

## L. STATE GOALS AND PRIORITIES

1. 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

DVR and the SRC have established goals and priorities, as well as targets, for Program Years 2024 and 2025. These are based on the DVR/SRC Needs Assessment completed in 2023, and in response requirements included in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act (WIOA, particularly the Common Performance Measures. All DVR goals and priorities are established within the Division's long-established strategic themes:

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

### **Program Year 2024 Goals and Priorities**

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

DVR is a strong supporter of the WIOA Common Performance Measures. We believe the measures support consumers in their career goals and promote higher wages and more sustainable employment. However, the WIOA measures are extremely lagging, 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, in 2020 DVR established leading measures expected to improve the longer-term WIOA outcome measures. These measures are visible to all staff in real time through a Dashboard. Since the implementation of the Dashboard DVR has seen considerable improvement in both the leading measures and the Common Performance Measures. In 2023, DVR updated the leading measures based on field experience and updated the targets to more ambitious and aspirational. We also included some intermediate performance outcome targets. The following is a list of the leading measures and outcome targets and how they are expected to positively impact the lagging outcome measures:

#### The Leading Measures

*Sustained Teaming:* The involvement of other team members (employment placement staff, Certified Work Incentive Counselors, and others) over the life of the case strengthens consumer engagement in completing their employment goals. This

measure assesses if multiple team member are engaged with the participant throughout the life of the case.

**Target: 30% of all cases will show sustained teaming. This measure was set at a relatively low level for PY 24 because it is new. We expect to increase it as we collect data on the state averages.**

*Career Assessment During the Case:* The use of career assessment tools supports exploration of and better matches between consumers and higher wage and higher skill employment options. High quality career assessment tools can help participants identify meaningful career pathways.

**Target: 50% of participants will receive career assessments**

*Credential Focused Education and Training:* Education and training are the best options we can provide to help participants achieve high wage and high-quality careers. Even relatively short-term training programs can dramatically increase a participant's earning levels.

**Target: 35% of participants will enroll in credentialed focused education and training**

*Work-Based Learning Experiences:* Paid work experiences are often a highly effective way of introducing participants with little or no work experience to employment. This includes students and youth as well as adults who have been out of the workforce for extended periods of time. Paid Work Experiences offer a low risk way for participants to take the first step towards competitive employment. Also Paid Work Experiences can be an effective way for participants to explore new career pathways before they commit to credentialed training. For example, a participant interested in HVAC training might use a work experience to make an informed choice to determine if it is a good career match.

**Target: 25% of participants will participate in Paid Work Experiences**

*High Wage Plan Goals:* The participant and the counselor set the employment goal in the plan. Participants sometimes have low expectations of what is possible or have never considered higher wage career goals. Vocational counselors encourage participants to consider higher wage plan goals in occupations they may have never considered.

**Target: 50% of participants will have higher wage plan goals. Higher wages are defined as 150% of minimum wage or better.**

*Sustained Follow Up:* Continued support and encouragement after job placement results in better job retention and career advancement.

**Target: 50% of participants will receive sustained follow up after job placement.**

Intermediate Outcome Targets

The following intermediate target measures help the counselor and HA management determine if the leading measures are resulting in improvements in outcomes.

*Credentials Earned:* What percentage of participants who were enrolled in a credentialed training program achieved one or more related credential.

**Target: 50% of participants enrolled will achieve a credential**

*Rehabilitation Rate:* This is the percentage of cases closed with an employment outcome compared to cases closed with no verified employment outcome.

**Target: 55% of participants will achieve an employment outcome**

*Participants Earning 150% of Minimum Wage or better:* This is the percentage of participants who were closed with an employment outcome who are earning 150% of minimum wage or better.

**Target: 35% of participants closed with an employment outcome will earn 150% of minimum or better.**

**2. DVR will increase consumer opportunities to participate in post-secondary education and training and gain industry recognized credentials.**

Post-secondary credentials are a proven mechanism for consumers to access higher wage employment and meaningful careers. In Program Year 2021, 559 participants were enrolled in programs potentially leading to a credential, and 121 participants completed a program and earned a credential. In Program Year 2022, 626 participants were enrolled in programs potentially leading to a credential, and 156 participants completed a program and earned a credential. In Program Year 2024 DVR seeks to continue to increase participation in program years 2024 and 2025.

Targets

Program Year 2024 Target: 700 DVR consumers will enroll in training leading to a credential and 170 DVR consumers will achieve a credential.

Program Year 2025 Target: 800 DVR consumers will enroll in training leading to a credential and 200 DVR consumers will achieve a credential.

