

State Plan Goals and Priorities Update

The State Plan Goals and Priorities were developed by DVR and the SRC in the early spring of 2018 for the State Plan for Program Years 2018 and 2019. *The Program Years for the VR program are a little confusing because they do not follow the state or federal fiscal years.* The program years are as follows:

Program Year 2018: July 1, 2018 to June 30, 2019

Program Year 2019: July 1, 2019 to June 30, 2020

Because we are still in Program Year 2019, we can only provide an update on Program Year 2018.

(I) State's Goals and Priorities.

Based on the DVR/SRC Needs Assessment completed in December of 2017, DVR and the SRC have established targets for Program Year 2018 for DVR's Strategic Plan goals. DVR and the SRC have also established goals and priorities in response to the new mandates and requirements included in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act (WIOA). In particular, DVR and the SRC established goals and priorities related to the implementation of the WIOA Common Performance Measures. All DVR goals and priorities are established within the Division's long-established strategic themes as follows:

- *Organizational Effectiveness*
- *Valued and Empowered Employees*
- *Prepared Job Seekers*
- *Collaborative Partnerships*

(A) Program Year 2019 Goals and Priorities

1. DVR will align services to support consumers in achieving the WIOA Common Performance Outcome Measures.

Program 2019 Measures:

- a. Employment retention six months post closure
- b. Employment retention twelve months post closure
- c. Median earnings six months post closure
- d. Credential attainment rate
- e. Measurable skills gains
- f. Employer engagement

Program Year 2019 Target: DVR will be collecting and reporting baseline data to RSA during this period.

Program Year 2018 Update: DVR is a strong supporter of the WIOA Common Performance Measures. We believe the new measures support consumers to achieve their career goals and promote higher wage and more sustainable employment.

To respond to the paradigm shift, DVR has implemented a series of strategies to align program services to meet the new measures, called the Careers Initiative. DVR staff and management have welcomed the new focus on how to assist our customers to have not just a job, but a career. The new strategies include:

- *Promoting Post-Secondary Education and Training:* DVR has realigned case service resources to support more consumers in post-secondary training and education to help them achieve credentials in high-demand, high-wage fields. For individuals who need more support to succeed in education and training, DVR is implementing a “progressive education” approach that provides an incremental and low-risk path.
- *Career Assessment:* DVR is promoting the use of modern career assessment tools that help consumers see beyond entry-level employment and identify their potential. Modern assessment tools such as Virtual Job Shadow open up consumers to potential careers they may have never considered.
- *Supporting Practice Change:* DVR has updated policy and practice to promote consumers achieving longer-term career goals. For example, counselors are encouraged to support consumers to see beyond the “right now” job they need to pay the bills and look towards a career that will help them transition to a better life.
- *Teaming to Support the Consumer:* DVR encourages counselors to pull in other team members to support consumers in achieving their employment goals. This might include the employment consultant, the benefits counselor, or the assistive technology specialist. We also strongly encourage teaming with the Department of Labor, Adult Basic Education, and a range of other community partners.
- *Follow-Up After Placement:* DVR requires regular follow-up with consumers post-exit to promote job retention and career advancement. This can be critical for consumers who are struggling to retain their jobs. It can also be an opportunity to encourage consumers to see if they are ready for the next career step.

DVR tracks implementation of the above new strategies through a new *Performance Dashboard*. The Dashboard provides real-time information on these practices for staff and managers at the counselor, district, and statewide level. The Dashboard provides the counselor and manager everything they need to know at a glance. It helps them judge how they are doing within a useful frame of reference so they can focus on what they need to do to achieve desired outcomes.

The WIOA measures are extremely lagging measures, meaning most of the desired outcomes occur well after services end. For example, the measure of median earnings occurs two full quarters after case closure. As a result, the measures are not very useful in guiding the work of

frontline staff on a day-to-day basis. Therefore, DVR decided to establish leading measures of activities expected to improve the longer-term WIOA outcome measures. The below section outlines these lead measures and how they are expected to influence the lagging outcome measures.

- Leading Measure One: The use of career assessment tools to support exploration of higher wage and higher skill options
- Leading Measure Two: The involvement of other team members (employment placement staff, benefits counselors and others) strengthens consumer engagement in completing their employment goal
- Leading Measure Three: Career focused education and training leads to higher wage and higher quality employment.
- Leading Measure Four: VR counseling with an emphasis on career focused plans will lead to higher wage and higher quality employment.
- Leading Measure Five: Continued support and encouragement after closure results in better job retention and career advancement.

