

Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD): Attachment 4.10

Qualified Personnel Providing Vocational Rehabilitation Services

The Office of Adult Career and Continuing Education Services – Vocational Rehabilitation (ACCES-VR) is committed to establishing and maintaining an adequate supply of vocational rehabilitation counselors (VRCs) and relies on two systems to assess its qualified personnel needs. These systems are the New York State Education Department (NYSED) Fiscal and Human Resources Information Management System and the VR Reporting System. ACCES-VR collects data from these systems to track information about its VRCs who meet the Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD) requirements and the number of consumers served, and then uses the information to make trend data projections to assess staffing needs.

ACCES-VR hires VRCs who meet CSPD requirements to provide vocational rehabilitation services. ACCES-VR employs vocational rehabilitation counselor assistants (VRCA) to perform a variety of paraprofessional tasks to support the VRCs in assisting individuals with disabilities to obtain or retain employment. The VRCA interact with consumers and perform administrative tasks to facilitate service delivery. ACCES-VR does not employ any other type of rehabilitation staff, such as mobility instructors or rehabilitation teachers.

There are 291 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) VRC positions filled. ACCES-VR uses trend data projections to estimate the number of individuals that will be found eligible for ACCES-VR services. Based on these projections, ACCES-VR determined that 70 new VRCs will be needed to serve its consumers over the next five years. The estimate is based on the anticipated number of individuals to be served, the number of VRCs and supervisory counseling staff age 50 or older with 25 years of service who will be eligible for retirement within the next five years and others who may leave the agency.

There are 84 FTE VRCA positions filled. ACCES-VR estimates it will need 49 new VRCA over the next five years. The estimate is calculated based on a projected need for a total of 97 VRCA positions (1 VRCA: 3 VRC ratio), the number of VRCA age 50 or older with 25 years of service who will be eligible for retirement within the next five years and others who may leave the agency.

The number of consumers served increased from 52,341 last year to 52,361 this year. Based on a ratio of 1:175 VRC to consumer, the current level of counselors and counselor assistants allows us to adequately serve current numbers of eligible individuals.

Projected Counseling Staff Needs

Job Title	Total positions	Current vacancies	Projected Need over the next 5 years
Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors	291	28	70
Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Assistants	84	2	49

Council on Rehabilitation Education (CORE) Accredited Programs

The Council on Rehabilitation Education (CORE) is the agency that provides accreditation to Master's programs in Rehabilitation Counselor Education at institutions of higher education. The CORE accredited programs in New York State (NYS) are: University at Buffalo – State University of New York (SUNY), Hofstra University and Hunter College – City University of New York (CUNY).

Overall, there was a 19 percent increase in student enrollment at NYS CORE programs from last year. In 2013, there were 241 students enrolled in graduate programs in rehabilitation counseling, compared to 202 the previous year. ACCES-VR maintains a contact at each of these institutions of higher education and collects the following student data:

- SUNY Buffalo offers a graduate program in rehabilitation counseling to students both on-campus and online. In FFY 2012, student enrollment increased 29 percent, to 111 students from 86 students the previous year.
- Hofstra University student enrollment in FFY 2012 decreased 23 percent, to 41 students from 53 students the previous year.
- CUNY Hunter College student enrollment in FFY 2012 increased 41 percent, to 89 students from 63 students the previous year.

Institutions of Higher Education (CORE) Student Total

Institutions	Students enrolled	Employees sponsored by agency and/or RSA	Graduates sponsored by agency and/or RSA	Graduates from the previous year
University at Buffalo	111	9	0	15
Hofstra University	41	1	0	13
Hunter College - City University of New York	89	1	0	18

Plan for Recruitment, Preparation and Retention of Qualified Personnel

ACCES-VR launched several initiatives to attract professional rehabilitation counselors and graduate students to consider employment in New York State. These initiatives included college recruitment visits and counselor internships.

Recruitment and Outreach:

ACCES-VR works with CORE programs in New York and contiguous states to attract potential candidates from diverse backgrounds for employment at ACCES-VR. To maximize outreach efforts, ACCES-VR increased its use of technology to share information and maintain contact with schools. In 2013, recruitment visits focused on colleges and universities in and around New York State. The benefits of working in NYS were shared with Program Directors and students in graduate Rehabilitation Counseling programs. They were also advised of internship opportunities and the application process for taking the NYS Civil Service exam for VR counselors.

Counselor Internships:

ACCES-VR has an internship program to provide second-year graduate students with an opportunity to perform their internships in one of the ACCES-VR field offices. This initiative allows students to complete their degree requirements while building valuable experience with the State VR program. The internship program is comprised of two components: a practicum and an internship. These are offered three times each year and recently graduated students can work in intern status while pursuing full time employment at ACCES-VR. When resources allow, paid internships are made available to students.

