APPENDIX VII - Program-Specific Requirements for Vocational Rehabilitation (Blind)(Revised)

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

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

a. Input of State Rehabilitation Council (Blind)

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

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

BASIS OF INPUT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The State Rehabilitation Council conducted a Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment, which was reviewed and approved at a meeting of the Council held on December 4, 2015. The Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment consisted of the following methods for gathering data:
1. Public Hearings and Town Forums
2. Review of Strategic Plan and Demographic Data
3. Telephone Survey of Consumers
4. Telephone Survey of Key Internal and External Stakeholders

Comments from Public Hearings and Town Forums

Two public hearings and five town forums were initially conducted to gather input on the Combined State Plan for the New Mexico Commission for the Blind. These were followed by a second round of five town forums that took place while the overall Combined Plan was out for the 30 day public comment period. These public meetings were conducted so as to solicit comment from geographically and ethnically diverse populations. To better facilitate public participation, the Commission uses town forums as it helps create a more informal and more inviting atmosphere. Notice for all of these public meetings was published in the Albuquerque Journal, published in local newspapers, placed on the Commission’s web page, placed on the Commission’s NEWSLINE for the Blind system, posted in Commission offices, emailed to consumer organizations, and emailed to interested persons and stakeholders. The SRC Chair and a majority of SRC members attended both of the public hearings. The SRC Chair also attended three of the town forums, and the SRC Secretary attended two town forums. The Agency Executive Director attended all of the public hearings and town forums, as did the SRC Liaison who took notes of the public hearings and town forums.

The first public hearing was held in Albuquerque during the state convention of the National Federation of the Blind (NFB) of New Mexico. This public hearing was held at the Uptown Sheraton
The NFB convention was the only consumer organization convention held in the state in 2015. There were nearly 200 persons registered for the convention, and these persons came from all parts of the state. A town forum was held at the Commission for the Blind office in Las Cruces on October 5, 2015; and another was held at the Commission Orientation Center in Alamogordo on October 6, 2015. The second public hearing was held at the Commission Albuquerque office on November 12, 2015. A town forum was held at the San Juan Center for Independence in Farmington on November 30, 2015; one was held at the City of Las Vegas Museum and Rough Rider Memorial Collection in Las Vegas on December 1, 2015; and one was held at the Commission office in Santa Fe on December 2, 2015. A town forum was held at the Orientation Center in Alamogordo on January 21, 2016; one was held at the Branigan Library in Las Cruces on January 22, 2016; one was held at the Commission office in Albuquerque on January 29, 2016; one was held at the San Juan Center for Independence in Farmington on February 9, 2016; and one was held at the Commission office in Santa Fe on February 12, 2016.

A review of the initial round of public meetings took place at a regular meeting of the State Rehabilitation Council held on December 4, 2015. During the review, the SRC Liaison reviewed the notes of the comments made at the public meetings and through written submissions. A review of the second round of public meetings took place at a special meeting of the State Rehabilitation Council held on February 22, 2016. During the review, the SRC Liaison again reviewed the notes of the comments made at the public meetings.

Strategic Plan and Demographic Data

The State Rehabilitation Council reviewed and discussed the strategic plan and demographic data during the meeting on December 4, 2015. The discussion included a review of the last two year results of the American Community Survey that shows a significant increase in the number of blind and visually impaired persons in New Mexico, a large increase in the number of blind or visually impaired persons who are over 65, and a dramatic increase in the number of blind or visually impaired persons who are under 18. The Council also considered scientific and medical reports on the increasing rate of diabetes in young persons and the impact that it will have on future rates of blindness as more persons will have diabetic retinopathy; the dramatically increasing rate of Optic Nerve Hypoplasia (ONH) and the increasing numbers of consumers with ONH that the Agency can expect in the next 5 to 10 years; the large number of young persons with retinopathy of prematurity; the increasing level of persons deciding to not participate in the workforce as a part of an overall national trend; the impact of the “failure to launch” trend that is resulting in young persons not starting work until later; and the overall aging of the workforce and desire among those older workers to become and remain employed.

Surveys of Consumers and of Key Stakeholders A telephone Survey was conducted using a sample size equal to approximately 10 percent of Commission vocational rehabilitation clients. The sample was randomly and anonymously selected. The sample included cases that were currently open or which had been closed for any reason during the last year. The survey consisted of ten open–ended questions and one multiple–choice question. The survey also included a question designed to measure consumer satisfaction. The Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment and Consumer Satisfaction Survey were adopted by the Executive Committee of the State Rehabilitation Council, and approved by the State Rehabilitation Council at the meeting held on December 4, 2015. To assure that the survey was anonymous, a random sample was gathered, and the actual survey was conducted by an independent contractor who was not an employee of the Commission for the Blind.

A telephone Survey of key external and internal stakeholders was also conducted as part of the Comprehensive Needs Assessment. The survey consisted of nine open–ended questions that were approved by the State Rehabilitation Council. To assure that the survey was anonymous, the survey
was conducted by an independent contractor who was not an employee of the Commission for the Blind.

The survey results were discussed at a meeting of the State Rehabilitation Council held on December 4, 2015. The survey respondents identified a wide variety of needs, including technology, technology training, Braille, math, and cane travel; services for students and youth with the most significant disabilities, in particular work experiences; a need to work collaboratively with the State Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped, public schools, colleges and universities, transportation providers, and one–stops; a need to add capacity at the Orientation Center, in particular the ability to provide training in a realistic independent living situation as would be possible using the proposed apartments; a need to provide note–taking skills and other job readiness skills to transition–age youth; a need to improve support for underserved populations including individuals in rural locations, individuals who are deaf blind, Native Americans, older individuals who are blind, and youth with disabilities; and a need to increase the number of bilingual staff throughout the agency, plus a need to add more technology staff and more staff in the Albuquerque Skills Center.

COMMENTS FROM THE COUNCIL

The Council met in Albuquerque on December 4, 2015, and again on February 22, 2016. The purpose of the December 4 meeting was to approve the Commission’s portion of the State Plan, and the purpose of the February 22 meeting was to approve the Commission’s portion of the State Plan as a part of the overall Combined State Plan. Notice of the meetings were provided pursuant to the New Mexico Open Meetings Act, 10–15–1 NMSA 1978, with notice being published in a newspaper of general circulation, placed on the Commission’s web page, placed on NEWSLINE for the Blind, and distributed by email to key stakeholders. The Council reviewed and discussed the State Plan attachments, reviewed and discussed the comments that were solicited at the public hearings and town forums, reviewed and discussed the results of the Consumer and key stakeholder surveys, and reviewed and discussed the strategic plan and demographic data. After the review and discussion, the Council discussed, revised, and commented on the established Goals and Priorities. The Goals and Priorities were read individually allowing for thorough opportunity for recommendations and comments on each Goal and Priority. What follows are the approved Goals and Priorities approved at the December 4, 2015 meeting, along with an Agency Summary of how they will meet the Goals and Priorities, Council Comments, and the Agency Response:

Goals and Priorities

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

Council Recommendations: The Council agreed that this was an appropriate goal considering the requirements of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), in particular the requirements to improve cooperation with core partners. They asked for more specifics on how the agency would meet the goal.

Agency Response: This is a new Goal and Priority and the agency has not undertaken any activities specifically designed to meet it. The agency will work cooperatively with the identified partner entities by designating specific liaisons and points of contact, by providing information, by entering into cooperative agreements where appropriate
b. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes by working cooperatively with the New Mexico Department of Health so as to develop opportunities for competitive and integrated employment for persons who are blind or visually impaired, which will be accomplished by working in partnership with the Medical Assistance Division, the Developmental Disabilities Supports Division, and the Behavioral Health Services Division.

Council Recommendations: The Council agreed that this was an appropriate goal considering the requirements of WIOA, in particular the requirements to improve interagency cooperation. The Council asked for specifics on how the agency would meet the goal.

Agency Response: This is a new Goal and Priority and the agency has not undertaken any activities specifically designed to meet it. The agency will work cooperatively with the Department of Health, with the Medical Assistance Division, with the Developmental Disabilities Supports Division, and with the Behavioral Health Services Division. The agency will designate specific liaisons and points of contact for each of these entities, will provide information as appropriate, and will enter into a cooperative agreement with the Department of Health.

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

Council Recommendations: Based on the comments received via the needs assessment, the Council agreed that this is an important goal for the coming year. The Council asked if there was anything else that they could do to help facilitate the apartment approval process.

Agency Response: The agency is working actively to obtain necessary approvals and funding to construct the proposed apartment facility. The agency has conducted planning discussions with the Facilities Management Division, and is hoping to begin construction sometime in the first half of 2017. The agency is planning on seeking capital improvement funding from the state, and will continue to look at whether or not it is feasible to use federal Basic Support funding.

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

Council Recommendations: The Council agreed that outreach is an important activity and that this goal should be continued from the previous year.

Agency Response: The agency will work to increase outreach to the identified groups using the recommended outreach methods. In 2014 and 2015, the agency had positive news coverage of its vocational rehabilitation program on the front pages of the Albuquerque Journal and the Las Cruces Daily Sun, and in the Alamogordo Daily News and the Santa Fe New Mexican. The agency also participated in radio broadcasts, and staffed a table at the annual meeting of the Academy of Ophthalmology. The agency also sponsored the 2015 Getting in Touch with Literacy conference which drew more than 125 educational professionals and teachers of the blind from throughout the state. In addition, the agency has developed Keystroke, an accessible typing tutor program that works on both the PC and on the Mac, and has developed iFidget for the iPhone. These apps are a
part of the Commission’s outreach strategy as they are available free of charge to school districts, helping the agency to establish contact and build relationships with individual teachers and local school districts.

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

Council Recommendations: The Council agreed that this is a necessary goal in light of new WIOA requirements to expand transition services to students with disabilities and youth with the most significant disabilities. The Council asked for specifics regarding how the agency would meet this goal.

Agency Response: The agency will work to increase services and outreach to Pre–Employment Transition Students using the identified methods. The agency already seeks to be involved in Individualized Education Plan meetings for transition clients starting at age 14, and the agency operates the Students in Transition to Employment Program in Albuquerque and Alamogordo. The agency has also sponsored trainings and certification exams for the National Certification in Literary Braille and the National Certification in Unified English Braille. In addition, the agency has developed Keystroke, an accessible typing tutor program that works on both the PC and on the Mac, and has developed iFidget for the iPhone. These apps are a part of the Commission’s outreach strategy as they are available free of charge to school districts, helping the agency to establish contact and build relationships with individual teachers and local school districts.

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

Council Recommendations: The Council agreed that the concept of “informed choice” is fundamental within the public vocational rehabilitation program and that this goal should be continued in the coming year. Agency Response: The agency continues to provide our services in a way that allow our clients to set and obtain high employment goals. This has historically been reflected by strong performance on Indicator 1.5, which measured the average starting salary of our clients against the average state wage. Even though this Indicator is no longer in place under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, the agency will continue to provide services that will enable our clients to obtain high starting wages.

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

Council Recommendations: The Council agreed that Newsline is critical to the ability of blind and visually impaired New Mexicans to access information, news, breaking news, Spanish–language news, and access job listings.

Agency Response: The agency is committed to providing a quality Newsline service. The agency updated the local Newsline software on September 2, 2014, and the agency will be able to add
additional publications as a result of this upgrade, including the Alamogordo Daily News. The Agency will continue to sponsor NFB–Newsline in New Mexico.

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

Council Recommendations: Based on new WIOA requirements to expand job readiness services to transition–age youth, plus comments received via the needs assessment, the Council believes that this is an important goal for the agency. They asked for specifics on staffing and programs to be offered at the Skills Center.

Agency Response: The agency is committed to using the Skills Center to meet the needs of vocational rehabilitation clients. As a result, the agency used the Skills Center to provide training to Students in Transition to Employment Program in 2014 and 2015, and will continue this activity in 2016. The Skills Center was also used to provide support in the area of Braille and technology training, as well as to function as a meeting place for programs related to vocational rehabilitation.

i. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes through the provision of independent living training to vocational rehabilitation consumers, including through the proposed apartment training facility at the Orientation Center.

Council Recommendations: Based on comments received in the needs assessment, the Council is in full support of this goal, in particular the construction of the apartment facility in Alamogordo.

Agency Response: The agency continues to refer vocational rehabilitation clients to receive independent living services, recognizing the need for clients to be able to function independently to become employed. The agency recognizes the benefit of providing training at the Orientation Center that is realistic and appropriate to the individual needs of clients, and is therefore actively seeking to build apartments that can be used to provide more realistic and appropriate training.

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

Council Recommendations: Based on comments received through the needs assessment, the Council recommends a goal regarding services to persons who are deaf–blind.

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

k. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes through the Business Enterprise Program (BEP) by shortening the time required for vendors to complete the required training, including by using Randolph–Sheppard Act training offered by the Hadley School for the Blind.
Council Recommendations: The Council is in full support of the agency’s Business Enterprise Program and believes that this is an important goal for the agency to pursue.

Agency Response: The agency has adopted the Hadley class as the training method for BEP vendors, and is working with New Mexico programs to create a local provider so that food preparation and cooking methods can be taught locally. It is anticipated that we will have this in place by the middle of 2016.

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

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

Agency Response: The agency recognizes the need to have strong fiscal programs so as to maximize the receipt of federal funds, and to otherwise provide appropriate vocational rehabilitation services to our clients. To do this, the agency must have in place a sufficient number of qualified fiscal staff to comply with federal fiscal rules, and to appropriately respond to changing fiscal requirements and staffing levels. The agency has submitted its “Single Audit” on time for each of the last four years, and has only had two minor fiscal findings in those three years.

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

Council Recommendations: The Council decided to continue this Goal.

Agency Response: The agency is engaging in new and innovative approaches to provide services and engage in outreach. The agency has developed the iFidget app for the iPhone to help clients correct inappropriate rocking motions that a small portion of blind individuals develop. The agency also developed a typing program called Keystroke that helps blind persons learn how to type more efficiently, including persons who are Deaf–Blind. The agency has also improved its web page and the way in which notices of meetings is communicated, and has added the ability for interested persons to subscribe to receive notices. The agency has also developed an entirely new web page that has a more modern appearance, and that will allow for referrals to be made by health care professionals through the web page.

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

Council Recommendations: The Council discussed and decided to continue the Goal, noting the myriad benefits of working.

Agency Response: The agency continues to provide benefits counseling and guidance through a contract with the New Mexico Legal Aid Society. The agency also had staff from Legal Aid provide training on benefits to the vocational rehabilitation counselors. The agency has also provided seminars on benefits to clients.
The goals and priorities described above were jointly developed and agreed to by the Commission for the Blind and the State Rehabilitation Council. They were discussed and approved at the regular meeting held on December 4, 2015.

On February 22, 2016, the State Rehabilitation Council held a special meeting during which the Combined State Plan was discussed and approved. The Council made the following recommendations, and the agency had the following responses:

Council Recommendation: The Council reviewed and affirmed the Goals and Priorities adopted at the December 4 meeting.

Agency Response: The agency concurs.

Council Recommendation: The Council recommended that the Council approve the state plan with a correction to indicate that the Commission for the Blind is a separate state agency.

Agency Response: The agency concurs. Council Recommendation: The Council recommended that the Commission continue to provide Independent Living and Older Blind services through the Commission for the Blind as a separate state agency dedicated to serving persons who are blind or visually impaired.

Agency Response: The agency concurs, and will continue to provide such services, recognizing that the agency has more independent living teachers (9) than vocational rehabilitation counselors (8).

Council Recommendation: The Council recommended that the agency continue to provide Newsline for the Blind and NFB–Newsline.

Agency Response: The agency concurs, and will continue to make provision of Newsline for the Blind and NFB–Newsline a priority.

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

Please see A.1. above

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

Please see A.1. above.

b. Request for Waiver of Statewideness (Blind)

When requesting a waiver of the statewideness requirement, the designated State unit must identify the types of services to be provided by the program on a non-statewide basis. The waiver request must also include written assurances that:
1. A local public agency will provide the non-Federal share of costs associated with the services to be provided in accordance with the waiver request; (Blind)

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

2. The designated State unit will approve each proposed service before it is put into effect; and (Blind)

3. All State plan requirements will apply (Blind)

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

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

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

1. Federal, State, and local agencies and programs; (Blind)

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

A Cooperative Agreement in the form of a Memorandum of Understanding between the agency and the State Public Education Department has been established to facilitate the professional relationship between the two agencies. This agreement facilitates the referral process and coordination of services between the agencies, and among the state’s school districts. The Commission for the Blind has the basic responsibility to provide vocational rehabilitation services to all eligible blind residents of New Mexico. The Public Education Department has the basic responsibility to provide an appropriate public education to New Mexico children with disabilities, including those with visual disabilities. The Deputy Director for Vocational Rehabilitation has served on the Statewide Transition Coordinating Council in past years, although the STCC is not currently active. The Agency assures the interagency cooperation with, and utilization of the services and facilities of the Federal, State, and local agencies and programs. This includes programs carried out by the State under section 4 of the Assistive Technology Act of 1998; Programs carried out by the Under Secretary for Rural Development of the Department of Agriculture; Non–educational agencies serving out–of–school youth; and State use contracting programs; to the extent that such agencies
and programs are not carrying out activities through the statewide workforce investment system. The Agency works with the following rehabilitation services providers: Zuni Entrepreneurial Enterprises, Inc.; New Vistas Center for Independent Living; Developmental Disabilities Planning Council; TRESCO; Laguna–Acoma Vocational Rehabilitation; Navajo Nation Office of Special Education & Rehabilitation Services; Jemez Disabilities Project; Tobosa Developmental Services; Goodwill Industries; Department of Health, Developmental Disabilities Support Division; Taos County ARC; Community Options; Helen Keller National Center; Community Outreach Programs for the Deaf; the NM Commission for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Persons; Albuquerque Center for Hope and Recovery; Yes We Can New Mexico; and the Small Business Development Centers located throughout New Mexico. Relationships with these organizations run the gamut, including referrals, vocational evaluations, job development, job coaching, transportation, consulting, case management, joint case servicing, deaf blind services, supported employment services, and self-employment services. The agency has representation on the SILC. The Agency will explore ways to build better ties with the IL centers and work with the SILC, in an effort to increase staff and consumer awareness of their activities. A representative of the SILC is expected to be appointed to the Agency’s SRC in FY 2016, and as such, will be able to keep the Council up to date on their respective current activities.

The agency regularly interacts with the Governor’s Commission on Disability (GCD), with a goal of helping to coordinate state services and programs in a way that maximizes employment opportunities for vocational rehabilitation consumers. A representative of the GCD made a presentation at a counselor training in October 2015.