In Program Year 2018, sufficient data collection had occurred to begin reporting on three of the five measures that are reported at the program level (employer engagement is reported as a combined measure for all WIOA core partners):

- Employment rate in the second quarter post closure was 49%
- Median earnings in the second quarter post closure was \$3,516
- Measurable skill gains rate was 54.9% compared to 37.8% in PY 2017

2. DVR will increase the percentage of consumers earning over 110% of minimum wage and over 150% of minimum wage at closure. DVR believes in order to increase median earnings six months post closure, the agency must increase earnings at closure. Based on Needs Assessment data from 2017, 55% of DVR consumers were earning 110% of minimum wage or less at closure and only 18% of DVR consumers were earning over 150% of minimum wage at closure.

Program Year 2019 Measures:

- a. The percentage of DVR consumers with earnings greater than 110% of minimum wage at employment closure.
- b. The percentage of DVR consumers with earnings greater than 150% of minimum wage at employment closure.

Program Year 2019 Targets:

- a. 55% of DVR consumers will earn 110% or greater of minimum wage at closure.
- b. 25% of DVR consumers will earn 150% or greater of minimum wage at closure.

Program Year 2018 Update: For cases closed successfully in Program Year 2018, 58% had wage rates at or above 110% of the minimum wage and 23% were earning 150% of the minimum wage (above \$16 per hour) or more.

As noted, DVR has established a performance dashboard to tracking leading and lagging indicators. The dashboard is visible to all staff and provides them with real time data. We determined it was important to track wages at closure within the dashboard. However, rather than having two measures, earnings at 110% and 150% of minimum wage, we determined it would be clearer to have a single measure earnings at 125% of minimum wage. Using this measure the data shows the following:

- Program Year 2017: In Program Year 2017 901 individuals were closed employed. The percentage earning 125% of minimum wage at closure was 33%.
- Program Year 2018: In Program Year 2018 877 individuals were closed employed. The percentage earning 125% of minimum wage at closure was 38%.

While we cannot draw conclusions from a single data point, Program Year 2018 was the first year of implementation of the DVR Careers Initiative. However, the increase in the percentage of closures at or above 125% of minimum does coincide with the implementation of the initiative. We need additional data points over time to determine if this is a trend.

- 3. DVR will increase consumer opportunities to participate in and gain industry recognized credentials in middle skills professions.** Industry recognized credentials are a proven mechanism for consumers to access higher wage employment. This will include sector-based training programs in collaboration with the Career and Technical Education Centers and Community College of Vermont.

Program Year 2019 Measure: Number of individuals achieving credential attainment.

Program Year 2019 Target: DVR will be collecting baseline data during this period.

Program Year 2018 Update: During Program Year 2018, 361 participants enrolled in some kind of training or post-secondary education beyond the high school level, ranging from basic skills preparation to graduate programs. Of the 244 enrolled in programs potentially leading to a credential, 48 participants completed a post-secondary degree or industry-recognized credential in PY 2018.

- 4. DVR will continue to expand efforts to effectively serve employers through Creative Workforce Solutions (CWS).** Employer engagement continues to be a critical activity to ensure DVR consumers have access to employment opportunities.

Program Year 2019 Measure: Employer engagement with DVR as tracked through the CWS Salesforce account management system.

Program Year 2019 Target: DVR will maintain active relationships with 2,500 employers statewide during the program year.

Program Year 2018 Update: During this period CWS had relationships with 2,418 discrete employers. The CWS Business Account Managers had 5,672 recording activities with those employers (introductory meetings, informational interviews and business tours). These activities generated 4,175 opportunities for DVR consumer. An opportunity might include:

- A job shadow or informational interview
- A training placement
- An OJT placement
- A competitive job opportunity

We believe the above data indicates that CWS continues to produce robust engagement with Vermont employers resulting in increased opportunities for DVR consumers.

5. Consumer satisfaction with DVR services will be maintained or increase.

Program Year 2019 Measure: Bi-annual consumer satisfaction survey.

Program Year 2019 Target: DVR will achieve an 79% or better overall consumer satisfaction rating. Consumers reported an 79% overall satisfaction rating in the most recent survey (2016).

DVR will also develop a process to assess student and parent satisfaction with Pre-ETS services. DVR will explore approaches to conducting such an assessment and develop metrics to track.

Program Year 2018 Update: The DVR Consumer Experience Survey is conducted every three years to determine consumers' overall satisfaction with the program. The survey is conducted by a third-party research firm, Market Decisions Research (MDR), who have an extensive background in working with other VR agencies nationwide. Seven hundred consumers were contacted to provide information for our 2019 survey.