**3. DVR will expand opportunities for participants to enroll in Registered Apprenticeships.**

Registered Apprenticeships are a proven strategy for job seekers to enter and succeed in high wage and high demand fields. Registered Apprenticeships also pay a wage to enrollees while they get trained. However, historically HireAbility participants have not enrolled in apprenticeship programs. HireAbility will be implementing a number of strategies to increase participant enrollment in apprenticeship programs. Because we are starting from a low baseline, the targets for PY 24 and PY 25 are relatively modest.

**PY 2024 Target: 10 HireAbility participants will be enrolled in Registered Apprenticeships**

**PY 2025 Target: 20 HireAbility participants will be enrolled in Registered Apprenticeships**

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

DVR is implementing a major program improvement effort for the JOBS programs. The JOBS program was first launched in one site in 1993. Between 1993 and 2005 DVR in partnership with the Department of Mental Health (DMH) expanded the JOBS model statewide. However, in recent years DVR and DMH have observed a decline in program services and outcomes with some of the programs. To address this decline DVR will be implementing the following strategies:

- *Fee for Benchmark Contracting:* Implementing a new fee for benchmark contract structure that will fund the program based on outcomes versus services. Such “value based” contracting has been demonstrated to improve outcomes and increase program accountability.
- *Centralized Case Management:* HireAbility has observed substantial inconsistencies in how designated Vocational Counselors manage the JOBS caseloads. This has affected participant services, data quality and program accountability. To address this HireAbility has implemented centralized case management with two Senior Vocational Counselors managing the caseload statewide.
- *JOBS Dashboard:* The JOBS Dashboard will be developed to support the JOBS program staff in tracking their activities and work with HireAbility participants. It will be a tool to help the Vocational Counselors and JOBS staff monitor outcomes and assist with reporting and fee for benchmark invoicing. Using real-time data from Aware system records, the JOBS Dashboard will displays only the most relevant JOBS program information in a concise and easy-to-use way. It will be designed to streamline effective coordination of JOBS program services, enhance case management between partners, and facilitate complete and accurate data collection.

## **Targets for PY 2024 and PY 2025**

Because HireAbility has radically changed the program outcome measures as defined in the fee for benchmark contract we do not have historic data to set targets. Therefore PY 24 and PY 25 will be baseline years to collect benchmark data. The fee for benchmark measures are as follows:

- Completion of career assessment
- Participation in Paid Work Experiences (PWE)
- Placement in competitive employment
- Supported employment post placement\
- Employment stabilization
- Supported employment closure and earnings level at closure
- Extended Employment post closure

### **5. DVR will continue to expand efforts to effectively serve employers under the new branding of HireAbility.**

Employer engagement continues to be a critical activity to ensure participants have access to employment opportunities and careers. Creative Workforce Solutions was the employer engagement and marketing arm under our old name of Vocational Rehabilitation. In 2021 we implemented a rebranding that pulled all our marketing under one banner HireAbility. This included a redesign of all our marketing materials including those for employers. It also included a media campaign using TV, radio and social media. The HireAbility rebranding has been very well received by the employer community.

The Business Account Managers (BAMS) are the primary employer engagement staff for HireAbility. They are deployed in all 12 district offices. HireAbility measures employer engagement through the following metrics:

- **New Employer Contacts:** These are defined as new contacts with employers who have never engaged with CWS.
- **Employer Activities:** These are defined as engagement activities with employers who have an ongoing relationship with CWS
- **Employer Opportunities:** These are defined as specific consumer opportunities such as a job opening, training opportunity, work-based learning opportunity, company tour or informational interview.
- **Caseload Driven Outreach:** Caseload Driven outreach is defined as labor market outreach directly related to consumers on counselors' current caseloads. Business Account Managers are tasked with directing two-thirds of their activities to caseload needs.

In Program Year 2022, the CWS team activity counts for the above activities were as follows:

- New Employer Contacts: 1,573
- Employer Activities: 3,587
- Employer Opportunities: 2,194
- Caseload Driven Outreach: 776

The annual targets for the CWS team for Program Years 2024 and 2025 are as follows:

- Contacts: 1,600 new contacts per program year
- Activities: 3,700 distinct engagement activities per program year
- Opportunities: 2,400 discrete consumer opportunities developed per program year
- Outreach: 900 distinct consumer opportunities developed based on caseload need.

**6. DVR will continue to seek opportunities to expand and/or improve services for underserved populations including individuals who need supported employment.**

DVR recognizes that there continue to be Vermont populations with disabilities that are unserved or underserved. These include, but are not limited to:

- Individuals with severe disabilities who need supported employment services but are not eligible for long term supports through the Division of Developmental Services or the Department of Mental Health.
- Individuals with disabilities who are offenders and are transitioning into the community.
- Individuals with substance use disorders.
- Survivors of traumatic brain injuries.