The agency participates on the Ticket to Work Partners group, along with the Social Security Administration, the New Mexico Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, and a number of employment networks that serve ticket holders throughout New Mexico. The group regularly meets in the Commission’s Skills Center Lecture Hall.

2015 marked the third year in which the Commission participated in the annual Black Expo, sponsored by the New Mexico Office of African American Affairs. The expo has been growing each year and Commission attendance provides an opportunity to conduct outreach to the African American community and provide information regarding VR services available through the commission.

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

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

The agency Technology Manager is a member of the New Mexico Technology Assistance Program Coordinating Council (NMTAP), formed under the Tech Act. The Technology Manager regularly attends and participates in NMTAP events and meetings. Commission also has a memorandum of Understanding with the Governor’s Commission on Disability, the agency that administers NMTAP. The Commission entered into a cooperative agreement with the Governor’s Commission on Disability under which $75,000 in Tech Act funding was transferred to the Commission to purchase assistive technology, and to provide demonstrations on that assistive technology.
3. Programs carried out by the Under Secretary for Rural Development of the United States Department of Agriculture; (Blind)

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

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

The Agency assures the interagency cooperation with, and utilization of the services and facilities of the Federal, State, and local agencies and programs. This includes programs carried out by the State under section 4 of the Assistive Technology Act of 1998; Programs carried out by the Under Secretary for Rural Development of the Department of Agriculture; Non–educational agencies serving out–of–school youth; and State use contracting programs; to the extent that such agencies and programs are not carrying out activities through the statewide workforce investment system. With regard to coordination with education officials to facilitate the transition of students with disabilities from school to the receipt of vocational rehabilitation services, including the provision of pre–employment transition services, the Agency has in place the Students in Transition to Employment program (STEP). The Commission expects 40 – 45 students will be participating in the 2016 STEP program, up from the 31 in summer 2015, as a result of expanded support for students with disabilities and youth with the most significant disabilities. These students come from various locations around the state and are recruited through high school counselors, special education departments, and from individuals who have exited their secondary education program and are not currently in a post–secondary program.

5. State use contracting programs. (Blind)

The Agency assures the interagency cooperation with, and utilization of the services and facilities of the Federal, State, and local agencies and programs. This includes programs carried out by the State under section 4 of the Assistive Technology Act of 1998; Programs carried out by the Under Secretary for Rural Development of the Department of Agriculture; Non–educational agencies serving out–of–school youth; and State use contracting programs; to the extent that such agencies and programs are not carrying out activities through the statewide workforce investment system. The executive director serves on the State Use Council and the director of the State Use agency has briefed the vocational rehabilitation counselor team on several occasions, including during FY 16.

d. Coordination with Education Officials (Blind)

Describe:

1. DSU's plans (Blind)

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

Pre–Employment Transition Services
The Commission believes that assignment of a representative from PED to the SRC will improve the Commission’s ability to partner with PED and facilitate the delivery of pre–employment transition services throughout New Mexico, especially in unserved and underserved areas of the state. Similarly, although the Commission’s Deputy Director for Vocational Rehabilitation Programs has served on the Statewide Transition Coordinating Council (STCC) in past years, the STCC has not been active for approximately four years. Re–establishment of the STCC could help stakeholders in the transition process work together to coordinate transition services and improve and increase the delivery of pre–employment transition services throughout New Mexico, especially in unserved and underserved areas of the state. Finally, the Commission plans to work closely with local education agencies throughout New Mexico to improve and increase the delivery of pre–employment transition services. This will be accomplished primarily through VR counselors who serve the LEAs within their service territories. In addition, the agency also plans to reclassify one of its VR counselor positions into a lead counselor position with responsibilities for coordinating the agency’s transition efforts.

Coordination with Other Education Officials

The Agency recently revised its memorandum of understanding with the New Mexico School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (NMSBVI). The MOU is designed to facilitate and coordinate transition services across the state. The agency’s Executive Director, Deputy Director, and VR Program Manager are in frequent communication with the superintendent of NMSBVI. Several NMSBVI students will be participating in the Agency’s Students in Transition to Employment Program (STEP). Agency staff and NMSBVI Outreach representatives have met, and established communication to discuss issues common to both entities.

To further enhance the number of consumers and improve transition services, the Commission has signed sixteen cooperative agreements with New Mexico school districts and related organizations. These school districts include Aztec, Bloomfield, Carlsbad, Cloudcroft, Clovis, Deming, Farmington, Gadsden, Las Cruces, Los Lunas, Portales, Roswell, Taos, Moriarty–Edgewood, Silver City, and the New Mexico School for the Blind and Visually Impaired.

Agreements were signed by the agency’s Executive Director in meetings with the Special Education Directors of each school district. The Commission is now pursuing cooperative agreements with school districts in Gallup–McKinley County, Cuba, Albuquerque, Alamogordo, Santa Fe, Rio Rancho, Las Vegas, Tucumcari, and Santa Rosa.

The Agency’s Executive Director has coordinated meetings with Educational Stakeholders, persons who provide educational services to individuals who are blind, including the New Mexico School for the Blind and Visually Impaired Superintendent, the President of the National Federation of the Blind, the President of Parents of Blind Children, as well as other educational officials responsible for providing special education services to blind students.

PY 2016 marks the tenth year of a MOA with the Department of Health and the New Mexico School for the Blind and Visually Impaired. The MOA will administer an allocation from DOH of $80,000, designed to provide assistive technology that, for a disability other than blindness, would be considered durable medical equipment.

2. Information on the formal interagency agreement with the State educational agency with respect to: (Blind)
A. consultation and technical assistance to assist educational agencies in planning for the transition of students with disabilities from school to post-school activities, including VR services; (Blind)

A memorandum of understanding between the Agency and the State Public Education Department (PED) has been established to facilitate the professional relationship between the two agencies. This agreement facilitates the referral process and coordination of services among the agencies. The Commission for the Blind has the basic responsibility to provide vocational rehabilitation services to all eligible blind residents of New Mexico, with employment being the Agency’s goal. The PED has the basic responsibility to provide an appropriate public education to New Mexico children with disabilities, including those with visual disabilities.

A summary of the terms of the MOU between the Commission and PED are as follows:

1. Consultation and technical assistance to assist educational agencies in planning for the transition of students with disabilities from school to post–school activities:

   Through adoption of the MOU, the Commission and PED will work towards development of a seamless service delivery system, and work towards methods of facilitating and coordinating services wherever practicable and appropriate.

   The Commission and PED maintain different requirements for determination of eligibility, documentation of disability, and the provision of services. The MOU does not require either entity to provide services to persons who would not otherwise be eligible for services, or to provide services that would not otherwise be required by applicable law or regulation.

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

2. Transition planning by personnel of the designated state agency and educational agency that facilitates the development and completion of their individualized education programs:

   School personnel make every effort to provide adequate notice to Commission counselors regarding upcoming IEP meetings. Commission counselors make every effort to attend all IEP meetings for their consumers. At the IEP meetings, Commission counselors and school personnel work together to identify necessary services that will both help the consumer complete their secondary education goals and also prepare the consumer for post–secondary work or school. As a result of these coordination efforts, the Commission develops an Individualized Plan for Employment to address the needs of each transition student.

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

3. Roles and responsibilities, including financial responsibilities, of each agency, including provisions for determining state lead agencies and qualified personnel responsible for transition services:

   The Commission and PED maintain various advisory and governing bodies. To assure maximum coordination of services, both organizations agree to maintain representation on appropriate
advisory and governing bodies. The Commission recommends qualified personnel to serve on the Statewide Transition Coordinating Council and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act State Advisory Panel. The PED supports and facilitates the placement of these designated individuals on the respective Council or Panel, subject to any applicable requirements of state or federal regulations or directives from the Governor. The PED recommends a qualified individual to serve on the Commission’s State Rehabilitation Council, and the Commission supports and facilitates the placement of this individual on the State Rehabilitation Council, subject to any applicable requirements of state or federal regulations or directives from the Governor.

The Commission has designated qualified personnel to be responsible for provision and coordination of transition services. The Commission’s Deputy Director for Vocational Rehabilitation has served on the Statewide Transition Coordinating Council. Similarly, the PED maintains qualified personnel who work to address transition needs of students throughout New Mexico, and a PED representative is expected to be appointed to the agency’s Statewide Rehabilitation Council in FY2016.

In the event that either organization is asked by an individual or another agency to provide or assist in obtaining a service that it believes to be the responsibility of the other Party, the Party asked to provide the service shall notify the other Party of its position in order to give the other Party an opportunity to assume proper responsibility. Disagreements over the Parties’ responsibilities shall be addressed through the dispute resolution provisions contained in the MOU.

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

4. Procedures for outreach to and identification of students with disabilities who need transition services:

The Commission and PED understand the importance of providing transition services to eligible students starting at the age of fourteen. Accordingly, both entities agree to develop and coordinate outreach procedures to facilitate identification of eligible individuals and to assure appropriate and timely delivery of services, to include the development of an IPE as soon as possible after the consumer turns age 14.

To the maximum extent practicable, the PED agrees to share results of Child Find and other outreach activities with the Commission, including identification of specific students who are identified as being blind or visually impaired. The students identified shall be of transition age, but will also include students who are nearing transition age so that the Commission may begin transition services immediately upon the student reaching the age of fourteen. Accordingly, students who are thirteen and identified as being blind or visually impaired shall be identified to the Commission by the PED. The provision of services to these identified students by the Commission shall be in accordance with a MOU that the Commission has with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) that addresses how the Commission and DVR are to coordinate services.

e. Cooperative Agreements with Private Nonprofit Organizations (Blind)

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

The Agency works with the following non–profit rehabilitation services providers:
NM Division of Vocational Rehabilitation; Zuni Entrepreneurial Enterprises, Inc.; New Vistas Center for Independent Living; Developmental Disabilities Planning Council; TRESCO; Laguna–Acoma Vocational Rehabilitation; Navajo Nation Office of Special Education & Rehabilitation Services; Jemez Disabilities Project; Tobosa Developmental Services; Goodwill Industries; Department of Health, Developmental Disabilities Support Division; Taos County ARC; Community Options; Helen Keller National Center; Community Outreach Programs for the Deaf; the NM Commission for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Persons; Albuquerque Center for Hope and Recovery; Yes We Can New Mexico; and the Small Business Development Centers located throughout New Mexico.

The Agency also maintains cooperative partnerships with the Centers for Independent Living throughout the state, and coordinates services through the Statewide Independent Living Council. The Agency has actively worked to expand ties with the IL centers and work with the SILC, in an effort to increase staff and consumer awareness of their activities. A SILC representative is expected to be appointed to the Agency’s Statewide Rehabilitation Council in FY2016, and as such, will keep each respective Council up to date on their respective activities. The Commission’s Deputy Director for Independent Living programs serves on the SILC.

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

The Commission is proud of its relationship with the National Federation of the Blind (NFB). The NFB is the largest organization of blind persons in the United States. The Agency incorporated NFB Newsline as a part of its overall Newsline services in FY 2002, and intends to continue NFB Newsline in PY 2016.

Newsline is an important part of the Commission’s outreach program to identify and serve most significantly disabled persons who are minorities, and individuals who have been unserved or underserved by the vocational rehabilitation or supported employment program. Newsline provides access to state and national publications to individuals in all portions of New Mexico, including in the most rural portions of the state. The local Newsline and NFB–Newsline have publications that include newspapers from Albuquerque, Santa Fe, Los Alamos, Alamogordo, Farmington, Las Cruces, and Roswell. NEWSLINE also has a Spanish language news category. NFB–Newsline offers prompts in Spanish, and has several Spanish language publications. NFB–Newsline voices can also be customized to meet the needs of individuals who are hard of hearing, and NFB–Newsline offers the ability to download publications for reading on a Braille display. This feature enables individuals who are deaf–blind to access the entire selection of more than 365 national newspapers and magazines. NFB–Newsline also offers a job search feature that enables job seekers to create custom searches of the CareerBuilder job database.

The Commission works closely with the New Mexico affiliate of the NFB as well. The NFBNM has opened its annual state convention agenda to enable the Commission to make reports on its programs and services and to hold public hearings in order to gather comments on the state plan, strategic plan, and agency services. The NFBNM has membership on the Commission’s State Rehabilitation Council, representing blind consumers. During 2015, the NFBNM and Commission co–sponsored employer awards to the University of New Mexico and the Albuquerque Public
Schools, recognizing the award–winning organizations at the NFBNM’s state convention banquet. The Commission has also had a strong relationship with the American Council of the Blind, another prominent organization of individuals who are blind. As with the NFBNM, the New Mexico affiliate of the ACB has opened its state convention agenda to enable the Commission to make reports and hold public hearings to gather comments on the state plan, strategic plan, and agency services. Representatives of the ACBNM have also served on the Commission’s State Rehabilitation Council, although the ACBNM has been only minimally active in the past few years.

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

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

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

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

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

2. Community Options, Inc., 4301 Lomas NE, Albuquerque, NM; 811 St. Michael’s Dr. Suite 107, Santa Fe, NM; and 2500 Missouri Ave., Las Cruces, NM. Community Options provided job assessment, job development and placement, on–the–job intensive skills training, other training and support required to achieve and maintain job stability, facilitation of socialization and communication with coworkers, and assistance with transportation arrangements. Individuals served under this agreement are those who meet the eligibility requirements of the Commission’s supported employment program.

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

4. New Vistas Supported Employment Services, 2890 Trades West Road, Santa Fe, NM. Services included job assessment, job development and placement, on-the-job intensive skills training, other training and support in order for the consumer to achieve and maintain stability on the job, facilitation of socialization and communication with coworkers, and assistance with transportation arrangements. The population served under this agreement included individuals who meet the eligibility requirements of the Commission’s supported employment program. 5. Tobosa Developmental Services, 1219 West Summit, Roswell, NM, 88201 Tobosa Developmental Services provided job assessment, job development and placement, on–the–job intensive skills training, other training and support in order for the consumer to achieve and maintain job stability, the facilitation of socialization and communication with coworkers, and assistance with transportation arrangements. The populations served under this agreement included individuals who meet the eligibility requirements of the Commission’s supported employment program.

6. The Opportunity Center, 905 10th Street, Suite C, Alamogordo, NM, The Opportunity Center provided job assessment, job development and placement, on–the–job intensive skills training, other training and support in order for the consumer to achieve and maintain job stability, the facilitation of socialization and communication with coworkers, and assistance with transportation arrangements. The populations served under this agreement included individuals who meet the eligibility requirements of the Commission’s supported employment program.

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

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

g. Coordination with Employers (Blind)

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

1. VR services; and (Blind)

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

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

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

The goal of the STEP Program is to give participating students more exposure to the workplace, enabling them to gain a better appreciation of the real-world expectations of employers, to enable them to gain a better understanding of their career options, and to acquire the job skills that will help them to achieve the ultimate goal of becoming employed. The STEP program does this through paid job experience. Job placement will be done based upon availability of work sites and the student’s career interests and ability. Students will be paid for up to 25 hours a week at minimum wage. Minimum wage is $7.50 hourly throughout New Mexico, except in Albuquerque, where it is $8.75, Santa Fe at $10.84 and Las Cruces at $8.40 per hour.

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

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

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

Summer employment is a common experience of adults in the workplace. When it comes to the employment of blind and visually-impaired youth, it can be a valuable experience for both the employer and the youth. Although we rarely find blind and visually-impaired youth who are interested in working during the school year, many of them are interested in working during the summer. The Commission has historically been able to fund summer employment opportunities for any youth who were interested, but the Commission will make a greater effort to encourage more youth to take advantage of summer employment opportunities beginning in summer 2016. The Commission supported 31 students in summer employment during summer 2015 and will strive to
increase that number to between 40 and 45 in summer 2016. Of course, the Commission will use existing employer relationships and develop new employer relationships to facilitate work opportunities for students who do wish to take advantage of work opportunities after school or on weekends when school is in session.

Employers

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

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

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

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

The Commission will also assist consumers interested in self-employment to take advantage of provisions of the New Mexico State Use Act. The New Mexico State Use Act, 13–1C–1 NMSA 1978, is an outgrowth of the state’s continuing efforts to expand opportunities for its citizens with disabilities. The Act opens state service contracts, including contracts to provide service to the state as business owners and entrepreneurs, to persons with disabilities without their having to competitively bid for the contract — so long as the services are provided at fair market pricing. Again, although the Commission has encouraged self-employment, it has not assisted its self-employed consumers to take full advantage of opportunities afforded by the State Use Act. The Commission will partner with Horizons of New Mexico, the program’s agent, to facilitate additional opportunities for self-employed consumers. The Commission’s executive director serves on the State Use Council.

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

Please see G.1. above.

h. Interagency Cooperation (Blind)

Describe how the designated State unit will collaborate with the State agency responsible for administering each of the following programs to develop opportunities for competitive integrated employment, to the greatest extent practicable:
1. the State Medicaid plan under title XIX of the Social Security Act; (Blind)

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

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

The Commission has been partnering with the New Mexico Department of Health, Developmental Disabilities Supports Division (DDSD) for many years. DDSD is responsible for overseeing various Medicaid home–and community–based waiver programs that are designed to help people with disabilities live as independently as possible. The Commission participates in the overall plan of services for eligible consumers by providing supported employment services such as vocational evaluation, vocational training, job development, job coaching, and extended services. New WIOA provisions will now enable the Commission to provide supported employment for up to 24 months and to provide up to 48 months of extended services to youth with the most significant disabilities.