The results from our 2019 survey were outstanding. Market Decisions Research found that of the consumers surveyed:

- 81% reported that they were satisfied or very satisfied with DVR.
- 96% said that they would recommend that their friends or family members seek help from DVR.

- 92% of consumers reporting that they are satisfied with their experience working with DVR staff and DVR Counselors; this statistic has risen two percent from our previous survey in 2016.

An area where DVR has enjoyed consistently high rates of satisfaction is in consumers feeling that they were treated by DVR staff with dignity and respect. In the 2019 survey, 98% of consumers reported feeling that they were treated by DVR staff with dignity and respect. The largest improvement in customer experience was seen in the ability of consumers to communicate with their DVR Counselors. In 2016, 88% of consumers were satisfied with their ability to contact their counselor; in 2019 this percentage has risen to 91%, an all-time high for the agency.

The Market Decisions Research survey also included for the first time, measures of satisfaction for youth in transition. 97% of youth reported that they found working with a transition counselor helpful. Only 11% reported having problems working with their DVR Transition Counselor. To get more qualitative data DVR is contracting with Market Decisions Research to conduct focus groups with youth in early 2020. We hope data from the focus groups will help inform how we provide services for students and youth going forward.

- 6. DVR will implement a comprehensive quality assurance process incorporating the new AWARE case management system.** In 2017 DVR successfully implemented the AWARE case management system. This system will provide DVR with a powerful new tool to upgrade the quality assurance process.

Program Year 2019 Measure: Design and implementation of the quality assurance system.

Program Year 2019 Target: Process evaluation of QA system (to be determined).

DVR implemented a comprehensive case review process starting on October 1, 2018. The review process is built into the AWARE case management system which tracks completion. The case review system tracks both compliance and quality issues. DVR required that supervisors review 5 cases per quarter for full time counselors.

For Program Year 2018, DVR completed 100% of the required case reviews. DVR staff and managers find the system easy to use and very helpful in supporting good case work. This also resolved a prior year audit finding.

- 7. DVR will continue to implement highly effective Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) for students statewide.**

Program Year 2019 Measures:

- a. The percentage of high schools statewide that have at least one student actively participating in Pre-ETS through DVR.
- b. The percentage of all potentially eligible students statewide who are participating in Pre-ETS through DVR.

Program Year 2019 Targets:

- a. 90% of high schools statewide will have at least one student participating in Pre-ETS through DVR.
- b. 20% of potentially eligible students will participate in Pre-ETS through DVR.

Program Year 2018 Update: The out posting of 14 DVR transition counselors to work exclusively with high schools has proven very effective in securing access for students.

- In Program Year 2018 all 54 Vermont Supervisory Unions have referred students to DVR for services.
- In Program Year 2018, DVR served 2,280 high school students statewide, approximately 42% of the eligible student population.

DVR has clearly done an effective job ensuring access to Pre-ETS services for all potentially eligible high school students.

8. DVR will implement the following strategies to mitigate FFY 2016 and FFY 2017 reductions in re-allotment funding that resulted in substantial cuts in services and capacity:

- Partnerships with other programs and state systems to sustain employment services for people with disabilities;
- Increasing program income through the Ticket to Work program;
- Exploring federal and state grant opportunities to pilot new service models; and
- Continually assessing the assignment of DVR resources to ensure funds are going toward activities that are most likely to result in an employment and career outcome.

Program Year 2019 Measures:

- a. State government or other community agencies that have contributed resources to sustain programs affected by the loss of re-allotment.
- b. Social Security Administration Ticket to Work and Cost Reimbursement revenue.
- c. Federal or state grant applications.

Program Year 2019 Targets:

- a. Baseline
- b. DVR will generate \$2.5 million in Ticket to Work Revenue in Program Year 2019.
- c. DVR will apply for at least one grant application in Program Year 2019.

Program Year 2018 Update:

- The Division of Developmental Services (DDS) has stepped in to provide additional funding for supported employment to back fill the loss of DVR resources. The new funding has sustained capacity for job placement and job development that would have otherwise been lost.
- DVR generated \$1,720,534 in Ticket to Work during Program Year 2018. The lower than expected revenue was primarily the function of the Social Security Administration suspending payments for two quarters for administrative reasons. Since then, Ticket to Work revenue is on track to meet the 2019 program year goal.
- DVR has formed a Development Team to meet regularly to explore funding opportunities. DVR applied for two grant applications during Program Year 2018.
 - DVR applied to SAMSHA for a supported employment program designed to serve adults with psychiatric disabilities in the outpatient program. Unfortunately, DVR's application was not selected for funding
 - DVR applied to the Kessler Foundation to support a pilot called Better Option than Social Security (BOSS). BOSS will provide innovative strategies to assist SSI/SSDI beneficiaries work at substantial levels. DVR is currently one of six finalists for this funding.