As it has nationally, the opioid use crisis has greatly impacted Vermont communities. HireAbility was successful in getting state funding to implement two pilots to serve individuals in recovery from substance use disorders. It is still early but the pilots have shown great promise. HireAbility continues to partner with the Department of Corrections to serve offenders with disabilities. We have a dedicated counselor who works with individuals in the facilities prior to release. Eligible individuals are then referred to designated counselors in their home communities.

**7. DVR will continue to track consumer satisfaction with the program's services through the bi-annual consumer satisfaction survey.**

Participant satisfaction is a critically important metric for HireAbility. The HireAbility Consumer Experience Survey is conducted every two years to determine consumers' overall satisfaction with the program. The survey is conducted by a third-party research firm, Market Decisions Research (MDR), which has an extensive

background working with VR agencies nationwide. Six hundred forty-six consumers were contacted for our 2022 survey. This survey has provided HireAbility with valuable information regarding consumers' reactions to remote and hybrid services.

The following are highlights from the 2022 results:

- 81% of consumers reported they were satisfied or very satisfied with DVR HireAbility.
- 93% said that they would recommend that their friends or family members seek help from DVR HireAbility.
- 90% of consumers responded that they are satisfied with their experience working with DVR HireAbility staff and counselors. This is a two percent increase from our 2016 survey.
- 97% felt they were treated by staff with dignity and respect.
- 77% of consumers reported that it was very easy or somewhat easy to connect with their Counselor, even during the times where services were being delivered entirely remotely.
- 63% of consumers reported that they would like to continue to receive services remotely.

HireAbility will continue to track participant satisfaction every two years to observe trends and identify areas for improvement. HireAbility will conduct a participant survey in PY 23 and PY 25.

Targets for PY 25:

- At least 96% of DVR consumers will report they would recommend DVR to family and friends.
- At least 90% will report they were satisfied or very satisfied with their experience working with DVR staff and counselors.

- 8. HireAbility will become an organization where; All staff and participants have a sense of belonging & feel welcomed here at HireAbility. Our diverse staff reflect the communities that we serve. Our strong connections with multicultural communities and community partners ensures engagement, successful outcomes, and career pathway opportunities for participants from diverse backgrounds.**

The above statement is our vision for HireAbility and our commitment to Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility (DEIA). To make this vision a reality, HireAbility

has worked with a consultant to conduct a needs assessment to identify areas of opportunity to grow. Based on the needs assessment, we have identified four areas of focus for our work in PY 24 and PY 25. We have formed four charter groups made up of a diverse cross section of staff to do this work. The charter groups are as follows:

- Develop a workforce that reflects the diverse populations we serve.
- Effectively reach all populations that are eligible for our services.
- Ensure staff have access to the tools and knowledge and feel competent to serve all participants in a culturally appropriate way
- Strengthen our existing communication loops to ensure staff are informed and can contribute.

The Charter groups will be charged with developing strategies to move the agency forward in these areas. They will also help identify metrics for success that are meaningful and measurable.

## 2. IDENTIFY THE GOALS AND PRIORITIES IN CARRYING OUT THE VR AND SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMS

Refer to JOBS Section

Add language regarding DS and CRT

## 3. ENSURE THAT THE GOALS AND PRIORITIES ARE BASED ON AN ANALYSIS OF THE FOLLOWING AREAS:

### A. THE MOST RECENT COMPREHENSIVE STATEWIDE ASSESSMENT, INCLUDING ANY UPDATES;

The goals and priorities outlined in the prior sections are based on the DVR and SRC Needs Assessment outlined in Section J.

After reviewing the data from the 2023 Needs Assessment, DVR and the SRC identified seven major findings. These findings are intended to help guide DVR's goals and priorities in the State Plan.

(need completed Needs Assessment to write)

### B. THE STATE'S PERFORMANCE UNDER THE PERFORMANCE ACCOUNTABILITY MEASURES OF SECTION 116 OF WIOA; AND



In Program Year 2020, there was sufficient data collection 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 53.3%
- Median earnings in the second quarter post closure were \$4,630
- Measurable skill gains rate was 49%

C. OTHER AVAILABLE INFORMATION ON THE OPERATION AND EFFECTIVENESS OF THE VR PROGRAM, INCLUDING ANY REPORTS RECEIVED FROM THE STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL AND FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM MONITORING ACTIVITIES CONDUCTED UNDER SECTION 107.

Not applicable.