2010 State Plan for Vocational Rehabilitation and

Supported Employment Services
COOPERATION WITH AGENCIES THAT ARE NOT IN THE STATEWIDE WORKFORCE INVESTMENT SYSTEM AND WITH OTHER ENTITIES

CBVH works closely with a variety of entities to enhance vocational rehabilitation services and placement opportunities for CBVH consumers. These efforts are described in this attachment.

A Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) developed among the New York State Department of Labor, State Education Department/Vocational and Educational Services for Individuals with Disabilities (SED/VESID) and the Office of Children and Family Services/Commission for the Blind and Visually Handicapped (OCFS/CBVH) for administration, implementation and promotion of the Work Opportunities Tax Credit program and the New York State Workers with Disabilities Employment Tax Credit Program remains current.

Employment Related Collaboration Activities

CBVH is collaborating with community rehabilitation programs, schools, employers and other state vocational rehabilitation programs to improve employment outcomes. These collaborative efforts are described in this section.

Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR) Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Business Network

CSAVR is actively working with business, consumers and state Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) agencies to develop a national VR Business network. The vision is to create a coordinated approach to serving business customers through a national VR team that specializes in employer development, business consulting and corporate relations. The dual customer approach provides the following benefits to the customers of the national network – business, VR consumers and state VR agencies:

- Business has direct access to qualified applicants and the support services provided by the public VR system;
- VR consumers have access to national employment opportunities and career development resources; and
- VR agencies have a national system for sharing employment resources, best practices and business connections.

As a member of the national network, CBVH has designated an Associate Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor to serve as a point person in New York State. The point person is the primary contact for national employers looking to partner with the state VR program and is responsible for providing a consistent set of services that support
employers in hiring and retaining individuals who are legally blind. In addition to being a resource for the referral of qualified candidates, CBVH offers the following support services to employers:

1. **Assistance with Work Accommodations** - CBVH has expertise in designing and providing work accommodations for individuals who are legally blind to assist in meeting performance expectations.

2. **Tax Credits** - CBVH qualifies job candidates for Federal and State tax credits for businesses, such as the Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC) and the New York Workers with Disabilities Employment Tax Credit (WETC).

3. **Employee Retention Services** - CBVH provides retention assistance that assists employees who are legally blind to remain a skilled asset to businesses.

In the past year, CBVH has shared information about federal positions with the Internal Revenue Service, another partner seeking to diversify their federal workforce. CBVH is developing a partnership with a major staffing company based in New York and assisting with efforts to bring the company into the national partnership. CBVH has also benefited from information available over the partnerships communication software, ShareNet. Through discussion boards, CBVH has participated in conversations regarding home-based employment resources, the effectiveness of different providers, testing accommodations and other issues. CBVH anticipates support of its sister agencies in working to improve accessibility of common test used to screen job applicants.

**Regional and Bi-Regional Coordination**

Until fiscal restraints limited the opportunity to meet, CBVH worked closely with VESID and other state VR agencies in Region I, meeting periodically to share information and resources. The relationships established through the group remain an important resource in planning initiatives to improve employment outcomes.

National, bi-regional and regional efforts are expected to lead to the development of numerous cooperative relationships with employers and human resource organizations and to provide employment opportunities for CBVH consumers. CBVH’s State Coordinator for Employment Partnerships also meets periodically with her VESID counterpart to plan mutual efforts and share information.

**Working with Community Rehabilitation Partners**

CBVH is interested in improving the capacity of community rehabilitation partners to successfully place consumers who are legally blind. With the enthusiastic support of
community rehabilitation partners, CBVH re-established both a Downstate and an Upstate Employment Providers Group. Due to provider agency staff turnover and geographic isolation of placement staff, the Upstate group teleconferenced only a few times in the past year. A new approach will be piloted this year, forming smaller regional groups who will meet in person, supported by a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor from the district office and one from home office. The downstate group continues to meet regularly share best practices, gain knowledge on specific programs or disabilities and discuss issues impacting efforts to place people in competitive settings. Toward this end, the group plans to learn more from HR professionals in different sectors (health care, entertainment, education) and conduct ongoing events for employers. In addition to repeating the Employer recognition event at Baruch College Computer Center for the Visually Impaired, the group is also involved in developing the program for the symposium, entitled “Changing Vision, Changing Lives.” The consortium is also working with Baruch to establish a mock interview event in May. The goal is to provide opportunities for consumers to gain practice in interviewing, while expanding employers’ disability awareness and knowledge of assistive technology.