9. With the implementation of Pre-ETS, the DVR caseload has trended towards serving a younger cohort. DVR needs to ensure the needs of middle-aged and mature workers are still adequately addressed, and in particular, the following cohorts:

- Adults ages 35 to 55
- Adults aged 55 and above

Program Year 2019 Measures:

- a. The number of individuals receiving services in these cohorts.
- b. The employment outcomes by age cohort.
- c. Consumer satisfaction as measured in the DVR satisfaction survey.
- d. Services provided by age cohort.
- e. Other measures as identified by DVR and the SRC.

Program Year 2019 Target: DVR will be collecting baseline data for this reporting period.

Program Year 2018 Update: Of the 5496 participants with Individualized Plans for Employment (IPE) receiving services in Program Year 2018, 58% were under the age of

35 when they began IPE services; 1506 (27%) were between the ages of 35 and 55 and 807 (15%) were 55 and older.

The wage rate and hours worked per week at closure were greater for older participants. Median number of hours worked per week were 32, compared to 25 for those under age 35. Median hourly wage at rehabilitation was \$15 for those over age 55 and \$12.50 for those age 35 to 55, compared to a median of \$11.50 for the younger population.

A higher proportion also exited successfully: 48% and 42% respectively, compared to 32% for those under age 35. However, it is more difficult to maintain contact with younger participants after job placement through the 90 days of stable employment required to claim a successful outcome. Evidence from PY 2017 exits shows a similar rate of successful VR case closure for these age groups (51% for age 55 and up, 40% for those aged 35 to 55, and 31% for under age 35). However, the employment rate in the second quarter post-exit for these groups was 46% for both of the older age groups, compared to 52% for those under age 35. In other words, the higher employment rate for older adults compared to youth may have more to do with stability and maturity than with employment outcomes.

10. DVR will continue to seek options for supported employment for the following underserved populations in the state:

- a. Individuals with developmental disabilities who do not meeting the developmental services system eligibility criteria or system or care priorities;
- b. Individuals with TBI who need onsite support;
- c. Individuals with psychiatric disabilities who do not meet the Community Rehabilitation and Treatment eligibility criteria; and
- d. Individuals with other severe disabilities who need supported employment.

Program Year 2019 Measure: DVR will track and report the results of specific initiatives related to these populations.

Program Year 2019 Target: Thirty individuals in the above categories will receive supported employment services.

DVR has had little success to date in expanding supported employment for these populations. The primary issue is that there is no infrastructure necessary for the ongoing support services required for populations that do not meet eligibility for mental health and developmental services.

The SAMSHA grant application referenced under Goal and Priority #8 was intended specifically to provide supported employment for individuals with psychiatric disabilities

who did not meet Department of Mental Health eligibility for supported employment. Unfortunately, that application was not selected for funding.

DVR is exploring using unobligated Title VI-B funds to expand supported employment services for individuals with developmental disabilities who do not meeting the developmental services system eligibility criteria or system or care priorities. We are looking at three communities in the State where the need is most pressing.

11. DVR will improve the outcomes for students and youth with emotional/behavioral disabilities served through the JOBS Supported Employment Program.

Program Year 2019 Measure: Total number of consumers achieving a successful employment outcome (VR 26 closure).

Program Year 2019 Target: A total of 250 successful employment outcomes.

Program Year 2018 Update: DVR is waiting on latest data from the Program Evaluation Unit.

To align the JOBS Programs to the wider DVR Careers Initiative, we have spent the last year working with the agencies to establish new performance measures. We felt it was very important that JOBS youth should be included in the Careers Initiative and that our contracted performance measures should reflect that intent. The JOBS program staff and managers were closely involved in the development of the new measures. There is strong buy in and support. The new measures are laid out below:

- Total Number of Youth Served with DVR IPE
- Total Number of Youth Who received at least One Career Assessment During the Fiscal Year (50% of Total Served)
- Total Number of Youth Enrolled in Career Focused Training or Supported Education During the Fiscal Year (30% of Total Served)
- Total Number of Youth Placed in Competitive Employment for Ten Working Days (70% of Total Served)
- Total Number of Youth with a Higher-Wage IPE Goal during the Federal Fiscal Year (30% of Total Served)
- Total Number of Consumers employed at or above 125% of Vermont minimum wage at any time during the Federal Fiscal Year (30% of Total Served)