More than 200 students have participated in the internship program since 2006 with 32 VRCs hired. In 2013, ACCES-VR provided five practicum experiences and 23 paid internships.

Plan to Support VRCs to Meet CSPD:

Since NYS does not have State certification or licensure for VR counselors, ACCES-VR has elected to use the national standard established by the Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification (CRCC). The eleven counselors who do not meet this standard engaged in a training program to meet the standard by May 30, 2018. The participation of VRCs in an educational program to meet the standard is monitored on an ongoing basis to evaluate compliance with SED personnel standards (cited below).

Personnel Standards:

ACCES-VR employs VRCs who have, or are eligible to obtain, qualification as a Certified Rehabilitation Counselor (CRC). All VRCs are required to have:

- a current Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification (CRCC) certificate; or
- a Master's degree in Rehabilitation Counseling, including a supervised internship, from a CORE accredited program; or
- a Master's degree in Rehabilitation Counseling or Counseling and notice of eligibility to participate in the Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification (CRCC) certificate examination.

VRCs considered for appointment to a "Manual Communication" or "Spanish Language" position are required to demonstrate proficiency in the manual sign language or in the Spanish language. Proficiency must be at a level which will permit them to perform the duties of the position satisfactorily.

Civil Service Qualifications for Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Assistant:

ACCES-VR employs VRCAs to assist VRCs in the administrative, paraprofessional and routine communication tasks that enhance the vocational rehabilitation process. The VRCAs do not determine eligibility, develop the vocational goal, write the IPE, determine case closures nor do they provide VR services to consumers. To be eligible for employment, VRCAs must meet the following qualifications:

- Bachelor degree in vocational rehabilitation, social work, counseling, or psychology; or
- Bachelor degree and one year of qualifying experience; or
- 60 semester college credit hours and two years of qualifying experience; or
- Four years of qualifying experience.

Qualifying experience: In order for experience to be considered qualifying, the primary responsibilities of a position must have involved professional or paraprofessional duties in one of the following areas:

- either providing direct services beyond routine personal care or supervision to physically, mentally or learning disabled adults or adolescents in a rehabilitation program or facility; or
- providing vocational or educational services to disabled adults or disabled adolescents in the areas of assessment, counseling, job coaching, guidance, placement or job development.

Staff Development

ACCES-VR implemented the In-Service Training (IST) program to provide training and education opportunities for all VR staff to strengthen skills to enhance the delivery of quality services to consumers. Training is an important part of the development of qualified staff to meet the requirements of CSPD and to meet and maintain professional certification.

An annual training needs assessment is conducted to identify staff training needs to enhance staffs' skills and knowledge in the provision of VR services to individuals with disabilities that lead to successful employment outcomes. The results of the needs assessment survey are shared with the Region 2 Technical Assistance and Continuing Education Center (TACE), which assists ACCES-VR in providing training to VR professionals. With input from managers and the State Rehabilitation Council, a staff training program is developed.

In FFY 2013, ACCES-VR staff, including 285 CRCs, participated in 162 training opportunities. ACCES-VR provided funds through the IST grant to 19 staff to pursue certificate, non-degree, undergraduate, graduate or post-graduate degree courses. ACCES-VR staff participated in training on the following topics:

- ACCES-VR policies, procedures and technical assistance briefs: including Ticket to Work; post-secondary training including cost-effective services; economic need, Case Management System (CaMS); ACCES-VR business manual; Supervisory Institute for supervisory staff trainings on VR practices.
- assessment: including vocational evaluations, functional and situational assessment, presumption of eligibility and supported employment referrals.
- vocational rehabilitation counseling and professional conferences: including transition; engaging and preparing youth for employment; developing counseling and guidance plans; motivational interviewing; ethical issues in rehabilitation; VR Due Process including Mediation; case management; managing challenging behaviors in employment; working with consumers with: co-existing conditions; mental illness and substance abuse; autism, traumatic brain injury; multiple sclerosis; and working with sex offenders.
- rehabilitation technology: including assistive devices, cochlear implants and Microsoft applications such as power point, access and excel.
- job placement and employment: including labor market information; labor trends; placement initiatives and self-employment; work incentives; VR partnerships in employment; transferable skills; training techniques in employment setting; integration of recovery; re-entry for ex-offenders with disabilities; returning to

work with a traumatic brain injury; placing transgender into the workforce; independent living, and Americans with Disabilities Act.

- disability-related training: including professional conferences in mental health, developmental disabilities, deafness and hearing impairments, and substance abuse disorders. Training included post-traumatic stress disorder; traumatic brain injury; epilepsy; mood disorders; personality disorders; autism spectrum disorders; anxiety disorders; addiction; managing challenging behavior; visual acuity; multiple sclerosis and neuropsychology.
- supported employment: including professional conferences. Training was provided for an orientation to supported employment; counseling skills for direct service providers; job development; job coaching; extended services and natural supports; ethical issues in job placement; documentation and record keeping; job retention and career development; and benefits advisement.