CBVH removed Diagnostic Vocational Evaluation and Placement services from its Comprehensive Services Contract in order to expand the number of providers available to consumers. A Request for Qualifications resulted in 49 agencies being approved to provide placement services, and 12 agencies being approved to provide evaluation services. Changes in service guidelines enforce increased expectations of both counselors and contractors, and bring employers into the process at earlier phases, with a focus on achievement of quality outcomes.

Meeting the Needs of Special Populations

CBVH’s Rural Employment Group continues to meet by teleconference to discuss issues unique to rural areas. As a vehicle for problem solving, it has helped counselors find new approaches and share solutions that have worked. CBVH has also formed a group focusing on the needs of individuals who are legally blind who also have mental health issues. The group has shared resources and sought out expert advice on issues such as the effects on vocational pursuits of the various medications used to treat mental illness.

Chapter 515 Workgroup

An interagency group composed of representatives of CBVH, VESID, the Office of Mental Health (OMH) and the Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities (OMRDD) have been meeting regularly to assure cooperative implementation of the State Education Chapter 515 Integrated Employment law. Chapter 515 primarily focuses upon supported employment, including a memorandum of understanding which outlines the responsibilities of each agency in terms of intensive and extended services. This past year, the group focused its efforts on improving the
Chapter 515 Annual Report, and strengthening reporting through the existing New York Integrated Supported Employment Reporting (NYISER) system. The state agencies have consulted with the Empire State Chapter of the Association for Persons in Supported Employment (APSE) to improve service provision. Resulting changes to the system are expected to ease the reporting burden on providers and lead to better collection of data on the statewide supported employment program. Now the group is working with the Center for Essential Management Services, under the auspices of the Disability Statistics Research and Training Center, to develop a survey of supported employment providers to help define the service needs of persons participating in supported employment.

Most Integrated Setting Coordinating Council (MISCC), Committee on Employment

In the past year, CBVH joined 44 other members of the MISCC Committee on Employment to advise the larger MISCC regarding strategies to improve employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities. Developing a shared vision, values and beliefs by which to measure its recommendations, the Employment Committee identified five opportunities for collaboration:

1. Develop a statewide infrastructure for benefits and work incentives planning and assistance, including statewide collaboration on implementation for the Centers for Medicaid and Medicare Services (CMS) Comprehensive Employment System Medicaid Infrastructure Grant entitled “New York Makes Work Pay.”
2. Develop employer-focused strategies for increasing the employment rate.
3. Review data and funding integration to explore how existing funding and reporting structures across agencies can be more effectively integrated to better meet the needs of people with disabilities seeking employment and meaningful community integration.
4. Develop recommendations to significantly improve opportunities for public sector employment for individuals with disabilities.
5. Improve access to employment services for individuals with disabilities across State agencies by developing clear cross-systems partnership policies and procedures to ensure collaboration, coordination and a streamlined experience for customers.

Specific recommendations and strategies were identified and forwarded to the MISCC for consideration and approval. Smaller workgroups will move forward with those recommendations approved by the larger Council.

Cooperation with Industries for the Blind of New York State

CBVH continues its partnership with Industries for the Blind of New York State (IBNYS) to facilitate growth in competitive employment options. IBNYS’ Strategic Plan states

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that its leadership will focus 50% of its time on opportunity development, including areas of employment in service and technology. While supporting new initiatives, IBNYS will also maintain its manufacturing components, looking for new products and customers.

CBVH has encouraged IBNYS affiliates to provide needed work experience and skill training to enable individuals who are interested to move on to competitive employment in an integrated setting.

**Cooperative Agreement with Recipients of Grants for Services to American Indians**

In 2003, CBVH established an interagency agreement with the Seneca Nation of Indians Tribal Vocational Rehabilitation Program. The agreement represents both parties’ commitment to mutual cooperation, coordination and collaboration to increase vocational opportunities for members of the Seneca Nation of Indians with legal blindness. It establishes shared values, outlines how services will be coordinated and how members of both organizations will participate in cross-training activities.