3. the State agency responsible for providing mental health services. (Blind)

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

i. Comprehensive System of Personnel Development; Data System on Personnel and Personnel Development (Blind)

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

1. Data System on Personnel and Personnel Development (Blind)
A. Qualified Personnel Needs. (Blind)

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

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

The Commission endeavors to maintain caseload sizes of between 50 and 75 cases per counselor. To ensure the ratio of one counselor to 50–75 consumers, the Agency employs eight counselors. The Commission serves approximately 400 VR consumers at any one time. The Commission’s list of functional position titles, Full–time Equivalents), current vacancies, and the number of staff expected to retire in the next five years for each is provided below. Executive Director: 1, 0, 0 Deputy Director for Vocational Rehabilitation Programs: 1, 0, 1 Deputy Director for Independent Living/Building Manager: 1, 0, 1 Deputy Director for Adult Orientation Center: 1, 0, 0 Deputy Director for Finance and Administration: 1, 0, 0 Program Manager for Vocational Rehabilitation Programs: 1, 0, 0 Program Manager for Assistive Technology: 1, 0, 0 Program Manager for Business Enterprise Program: 1, 0, 0 Chief Financial Officer: 1, 0, 0 Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor: 8, 1, 2 Orientation Center Instructor: 8, 2, 3 Rehab/IL Teacher: 9, 0, 3 Assistive Technology Specialist: 4, 0, 0 Business Operations Specialist: 5, 1, 1 Orientation Center Dormitory Supervisor: 1, 0, 0 Orientation Center Dormitory Workers: 5, 0, 2 Coordinator of Technology for Children: 1, 0, 0 Reader/Driver: 8, 0, 3 Accountant/Auditor: 1, 0, 0 Procurement Officer: 1, 0, 0 Accounts Payable Supervisor: 1, 0, 1 HR, Training, and Labor Specialist: 1, 0, 0 IT Network Specialist: 2, 0, 0 Secretary: 10, 0, 1 Office Manager: 1, 0, 0 Receptionist: 1, 0, 0 Maintenance and Repair Worker: 3, 0, 1 Projections of staff needs in five years based upon current consumer trends would require the continued employment of eight counselors to maintain the present ratio of one counselor for every 50 to 75 cases. The Commission will maintain the present ratio of one counselor for every 50 to 75 cases in order to assure optimum services to consumers. It is apparent that improvements in service delivery will not necessarily rely upon expanded numbers of staff, but rather upon the qualities and training of personnel in the existing personnel configuration. The Agency will continue to provide annual intensive staff training, as well as periodic training to meet specific identified needs. In addition, the Agency has implemented the Accessible Web–Based Activity and Reporting Environment (AWARE) case management system, which will free additional time for counselors to serve consumers. Training on the AWARE program began in August of 1999 and is conducted on an ongoing basis. The Agency is serving all consumers that are referred for services, and it is not anticipated that there will be any significant increase in the number of consumers seeking services.

Please see i.1.A.i. above.

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

Please see i.1.A.i. above.

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

Please see i.1.A.i. above.
B. Personnel Development (Blind)

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

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

The Commission has a Memorandum of Understanding with New Mexico Highlands University, located in Las Vegas, New Mexico, which is offering a degree program in vocational rehabilitation counseling. Three of the agency’s current counselors either graduated from the New Mexico Highlands program or are currently taking graduate courses at Highlands. New Mexico Highlands has 39 students currently enrolled in their rehabilitation counseling program. They graduated seven students from December 2014 through August 2015, all of whom are eligible for both the New Mexico Licensed Rehabilitation Counselor and Certified Rehabilitation Counselor certifications. I am pleased to note that the New Mexico Highlands program is CORE accredited. The MOU with New Mexico Highlands also offers support of intern placements whenever possible, although the agency was unable to host any interns during the past FY. The Commission will continue its positive relationship with New Mexico Highlands University to assure that NMHU students consider employment with the Commission.

The Commission also recruits counselor candidates from both the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) and Texas Tech University. UTEP has 39 students currently enrolled in their rehabilitation counseling program. They graduated fifteen students from December 2014 through August 2015, all of whom are either CRC or eligible to receive CRC certification. Graduates from these programs often include representation from minority populations as well as candidates who speak Spanish.

Although the agency encourages its counselor staff to attend the Highlands University program, the agency recognizes that, depending on individual situations, distance education programs offered by other universities may also serve staff education needs. As such, the Commission has also inquired of the counselor training programs at other universities, including the University of North Texas (part of a well–established consortium between the University of North Texas, San Diego State University, and Georgia State University); as well as the counselor program at the University of Arkansas, Little Rock. A Commission counselor completed the University of North Texas program in spring 2010 and two other counselors took graduate classes there in the last year. Another counselor is currently taking graduate courses at the University of Arkansas, Little Rock.

New Mexico State University had sponsored a graduate program in Orientation and Mobility. Unfortunately, the program was discontinued following the completion of the summer 2009 semester. However, the program has been resurrected and began offering classes again in summer 2014. Two Commission staff members completed the NMSU O and M program. One of these staff members is still with the Commission and provides valuable training expertise for both vocational rehabilitation and independent living consumers. Eight students are currently enrolled in the program. One student graduated in summer 2015, tested, and received their Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist (COMS) certification.

The Commission also recruits Orientation and Mobility Specialists from Louisiana Tech University. Their Orientation and Mobility Specialist program emphasizes non–visual instruction and the Structured Discovery Model. This model is consistent with the training philosophy of the Commission’s Orientation Center in Alamogordo.
ii. the number of students enrolled at each of those institutions, broken down by type of program; and (Blind)

Please see i.1.B.i. above.

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

Please see i.1.B.i. above.

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

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

Commission personnel will meet with public and university personnel to review options for enabling the Commission’s rehabilitation teachers to meet certification requirements. The current and projected personnel needs for vocational rehabilitation counselors are stable, and are not expected to increase. This projection of personnel needs is based on the implementation of the AWARE case management program and a trend towards stable vocational rehabilitation caseloads statewide. However, the Commission is aware of changing demographics which may impact this, including the aging of the work force and an increasing rate of blind infants and children who have disabilities in addition to blindness. There are currently eight counselor positions in the vocational rehabilitation program. As previously discussed, the Executive Director of the Commission and his/her designee will continue to meet with university personnel to provide appropriate training to the eight rehabilitation counselors.

The Agency also actively recruits individuals who come from minority backgrounds or who have disabilities, including posting of job announcements on the "blind jobs" and "Rehab Professionals" list services and other blindness related list services. The agency also provides internships and recruits graduates of the New Mexico Highlands rehabilitation counselor program, which generally includes representation from minority populations as well as candidates who speak Spanish and Native American languages.

The Commission has a Memorandum of Understanding with New Mexico Highlands University, located in Las Vegas, New Mexico, which is offering a degree program in vocational rehabilitation counseling. Three of the agency’s current counselors either graduated from the New Mexico Highlands program or are currently taking graduate courses at Highlands. New Mexico Highlands has 39 students currently enrolled in their rehabilitation counseling program. They graduated seven students from December 2014 through August 2015, all of whom are eligible for both the New Mexico Licensed Rehabilitation Counselor and Certified Rehabilitation Counselor certifications. I am pleased to note that the New Mexico Highlands program is CORE accredited. The MOU with New Mexico Highlands also offers support of intern placements whenever possible, although the agency was unable to host any interns during the past FY. The Commission will continue its positive
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The Commission also recruits Orientation and Mobility Specialists from Louisiana Tech University. Their Orientation and Mobility Specialist program emphasizes non-visual instruction and the Structured Discovery Model. This model is consistent with the training philosophy of the Commission’s Orientation Center in Alamogordo.

Other training for rehabilitation professionals in the fields of blindness, deaf-blind and related disabilities such as diabetes has been continually provided by the Agency to existing professional and support staff. It is anticipated that these efforts will enable the Agency to meet federal certification requirements over the foreseeable future. The Commission will provide additional training in key areas, such as those related to transition services, career assessment, and job placement.

The agency currently uses a manual system for the tracking of data related to each counselor, their training programs and data directly pertinent to the CSPD requirements. A record of the transcripts and course work completed by each counselor is maintained in a file and is used to track progress in achieving the necessary academic requirements.

3. Personnel Standards (Blind)

Describe the State agency's policies and procedures for the establishment and maintenance of personnel standards consistent with section 101(a)(7)(B) and 34 CFR 361.18(c) to ensure that designated State unit professional and paraprofessional personnel are adequately trained and prepared, including:
A. standards that are consistent with any national or State-approved or -recognized certification, licensing, registration, or other comparable requirements that apply to the profession or discipline in which such personnel are providing VR services; and (Blind)

The New Mexico Commission for the Blind continues to monitor and update the comprehensive system of personnel development each year, to ensure that an adequate supply of qualified rehabilitation professionals and paraprofessionals are available to the Commission. Qualified counselors are those that have earned Certified Rehabilitation Counselor (CRC) certification, are eligible to sit for the CRC examination, or have attained a New Mexico License in Rehabilitation Counseling under the Master’s level requirements of the state license, as described below.

A. Master’s degree in rehabilitation counseling from a regionally accredited college or university. This requirement shall be satisfied by meeting the requirements of Paragraphs (1) or (2) of Subsection A below.

(1) A master’s degree awarded by a New Mexico college or university must incorporate the New Mexico Public Education Department’s approved competencies in rehabilitation counseling. (2) A master’s degree awarded by a college or university outside of New Mexico must be for a rehabilitation counseling program approved by the New Mexico Public Education Department.

B. Master’s degree in school counseling, vocational counseling or other related field and the provisions of Paragraphs (1) or (2) of Subsection B below

(1) one (1) year of experience in rehabilitation counseling, or (2) fifteen (15) semester hours of credit in the rehabilitation counseling competency areas of vocational/transition assessment, medical aspects of disability, psychosocial and/or psycho-cultural aspects of disability, case management in rehabilitation counseling, issues and practices in rehabilitation counseling, or placement aspects of rehabilitation counseling.

At present, five of the Agency’s seven counselors have CRC certification and the other two have completed Master’s degrees in fields other than rehab counseling but are not yet eligible to sit for the CRC and do not yet possess alternative state licensure.

The existing staffing configuration will include current staff as well as new staff hired to fill any positions that should become vacant. As turnover occurs due to retirement or staff leaving their positions, the Agency will make it a high priority to promptly fill any vacant counselor positions with CRC Certified Rehabilitation Counselors. The desired academic qualification for a new counselor is a Master’s degree in Rehabilitation Counseling. If the pool of candidates does not include a person possessing the desired qualifications, the minimum degree will be a Bachelor’s degree with a requirement that the counselor obtain either CRC certification or alternative state licensure within a maximum of four (4) years of the date of hiring. State licensure was enacted in 2000. The agency has set aside funds for counselor training to help counselors meet academic standards.

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

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

4. Staff Development. (Blind)

Describe the State agency's policies, procedures, and activities to ensure that, consistent with section101(a)(7)(C) of the Rehabilitation Act, all personnel employed by the designated State unit receive appropriate and adequate training in terms of:

A. System of staff development (Blind)

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

Vocational rehabilitation counselors attend regular bi-monthly training coordinated by the Deputy Director for VR Programs. The training regularly addresses technology issues, training center issues, employment services issues, transition, post-secondary education and training, and training on various state and local services. Recent presentations from state and local agencies include the Commission for Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing, Community Outreach Programs for the Deaf (deaf–blind services), Governor’s Commission on Disability, Developmental Disabilities Planning Council, Albuquerque Housing Authority, and the Small Business Development Center. The regional representative from the Helen Keller National Center is scheduled to travel to New Mexico in February 2016 to provide training to the Commission’s VR counselor team.

Training on the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act is being provided to emphasize legal requirements for current and newly hired staff, particularly with respect to assessment, vocational counseling, job placement, and rehabilitation technology, including training implemented in coordination with entities carrying out State programs under section 4 of the Assistive Technology Act of 1998. In addition, training will focus on evidenced–based approaches. Content experts from outside the Agency, including from the newly–established technical assistance centers around the country, will be secured in areas where Agency staff does not have the knowledge or expertise necessary to provide the training. This will include training on section 4 of the Assistive Technology Act of 1998.

Commission professionals spend eight weeks at the agency’s Orientation Center receiving immersion training. The training is conducted under blindfold, enabling the staff members to learn the same non–visual techniques that their consumers are learning. This creates a belief on the part of the staff that their blind clients really can travel independently, become literate (Braille literate), organize their households and documents, shop and prepare nutritious meals, and keep themselves clean and well–groomed.

Counselors also attend conventions of the two consumer organizations. New counselors who have never attended a national convention are given the option to attend either the ACB or NFB convention. Since the Commission encourages and supports consumer attendance at these conventions for a myriad of reasons, the Commission believes it is essential for counselors to attend so they can speak from personal experience when advising consumers. As for state conventions, counselors are required to attend both conventions initially, then required to attend one or the other in subsequent years. A great deal of learning takes place at both the national and state conventions. The Commission intends to continue this practice in future years. The Commission has a staff of five
assistive technology specialists. The Commission provides continuing training in assistive technology to both staff and consumers. The Commission operates a technology training lab in Albuquerque which provides regular instruction in the use of assistive technology. This training uses a hands-on lab setting to provide instruction in a wide variety of applications, including Microsoft Windows, Word, Excel, Outlook, PowerPoint, and Internet Explorer. The Commission also provides instruction in the use of different types of video magnifiers, Braille note takers, and in the production of Braille documents through the use of Braille translation software and Braille embossers. Training is also provided on the use of Apple Macintosh computers, iPads, and iPhones. These trainings are made available to consumers, parents of consumers, and school professionals. Consumers attending the Adult Orientation Center in Alamogordo also receive instruction in assistive technology as a regular part of their Center training. The Commission has increased individualized training to consumers through the addition of remote utilities, contract trainers, distance education trainers, and virtual classrooms. During FY 2011, the Commission began using textbooks that couple instruction in MS Office applications with specific screen readers and screen magnifiers.

Historically, Commission staff members have served on all four of the local workforce boards and the Executive Director has served on the State Workforce Board. Recent staff separations have caused a few vacancies on local boards, but those vacancies are expected to be filled with Commission staff during PY 2016. These staff members have received training as a part of their service on the various boards. The VR counselors have also received training on the availability of services through the One-Stops, and on how to assist consumers to access those services in the most appropriate fashion.

B. Acquisition and dissemination of significant knowledge (Blind)

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

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

5. Personnel to Address Individual Communication Needs (Blind)

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

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

Newly hired Agency personnel who work directly with consumers participate in up to two months of intensive training in the skills of blindness at the Commission’s Orientation Center, where two of the classes in the curriculum (Braille and Communications) deal with modes of communication utilized by individuals who are blind.

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

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

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

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

j. Statewide Assessment (Blind)

(Formerly known as Attachment 4.11(a)).

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

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

– Both demographic data and survey responses identified a need to provide support to individuals with Optic Nerve Hypoplasia. Some of these individuals will likely require supported employment services as they proceed through the vocational rehabilitation process toward employment. Needs were also identified in the areas of transition services; technology services; training in Braille, math, literacy, technology, and assistive technology; training at the agency’s Orientation Center, and in particular the need for the construction of planned apartments to replicate real living situations as a compliment to the current dormitory arrangement; the need for more work experience opportunities, especially for students with disabilities and youth with the most significant disabilities; and services to older adults who would like to obtain or retain employment.

A need to collaborate with workforce partners, but not consolidate services, in order to provide the most effective services possible to blind and visually impaired New Mexicans.
Following is a description of the needs assessment process conducted in support of our state plan submission:

The State Rehabilitation Council conducted a Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment, which was reviewed and approved at a meeting of the Council held on December 4, 2015. The Comprehensive statewide needs assessment consisted of the following methods for gathering data:

1. Public Hearings and Town Forums
2. Review of Strategic Plan and Demographic Data
3. Telephone Survey of Consumers
4. Telephone Survey of Key Internal and External Stakeholders

1. Public Hearings and Town Forums

The Commission and State Rehabilitation Council jointly held two public hearings in Albuquerque, along with town forums in Alamogordo, Farmington, Las Cruces, Las Vegas, and Santa Fe. Notices were widely distributed, including being published in local newspapers, being posted on NEWSLINE for the Blind, being placed on the Commission web page, and being placed on the Sunshine Portal. The hearings and town forums were designed specifically for the purpose of soliciting input on statewide needs. Public hearings were held during the general sessions of the annual conventions of the National Federation of the Blind of New Mexico (total registration for which was almost 200 persons) and at the Commission for the Blind offices in Albuquerque.

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

A need for collaboration, but strongly against consolidation of services. Commenters expressed an overwhelming call for continuing separate services for the blind in New Mexico. Commenters pointed to a homogenization of services which would not serve blind individuals effectively; an increase of caseload sizes by vocational counselor staff; a reduction in resources available to serve blind persons, whose services generally require more money and longer time horizons; concern that consolidation would lead to more hierarchy, more bureaucracy and less autonomy, resulting in reduced flexibility to direct services where they are needed; reduced expertise; member of the Commission Board who himself was a manager in Ohio when it underwent a consolidation and his comments that the result was reduced services for blind persons in Ohio; a need to maintain its own identity and its own State Rehabilitation Council; and commenters who pointed to research studies that separate services for the blind are more efficient and more effective than combined services. An informal vote at the National Federation of the Blind of New Mexico convention, with almost 200 in attendance, was almost unanimous in opposition to consolidation. The National Federation of the Blind is the largest organization of blind persons in the United States and the NFB of New Mexico is a strong affiliate of the national organization. Finally, many commenters asked what would be done about the Commission’s Independent Living Program, which predominantly serves older individuals who are blind across the state and has nothing to do with vocational training and employment.

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

A need for more blind staff at the Orientation Center.

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

A need for more Braille and orientation and mobility services.

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

The following needs were identified through this process:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

3. Telephone Survey of Commission Consumers

The Commission and State Plan Committee also developed and conducted a telephone consumer Survey, the specific results of which were presented to the State Rehab Council at its meeting on December 4, 2015. The survey instrument was specifically designed to solicit information on the needs of consumers pursuant to 34 CFR Section 361.29. The needs assessment randomly identified ten percent of Commission Consumers and consumers whose cases were closed in the last year. This sample was anonymously surveyed by an independent contractor with respect to the rehabilitation needs of persons who are blind or visually impaired and the need to establish, develop,
or improve community rehabilitation programs. Results were anonymous. A total of 19 persons were contacted and 13 surveys were completed.

The specific survey questions were: a. What do you see as the area of greatest future need? b. What do you see as the area of greatest current need? c. What needs do you see in regard to the aging workforce? d. What needs do you see in regard to blind children and youth? e. What population or group do you see as being most under–served? f. What needs do you see with respect to technology? g. What needs do you see with respect to integration of services? h. What needs do you see with regard to strategic planning? i. What needs do you see with regard to establishing, developing, or improving community rehabilitation programs? This includes the Commission for the Blind Orientation Center and planned apartments to be built as a part of the Orientation Center training. j. What other rehabilitation needs do you see? k. Overall, how satisfied are you with Commission’s services?

Very satisfied Satisfied Somewhat satisfied Neutral (neither satisfied or dissatisfied) Dissatisfied Very Dissatisfied

The following needs were identified as a result of this survey process:

A need for more technology services, including those related to hardware, software, and mobile devices.

A need for more technology training in order to prepare consumers for secondary school, post–secondary vocational training or education, and employment.

A need for more training in Braille, cane travel, and other skills.

A need for more services for students with disabilities and youth with the most significant disabilities, including math, Braille, technology, and independent living; as well as additional opportunities for work experiences.