An initial training program on the Individual Placement and Support (IPS) model and recovery from mental illness has evolved into an on-going Recovery-Oriented Vocational Rehabilitation Community of Practice. Through quarterly training sessions and on-going sharing of resources through e-mail, formal presenters and colleagues share knowledge and practices related to working with individuals with mental health conditions.

Procedures for Acquisition and Dissemination of Training

Training and education opportunities for VR staff are funded through the IST grant. ACCES-VR collaborates with other State agencies and disability organizations to jointly develop or provide disability and/or systems trainings for staff. ACCES-VR also partners with TACE to increase staff skills and enhance their knowledge. This partnership expands training opportunities for staff and gives ACCES-VR additional resources to maximize funding for trainings. Additionally, this partnership provides trainings for CRCs to earn continuing education credits to meet the Ethics certification requirements.

Other key partnerships include the Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services (OASAS); Association for Persons in Supported Employment (APSE), New York State Rehabilitation Association (NYSRA), New York Association of Psychiatric Rehabilitation Services, Inc. (NYAPRS), New York Association of Training and Employment Professionals (NYATEP) and the New York State Independent Living Council (NYSILC).

Training is provided through a variety of modalities such as distance learning, video-conference, seminars, workshops, individual district office training, and attendance at local, regional and statewide training programs and conferences. ACCES-VR utilizes video-conferencing training as much as possible to facilitate training

opportunities and to minimize costs. Consideration is given to the diversity of staff, skill levels, and experiences and needs when developing training programs.

Personnel to Address Individual Communication Needs

ACCES-VR ensures adequate services to applicants or eligible individuals with limited English proficiency or who use other modes of communication, such as sign language, by hiring staff able to communicate in other native languages or via other modes of communication, such as sign language. When such staff is not available, ACCES-VR obtains the services of other individuals who are able to communicate in appropriate modes with applicants or eligible individuals. ACCES-VR contracts with outside agencies and individuals for interpreter or communication services, and uses only certified or State-approved interpreters for the deaf when sign language interpreter services are required in the provision of VR services.

Coordination with Personnel Development and Training under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

Through its administration of vocational rehabilitation and independent living programs, ACCES-VR coordinates policy and services relating to transition services for students with disabilities from school to adult services and begins planning VR services for individuals with disabilities prior to their exiting high school. The coordination of meaningful transition services for students with disabilities from school-age to postsecondary settings is a priority for ACCES-VR. Within the State Education Department (SED), ACCES-VR collaborates with the P-12: Office of Special Education. The program managers jointly review and share training information and, when relevant, coordinate efforts by inviting respective staff to receive training on transition, accommodations, assessment and knowledge of specific disabilities. All VRCs were trained on the new Career Development and Commencement Credential (CDOS), as it relates to ACCES-VR's overall efforts in serving youth.

The CDOS is a NYS educational credential that replaces the Individualized Education Program (IEP) Diploma for students with significant disabilities. Effective July 1, 2013, the IEP diploma is no longer awarded to students with disabilities. As an alternate high school credential, the CDOS requirements demonstrate that students with disabilities have participated in a set of experiences related to preparing for employment. The CDOS credential is expected to provide more pertinent information for those students who apply to ACCES-VR.

It is envisioned that this credential will provide more documentation about the accomplishments of students in the areas of academic instruction, career exploration and development, and provide potential employers with documentation on which students are exiting school with demonstrated knowledge and experience for entry-level employment.

ACCES-VR has a number of VRCs across the State dedicated solely to transition. One office utilizes a “transition team” concept to serve students with disabilities over a wide geographic area. The chart below provides data about ACCES-VR services to youth (applicants prior to age 22). Both the number of youth applicants and youth served decreased from FFY 2012. Youth applicants decreased by 895 applicants from FFY 2012, while the number of youth served decreased significantly, by 1,506 fewer youth. In spite of this, 4,563 youth gained employment FFY 2013, an increase of 241 employed youth and the largest number employed in the last six years. Youth continue to make up a significant portion of the ACCES-VR caseload (39.1%). ACCES-VR will continue to work closely with schools to enable the smooth transition of students with disabilities from school to work.

ACCES-VR Services to Youth

Youth with Disabilities (Applicants prior to age 22)	FFY 2008	FFY 2009	FFY 2010	FFY 2011	FFY 2012	FFY 2013
Transition Age Youth applicants	18,036	18,406	14,469	13,070	12,976	12,081
Youth served	38,241	44,279	43,709	38,232	35,064	33,558
Youth employed after VR services	4,140	4,202	4,318	4,504	4,322	4,563
School districts with students with active ACCES-VR cases	682	693	693	690	688	687