The collaborative relationship between the CBVH Buffalo District Office and the Seneca Nation of Indians Tribal Vocational Rehabilitation Program has increased awareness, acceptance and utilization of CBVH services. CBVH maintains a relationship in which referrals are handled in a timely and culturally sensitive manner. CBVH staff conducts in-service training with agencies on the Cattaraugus Reservation, and working closely with staff of the Salamanca satellite of the Section 121 program and with the Area Office for the Aging on the reservation. CBVH staff serves on the Section 121 Project’s Advisory Board, which meets monthly. CBVH further supports the activities of the section 121 Tribal VR Program through the delivery of state-funded services to children and elderly individuals, allowing them to better focus resources on tribal members seeking employment.
COMPREHENSIVE SYSTEM OF PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT

This attachment describes the New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS), CBVH, system of personnel development to obtain an adequate supply of qualified professionals and paraprofessionals to provide vocational rehabilitation (VR) services to legally blind New Yorkers. As requested by the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA), this plan will focus on the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor (VRC), Senior VRC, Orientation and Mobility Specialist (O&M), and Vision Rehabilitation Therapist/Rehabilitation Teacher (RT) positions. The Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD) plan was developed by a workgroup composed of representatives from CBVH and the New York State Education Department (SED) - Office of Vocational and Educational Services for Individuals with Disabilities (VESID) and is updated annually. It has been reviewed and commented on by the CBVH State Rehabilitation Council.

A. DATA SYSTEM ON PERSONNEL AND PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT

1. Number of Personnel Employed
   a. As of August 1, 2008, CBVH employed a total of 53 individuals in field-based VRC and Senior VRC items. Two VRC items remain vacant and are expected to be filled this year.

   Approximately 4,000 legally blind individuals are "active" on VRCs' caseloads at any given time. The average caseload is 52 consumers per VRC upstate, and 83 consumers per VRC downstate. The increase in the average caseloads is a result of the time required to hire new counselors to replace those that retired. In addition, three counselors were compelled to take extended medical leave. The discrepancy in caseload sizes from upstate to downstate is due to the concentrated number of consumers in the downstate area.

   CBVH employs six O&M instructors and two RTs in field positions. One rehabilitation teacher retired and, because of the continuing shortage of qualified rehabilitation teachers, CBVH has been unable to fill the vacancy. CBVH intends to fill this position with an individual who is certifiable as a rehabilitation teacher. Otherwise, this number has remained constant in recent years.

   b. Projected Needs: It is projected for the period of September 1, 2007 to August 31, 2008 that five VRCs and Senior VRCs will retire or leave for other reasons. The orientation and mobility instructor that was expected to retire decided to remain on staff.
c. Projections: Of the 53 Senior VRC and VRCs in field positions, 48 are Certified Rehabilitation Counselors (CRC) or CRC eligible and four are not CRC eligible. One individual completed the requirements for a Masters degree majoring in vocational rehabilitation counseling and is now eligible for certified rehabilitation counselor status. Of the five who are not CRC eligible:

1. three intend to retire;
2. one is currently exploring credentialing options.

CBVH estimates that all state unit personnel will meet the CSPD standard by the end of 2015.

All six O&M instructors earned Master’s degrees and are eligible for certification from the Academy for Certification of Vision Rehabilitation and Education Professionals (ACVREP). Of the two RTs, one has a Master’s degree and one earned a Bachelor’s degree. Both are eligible for certification from ACVREP.

d. Several personnel transactions occurred during the period September 1, 2006 and August 31, 2007. The result of these transactions for the year as they affected each district office is as follows:

Buffalo
- No vacancies as of 8/31/08

Syracuse
- One VRC retired
- One VRC was hired
- No vacancies as of 8/31/08

Albany
- One vacant Rehabilitation Teacher of 8/31/08

White Plains
- Two VR Counselors left
- Two VR Counselor were hired
- One vacant VR Counselor position as of 8/31/08

New York City
- One Senior VRC Retired
- One VRC promoted to Sr. VRC
- One VR Counselor hired
CBVH estimates that by the year 2013, 32 current VRCs and Senior VRCs will be age 55 or older and eligible to retire. Many of those within retirement age, however, will not have enough time in service to retire at age 55 and will retire at a later time. In using age 57 as a likely retirement age, we assume that some employees who are older than 57 will remain employed by CBVH, but other VRCs, under age 57, may be promoted or leave for other reasons. Using this analysis of potential retirees and staff leaving for other reasons, we estimate that 29 VRCs and Senior VRCs will leave CBVH in the next five years. Of the 24 expected to remain, CBVH estimates only one VRC will not be CRC eligible without updating credentials. Using the same formula, it is estimated that seven of the eight O&M instructors and RTs will retire or leave for other reasons. All vacancies in the O&M and RT disciplines are expected to be replaced. This plan outlines strategies to update staff credentials so that they meet the highest academic standard for their profession. The in-service training unit of CBVH coordinates and evaluates all training programs attended by staff. All in-service training records are maintained electronically in a Microsoft Access program. A training file is maintained for each staff member containing: name, title, phone number, date hired, district office, college major, highest degree earned, a note section to track courses needed (if necessary), Certification or Certification eligible, and in-service training programs attended. CBVH can thus easily access data regarding staff credentials and CRC eligibility or status.