4. Telephone Survey of Key Internal and External Stakeholders

The Needs Assessment Process consisted of interviews with key internal and external stakeholders as well. These key stakeholders were surveyed by an independent contractor with respect to the rehabilitation needs of persons who are blind or visually impaired and the need to establish, develop, or improve community rehabilitation programs. Seven external and eight internal stakeholders were surveyed.

Key External Stake Holders

NFB State President, Adelmo Vigil NFB Association of Blind Students President, Eric Gordon NFB Parents of Blind Children President, Alexia Switzer NFB SAGE Division President, Nancy Burns NMSBVI Superintendent, Linda Lyle VA VIST Coordinator, Trudy Valdez Client Assistance Program Coordinator, Bernardine Chavez Adelante Executive Director, Mike Kivitz Tesco President and Chief Executive Officer, Deb Battista

Key Internal Stakeholders

Commission for the Blind Chair, Art Schreiber Commission State Rehabilitation Council Chair, Tom O’Brien Commission Executive Director, Greg Trapp Commission Deputy Director for Vocational
Rehabilitation, Jim Salas Commission Deputy Director for the Orientation Center, Lucy Alexander Commission Technology Manager, Curtis Chong Commission BEP Manager, Diana Martinez Commission Youth Outreach and Technology for Children Coordinator, Kelly Burma The following set of nine questions was asked of these key external and internal stakeholders:

a. What do you see as the area of greatest future need? b. What do you see as the area of greatest current need? c. What needs to you see in regard to the aging workforce? d. What needs do you see in regard to blind children and youth? e. What population or group do you see as being most underserved? f. What needs do you see with respect to technology? g. What needs do you see with respect to integration of services? h. What needs do you see with regard to strategic planning? i. What needs do you see with regard to establishing, developing, or improving community rehabilitation services? This includes the Commission for the Blind Orientation Center and planned apartments to be built as a part of the Orientation Center training. j. What other rehabilitation needs do you see? The following needs were identified as a result of this survey process:

A need to work more collaboratively with the State Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped, New Mexico School for the Blind and Visually Impaired, public schools, colleges and universities, transportation providers, and one–stop employment centers.

A need to add capacity at the Orientation Center, in particular the ability to reproduce an independent living situation such as would be possible with the planned apartments.

A need to provide note taking skills to students and youth in transition to post–secondary school or work.

A need for more work opportunities for students with disabilities and youth with the most significant disabilities.

A need to provide services that meet the specialized needs of youth with Optic Nerve Hypoplasia.

A need to improve support for underserved populations including individuals in rural locations, individuals who are deaf blind, Native Americans, older individuals who are blind, and youth with disabilities.

A need to increase the number of bilingual staff throughout the agency, plus a need to add more technology staff and more staff in the Albuquerque Skills Center.

B. who are minorities; (Blind)

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

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

– The needs assessment identified a need for more funding and more staff to reach rural and underserved areas of the state. They also covered the landscape in regard to services, expressing needs for more transportation, education, transition, and employment services; as well as a need to provide more services to older individuals with vision and hearing loss.
D. who have been served through other components of the statewide workforce development system; and (Blind)

There were a number of comments related to the one–stops. There were strong views on collaboration with the one–stops, but against consolidation of the Commission within the workforce development system. The views were consistent among consumers, external stakeholders, and internal stakeholders that separate services for blind adults and youth should be maintained. Comments also recommended an increase in collaboration with local education agencies, state colleges and universities, and state transportation providers.

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

There were many comments from consumers, external stakeholders, and internal stakeholders regarding the need to improve services to students with disabilities and youth with the most significant disabilities. Needs identified include technology, technology training, math skills, Braille skills, cane travel skills, independent living skills, and work opportunities.

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

Consumers, external stakeholders, and internal stakeholders all commented on the need to expand the agency’s Orientation Center in order to serve the growing number of blind and visually impaired individuals in New Mexico. In particular, comments advocated for the construction of apartments on property adjacent to the dormitory which was donated to the Commission. The apartments would provide an independent living experience that is currently being provided through rental apartments 1.5 miles away. Respondents identified how the apartments would enable the Commission to teach real independent living skills, that they would be better than the dorms, that the existence of apartments would attract consumers who currently choose to attend expensive out–of–state training centers which have apartments, that the apartments would provide a more convenient opportunity for consumers with families to participate, and that the apartments would provide a fully accessible independent living opportunity for individuals with physical disabilities.

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. (Blind)

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

k. Annual Estimates (Blind)

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

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

400

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

A. The VR Program; (Blind)

350

B. The Supported Employment Program; and (Blind)

50

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

0

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

0

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

$5,560,500

I. State Goals and Priorities (Blind)

The designated State unit must:
1. Identify if the goals and priorities were jointly developed (Blind)

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

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

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

In the context of the Agency’s mission statement, a goal of the VR Program is integrated, competitive employment, or supported employment placements. The Agency’s goal is having blind individuals employed and contributing members of society. The Agency strives to find, in the words of our former Executive Director and former Rehabilitation Services Administration Commissioner, "real jobs for real blind people." The mission of the New Mexico Commission for the Blind is to enable persons who are blind to achieve vocational, economic and social equality by providing career preparation, training in the skills of blindness and above all, promoting and conveying the belief that blindness is not a barrier to successful employment, or to living an independent and meaningful life.

The Agency’s priorities include serving individuals with the most significant disabilities. As a result of current funding levels, all eligible individuals seeking rehabilitation services are being served. Should funding levels change, the Commission may adopt an Order of Selection, pursuant to applicable provisions of the Rehabilitation Act.

Cooperative agreements have been established with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, Aging and Long Term Services Department, Department of Health Developmental Disabilities Supports Division, Governor’s Commission on Disability, Public Education Department, and Higher Education Department, New Mexico School for the Blind and Visually Impaired, Commission for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Persons (CDHH), and New Mexico Highlands University.

Input received by the State Rehabilitation Council and Commission staff, including the comprehensive needs assessment conducted during FY 2016, as well as a review of new performance indicators under WIOA, identified operational priorities in carrying out the vocational rehabilitation and supported employment programs:

On Friday, February 13, 2015, the Rehabilitation Services Administration announced that it would award 2016 grants based on the 2015 State Plan to reduce the burden of working on two plans at the same time. As a result, the Commission did not submit a State Plan in July of 2015. Instead, the Commission began work on the combined Plan to be submitted pursuant to the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. Accordingly, the Council met on December 4, 2015 and adopted the goals and priorities listed below to be submitted as a part of the combined Plan. Following the public comment period, the SRC met again on February 22, 2016 and affirmed the goals and priorities.

a. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes by partnering and working with community colleges and one–stop centers to more effectively utilize services available through the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act, Adult, Dislocated Worker, Youth, and Wagner–Peyser programs.
Agency Response: This is a new Goal and Priority and the agency has not undertaken any activities specifically designed to meet it. The agency will work cooperatively with the identified partner entities by designating specific liaisons and points of contact, by providing information, by entering into cooperative agreements where appropriate.

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

Agency Response: This is a new Goal and Priority and the agency has not undertaken any activities specifically designed to meet it. The agency will work cooperatively with the Department of Health, with the Medical Assistance Division, with the Developmental Disabilities Supports Division, and with the Behavioral Health Services Division. The agency will designate specific liaisons and points of contact for each of these entities, will provide information as appropriate, and will enter into a cooperative agreement with the Department of Health.

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

Agency Response: The agency is working actively to obtain necessary approvals and funding to construct the proposed apartment facility. The agency has conducted planning discussions with the Facilities Management Division, and is hoping to begin construction sometime in the first half of 2017. The agency is planning on seeking capital improvement funding from the state, and will continue to look at whether or not it is feasible to use federal Basic Support funding.

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

Agency Response: The agency will work to increase outreach to the identified groups using the recommended outreach methods. In 2014 and 2015, the agency had positive news coverage of its vocational rehabilitation program on the front pages of the Albuquerque Journal and the Las Cruces Sun–News, and in the Alamogordo Daily News and the Santa Fe New Mexican. The agency also participated in radio broadcasts, and staffed a table at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Ophthalmology. The agency also sponsored the 2015 Getting in Touch with Literacy conference which drew more than 125 educational professionals and teachers of the blind from throughout the state. In addition, the agency has developed Keystroke, an accessible typing tutor program that works on both the PC and on the Mac, and has developed iFidget for the iPhone. These apps are a part of the Commission’s outreach strategy as they are available free of charge to school districts, helping the agency to establish contact and build relationships with individual teachers and local school districts.

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

Agency Response: The agency will work to increase services and outreach to Pre-Employment Transition Students using the identified methods. The agency already seeks to be involved in Individualized Education Plan meetings for transition clients starting at age 14, and the agency operates the Students in Transition to Employment Program in Albuquerque and Alamogordo. The agency has also sponsored trainings and certification exams for the National Certification in Literary Braille and the National Certification in Unified English Braille. In addition, the agency has developed Keystroke, an accessible typing tutor program that works on both the PC and on the Mac, and has developed iFidget for the iPhone. These apps are a part of the Commission's outreach strategy as they are available free of charge to school districts, helping the agency to establish contact and build relationships with individual teachers and local school districts.

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

Agency Response: The agency continues to provide our services in a way that allow our clients to set and obtain high employment goals. This has historically been reflected by strong performance on Indicator 1.5, which measured the average starting salary of our clients against the average state wage. Even though this Indicator is no longer in place under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, the agency will continue to provide services that will enable our clients to obtain high starting wages.

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

Agency Response: The agency is committed to providing a quality Newsline service. The agency updated the local Newsline software on September 2, 2014, and the agency will be able to add additional publications as a result of this upgrade, including the Alamogordo Daily News. The Agency will continue to sponsor NFB–Newsline in New Mexico.

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

Agency Response: The agency is committed to using the Skills Center to meet the needs of vocational rehabilitation clients. As a result, the agency used the Skills Center to provide training to the Students in Transition to Employment Program participants in 2014 and 2015, and will continue this activity in 2016. The Skills Center was also used to provide support in the area of Braille and technology training, as well as to function as a meeting place for programs related to vocational rehabilitation.

i. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes through the provision of independent living training to vocational rehabilitation consumers, including through the proposed apartment training facility at the Orientation Center.
Agency Response: The agency continues to refer vocational rehabilitation clients to receive independent living services, recognizing the need for clients to be able to function independently to become employed. The agency recognizes the benefit of providing training at the Orientation Center that is realistic and appropriate to the individual needs of clients, and is therefore actively seeking to build apartments that can be used to provide more realistic and appropriate training.

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

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

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

Agency Response: The agency has adopted the Hadley class as the training method for BEP vendors, and is working with New Mexico programs to create a local provider so that food preparation and cooking methods can be taught locally. It is anticipated that we will have this in place by the middle of 2016.

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

Agency Response: The agency recognizes the need to have strong fiscal programs so as to maximize the receipt of federal funds, and to otherwise provide appropriate vocational rehabilitation services to our clients. To do this, the agency must have in place a sufficient number of qualified fiscal staff to comply with federal fiscal rules, and to appropriately respond to changing fiscal requirements and staffing levels. The agency has submitted its “Single Audit” on time for each of the last four years, and has only had two minor fiscal findings in those four years.

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

Agency Response: The agency is engaging in new and innovative approaches to provide services and engage in outreach. The agency has developed the iFidget app for the iPhone to help clients correct inappropriate rocking motions that a small portion of blind individuals develop. The agency also developed a typing program called Keystroke that helps blind persons learn how to type more efficiently, including persons who are Deaf–Blind. The agency has also improved its web page and the way in which notices of meetings are communicated, and has added the ability for interested persons to subscribe to receive notices. The agency has also developed an entirely new web page
that has a more modern appearance, and that will allow for referrals to be made by health care professionals through the web page.

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

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

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

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

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

Please see I.2. above.

B. the State’s performance under the performance accountability measures of section 116 of WIOA; and (Blind)

Data in this section has not been collected but will be tracked in the future using the AWARE case management system from Alliance Enterprises.

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

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

The agency’s last Section 107 Monitoring took place in 2010. Pursuant to that Monitoring, the agency has developed and implemented a Corrective Action Plan, and that Corrective Action Plan has been approved by the Rehabilitation Services Administration. The agency also continues to maintain the corrections that were identified and put in place. The agency continues to be audited under its annual Single Audit or OMB A-133 audit. The agency has only had two fiscal findings in the last 4 Single Audits. The last Single Audit was for State Fiscal Year (SFY) 15, and has been submitted to the Federal Audit Clearinghouse in compliance with OMB Circular A-133. The agency SFY 15 audit was submitted on time, and the agency had one finding in its SFY 15 Single Audit. The finding was 2015-001, and stated that the Commission did not have “written Procedures for determining the allowability of costs in accordance with Subpart E-Cost Principles of this part and
the terms and conditions of the Federal award.” On April 28, 2016, the Commission adopted “Allowable Cost Policy and Procedure,” which is intended to resolve finding 2015-001.

m. Order of Selection (Blind)

Describe:

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

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

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

B. The justification for the order. (Blind)

C. The service and outcome goals. (Blind)

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

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

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

n. Goals and Plans for Distribution of title VI Funds. (Blind)

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

The Commission has set forth as its number one priority the goal of serving individuals with the most significant disabilities, including youth with the most significant disabilities, with a quality employment outcome as the end result. A supported employment outcome for individuals with multiple or severe disabilities is a priority with these individuals being served in competitive integrated settings pursuant to the Olmstead decision and WIOA. Some of these individuals have recently been de-institutionalized and some live in isolated rural settings. The Commission has sought to enhance supported employment placements in the consumer’s own community to provide employment in familiar surroundings and close proximity to natural supports. This activity is intended to address the lack of placement options in rural portions of the State. The Commission will continue to work with Community Rehabilitation Programs, Native American VR Programs, consumer organizations, disability groups, advocates and other stakeholders to assess the degree to which current staffing
patterns and service delivery activities achieve the goal of improving employment outcomes, in competitive integrated settings, in rural portions of the State. These groups will advise Agency management in designing, as necessary, new Agency service patterns to provide a continuum of services to this population. The Agency will seek to increase the number of supported employment consumers during the next year and will continue to review cases for appropriate identification for supported employment. Services typically identified for these consumers include training, transportation, day programs, comprehensive assessments, appropriate assistive technology, job coaching, interpreting, and other vocational services. These services will be provided through purchase of direct services predominantly using Title VI, Part B funds. Extended services have historically been provided through various methods, including the Developmental Disabilities Waiver, the Disabled & Elderly Waiver, the Brain Injury Services Fund, the Working Disabled Individual (Category 043), subsidized employment, Employment–Related Work Expenses, Blind Work Expenses, and by arranging for natural supports. The Agency focuses on developing natural supports through co-workers, family members, and friends whenever possible, and by providing training to potential job coaches, who in turn provide services to enable consumers to obtain and maintain employment. Fortunately, under new provisions of WIOA, the Commission will be able to fund extended services for youth with the most significant disabilities for up to four years.

Youth services offered under Supported Employment are determined on an individual basis depending on the needs of the consumer. Services to youth with the most significant disabilities begin at age 14, and include representation by Commission counselors at IEP meetings, support in school–based transition programs for youth age 18–21, and summer job experiences. The Commission provides summer employment experiences for supported employment youth through its Students in Transition to Employment Program, which provides employment and training experiences at its Alamogordo training center, its Albuquerque Skills Center, and community–based placements throughout New Mexico.

Another program that will serve youth with the most significant disabilities is the Commission’s Technology for Children program, which is also a frequent point of first contact with the agency. This program provides information to the public, parents, and schools about the Commission’s vocational rehabilitation program in a way that significantly enhances the agency transition services. It also provides technical assistance and support services that enhance the agency’s ability to work cooperatively with school districts. The agency has a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with the Department of Health and the New Mexico School for the Blind and Visually Impaired. The MOA will administer an allocation from DOH of $80,000, designed to provide assistive technology that, for a disability other than blindness, would be considered durable medical equipment. The Technology Specialist who coordinates the Technology for Children program will continue to provide assistive technology support to economically disadvantaged and rural school districts. The Technology Specialist assigned to the Technology for Children program also speaks Spanish.

Transition to extended services (on–going support services and other appropriate services provided by another state agency, a private non–profit organization, an employer, etc.) may be provided for up to four years following case closure.

Specific goals for PY 2016 include: 1. At least three closures in competitive integrated settings; 2. Closures averaging at least $7.50 per hour; 3. Closures averaging at least fifteen hours worked per week.

The goals and priorities described above were jointly developed and agreed to by the Commission for the Blind and our State Rehabilitation Council.
2. Describe the activities to be conducted, with funds reserved pursuant to section 603(d), for youth with the most significant disabilities, including: (Blind)

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

The Commission is pleased with the opportunity to provide extended services to youth with the most significant disabilities following the closure of their VR case for a period of up to four years or until the individual turns age 25. The Commission believes this is a particularly beneficial improvement within WIOA. The Commission will initially use the 50% reserve for this purpose. If the 50% reserve is exhausted, the Commission is prepared to utilize regular supported employment funds for this purpose. Finally, if the supported employment funds are exhausted, the Commission is prepared to use regular VR funds to provide extended services. As the consumer approaches age 25, the Commission will assist in the transition to waiver funding and natural supports for the provision of extended services.

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

Please see n.1. above.

o. State's Strategies (Blind)

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

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

The Mission of the New Mexico Commission for the Blind is to enable persons who are blind to achieve vocational, economic and social equality by providing career preparation, training in the skills of blindness and above all, promoting and conveying the belief that blindness is not a barrier to successful employment, or to living an independent and meaningful life.

The Commission will make every effort to meet and exceed the performance accountability indicators outlined by WIOA. The Commission’s efforts are also directed toward accomplishment of the goals and priorities identified in description (l), State Goals and Priorities, and description (n), Goals and Plans for Distribution of Title VI Funds:

Services provided to accomplish these objectives include rehabilitation counseling, individualized training, comprehensive blindness training in a residential setting, independent living services provided to vocational rehabilitation consumers, educational and support services, and meaningful opportunities for employment in competitive integrated work settings supported through the provision of assistive technology and other workplace modifications. The Agency also provides career training,
training in a variety of blindness skills, and above all, promotes and conveys the philosophy that blindness is not a barrier to employment or any other aspect of a full, meaningful life.

