions after the satisfaction of their 700 hours and probation. This has become an issue of concern in the disability community at large and the Commission for Services to People with Disabilities (CSPS) is proposing a BDR to add supports to the 700 Hour Program to address these shortcomings. Specifically, they want to put the responsibility to train and support State agencies on the working of the 700 Hour Program onto State Human Resources. Vocational Rehabilitation would continue to provide the clients and work to support these clients till converted to State employees after the completion of the 700 hours. It was also discussed that another position may be requested in the BDR for Vocational Rehabilitation to manage their portion of the program, as there is currently no full-time staff dedicated to the program.

- Any COVID-related news updates related to your program

All independent and co-located VR offices are again open full time to the public. VR has implemented a hybrid work schedule for all staff, with staff alternating days working from home and in the office. VR is now back to pre-pandemic numbers of applicants/intakes even though we are running at an approximately 25% vacancy rate.

- Any information on service providers that you can

The VR Program continues to lack statewide resources for transportation and medical providers. Due to lack of transportation infrastructure and allowable compensation schedules competing with private practice rates, we experience needs in these areas, especially in the rural communities. Any support or suggestions from the GWDB would be welcomed.

- Any relevant and recent performance measures that you can share

- In SFY 2021:
 - o Nevada VR has had 413 “successful client employment outcomes”, or in other words has helped employ 413 individuals with disabilities. At this point, Nevada VR is on track to close more than 500 successful client employment outcomes by 6/30/22.
 - o 24% of the new applicants to the Nevada VR program are individuals receiving SSI/DI. This is an indication that this population is considering competitive/integrated employment and may consider separating from benefits if enough benefits counseling is done in support of a quality job.

- Any upcoming initiatives and plans for the program

Vocational Rehabilitation is pursuing collaborative partnerships in the following areas:

1. P21: VR is entering into a pilot with the Path 2 Independence (P2I) at UNR. This is a comprehensive transition program designed for individuals with intellectual/developmental disabilities to go to college. It is a 2-year program, marrying academics and life skills into a 2 year certificate that is often a “terminal” or final piece of formal education for these individuals. Issued through the Office of Continuing Education, these certificates will open employment doors and create opportunities which these individuals would otherwise not have. Furthermore, studies have shown that people who complete these certified transition programs have a 74% increase in employability.
2. VR continues to work with the Governor’s Office of Workforce Innovation (GOWINN) on the Reimagine Workforce Preparation (SANDI) Grant. The \$13.8 million award will be used to support job training efforts such as short-term courses, credentials, and pathways to help prepare unemployed and underemployed Nevadans for in-demand occupations in high-growth, high-wage sectors such as manufacturing, health care, information technology, logistics and skilled trades. TMCC has already made a presentation to northern VR staff and referrals are being made. Presentations will occur in rural and southern Nevada as partners are ready to take referrals.