CBVH’s current staffing allows for CBVH to effectively provide services to all individuals who apply for and are determined eligible for VR services.

B. DATA ON PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT

1. There are six institutions of higher education in New York State (NYS) accredited by the Council on Rehabilitation Education (CORE) that prepare vocational rehabilitation professionals. CBVH maintains contact with all of these institutions of higher education, assists in recruitment for the colleges and uses their students as a source for CBVH staff positions. Last year, the colleges reported the following enrollment information:

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• State University of New York at Albany
  10 Students enrolled
  5 Graduates last year
  0 Disabled
  2 Non-white

• Hofstra University
  29 Students enrolled
  13 Graduates last year
  7 Disabled
  13 Non-white

• Hunter College of the City University of New York (CUNY)
  83 Students enrolled
  24 Graduates last year
  16 Disabled
  23 Non-white

• St. John’s University Closed during 2008

• State University of New York at Buffalo
  25 Students enrolled
  4 Graduates last year
  3 Disabled
  4 Non-white

• Syracuse University
  9 Students enrolled
  5 Graduates last year
  1 Disabled
  0 Non-white

CBVH continues to work with the five remaining institutions of higher education to develop a process for the recruitment of students from diverse populations, and to establish a curriculum based on best practices, research, and development trends.

2. Hunter College of CUNY is the only university preparation program in New York State graduating O&M instructors and RTs. Graduates from this program are eligible for certification by the ACVREP.
A. Dual Orientation and Mobility/Rehabilitation Teacher/ Hybrid Orientation and Mobility

22 Students enrolled
22 Graduates last year
5 Disabled
12 Non-white

3. Lighthouse International no longer conducts training programs for professional or paraprofessional Vision Rehabilitation Therapists.

C. Plan for Recruitment, Preparation, and Retention of Qualified Personnel.

The following steps describe the ongoing activities that will enable CBVH to continue the long-term CSPD plan and develop resources needed to recruit, prepare and retain qualified personnel in New York State:

a. Maintain relationships established with the Regional Technical Assistance and Training Center (TACE – formally the Regional Rehabilitation Continuing Education Program (RRCEP)), the VR counseling pre-service preparation programs in NYS, pre-service O&M and RT programs, and long distance learning pre-service programs from other states.

b. Continue to track the number of students who graduate from pre-service programs statewide and the percentage of diverse populations (e.g. severely disabled, Latino) within those programs.

c. Continue to develop relationships with distance learning programs to locate curriculum that meet the learning styles and needs of CBVH staff. These include video conferencing, videotapes, and/or computer technology.

d. Increase opportunities for staff in-service training.

e. Maintain a training database for all CBVH staff that includes the following information:

1. CRC status
2. Educational history
3. Proficiency areas (sign language, foreign language)
4. Training priority requests
5. Graduate course work

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f. Continue to recruit qualified VRCs, O&Ms, and RTs including those from diverse backgrounds or who have needed language skills.

g. Continue to partner with VESID with regard to the CSPD and the long term training of employees.

D. PERSONNEL STANDARDS

1. Highest Standard For VRCs

CBVH hires only individuals who meet The New York State Department of Civil Service’s personnel standard for vocational rehabilitation counselors. The standard is:

a. A current Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification (CRCC certificate; OR
b. A master’s degree in Rehabilitation Counseling, including a supervised internship, from a Council on Rehabilitation Education (CORE) accredited program; OR

c. A master’s degree in Rehabilitation Counseling or Counseling and notice of eligibility to sit for the Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification (CRCC) certificate examination.

2. Plans to Retrain or Hire Staff Who Do Not Meet The Highest Requirements

Staff Hired Prior to Implementation Date

Nine staff was hired prior to the implementation date of this CSPD. Their progress is updated in section A.1.c. of this report. An individual plan to achieve CRC academic eligibility is developed for each staff person who requires this credential.