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

The Commission is committed to expanding and improving services to blind and visually–impaired New Mexicans who are interested in obtaining, retaining, or advancing in employment. The Commission believes that the first step in this process is to build and improve relationships with core partners under WIOA. Partnerships of this kind will serve to leverage resources of each agency. The first benefit of these relationships will be an opportunity to identify additional consumers who might not have been aware of the availability of Commission services and their potential to engage in integrated and competitive employment. This could include supported employment and non–supported employment consumers as well as students with disabilities and youth with the most significant disabilities. It can also include individuals who could benefit from training at the Orientation Center, including those who might benefit from the proposed apartment facility at the Orientation Center.

The Commission recognizes that there is a need to expand its assistive technology training services, but is constrained by the lack of qualified trainers with experience in the assistive technology used by persons who are blind or visually impaired. Consequently, the Commission will engage in activities designed to identify additional methods and resources that can help to improve assistive technology training. This will include providing training to existing employees to expand capacity, and use of external contracted trainers who can be brought to New Mexico to provide intensive technology training.

When it comes to placements, the Commission has positive relationships with many employers and employment organizations. However, to improve the opportunity for placements in competitive and integrated settings, the Commission will engage in additional work with federal contractors, which now have goals for hiring persons with disabilities. The Commission will also expand support of self–employment goals, which can be the most appropriate option for many individuals. New Mexico has a strong state use law which provides for “qualified individuals” to engage in competitive and integrated work with state and governmental entities. The agency Executive Director is a member of the New Mexico Council for Purchasing from Persons with Disabilities, which administers the state use program. Accordingly, the Commission will explore ways to more fully utilize the employment opportunities presented by the State Use Act.

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

The Commission believes that assistive technology is an important way to level the playing field for its blind and visually impaired consumers. The agency has an effective process for evaluating consumers to determine their technology and assistive technology needs and purchasing those items, whether they be needed for home, school, or work sites. The software and hardware cover the landscape of traditional technology, including computers, printers, monitors, scanners, tablets, and smart phones; plus assistive technology that includes magnification, speech output, Braille, optical character recognition, book readers, and accessible smart phone apps. The Commission will evaluate its technology staff to better utilize their respective skills and assign training tasks to those who are particularly skilled in that area. Additionally, the Commission will recruit contract trainers who can provide in–person and remote training. Remote training is necessary since New Mexico is a very large state with a relatively small population. The Commission will continue purchasing
subscriptions to digital training materials which pair the software application with the assistive technology solution, such as teaching Microsoft Word 2013 with JAWS (JAWS is a popular screen reading program). Although these textbooks are efficient for the self-starter and also serve as an excellent reference, consumers who are not self–starters need a human option. The Commission will also use resources such as the Hadley School for the Blind to provide training on specific applications and operating systems. Finally, the Commission will work on expanding assistive technology training provided at the Orientation Center in Alamogordo through the construction of the proposed apartment facility which will attract additional consumers and expand capacity at the Center. The apartment facility will also enable the Commission to provide assistive technology training to consumers during the summer STEP program, during which time the dormitory is occupied by transition students age 14 to 21.

PY 2016 marks the tenth year of a MOA with the Department of Health and the New Mexico School for the Blind and Visually Impaired. The MOA administers an allocation from DOH of $80,000, designed to provide assistive technology that, for a disability other than blindness, would be considered durable medical equipment. This initiative serves blind children that are both transition–age and those not yet transition–age. The Coordinator of the Technology for Children program is thus able to provide assistive technology support to transition consumers, including those residing in economically disadvantaged and rural school districts. The Coordinator of the Technology for Children program also speaks Spanish. The agency will promote the program and solicit applications for program services through its annual letter to the special education directors of all 89 school districts in New Mexico; through new MOUs with individual school districts; and through communication with transition specialist, Teachers of the Visually Impaired, and Orientation and Mobility Specialists throughout the state.

The Commission also works with Community Outreach Programs for the Deaf to register Commission consumers for the iCanConnect program. iCanConnect is another name for the National Deaf–Blind Equipment Distribution Program (NDBEDP), a federal program designed to provide distance communications technology and training for people with combined hearing and vision disabilities, and to increase opportunities for independence for this underserved population to stay connected with family, friends, service providers, and their communities. There is a wide range of equipment available depending on client needs. Some examples include: Braille devices, Computers, Mobile devices, Phones, and Signalers.

The Commission’s Assistive Technology Specialist Supervisor serves on the New Mexico Technology Assistance Program (NMTAP) advisory board, publicizing Commission services and providing consultant services regarding specialized technology for the blind and visually impaired. NMTAP offers free services to New Mexicans with disabilities to help them get the assistive technology services they need. NMTAP is a statewide program designed to increase knowledge of, access to, and acquisition of assistive or adaptive technology for anyone with any disability, anywhere in the state, of any age. Their mission is to help individuals with disabilities enhance their quality of life through the use of assistive technology. To fulfill this mission, the NMTAP staff provides many services to individuals with disabilities, their family members, and service providers, including support to individuals transitioning into higher education, work, or community living.

The Commission received a grant of $75,000 from NMTAP in FY 2014 to outfit its Skills Center. The grant enabled the commission to purchase a variety of computers (both Mac and Windows) and assistive technology, (Braille displays, cameras for optical character recognition systems, note–taking devices, and screen reading and screen magnification software and hardware). The equipment makes it possible for Commission consumers to compare competing products from manufacturers so as to make an informed choice when choosing the technology tools that will work best for their individual situation. The technology is also used to support training in the Skills Center,
including specialized workshops for adults/youth and the Students in Transition to Employment summer program for students with disabilities and youth with the most significant disabilities.

The Commission operates the Students in Transition to Employment Program (STEP) to provide training and actual work experiences to students and youth who are blind or visually impaired. The Commission will continue to provide the STEP program in Albuquerque, Alamogordo, and through community placements across the state.

The Commission recognizes the need to address growing deficiencies in the computer and Braille skills of students attending public schools, and is developing strategies to address these deficiencies. These strategies include topical seminars, classes conducted at the Skills Center, and use of programs such as the Hadley School for the Blind. One of the barriers to becoming employed that some students who are blind or visually impaired must address is the tendency to engage in “rocking” behaviors. While only a small portion of persons who are blind or visually impaired actually engage in such behaviors, the stigmatizing habit can prevent these persons from becoming employed in positions consistent with their true abilities. The Commission has therefore developed an iPhone app that is designed to address the behavior. The app, called iFidget, uses the iPhone’s gyroscope to detect the rocking motion and discretely alert the user so that he or she may correct the behavior. The app, which is available as a free download, is also intended to help the Commission to engage in outreach activities, and to build relationships with school districts.

The Commission has also developed a typing application called Keystroke that works on both PC and Mac computers. Keystroke uses advanced metrics to measure typing ability and progress. Keystroke enables the Commission to better meet the needs of consumers, as well as to build relationships with school districts.

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

The Commission plans to conduct outreach to identify and serve individuals who are minorities, including those who have most significant disabilities, and those who are unserved or underserved. The Agency will focus on the following comprehensive initiatives during the upcoming year:

Newsline is an important part of the Commission’s outreach program to identify and serve most significantly disabled persons who are minorities, and individuals who have been unserved or underserved by the vocational rehabilitation or supported employment program. Newsline provides access free of charge to state and national publications to individuals in all portions of New Mexico, including in the most rural portions of the state. The local Newsline and NFB–Newsline have publications that include newspapers from Albuquerque, Santa Fe, Los Alamos, Alamogordo, Farmington, Roswell, and Las Cruces, as well as a job search utility that provides blind job seekers with access to the CareerBuilder jobs database. NFB–NEWSLINE also provides publications and prompts in Spanish. NFB–Newline voices can also be customized to meet the needs of individuals who are deaf of hearing, and NFB–Newline offers the ability to download publications for reading on a Braille display. This feature enables individuals who are deaf–blind to access the more than 400 national newspapers and magazines on NFB–Newsline. Commission counselors, technology specialists, Orientation Center teachers, Business Enterprise Program consultants, and rehab teachers will promote and demonstrate the program to Commission consumers.
In an effort to reach out to populations that have been unserved or underserved, the Commission will continue the operation of field offices, four of which are located in rural portions of the state where there is a greater portion of persons who are unserved or underserved. For example, the northwest section of the State is served by the Farmington office, and is primarily rural and includes a large portion of the Navajo, Jicarilla Apache, and pueblo Native American communities. The Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor and Rehab Teacher in Farmington are sensitive to the cultural aspects of the communities they serve. The Rehab Teacher is himself Navajo and speaks Dine Bizaadthe, the Navajo language. The staff in the Las Vegas office is likewise sensitive to the unique cultural aspects of northern New Mexico, and is fluent in Spanish. This is also the case for the Las Cruces office and southern/southwestern New Mexico, where the VR counselor and technology specialist are bilingual; while the technology trainer in the Roswell office is also bilingual. The Coordinator of the Technology for Children program is bilingual, and there are several teachers and employees at the Orientation Center who are bilingual.

The Vocational Rehabilitation program will establish a process to review cases that have been closed as unsuccessful. The goal will be to reach out to individuals who have exited the system and inquire if they would like their case re–opened. This will enable the Commission to reach additional individuals who come from minority or unserved or underserved populations, giving them an additional opportunity to receive services. The Commission also has a significant percentage of staff members who speak Spanish, enabling the agency to better reach individuals who are monolingual Spanish speakers, or who speak Spanish as their primary language.

The Students in Transition to Employment Program (STEP) will continue with its efforts to provide work experience and skills training to blind students during the summer months, including to students who are from unserved or underserved populations. STEP will continue to engage in outreach to recruit students with the most significant disabilities, including students from minority backgrounds, and students who are also unserved or underserved. The STEP program is also operated on a residential basis in Alamogordo, which allows students from even the most economically disadvantaged and rural portions of the state to participate. STEP students earn a salary during the employment portion of the program. In addition to providing essential job training and experience, this also has the benefit of serving as a significant incentive for many students from economically disadvantaged families, enabling the Commission to reach and attract more individuals into the program. After making 31 placements in 2015, the Commission will strive to place 40 students and youth in summer jobs in 2016.

There are 89 school districts in New Mexico, most of which are in economically disadvantaged and rural portions of the state. Most of these districts do not have teachers who are specifically trained to instruct students who are blind or visually impaired. The Commission will continue sending annual letters to special education directors at each of these school districts in order to make them aware of Commission transition services. Rehabilitation counselors will contact local public school transition coordinators, guidance counselors, or other appropriate personnel to identify children age 13 or over with visual impairments. Counselors will also attend the annual Transition Institute, where they will meet school personnel from around New Mexico. The Commission will also make parents aware of Commission services by making presentations and distributing information to members of parent organizations, such as the National Federation of the Blind Parents of Blind Children Division. These outreach activities will result in additional contacts with teachers and parents, and increase familiarity with Commission services.

The Technology for Children Coordinator will continue to provide services to students from unserved or underserved backgrounds, and to build relationships with school districts that serve students who are unserved or underserved. The Technology for Children program is an important outreach activity, and is also a frequent point of first contact with the agency. It provides information to the public, parents, and schools about the Commission’s vocational rehabilitation program in a way that
significantly enhances the agency transition services. It also provides technical assistance and support services that enhance the agency’s ability to work cooperatively with school districts. The agency has a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with the Department of Health and the New Mexico School for the Blind and Visually Impaired. The MOA will administer an allocation from DOH of $80,000, designed to provide assistive technology that, for a disability other than blindness, would be considered durable medical equipment. The Technology Specialist who coordinates the Technology for Children program also speaks Spanish.

One of the barriers to becoming employed that some persons who are blind or visually impaired must address is the tendency to engage in “rocking” behaviors. While only a small portion of persons who are blind or visually impaired actually engage in such behaviors, the stigmatizing habit can prevent these persons from becoming employed in positions consistent with their true abilities. The Commission has therefore developed an iPhone app that is designed to address the behavior. The app, called iFidget, uses the iPhone’s gyroscope to detect the rocking motion and discretely alert the user so that he or she may correct the behavior. The app, which is available as a free download, is also intended to help the Commission to engage in outreach activities, and to build relationships with school districts.

The Commission has also developed a typing application called Keystroke that works on both PC and Mac computers. Keystroke uses advanced metrics to measure typing ability and progress. Keystroke enables the Commission to better meet the needs of consumers, as well as to build relationships with school districts.

The Commission recognizes that individuals who are Deaf–Blind are often unserved or underserved, as are eligible individuals who have a hearing impairment. To address this need, the Commission has obtained an affiliate status with the Helen Keller National Center. The Commission will continue to participate in regular meetings held around the state with an HKNC consultant, local/regional school counselors, and community rehabilitation providers. The regional representative from Helen Keller is scheduled to travel to New Mexico in February 2016 to deliver training to Commission counselors. The Agency has also entered into a Joint Powers Agreement and a Memorandum of Understanding with the New Mexico Commission for Deaf and Hard of Hearing to identify and serve eligible individuals who also have hearing impairments. In addition, the Commission has a Memorandum of Understanding with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation on how the agencies will serve this population. The MOU is designed to streamline services and avoid unnecessary service delays.

The One–Stop employment system faces special challenges in New Mexico due to the rural nature of the state and the state’s very large geographic area. As a result, there are relatively few One–Stop offices that serve the state. The Commission currently has representation on two of the four local Workforce Development Boards in addition to the executive director serving on the state board. Appointments of commission staff to the other two local boards is expected during PY 2016. Commission representatives on these boards promote Commission services, represent vocational rehabilitation perspectives, educate board members (especially board members from businesses), help Commission consumers to better access the One–Stop services, and also help to make the employees of the One–Stops more aware of Commission services.

The Commission has nine Rehab Teachers, which enables the agency to reduce the geographic coverage of each teacher and improve the quality of service delivery statewide. Rehab Teachers are required to assist and participate in local support groups, which help the Commission to identify and serve persons who are from minority backgrounds, or who are otherwise unserved or underserved. The Commission will continue this support group effort, with a special focus on outreach to Native Americans, rural minority populations, and other areas that contain communities of individuals who
are unserved or underserved. Approximately 15 support groups are operating throughout the State, with ongoing facilitation being provided in several groups by consumers or former consumers. The majority of the support groups serve consumers in very rural areas with large populations of persons who are minorities, or who are otherwise unserved or underserved. Examples include Farmington, Las Vegas, Silver City, Clovis, and Carlsbad.

In addition to the outreach methods identified above, the Commission will also research the feasibility of paid advertising to reach blind and visually impaired youth and adults who could benefit from Commission services.

The Commission will also work to expand services at the orientation Center in Alamogordo, which serves many individuals from unserved or underserved backgrounds. Many of these individuals come from rural portions of the state, where they did not receive appropriate blindness skills training from their local schools. The agency will work to expand these services through the construction of an apartment facility at the orientation Center in Alamogordo. This proposed apartment facility will enable the Orientation Center to expand capacity and serve more individuals from unserved or underserved backgrounds.

4. The methods to be used to improve and expand VR services for students with disabilities, including the coordination of services designed to facilitate the transition of such students from school to postsecondary life (including the receipt of VR services, postsecondary education, employment, and pre-employment transition services).

(Blind)

The Commission recognizes the need to expand and improve transition services. Counselors regularly communicate with special education directors, transition specialists, orientation and mobility specialists, and teachers of the visually impaired in their service territories. The Commission communicates each year with each of the special education directors in the 89 school districts throughout New Mexico and has signed MOUs with 16 of those school districts so far in an effort to improve transition services. Counselors also attend training on transition issues, such as the New Mexico Transition Institute and the Southwest Conference on Disability. The Deputy Director for Vocational Rehabilitation Programs has served on the Statewide Transition Coordinating Council for many years, and will encourage the STCC to become more active.

In an effort to improve its transition program, the commission will attempt to reclassify one of its vocational rehabilitation counselor positions into a lead counselor position responsible for transition services. Although the Students in Transition to Employment has been the centerpiece for providing summer work experiences to students with disabilities and youth with the most significant disabilities, the Commission will work with its counselors, local education agencies, and the business development specialists from one–stop centers to expand work opportunities throughout New Mexico. These opportunities will include job shadowing, after–school, weekend, and summer employment. The commission will also deliver employment readiness workshops throughout the year.

Although support of careers requiring post–secondary education, especially graduate education, appears to be an area of newly increased emphasis under WIOA, it has been an emphasis of Commission services for many years. The Commission has identified a trend of an increasing number of blind and visually–impaired students leaving the public school system who are not prepared for post–secondary programs. Consequently, the reading, math, and English literacy
classes offered through Adult Basic Education are necessary to prepare these Commission consumers for the post–secondary vocational training and education programs that will ultimately lead to successful careers. The Commission will work with community colleges to ensure that these programs are accessible to blind and visually–impaired students.

The Commission will address the five required Pre–Employment Transition Services as follows:

a. Job exploration counseling:

The commission has historically focused exclusively on employment in competitive integrated settings and self–employment. A large part of the career assessment process is helping the consumer to identify a career that is the best fit for them. The Commission’s Career Choice Questionnaire is a template for consumers to research prospective careers, including interviewing individuals currently working in those fields, identifying prospective industry mentors, and job shadowing. The Commission will continue to encourage students and youth to actively research careers in order to find the career that is the right fit.

b. Work–based learning experiences, which may include in–school or after school opportunities, or experience outside the traditional school setting (including internships), that is provided in an integrated environment to the maximum extent possible;

In addition to the Students in Transition to Employment Program (STEP) summer program, the Commission will expand its transition services to support in–school, weekend and after–school work opportunities for students with disabilities and youth with the most significant disabilities throughout New Mexico. The Commission will partner with local education agencies and one–stops to facilitate these work opportunities.

c. Counseling on opportunities for enrollment in comprehensive transition or postsecondary educational programs at institutions of higher education;

The Commission has long–supported careers requiring post–secondary education, including graduate education. The Commission will continue this practice since careers requiring post–secondary education, including graduate education, often command good salaries and good benefits.

d. Workplace readiness training to develop social skills and independent living;

In addition to a summer job in a competitive integrated setting, The Commission’s Students in Transition to Employment Program includes a significant workplace readiness training component. However, in order to expand workplace readiness training services, the Commission will begin offering additional workshops and seminars. The Commission has recently added staff to its Albuquerque Skills Center specifically for this purpose. The Skills Center will offer seminars and workshops for high school students, college students, and parents. Training will be delivered throughout the year, during summers, school breaks, after school, and through distance delivery methods. Topics cover the landscape, including parent participation, MS Windows, Word, PowerPoint, Excel, Outlook, mobile technology, computer operator maintenance, and training on various assistive technology software and hardware; note–taking skills, Braille, math, college success, summer employment preparation, Hadley support days, job readiness, professional dress and appearance, resume writing, job search strategies, mock interviews, Newsline resources (newspapers, magazines, research capabilities, and job search functions); transportation options, and financial literacy.
e. Instruction in self-advocacy, which may include peer mentoring.