Staff Hired Subsequent to the Implementation Date

New York State Civil Service VRC personnel standards were approved and reflect this CSPD. All VRCs in VRC titles will be required to commit to academic eligibility for CRC.

E. STAFF DEVELOPMENT

1. The CBVH in-service training program provides funds for attendance at workshops, conferences, formal course work, agency developed training sessions, RCEP developed or sponsored training and conferences. Training has been offered in counseling, rehabilitation, medical aspects of disability, job

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placement, rehabilitation technology, cultural diversity, informed choice, the Americans with Disabilities Act, the Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1998, and other topics related to vocational rehabilitation. CBVH contracts with 11 Adaptive Technology Centers in the state. Upon request, the centers provide training to CBVH staff on new access technology for individuals with disabilities.

2. Training areas for staff development are determined by the following:
   
a. Annual needs assessment conducted by the Training Unit,
b. RSA priorities, and
c. CBVH administration priorities.

3. CBVH maintains a library, which contains current information and research in the rehabilitation field. This information is available to all staff.

F. PERSONNEL TO ADDRESS INDIVIDUAL COMMUNICATION NEEDS.

CBVH continues to obtain the services of individuals able to communicate in the native language of individuals who have limited English speaking ability or require American Sign Language. Qualified interpreters are hired for services for individuals who are deaf/blind. CBVH staff with the required qualifications may be used for this purpose, or sub-contractors with specialty skills may be used.

G. PERFORMANCE EVALUATION SYSTEM

VRCs and their supervisors establish performance standards that become the basis for the counselor's annual evaluation. These performance standards will include the measures needed by those who must upgrade their qualifications to meet nationally recognized standards.

H. COORDINATION OF CSPD WITH THE INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES EDUCATION ACT (IDEA)

CBVH is not responsible for hiring staff who work in school systems – that is the responsibility of VESID, the New York state agency that administers both the vocational rehabilitation program for individuals with disabilities other than legal blindness as well as special education programs for school-age children. The CSPD functions for both areas are carried out within VESID's Office of Program Development and Support Services (PDSS), in collaboration with other VESID organizational units. The CBVH CSPD was developed by a workgroup, which included representatives of both VESID and CBVH.

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CBVH and the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) jointly agreed to once again work with the staff from the Center for Essential Management Services (CEMS) to complete a second phase of the CBVH comprehensive statewide assessment required by the Rehabilitation Services Administration. CBVH and the SRC have decided to conduct needs assessments on a continuing basis – in other words, conducting needs assessments annually over a three year period. The second phase of the Statewide Needs Assessment will be completed in late spring 2009 and will focus on analyzing extant data and conducting consumer surveys for all consumers who cases were closed in status 26, 28 or 30 during FY 2008. The surveys will capture data reflecting not only the consumer’s satisfaction with services but also how important those services are to the life of the consumer. By including consumers who did not successfully complete a vocational rehabilitation program in the survey process, CBVH expects to gather information that will provide insight into what changes need to be made to the service provision system that would offer opportunities to more individuals to obtain and maintain employment. Year three will address the State workforce investment system and focus on combining the results of the qualitative needs assessment (2008) with the quantitative needs assessment (2009) to facilitate a more systematic and ongoing effort to identify the needs of persons who are legally blind and to determine if there is a need to establish, develop or improve community rehabilitation programs. CBVH will share the results of the Statewide Needs Assessment with RSA as soon as they are available.

Individuals with the most significant disabilities, including their need for supported employment – this section will be completed when the results of the current needs assessment are provided by CEMS.

Individuals with disabilities who are minorities – this section will be completed when the results of the current needs assessment are provided by CEMS

Individuals with disabilities who are unserved – this section will be completed when the results of the current needs assessment are provided by CEMS

Individuals with disabilities who are underserved – this section will be completed when the results of the current needs assessment are provided by CEMS

Individuals with disabilities served through other components of the statewide workforce investment system – The 2009 needs assessment will not address the needs of individuals with disabilities served through other components of the statewide workforce investment system. The 2010 needs assessment will address this topic. Attachment 4.11(a), Page 1 of 2 Pages for 2010 State Plan

The need to establish, develop, or improve community rehabilitation programs within the state – this section will be completed when the results of the current needs assessment are provided by CEMS. It is expected that the results of the 2009 Needs
Assessment will assist CBVH in determining if there is a need to establish, develop or improve community rehabilitation program with the state.

STATEWIDE ASSESSMENT

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