Although self-advocacy is a regular part of counseling/guidance services, the Commission will develop a more-structured approach to self-advocacy training in order to provide more consistency in this area.

Technology will be an added service in support of each of the above approaches. The Commission has observed that many blind and visually impaired high school students are unable to use a computer sufficiently to take and retrieve their own class notes, conduct Internet research, compose and edit writing assignments, prepare PowerPoint presentations, and manage email. Technology training will be enhanced to fill this need using agency staff, contract trainers, and digital self-paced training materials.

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

The Commission plans to build a four unit apartment facility on donated property adjacent to the dormitory at our Orientation Center in Alamogordo. Currently, the dormitory can accommodate up to 15 students. Typical of many dormitory facilities, the Orientation Center dorm provides meal service to students attending the training center. The Commission does rent apartments in a complex approximately 1.5 miles away in order to provide an independent living opportunity for students nearing the end of their center training experience. There is broad agreement that such independent living experiences are essential for center students as they transition from living with parents or family members to living independently.

Goals in Building the Apartment Facility

Should the proposed apartments be built, the Orientation Center will increase overall capacity by 3 to 4 individuals at any one time, allowing for as many as 6 to 8 individuals to be served during any one year. This will help further the integration and competitive employment of persons who are blind or visually impaired.

Should the proposed apartments be built, the Orientation Center will acquire the ability to provide continued training for up to 3 to 4 adult during the months of June and July when the Orientation Center and dormitory are otherwise being used to provide training to transition students aged 14 to 21 as part of the Commission’s Students in Transition to Employment (STEP) program. Because of the particular circumstances required to make such continued training appropriate for adults, it is projected that 2 adults will on the average receive such training in any one year. By receiving such continued training, these adults will be able to graduate sooner and with a higher likelihood of success. This will help further the integration and competitive employment of persons who are blind or visually impaired.

Should the proposed apartments be built, the Orientation Center will have an increased number of persons electing to attend training at the Orientation Center rather than decline training or attend more expensive training at an out-of-state training center. It is anticipated that 3 to 4 individuals will elect to attend training each year at the Orientation Center who would not have otherwise elected to receive training, and that an average of 1 to 2 individuals per year will attend training at the Orientation Center rather than attend an out-of-state training center. Because these persons will be served closer to their homes and families and other sources of natural supports, this will help further the integration and competitive employment of persons who are blind or visually impaired.
Results of Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment

The Commission for the Blind conducted a Comprehensive Statewide Needs assessment (CSNA) in 2015 that identified the need to “improve the Orientation Center in Alamogordo through the construction of an apartment facility. The CSNA consisted of the following:

a. A review of the Commission’s Strategic Plan and a review of relevant demographic data; b. An anonymous survey of 10 percent of Commission consumers who had an open case or a case that was closed within the last year. The interview consisted of ten questions, and was conducted by an independent contractor who was hired specifically for the purpose. One of the ten questions asked was, “What needs do you see with regard to establishing, developing, or improving community rehabilitation services?” c. An interview with key internal and external stakeholders. The interview consisted of nine questions, and was conducted by an independent contractor hired specifically for the purpose. One of the nine questions asked was, “What needs do you see with regard to establishing, developing, or improving community rehabilitation services?”

CSNA Results

The Strategic Plan and the demographic data showed an increasing need for additional capacity at the Orientation Center. The Strategic Plan has as a Goal and Priority the building of the apartment facility. The Strategic Plan also identifies a growing population of persons who are blind or visually impaired, and especially of transition age consumers. The demographic data showed a rapidly increasing population of persons who are blind, and especially persons who are under 18. According to the American Community Survey results for the last two years, the population of persons under 18 in New Mexico increased by 37.8 percent in just one year. This constitutes a dramatically growing population of young persons who will require training at the Orientation Center in the coming years. This is likely due in significant part to the increasing population of persons with Optic Nerve hypoplasia and the increasing rate of children with Retinopathy of Prematurity. In addition, there is a significant one–year increase of 6.8 percent for persons aged 18 to 64. This 6.8 percent increase reflects a growing population of working–age persons who will require training at the Orientation Center. With the population of persons with diabetes growing dramatically, including for Hispanics who have nearly a 50 percent lifetime risk of diabetes, the orientation Center can expect to see increasing numbers of persons with diabetic retinopathy.

The interviews of consumers and key internal and external stakeholders resulted in the identification of a need for the apartment facility. The survey of consumers resulted in several individuals identifying the need to construct the apartment facility. These consumers are individuals who have an especially valuable perspective on the issue of the apartment facility as such an apartment might influence their own decisions, or might have influenced their own decisions.

The interviews of key internal and external stakeholders resulted in a strong showing of support for the apartments. All of the key internal stakeholders identified the need for the apartment facility, and a large portion of the external stakeholders identified a need for the facility. These are all individuals who have specific knowledge and expertise related to the needs of individuals who are blind or visually impaired...

Reasonableness and Effectiveness

In considering the need for apartment facilities, the results of the CSNA were considered with respect to other options for provision of such training. The proposed apartment facility was determined to be an especially effective and reasonable method of providing such training considering the cost of providing out–of–state training to an average of 1 to 2 persons per year who
would otherwise decide to receive training at the Orientation Center if the proposed apartment facility is constructed. Because such training costs an average of approximately $4,000 per month, and because the training typically takes 6 to 9 months, and because such training also requires additional travel and associated costs, the proposed apartment facility is a more reasonable and cost-effective method of providing such training when the long-term costs are considered. In addition, the proposed apartments will eliminate the need to rent a corresponding number of apartments in Alamogordo, saving up to $3,000 per month in rental expenses alone. The proposed apartments will also be designed and maintained in compliance with modern building codes and accessibility requirements, reducing the potential liability associated with placing students at older and less well-maintained private facilities. This is especially significant since the New Mexico Tort Claims Act has waived sovereign immunity for negligent maintenance, meaning that the Commission for the Blind would have significant liability if a student was injured while staying at a privately rented apartment. As mentioned in the introduction, the Commission currently rents apartments that are 1.5 miles away from the center, requiring additional expenditures for staff time when transporting students, as well as additional vehicle mileage. The proximity of the proposed apartment facility to the center will also translate to more prompt and reliable attendance, making for more efficient training. The proximity of the proposed apartment facility to the existing dormitory also allows for better peer mentoring and socialization amongst students, which is an important aspect of the training. Finally, the proposed apartment facility will allow for the Center to serve a greater number of students, increasing the overall effectiveness of the Center.

Strategies

The New Mexico Commission for the Blind is the only training center in the country that is certified by both the Commission on Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF) and the National Blindness Professional Certification Board (NBPCB).

The Orientation Center will continue to seek accreditation by CARF. Should the apartment facility be built, the CARF visit and accreditation process will include an examination of the apartment facility. CARF has a strong belief in the integration and competitive employment of persons with disabilities, and the apartment facility will help the Orientation Center to continue to be CARF accredited.

The Orientation Center will continue to seek certification from the NBPCB. Should the apartment facility be built, the NBPCB certification process will include an examination of the apartment facility. Because the NBPCB has an especially strong belief in the integration and competitive employment of persons who are blind or visually impaired, the apartment facility will help the Orientation Center to continue to be NBPCB certified as a greater number of students attending the Orientation center will have more opportunities to practice independent living skills.

The Orientation Center will explore new and innovative methods of using the apartment facility that will further the integration and competitive employment of persons who are blind, including using the apartment facility to house consumers during the summer who will receive refresher training or other short term instruction on concentrated areas of need, such as technology or orientation and mobility.

The Orientation Center will encourage students who have not lived on their own, or who have fears associated with living on their own, to transition into the apartment facility as a way of encouraging and fostering independence. Because such independent living is usually necessary for individuals who are attending a college or university, and since independent travel and lodging is a requirement of many professions, the use of the proposed apartments in this manner will further the integration and competitive employment of persons who are blind or visually impaired.
The Orientation Center will engage in specific activities related to the apartment facility that will further the integration and competitive employment of persons who are blind or visually impaired, including using the apartment facility to better meet the individualized needs of persons with disabilities in addition to blindness, including disabilities and medical conditions that might make it difficult for such persons to reside in the dormitory.

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

The Commission has historically performed well on the standards and indicators that were utilized previously. The Commission’s perspective on each of the new performance indicators is below.

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

This indicator is similar to the previous indicator 1.2, which was one of the non–primary indicators and that captured data referred to as the rehabilitation rate. As was usually the case in states that place greater emphasis on the quality of employment outcomes, the Commission’s performance on this indicator was in the bottom tier of performance. The Commission places a high priority on the consumer’s right to exercise informed choice. While this has been important when measuring the quality of employment outcomes, it can result in a situation where the consumer may have a reduced likelihood of achieving a successful employment outcome. It was also a non–primary indicator, meaning that less emphasis was placed on it as a performance measure, whereas the quality of outcomes was a “primary” indicator. This result has also been due to the unique challenges of serving persons who are blind or visually impaired in a state with high levels of economic and social disadvantages, coupled with the considerable challenges associated with a geographically large and sparsely populated state. It is also due to the Commission’s desire to serve all eligible blind individuals interested in employment, including providing vocational rehabilitation services to those eligible individuals who face the greatest barriers to achieving an employment outcome. This includes an unusually large percentage of consumers with secondary disabilities. The Commission welcomes and even solicit consumers with challenging situations, and does not discourage or deflect such individuals from the vocational rehabilitation program. The Commission will work to identify and address the barriers to employment in a way that will improve performance on this measure.

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

This indicator is also similar to the previous indicator 1.2, which was one of the non–primary indicators and that captured data referred to as the rehabilitation rate (See above). The Commission will work to identify and address the barriers to employment in a way that will improve performance on this measure.

c. The median earnings of program participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the second quarter after exit. — This indicator measures median earnings at the same time frame as the first indicator measures the employment rate of participants:
This indicator is similar to Indicator 1.5, which measured the starting wages of consumers. The Commission historically performed exceptionally well on the previous indicator 1.5, and expects to perform well on this indicator. The Commission will work to identify and address the barriers to employment in a way that will improve performance on this measure.

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

The Commission has historically encouraged pursuit of careers requiring post–secondary education, including graduate education, and expects to perform well on this indicator. The Commission will work to identify and address the barriers to employment in a way that will improve performance on this measure.

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

The Commission has historically encouraged pursuit of careers requiring post–secondary vocational training and education, including graduate education, and expects to perform well on this indicator. The Commission will work to identify and address the barriers to employment in a way that will improve performance on this measure.

f. Effectiveness in serving employers:

The Commission is unsure how this indicator will be measured, so performance is difficult to project. However, the Commission has historically done well in helping employers to retain valuable employees. The Commission will work to identify and address the barriers to employment in a way that will improve performance on this measure.

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

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

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

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

Input received by the State Rehabilitation Council and Commission staff, including the comprehensive needs assessment conducted during FY 2016, as well as a review of new performance indicators under WIOA, identified operational priorities in carrying out the vocational rehabilitation and supported employment programs:
a. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes by partnering and working with community colleges and one-stop centers to more effectively utilize services available through the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act, Adult, Dislocated Worker, Youth, and Wagner-Peyser programs.

Agency Action: This is a new Priority. The agency will work cooperatively with the identified partner entities by designating specific liaisons and points of contact, by providing information, by entering into cooperative agreements where appropriate.

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

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

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

Agency Action: The agency is working actively to obtain necessary approvals to construct the proposed apartment facility. The agency has conducted preliminary planning discussions with the Facilities Management Division, and is hoping to begin construction sometime in the last half of 2016.

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

Agency Action: The agency will work to increase outreach to the identified groups using the recommended outreach methods. In 2014 and 2015, the agency had positive news coverage of its vocational rehabilitation program on the front pages of the Albuquerque Journal and the Las Cruces Daily Sun, and in the Alamogordo Daily News and the Santa Fe New Mexican. The agency also participated in radio broadcasts, and staffed a table at the annual meeting of the Academy of Ophthalmology. The agency also sponsored the 2015 Getting in Touch with Literacy conference which drew more than 125 educational professionals and teachers of the blind from throughout the state.

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

Agency Action: The agency will work to increase services and outreach to Pre-Employment Transition Students using the identified methods. The agency already seeks to be involved in Individualized Education Plan meetings for transition clients starting at age 14, and the agency operates the Students in Transition to Employment Program in Albuquerque and Alamogordo. The agency has also sponsored trainings and certification exams for the National Certification in Literary Braille and the National Certification in Unified English Braille.

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

Agency Action: The agency continues to provide our services in a way that allow our clients to set and obtain high employment goals. This has historically been reflected by strong performance on previous Indicator 1.5, which measured the average starting salary of our clients against the average state wage. Even though this Indicator is no longer in place under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, the agency will continue to provide services that will enable our clients to obtain high starting wages and earnings.

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

Agency Action: The agency is committed to providing a quality Newsline service. The agency updated the local Newsline software on September 2, 2014, and the agency will be able to add additional publications as a result of this upgrade, including the Alamogordo Daily News. The Agency will continue to sponsor NFB-Newsline in New Mexico Newsline.

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

Agency Action: The agency is committed to using the Skills Center to meet the needs of vocational rehabilitation clients. As a result, the agency used the Skills Center to provide training to Students in Transition to Employment Program in 2014 and 2015, and will continue this activity in 2016. The Skills Center was also used to provide support in the area of Braille and technology training, as well as to function as a meeting place for programs related to vocational rehabilitation.

i. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes through the provision of independent living training to vocational rehabilitation consumers, including through the proposed apartment training facility at the Orientation Center.

Agency Action: The agency continues to refer vocational rehabilitation clients to receive independent living services, recognizing the need for clients to be able to function independently to become employed. The agency recognizes the benefit of providing training at the Orientation Center that is realistic and appropriate to the individual needs of clients, and is therefore actively seeking to build apartments that can be used to provide more realistic and appropriate training.
j. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes for consumers who are Deaf-Blind through collaboration and partnership with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, with the Community Outreach Programs for the Deaf, and with the Commission for Deaf and Hard of Hearing, including through the delivery of assistive technology to consumers who are Deaf-Blind.

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

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

Agency Action: The agency has adopted the Hadley course as the core training method for BEP vendors, and is working with New Mexico programs to create a local provider so that food preparation and cooking methods can be taught locally. It is anticipated that the agency will have this in place by the middle of 2016.

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

Agency Action: The agency recognizes the need to have strong fiscal programs so as to maximize the receipt of federal funds, and to otherwise provide appropriate vocational rehabilitation services to our clients. To do this, the agency must have in place a sufficient number of qualified fiscal staff to comply with federal fiscal rules, and to appropriately respond to changing fiscal requirements and staffing levels. The agency has submitted its “Single Audit” on time for each of the last three years, and has only had one fiscal finding in those three years.

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

Agency Action: The agency is engaging in new and innovative approaches to provide services and engage in outreach. The agency has developed the iFidget app for the iPhone to help clients correct inappropriate rocking motions that a small portion of blind individuals develop. The agency also developed a typing program called Keystroke that helps blind persons learn how to type more efficiently, including persons who are Deaf-Blind. The agency has also improved its web page and the way in which notices of meetings are communicated, and has developed an entirely new web page that has a more modern appearance, and that will allow for referrals to be made by health care professionals through the web page.

n. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes for consumers by providing enhanced benefits counseling and guidance to reduce concerns related to the loss or reduction of benefits.
Agency Action: The agency continues to provide benefits counseling and guidance through a contract with the New Mexico Legal Aid Society. The agency also had staff from Legal Aid provide training on benefits to the vocational rehabilitation counselors. The agency has also provided seminars on benefits to clients.

B. support innovation and expansion activities; and (Blind)

The agency supports the funding and program activities of the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC). The Agency assumes all costs incurred for all regularly scheduled meetings, subcommittees and special meetings. This includes expenses related to securing meeting facilities, members’ travel and per diem expenses, interpreters, clerical support, office supplies, and materials. The Agency provides a staff person who prepares the agendas, minutes, and other materials as necessary for each scheduled meeting. The Agency provides a staff person to schedule and make all necessary arrangements for Public Hearings. The SRC is active in providing input into the Agency’s State Plan, Manual of Operating Procedures, and other matters pertaining to the Agency’s program of activities.

The Commission has sponsored NFB Newsline. This is an augment to our existing NEWSLINE for the Blind. NFB Newsline enables our consumers to read over 365 national newspapers, four of which are Spanish–language publications, plus New Mexico newspapers, enhancing their ability to access information that is essential for success in both the academic and professional environments, as well as improving the quality of employment outcomes.

The agency has also created the Skills Center, a training site to meet the needs of vocational rehabilitation consumers and potential vocational rehabilitation consumers. The agency is scheduling a variety of activities in the Skills Center. These activities include meetings, workshops, seminars, and other training events such as the summer Students in Transition to Employment Program. The Commission has recently added staff to its Albuquerque Skills Center specifically for this purpose. The Skills Center will offer seminars and workshops for high school students, college students, adults, and parents. Training will be delivered throughout the year. To meet the particular needs of transition students, training will be scheduled during summers, school breaks, after school, and through distance delivery methods. Topics cover the landscape, including parent participation, MS Windows, Word, PowerPoint, Excel, and Outlook, mobile technology, computer operator maintenance, and assistive technology hardware and software; Braille, math, note–taking skills, college success, STEP prep, Hadley support days, job readiness, professional dress and appearance, resume writing, job search strategies, mock interviews, Newsline resources (newspapers, magazines, research capabilities, and job search functions); transportation options, and financial literacy.

The Commission has adopted a policy to support consumer attendance at the division/special interest group meetings held during national consumer organization conventions. In order to receive the support, the consumer’s vocational goal must be directly related to the particular division/special interest group meeting. The Commission, with the support of the SRC, believes that attendance at related division/special interest group meetings can enhance the consumer’s ability to achieve their vocational goal. Benefits would include learning about current developments in their field, meeting and networking with individuals who are successful in their fields, learning about the use and accessibility of career–specific technology, learning how blind and visually impaired individuals in the field use assistive technology successfully, and learning techniques that would enable them to succeed in their vocational training/education program and ultimately in their chosen field. The Commission also supports annual attendance at the state conventions of both consumer organizations.
PY 2016 will mark the tenth year of a MOA with the Department of Health and the New Mexico School for the Blind and Visually Impaired. The MOA administers an allocation from DOH of $80,000, designed to provide assistive technology that, for a disability other than blindness, would be considered durable medical equipment. This initiative serves blind children that are both transition–age and those not yet transition–age.

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

The Commission has adopted policies that prohibit discrimination, including discrimination based on gender, race, national origin, color, disability, and age. The Commission Outreach efforts also comprise a major portion of overcoming identified barriers relating to equitable access in participation of programs and services.

Newsline is an important part of the Commission’s activities that overcome barriers and has increased access to the printed word, including announcements of the meetings of the Commission and State Rehabilitation Council. Newsline also provides access to information required during university study, information related to particular professions or occupations, information of interest to the business community, and employment ads. NFB–Newsline has several Spanish publications as well as a job search utility. NFB–Newsline voices can also be customized to meet the needs of individuals who are hard of hearing, and NFB–Newsline offers the ability to download publications for reading on a Braille display. This feature enables individuals who are deaf–blind to access the entire selection of more than 365 national newspapers and magazines. New Mexico is mirroring the nation in experiencing a serious problem relating to a lack of appropriate Braille instruction for students who are blind or visually impaired. Due to the rural and economically disadvantaged nature of the state, this problem is even more serious in New Mexico. As a result, the agency is finding that an increasing number of blind children are entering the vocational rehabilitation program without adequate Braille or literacy skills. This problem constitutes a significant barrier for these children in terms of their ability to equitably participate in the Commission’s vocational rehabilitation and supported employment programs. This barrier is a new development that is largely related to the shift away from residential schools, and is therefore prevalent in the younger generation of blind persons. Accordingly, The Commission’s Technology for Children program is an important part of the Commission’s strategy to overcome this barrier. By providing assistive technology to blind and visually impaired children, these children are being given the tools necessary to acquire Braille and literacy skills. The Commission has also recently added staff to its Albuquerque Skills Center and will be delivering additional programming to address this need.

With regard to language barriers, approximately 40% of the Agency’s staff is bi–lingual. This makes it possible in most cases for the agency to directly communicate with consumers in their own language. If an interpreter is needed, in either American Sign Language or other language, the agency secures the services of an appropriate interpreter. When human interpreters are not available on–site, the Commission utilizes a phone–based interpreter service with support for more than 150 languages. The Agency also regularly contracts with sign language interpreters whenever there is a need for a sign language interpreter. The agency has been experimenting with video remote interpreting so as to more–effectively serve deaf–blind consumers who require sign language support. This is especially effective in rural areas where it is difficult to schedule on–site interpreters. The Commission has created a video describing the Orientation Center, which is available in both a captioned and Spanish language format.

The Agency is ADA compliant. All facilities of the Agency are wheelchair accessible and free of physical barriers for the mobility impaired. TDD and TTY devices are in place for persons who are
deaf or hearing impaired. All Agency materials are available in accessible formats, or staff is available to assist individuals with completion of any necessary state forms. The Agency makes every effort to fully comply with whatever needs or desires the consumer may have. The Agency employs several reader–drivers for Agency staff who require this accommodation. Reader/drivers are also available to transport consumers to job interviews and other related appointments as necessary.

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

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

The agency is committed to using the Skills Center to meet the needs of vocational rehabilitation clients. As a result, the agency used the Skills Center to provide training to Students in Transition to Employment Program in 2014 and 2015, and will continue this activity in 2016. Beginning in summer 2016, the Commission began offering its STEP One program. STEP one is designed to serve students who have significant disabilities in addition to blindness or visual impairment. This program is designed for consumers who might not be able to handle the rigorous STEP work and training schedule. The STEP One program will offer two half-days of training with a lower student to teacher ratio that will allow for more one-on-one training. It will also offer a work schedule that would meet the individual needs of each consumer. A job coach will be hired to support each of the students in the STEP One program as necessary.

The Skills Center was also used to provide support in the area of Braille and technology training, as well as to function as a meeting place for programs related to vocational rehabilitation.

The agency continues to refer vocational rehabilitation clients to receive independent living services, recognizing the need for clients to be able to function independently to become employed. The agency recognizes the benefit of providing training at the Orientation Center that is realistic and appropriate to the individual needs of clients, and is therefore actively seeking to build apartments that can be used to provide more realistic and appropriate training.

The agency is engaging in new and innovative approaches to provide services and engage in outreach. The agency has developed the iFidget app for the iPhone to help clients correct inappropriate rocking motions that a small portion of blind individuals develop. The agency also developed a typing program called Keystroke that helps blind persons learn how to type more efficiently, including persons who are Deaf-Blind. The agency has also improved its web page and the way in which notices of meetings are communicated, and has developed an entirely new web page that has a more modern appearance, and that will allow for referrals to be made by health care professionals through the web page.
p. Evaluation and Reports of Progress: VR and Supported Employment Goals (Blind)

Describe:

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

A. Identify the strategies that contributed to the achievement of the goals. (Blind)

The Commission for the Blind conducted a comprehensive series of strategic planning discussions, town forums, and public hearings in federal fiscal year 2016. This was done in partnership with the State Rehabilitation Council. The Commission has identified areas of future need, and identified new and innovative approaches to the meeting of existing needs. Of prime concern is a projected dramatic increase in blindness due to the aging of the population, as well as the newer trend of significant increases in the number of blind children, and the need to serve this population through vocational rehabilitation services. ACCORDING TO THE 2013 AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY, THERE ARE 71,300 PERSONS IN NEW MEXICO WHO REPORT HAVING SERIOUS DIFFICULTY SEEING, EVEN WHEN WEARING GLASSES OR CONTACT LENSES. OF THAT NUMBER, 7,669 ARE UNDER 18, 34,572 ARE 18 TO 64, AND 29,059 ARE 65 AND OLDER.

The increase in blind children is due to Optic Nerve Hypoplasia, which has increased 600% in the last 30 years. The Commission is actively preparing for an increase in the number of vocational rehabilitation consumers entering the program with Optic Nerve Hypoplasia (ONH). ONH is now the leading cause of blindness in children, and it often causes cognitive impairment and developmental delays in addition to blindness.

GOALS AND PRIORITIES

The Commission has made the following progress with regard to meeting the goals and priorities identified in the FY 2015 State Plan:

a. Increase the number of consumers served through enhanced Outreach Activities; including Media outreach, collaboration with Eye Doctors, and the use of the Technology for Children program to conduct outreach to school districts.

The Commission regularly participates in the annual New Mexico Academy of Ophthalmology conference in Albuquerque. Counselors also visit ophthalmologists in their territories to ensure that the medical community is aware of the Commission and the services that are provided.

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

To further enhance the number of consumers and improve transition services, the Commission has signed 16 cooperative agreements with school districts. These school districts include Aztec, Bloomfield, Carlsbad, Cloudcroft, Clovis, Deming, Farmington, Gadsden, Las Cruces, Los Lunas, Portales, Roswell, Taos, Moriarty–Edgewood, Silver City, and the New Mexico School for the Blind and Visually Impaired. The agreements were signed by the Executive Director in meetings with the Special Education Director of each school district. The Commission is now pursuing cooperative agreements with school districts in Gallup–McKinley County, Cuba, Albuquerque, Alamogordo, Santa Fe, Rio Rancho, Las Vegas, Tucumcari, and Santa Rosa.

b. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes of transition consumers by providing assistive technology where appropriate as a part of an Individualized Plan for employment, by providing assistive technology through the Technology for children program, and by conducting educational activities to increase awareness and use of Braille, including Braille math. As already mentioned, the Commission has entered into cooperative agreements with school districts throughout the state. The agreements will facilitate the participation of counselors in IEP meetings, enabling counselors to raise issues such as the use of Braille and Braille math.

The Commission has also expanded its menu of assistive technology training. Choices include walk—in instruction each Monday morning in our Albuquerque lab; distance education; and one—on—one training covering Microsoft Windows, Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Outlook, and Internet Explorer; Mozilla Firefox; the Kurzweil and OpenBook OCR systems; Victor Reader Stream and BookSense portable book readers; PAC Mate, BrailleNote Apex, and BrailleSense electronic note—takers; and various magnification software and hardware. During FY2015, 144 consumers received dedicated one—on—one technology training and 547 callers received help desk support or technical information.

The Students in Transition to Employment Program (STEP) included 31 participants in FY 2015. STEP continues to be a valuable opportunity for young adults who are blind and have little or no experience in the working world. STEP provides a measure of self—confidence, life skills, and working skills that help students achieve their vocational rehabilitation goals.

Another important outreach activity is the Technology for Children program, which is also a frequent point of first contact with the agency. It provides information to the public, parents, and schools about the Commission’s vocational rehabilitation program in a way that significantly enhances the agency’s transition services. It also provides technical assistance and support services that enhance the agency’s ability to work cooperatively with school districts. The agency has a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with the Department of Health and the New Mexico School for the Blind and Visually Impaired. The MOA administered an allocation from DOH of $80,000 in FY 2015, designed to provide assistive technology that, for a disability other than blindness, would be considered durable medical equipment. The program served six children in FY 15. The Technology for Children program provided assistive technology support to economically disadvantaged and rural school districts. The Technology Specialist assigned to the Technology for Children program also speaks Spanish.

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

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

According to the U.S. Department of Education, Rehabilitation Services Administration, Standards and Indicators data, last issued for the 2014 federal fiscal year, New Mexico ranked first in the nation on two of the three primary indicators used to measure the performance of vocational rehabilitation programs, and in the top third on the third.

Primary Indicator 1.3: The Commission ranked first for the percentage of consumers with employment outcomes who were competitively employed. According to the ranking, 100% of the Commission’s consumers earned at least minimum wage. No other agencies serving blind consumers achieved the 100% mark.

Primary Indicator 1.4: The Commission ranked first for the percent of Individuals with significant disabilities that had competitive employment outcomes, with 100% of individuals having significant disabilities. The Commission shared this distinction with ten other states.

Primary Indicator 1.5: The Commission ranked eighth for the average starting wage of consumers compared to the average state wage. Our consumers’ starting wage of $14.18 was 72.5% of the average New Mexico wage of $19.54.

Indicator 1.6: The Commission ranked first for the comparison of consumers who on exiting the program rely on their earnings as their primary source of income compared to those who relied on their earnings as their primary source of income when entering the program. The spread was 58.0. Though not a primary indicator, 1.6 measures the difference that Commission services make, and reflects the quality of employment outcomes achieved by Commission consumers. For comparison, Virginia was at 47.09 and Maine was at 47.06.

d. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes achieved by consumers by providing a quality Newsline system that gives consumers access to employment listings, news, and other important information.

The Commission has provided access to NFB–Newsline, including in coordination with the Commission for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Persons. NEWSLINE for the Blind continues to grow yearly, relying on a staff of one and over 100 volunteers. The Agency incorporated NFB Newsline as a part of Newsline services in FY 2002, and intends to continue NFB Newsline in PY 2016.

Newsline is an important part of the Commission’s outreach program to identify and serve most significantly disabled persons who are minorities, and individuals who have been unserved or underserved by the vocational rehabilitation or supported employment program. Newsline provides access to state and national publications to individuals in all portions of New Mexico, including in the most rural portions of the state. Newsline started with 200 listeners in the Albuquerque area in 1991, and has grown to more than 5000 listeners. The local Newsline and NFB–Newsline have publications that include newspapers from Albuquerque, Santa Fe, Los Alamos, Alamogordo, Farmington, Las Cruces, and Roswell. NEWSLINE also has a Spanish language news category. NFB–Newsline offers prompts in Spanish, and has several Spanish language publications. NFB–
Newsline voices can also be customized to meet the needs of individuals who are hard of hearing, and NFB–Newsline offers the ability to download publications for reading on a Braille display. This feature enables individuals who are deaf–blind to access the entire selection of more than 365 national newspapers and magazines.

e. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes by using the Skills Center to meet the needs of vocational rehabilitation consumers, as well as potential vocational rehabilitation consumers, in a way that is creative and innovative.

The Skills Center was dedicated in April 2012 and has been used to host a number of events. The Student Transition to Employment Program (STEP) is a summer employment and training program for youth between the ages of 14 and 21. STEP utilized the Skills Center during the summers 2012, 2013, 2014, and 2015. The Skills Center also hosted a number of meetings and trainings for blind entrepreneurs for the Business Enterprise Program, including entrepreneur trainings, facility selection evaluations, Committee meetings, and the semi–annual meetings of BEP blind entrepreneurs. The facility was also used for vocational evaluations and testing as well as training of VR consumers. The Skills Center was also used as a meeting place for the State Rehabilitation Council and for various stakeholder organizations. Additional staff is being added during FY16 in order to expand trainings to be offered at the Skills Center.

During FY 13, the agency’s executive director began discussions with the Governor’s Commission on Disability (GCD), the administrator of the New Mexico Technology Assistance Program (NMTAP), to allocate NMTAP funds to the Commission for the Blind. The allocation of $75,000, was used to purchase a variety of Computers (including Macintosh), Pearl cameras, note–takers, Braille displays, Braille embossers, Braille translation software, screen readers, optical character recognition packages, and magnification hardware/software. The purpose of the technology acquisition was twofold: 1. to demonstrate options available to consumers when it comes to technology; and 2. to train consumers on the use of the chosen technology. The actual funding and acquisition took place in FY14.

f. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes by using and renovating the Adult Orientation Center to provide employment preparation training for both adults and transition students.

The Commission’s Orientation Center generally serves blind adults from August through May and hosts a residential Student Transition to Employment Program (STEP), our summer employment and training program for individuals between the ages of 14 and 21, during June and July.

The Commission continues to use a model of "structured discovery" at the Orientation Center that incorporates use of sleep shades to provide training that will avoid the need for consumers to return for additional training should the consumer experience a decrease in vision. The Commission funds training at out–of–state facilities whenever a vocational rehabilitation consumer wishes to receive services that do not incorporate sleep shades.

The Commission has continued to enhance and develop an Individualized Plan of Instruction (IPI) that customizes training to the needs of each consumer, including those who choose to use a guide dog and those who have some residual vision. The IPI serves as a tool for center staff in making their initial assessment, developing an individualized training program, and assessing progress. Procedures have been developed to serve those consumers who use guide dogs so that they may gain maximum benefit from their training experience. Although center philosophy strongly emphasizes non–visual techniques, low vision devices are incorporated into the curriculum for those students who would benefit from a comparison, and who might take advantage of such devices once
they leave the center. A total of 19 students attended Adult Orientation Center training during FY 2015.

The Commission made a variety of improvements to the Orientation Center physical plant during FY 2013. These improvements included the remodeling of restroom facilities in the men’s dormitory, making them both attractive and accessible; creating an attractive and welcoming entrance from the main parking lot; creating an attractive and welcoming waiting area for center visitors; remodeling administrative office spaces; replacing 52 old leaky windows with modern energy-efficient windows; and replacing flooring throughout the training center. An initiative to build student apartments on donated land adjacent to the dormitory is expected through the next several years.

The Orientation Center is a residential training program for adults who are blind or visually impaired. Most of the Center’s students are "newly blinded," having lost vision relatively recently. The Orientation Center is accredited by the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF). The Center is also a "Structured Discovery" center that is certified by the National Blindness Professional Certification Board (NBPCB). The CARF accreditation and NBPCB certification help attract students to the Center, increasing the student population. The CARF accreditation is also a part of the Center’s risk management process, and the Center would face increased liability without CARF accreditation... Fully staffed, the Center is able to serve up to 16 students effectively. In addition, graduates of a structured Discovery Center have earnings on average of $10,000 higher annually than those who graduate from a traditional center.

g. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes through the provision of independent living services to vocational rehabilitation consumers

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

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

The Commission employs two individuals who possess O&M certification. The Rehab Teachers are the front line staff providing the initial instruction in Orientation & Mobility for vocational rehabilitation consumers. The Commission also contracts with private O&M instructors as necessary to meet the needs of vocational rehabilitation consumers across the state. The Commission has also provided professional O&M training to the teachers at the Orientation Center.

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

The Commission maintains good working relationships with the Commission for Deaf and Hard of Hearing, as well as the Community Outreach Program for the Deaf (COPD). The goal is to support the needs of deaf–blind consumers in the state. An important part of the relationship is ICanConnect, which is a part of the National Deaf–Blind Equipment Distribution Program (NDBEDP). The Commission entered into an agreement with COPD to administer the program in New Mexico.
Also, in 2006, the Commission entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with the New Mexico School for the Blind and Visually Impaired designed to further enhance transition services for students who are Deaf–Blind. The Commission also serves on the New Mexico Deaf–Blind Task Force, which brings together stakeholders to discuss ways to improve services to deaf–blind individuals in the state. During FY2015, the Commission utilized these MOUs to provide enhanced services to deaf–blind consumers. NFB Newsline will also provide deaf–blind persons with access to a variety of New Mexico newspapers, including those in Farmington, Las Cruces, Albuquerque, and Roswell.

i. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes through the Business Enterprise Program (BEP) by shortening the time required for vendors to complete the required training.

During FY 2015, the commission began evaluating a new online vendor training program available through the Hadley School for the Blind. The Hadley School for the Blind has historically served blind individuals via correspondence courses. As technology has increased, Hadley has also updated the way it delivers its courses. The new vendor training will enable vendor trainees from New Mexico and across the country to access the self-paced training program. The self-paced nature of the training will enable quick learners to progress more quickly through the curriculum, thereby enabling them to acquire their licenses more quickly, and ultimately enabling them to acquire a vending or food service facility more quickly as well.

j. Enhance overall performance and productivity by improving administrative services and increasing the accuracy and timeliness of the submission of Federal reports.

The Commission has hired additional staff, provided additional training to existing staff, and is improving its case management capacity for the VR Program and the BEP Program. This will include the purchase of new Social Security Reimbursement and BEP modules.

k. Enhance overall performance and productivity by engaging in activity designed to mitigate and ameliorate the impacts of blindness and visual impairment, and by engaging in outreach and other activities designed to identify additional potential consumers, and by making the public and medical establishment more aware of Commission services.

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

The agency continues to promote the Technology for Children program, which, in addition to providing needed assistive technology, often serves as an important first contact to the agency for blind and visually–impaired children and youth who will later become consumers of the agency.

The Commission regularly participates in the annual New Mexico Academy of Ophthalmology conference in Albuquerque. Counselors also visit ophthalmologists in their territories to ensure that the medical community is aware of the Commission and the services that are provided.
l. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes for consumers by providing enhanced benefits counseling and guidance, with the purpose being to reduce fears related to the loss or reduction of benefits.

Counselors received training during March 2013 designed to help them understand the myriad benefit programs. The training has increased the ability of each counselor to help consumers understand program requirements and thereby reduce the fear of losing benefits. In addition to the training, counselors also received a desk reference which contains valuable information regarding each program as well as sample letters that can be used to report earnings.

The agency continues to utilize a comparable benefits survey, designed to identify benefit program eligibility for eligible VR consumers.

m. Agency goals have been provided to the New Mexico Legislature as part of the Performance–Based Budgeting process. The goals/accomplishments for State FY 2015 are provided below. State fiscal year goals should be considered federal fiscal year goals as well.

1.) Number of quality employment outcomes for blind or visually impaired consumers: – SFY 2015 Goal was 25 – SFY 2015 Actual was 15 2.) Average hourly employment wage for blind or visually impaired consumers: – SFY 2015 Goal was $13.50 – SFY 2015 Actual was $22.07 3.) Percentage of clients who rely on their own earnings upon exiting from vocational rehabilitation services: – SFY 2015 Goal was 90% – SFY 2015 actual was Unknown since RSA did not release Standards and Indicators data for the most recent reporting period as a result of the implementation of WIOA. WIOA will be using different performance indicators than were used previously.

STRATEGIES

Effective strategies focus on meeting the needs of consumers, both in terms of State Plan Goals and Priorities and RSA Standards and Indicators. Establishing a firm and reassuring foundation of monthly income and medical insurance is important to the fundamental job–readiness of each consumer, so the Commission contracted with New Mexico Legal Aid to provide assistance to consumers that needed help with guidance and counseling with respect to SSI and SSDI work incentives. A great deal of emphasis is placed on consumers possessing skills that will help them overcome their vision loss, and the Commission encourages attendance at the Orientation Center. All interested consumers are taken on a tour of the center by their counselor. Those who choose not to attend the center are provided training in their own communities by the Commission’s Independent Living Teachers. Counselors spend a great deal of time and effort assisting the consumer to identify their own career goal, and counselors ask that consumers research identified career goals to determine whether a contemplated career is a good fit. The research also helps to solidify the path (vocational training, education, licenses, certifications, that are necessary to achieve the career goal. The Commission recognizes careers requiring graduate education, working hard to utilize comparable benefits where appropriate. For example, counselors make a particular effort to utilize the Free Application for Federal Student Aid to access Pell and other grant funding to cover costs for college undergraduates. Effective use of comparable benefits, especially school grants, means that more money is available for services with no comparable benefit options, such as assistive technology. Use of assistive technology is encouraged and resources are made available to purchase needed hardware and software tools and provide necessary training. On–the–job (OJT) placements of three–six months are used whenever appropriate, such as to help employers overcome any doubts they may have about employing a blind or visually–impaired individual.

SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT
Supported employment cases continue to be a high priority. During FY 2015, the Commission served 38 supported employment consumers but did not achieve any employment outcomes in integrated/competitive settings. The Commission continues to work closely with family members, community organizations, and other state agencies in an effort to provide the most comprehensive services possible. The Commission has worked closely and creatively with each of these groups to fund and deliver training services, transportation services, job development services, job coaching services, and a variety of other ongoing services.

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

Please see 1.A. above.

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

A. Identify the strategies that contributed to the achievement of the goals. (Blind)

The FY 2015 State Plan identified the following goals: 1. At least three closures in integrated settings; 2. Closures averaging at least $7.50 per hour; 3. Closures averaging at least fifteen hours worked per week.

During FY 2015, the Commission served 38 supported employment consumers at some point during the year but did not achieve any employment outcomes in integrated/competitive settings. The Commission continues to work closely with family members, community organizations, and other state agencies in an effort to provide the most comprehensive services possible. The Commission has worked closely and creatively with each of these groups to fund and deliver training services, transportation services, job development services, job coaching services, and a variety of other ongoing services.

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

A number of factors impeded our ability to meet our goals in FY15, including the following: * Counselor staff shortages: The agency has had a significant turnover of counselors in the past five years, having lost the four most-experienced counselors to retirement (three) and relocation (one). In addition to undertaking a significant training effort for new counselors, the agency has not been able to fill all of the positions as quickly as would be preferred. This has been due to new hiring procedures implemented by the state. As a result, existing staff have been required to cover larger caseloads and larger geographic areas, leading to less contact time for each consumer. This also means less time to conduct job development for job-ready consumers. * Ineffective job developers: The agency has found only limited success employing private job developers. Even job developers that have been successful in placing VR consumers of the general agency have had only limited success placing consumers of the Commission. Job development has thus fallen to Commission VR counselors, and, as noted above, current Commission counselors are by-and-large very inexperienced as a group and over-extended due to staffing shortages. * Consumers unable to work: During FY15, several consumers who had been coded supported employment while still in high school, were closed without an employment outcome as the result of work evaluations conducted by
the Department of Health, Developmental Disabilities Support Division (DDSD), the agency responsible for administering the DD Waiver program. DDSD has a requirement that clients must be able to work at least ten hours per week in order to include employment as a supported service, and the consumers in question were unable to do so. * Consumers no longer interested in work: Often, consumers that would otherwise require supported employment services say they are interested in work and a VR case is opened. Unfortunately, their interest is often the result of suggestions and pressure from family members or service providers. Despite offers of support in the process of transitioning to employment, their interest in employment sometimes wanes as they come to understand the changes that are forthcoming when employment becomes part of their regular schedule. * Many supported employment youth: Currently, the agency has 21 consumers coded as supported employment, nine of whom are youth with the most significant disabilities and still in high school. A handful of youth with the most significant disabilities are scheduled to participate in our summer Students in Transition to Employment Program (STEP) as well as our STEP One program, specifically designed for youth that might require additional supports.

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

Data in this section has not been collected but will be tracked in the future using the AWARE case management system from Alliance Enterprises.

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

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

The Commission has engaged in several innovation and expansion activities in Fiscal Year 2015. The funding of these activities exceeded the 1.5% of 110 dollars generally allocated to innovation and expansion efforts. These activities will continue in PY 2016. The agency supports the funding and program activities of the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC). The agency recognizes that the SRC is an integral and valuable partner in its efforts to provide services to vocational rehabilitation consumers. The Agency assumes all costs incurred for all regularly scheduled meetings, subcommittees and special meetings. This includes expenses related to securing meeting facilities, members’ travel and per diem expenses, teleconference meetings, interpreters, clerical support, and office supplies and materials. The Agency provides a staff person who prepares the agendas, minutes, and other materials as necessary for each scheduled meeting. The Agency provides a staff person to schedule and make all necessary arrangements for Public Hearings and town forums. The SRC is an equal partner in the development of the State Plan, and actively provides input for the Manual of Operating Procedures, agency policies, Orientation Center, and other matters pertaining to the Agency's programs and activities.

The Commission sponsors NFB Newsline. This is an augment to the existing NEWSLINE for the Blind. NFB Newsline enables consumers to read over 365 national newspapers, four of which are Spanish–language publications, plus New Mexico newspapers, enhancing their ability to rapidly access information that is increasingly essential for success in both the academic and professional environments.
The Commission employs a Deputy Director for Independent Living/Building Management Programs. One of her responsibilities is to seek grant funding for new initiatives designed to enhance basic services. Her efforts were rewarded with a capital improvement appropriation of $750,000 from the New Mexico Legislature to support the initiative to transform the Employment Development Center into a skills training site to meet the needs of vocational rehabilitation consumers, as well as potential vocational rehabilitation consumers. The renovation is now complete and the agency is scheduling a variety of activities in the Skills Center. These activities include meetings, workshops, seminars, and other training events such as the summer Students in Transition to Employment Program.

The Commission has adopted a policy to support consumer attendance at the division/special interest group meetings held during national consumer organization conventions. In order to receive the support, the consumer’s vocational goal must be directly related to the particular division/special interest group meeting. Our agency, with the support of our SRC, believes that attendance at related division/special interest group meetings can enhance the consumer’s ability to achieve their vocational goal. Benefits would include learning about current developments in their field, meeting and networking with individuals who are successful in their fields, learning about the use and accessibility of career–specific technology, learning how blind and visually impaired individuals in the field use assistive technology successfully, and learning techniques that would enable them to succeed in their vocational training/education program and ultimately in their chosen field.

FY 2015 marked the eighth year of a MOA with the Department of Health and the New Mexico School for the Blind and Visually Impaired. The MOA administers an allocation from DOH of $80,000, designed to provide assistive technology that, for a disability other than blindness, would be considered durable medical equipment. This initiative serves blind children that are both transition–age and those not yet transition–age. A total of six children were served by this initiative in FY 2015.

q. Quality, Scope, and Extent of Supported Employment Services. (Blind)

Include the following:

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

Supported employment services may include a comprehensive assessment as provided under the basic vocational rehabilitation program, job site assessment, and other evaluations to determine possible benefits from supported employment to consumers with the most significant disabilities, including youth with the most significant disabilities. Additional supported employment services include job development, placement and intensive job skills training, social skills training, regular observation and supervision of the individual, and regular contact with the employer, consumer, parent, family members, guardians, advocates or other authorized representatives of the individual and other suitable professionals. The utilization of natural support systems as well as the provision of appropriate services under the basic vocational rehabilitation program is available to supported employment consumers.

Extent of Services: The adult services offered under Supported Employment are determined on an individual basis depending on the needs of the consumer. Supported employment services generally
do not extend beyond a 24-month period of time, an increase of six months as a result of WIOA. However, in some unusual circumstances, Supported Employment Services may be extended if it is determined appropriate and agreed upon in the IPE. To be determined appropriate, there must be a reasonable basis to believe that ongoing supports can be obtained within a relatively brief period of time, and that a disruption or loss of employment would be avoided by the continued provision of Supported Employment Services for a short period of time. Transition to extended services (ongoing support services and other appropriate services provided by another state agency, a private non-profit organization, an employer, etc., generally via waiver programs), may occur prior to reaching the 24 month limit if the individual has stabilized on the job. In the event that the consumer requires additional job development/placement services after a successful closure, support will be made available for additional training, work tools, and job development services through a post-employment services plan.

The Commission will initially pay for supported employment services with supported employment grant funds. However, if the supported employment funds are exhausted, the Commission is prepared to use regular VR funds to provide supported employment services. As the consumer approaches the 24-month limit for supported employment services, the Commission will assist in the transition to waiver funding and natural supports for the provision of extended services.

Like adult services, the youth services offered under Supported Employment are determined on an individual basis depending on the needs of the consumer. Services to youth with the most significant disabilities begin at age 14, and include representation by Commission counselors at IEP meetings, support in school-based transition programs for youth age 18-21, and summer job experiences. The Commission provides summer employment experiences for supported employment youth through its Students in Transition to Employment Program, which provides employment and training experiences at its Alamogordo training center, its Albuquerque Skills Center, and community-based placements throughout New Mexico. Beginning in summer 2016, the Commission began offering its STEP One program. STEP one is designed to serve students who have significant disabilities in addition to blindness or visual impairment. This program is designed for consumers who might not be able to handle the rigorous work and training schedule of the regular STEP program. The STEP One program will offer two half-days of training with a lower student to teacher ratio that will allow for more one-on-one training. It will also offer a work schedule that would meet the individual needs of each consumer. A job coach will be hired to support each of the students in the STEP One program as necessary.

Another program that will serve youth with the most significant disabilities is the Commission’s Technology for Children program, which is also a frequent point of first contact with the agency. The Technology for Children program is intended to help the Commission identify potentially eligible consumers, specifically youth with the most significant disabilities. The purpose is to provide assistive technology that will help lessen the significance of the disability or reduce any developmental delay that may be present.

The agency has a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with the Department of Health and the New Mexico School for the Blind and Visually Impaired. The MOA will administer an allocation from DOH of $80,000, designed to provide assistive technology that, for a disability other than blindness, would be considered durable medical equipment. Through the Technology for Children Program, youth with the most significant disabilities who are too young for regular VR services would be able to receive assistive technology which would otherwise not be provided by a school district since it is primarily purchased for use at home. The Technology Specialist who coordinates the Technology for Children program will continue to provide assistive technology support services to economically disadvantaged and rural school districts, enabling them to benefit from her extensive assistive technology experience and thereby benefiting all of the youth with the most significant disabilities in...
those school districts. The Technology Specialist assigned to the Technology for Children program also speaks Spanish.

The Commission is pleased with the opportunity to provide extended services to youth with the most significant disabilities following the closure of their VR case for a period of up to four years or until the individual turns age 25. The Commission believes this is a particularly beneficial improvement within WIOA. The Commission will initially use the 50% reserve for this purpose. If the 50% reserve is exhausted, the Commission is prepared to utilize regular supported employment funds for this purpose. Finally, if the supported employment funds are exhausted, the Commission is prepared to use regular VR funds to provide extended services. As the consumer approaches age 25, the Commission will assist in the transition to waiver funding and natural supports for the provision of extended services.

Results of Needs Assessment: The results of the Needs Assessment of rehabilitation and career needs of this population are discussed in description (j) Statewide Assessment.

2. The timing of transition to extended services. (Blind)

Please see 1. above.

Certifications (Blind)

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

Name of designated State agency

Full Name of Authorized Representative:  Greg Trapp

Title of Authorized Representative:  Executive Director

States must provide written and signed certifications that:

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

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

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

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

5. The State legally may carry out each provision of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement. Yes

6. All provisions of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement are consistent with State law. Yes

7. The Authorized Representative listed above has the authority under State law to receive, hold, and disburse Federal funds made available under the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement; Yes

8. The Authorized Representative listed above has the authority to submit the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and the supplement for Supported Employment services; Yes

9. The agency that submits the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement has adopted or otherwise formally approved the plan and its supplement. Yes

Footnotes (Blind)

Certification 1 Footnotes

* Public Law 113-128.

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

Certification 2 Footnotes

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

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

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

Certification 3 Footnotes
* No funds under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act may be awarded without an approved supplement to the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan in accordance with section 606(a) of the Rehabilitation Act.

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

Additional Comments on the Certifications from the State (Blind)

Certification Regarding Lobbying — Vocational Rehabilitation (Blind)

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

(Blind)

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

(Blind)

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

(Blind)

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

Statement for Loan Guarantees and Loan Insurance (Blind)

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

Applicant’s Organization       New Mexico Commission for the Blind

Full Name of Authorized Representative:        Greg D. Trapp

Title of Authorized Representative:      Executive Director

SF LLL Form – Disclosure of Lobbying Activities (only if applicable)
(http://www2.ed.gov/fund/grant/apply/appforms/appforms.htm). If applicable, please print, sign, and email to MAT_OCTAE@ed.gov

Certification Regarding Lobbying — Supported Employment (Blind)

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

(Blind)

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

(Blind)

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

(Blind)

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

Statement for Loan Guarantees and Loan Insurance (Blind)

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

Applicant’s Organization   New Mexico Commission for the Blind

Full Name of Authorized Representative:   Greg D. Trapp

Title of Authorized Representative:   Executive Director

SF LLL Form – Disclosure of Lobbying Activities (only if applicable)
(http://www2.ed.gov/fund/grant/apply/appforms/appforms.html).

Assurances (Blind)

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

1. Public Comment on Policies and Procedures: (Blind)

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

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

The designated State unit assures it will comply with all requirements pertaining to the submission and revisions of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement for the State Supported Employment Services program, as required by sections 101(a)(1), (22), (23), and 606(a) of the Rehabilitation Act; section 102 of WIOA in the case of the submission of a unified plan; section 103 of WIOA in the case of a submission of a Combined State Plan; 34 CFR 76.140.
3. Administration of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan: (Blind)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

h. the descriptions for cooperation, collaboration, and coordination, as required by sections 101(a)(11) and (24)(B); and 606(b) of the Rehabilitation Act. (Blind)
i. all required methods of administration, as required by section 101(a)(6) of the Rehabilitation Act. (Blind)

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

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

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

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

4. Administration of the Provision of VR Services: (Blind)

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

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

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

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

Agency will provide the full range of services described above Yes

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

e. comply with the requirements for the development of an individualized plan for employment in accordance with section 102(b) of the Rehabilitation Act. (Blind)
f. comply with requirements regarding the provisions of informed choice for all applicants and eligible individuals in accordance with section 102(d) of the Rehabilitation Act. (Blind)

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

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

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

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

   i. has developed and will implement,
      A. strategies to address the needs identified in the assessments; and
      B. strategies to achieve the goals and priorities identified by the State, to improve and expand vocational rehabilitation services for students with disabilities on a statewide basis; and
   ii. has developed and will implement strategies to provide pre-employment transition services (sections 101(a)(15) and 101(a)(25)).

(Blind)

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

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

b. The designated State agency assures that it will submit reports in such form and in accordance with such procedures as the Commissioner may require and collects the information required by section 101(a)(10) of the Rehabilitation Act separately for individuals receiving supported employment services under title I and individuals receiving supported employment services under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act. (Blind)
c. The designated state unit will coordinate activities with any other State agency that is functioning as an employment network under the Ticket to Work and Self-Sufficiency program under Section 1148 of the Social Security Act. (Blind)

6. Financial Administration of the Supported Employment Program: (Blind)

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

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

7. Provision of Supported Employment Services: (Blind)

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

b. The designated State agency assures that:

   i. the comprehensive assessment of individuals with significant disabilities conducted under section 102(b)(1) of the Rehabilitation Act and funded under title I of the Rehabilitation Act includes consideration of supported employment as an appropriate employment outcome, in accordance with the requirements of section 606(b)(7)(B) of the Rehabilitation Act

   ii. an individualized plan for employment that meets the requirements of section 102(b) of the Rehabilitation Act, which is developed and updated with title I funds, in accordance with sections 102(b)(3)(F) and 606(b)(6)(C) and (E) of the Rehabilitation Act.

(Blind)
Additional Comments on the Assurances from the State (Blind)

VII. Program-Specific Requirements For Combined State Plan Partner Programs

States choosing to submit a Combined State Plan must provide information concerning the six core programs—the Adult Program, Dislocated Worker Program, Youth Program, Wagner-Peyser Act Program, Adult Education and Family Literacy Act Program, and the Vocational Rehabilitation Program—and also submit relevant information for any of the eleven partner programs it includes in its Combined State Plan. When a State includes a Combined State Plan partner program in its Combined State Plan, it need not submit a separate plan or application for that particular program.* If included, Combined State Plan partner programs are subject to the “common planning elements” in Sections II and III of that document, where specified, as well as the program-specific requirements for that program (available on www.regulations.gov for public comment). The requirements that a State must address for any of the partner programs it includes in its Combined State Plan are provided in this separate supplemental document. The Departments are not seeking comments on these program-specific requirements, which exist under separate OMB control numbers and do not represent requirements under WIOA. For further details on this overall collection, access the Federal eRulemaking Portal at http://www.regulations.gov by selecting Docket ID number ETA-2015-0006.

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