



# **REHABILITATION SERVICES ADMINISTRATION REPORT FOR FISCAL YEARS 2017–2020**

REPORT ON FEDERAL ACTIVITIES  
UNDER THE *REHABILITATION ACT OF 1973*

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ADMINISTRATION REPORT  
FOR  
FISCAL YEARS 2017–2020**

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UNDER THE *REHABILITATION ACT OF 1973***

**MAY 2022**

OFFICE OF SPECIAL EDUCATION AND REHABILITATIVE SERVICES  
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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## **May 2022**

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# ACRONYMS

<b>Acronym</b>	<b>Full Term</b>
<b>ABA</b>	<i>Architectural Barriers Act</i>
<b>ADA</b>	<i>Americans with Disabilities Act</i>
<b>AIVRS</b>	American Indian Vocational Rehabilitation Services
<b>AIVRTTAC</b>	American Indian Vocational Rehabilitation Training and Technical Assistance Center
<b>ALN</b>	Assistance Listing Number
<b>ASL</b>	American Sign Language
<b>CANAR</b>	Consortia of Administrators for Native American Rehabilitation
<b>CAP</b>	Client Assistance Program
<b>CBVI</b>	New Jersey Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired
<b>CFDA</b>	Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance
<b>CPID</b>	Career Pathways for Individuals with Disabilities
<b>CRD</b>	U.S. Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division
<b>DD Act</b>	<i>Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act of 2000</i>
<b>DLC</b>	Disability Law Colorado
<b>DRP</b>	Disability Rights Pennsylvania
<b>ED</b>	U.S. Department of Education
<b>EEOC</b>	Equal Employment Opportunity Commission
<b>FAQs</b>	Frequently Asked Questions
<b>FY</b>	Fiscal Year
<b>GPRA</b>	<i>Government Performance and Results Act</i>
<b>IDEA</b>	<i>Individuals with Disabilities Education Act</i>
<b>IL</b>	Independent Living
<b>IL-OIB</b>	Independent Living Services for Older Individuals Who Are Blind
<b>IPE</b>	Individualized Plan for Employment
<b>JDVRTAC</b>	Job-Driven Vocational Rehabilitation Technical Assistance Center
<b>LEAs</b>	Local Educational Agencies
<b>MDLC</b>	Minnesota Disability Law Center

<b>Acronym</b>	<b>Full Term</b>
<b>NCRTM</b>	National Clearinghouse of Rehabilitation Training Materials
<b>NDRN</b>	National Disability Rights Network
<b>NRTC</b>	National Research and Training Center
<b>NTACT</b>	National Technical Assistance Center on Transition
<b>NWIC</b>	Northwest Indian College
<b>OCB</b>	Oregon Commission for the Blind
<b>OCIO</b>	Office of the Chief Information Officer
<b>OCR</b>	U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights
<b>OFCCP</b>	Office of Federal Contract Compliance Program
<b>OIB-TAC</b>	Older Individuals Who Are Blind Technical Assistance Center
<b>OSEP</b>	Office of Special Education Programs
<b>OSERS</b>	Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services
<b>OVR</b>	Kentucky Office of Vocational Rehabilitation
<b>P&amp;A</b>	Protection and Advocacy
<b>PAIR</b>	Protection and Advocacy of Individual Rights
<b>PEQA-TAC</b>	Technical Assistance Center for Vocational Rehabilitation Agency Program Evaluation and Quality Assurance
<b>PTI</b>	Parent Training and Information
<b>PY</b>	Program Year
<b>RSA</b>	Rehabilitation Services Administration
<b>SE program</b>	Supported Employment Services Program
<b>SEAs</b>	State Educational Agencies
<b>SGA</b>	Substantial Gainful Activity
<b>SLA</b>	State Licensing Agency
<b>SILC</b>	Statewide Independent Living Council
<b>SMPID</b>	RSA's State Monitoring and Program Improvement Division
<b>SNAP</b>	Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program
<b>SSDI</b>	Social Security Disability Insurance
<b>SSI</b>	Supplemental Security Income
<b>TA</b>	Technical Assistance
<b>TANF</b>	Temporary Assistance for Needy Families

<b>Acronym</b>	<b>Full Term</b>
<b>TSPD</b>	Training and Service Programs Division
<b>VR</b>	Vocational Rehabilitation
<b>VR program</b>	Vocational Rehabilitation Services Program
<b>VRTAC-TC</b>	Vocational Rehabilitation Technical Assistance Center— Targeted Communities
<b>VRTAC-Y</b>	Vocational Rehabilitation Technical Assistance Center— Youth with Disabilities
<b>WIA</b>	<i>Workforce Investment Act of 1998</i>
<b>WINTAC</b>	Workforce Innovation Technical Assistance Center
<b>WIOA</b>	<i>Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act</i>

# PREFACE

The *Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Rehabilitation Act)*<sup>1</sup> provides the statutory authority for programs and activities that assist individuals with disabilities in the pursuit of gainful employment, independence, self-sufficiency, and full integration into community life. The *Rehabilitation Act* was last amended by *Title IV of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)*,<sup>2</sup> signed into law on July 22, 2014—a bipartisan and bicameral effort that reformed the Federal adult education and workforce development system and presented opportunities to change the way these systems operate.

This report to the President and Congress describes the activities of the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) (a component of the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS)) during Federal fiscal years (FYs) 2017 through 2020 (October 1, 2016, through September 30, 2020), including its collaboration with other Federal agencies. RSA is the principal agency for carrying out *Titles I, III, VI*, and specified portions of *Titles V and VII* of the *Rehabilitation Act*. RSA is responsible for preparing and submitting this report to the President and Congress as required by Section 13(a) of the *Rehabilitation Act*.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 29 U.S.C. § 701 et seq.

<sup>2</sup> WIOA superseded the *Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA)*.

<sup>3</sup> Data used in this report are from Federal, U.S. Department of Education (ED), OSERS, or RSA systems and annual reports that may require user permission or registration or are restricted to ED or RSA personnel. Access to these systems and reports has not been made available to the public in this report. Reports on RSA activities that are readily available can be found at the RSA website: <https://rsa.ed.gov>

# REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

Following a brief overview of the *Rehabilitation Act* and identification of the programs it authorizes, RSA describes in this report the purpose, funding, activities, and performance of each formula and discretionary grant program it administers for the period covering FYs 2017 through 2020. Additionally, RSA explains reasons underlying trends in performance, including the effect, if any, of the COVID-19 pandemic on the trends, and the technical assistance provided by RSA to improve the performance of the programs.

With respect to the State Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Services program, the largest of the four programs described in the “Employment Programs” section of this report designed to assist individuals with disabilities to achieve competitive integrated employment, RSA:

- Describes declines in some areas of performance, such as the number of individuals with disabilities who applied and were determined eligible for services and the employment outcomes these individuals obtained, along with improved performance regarding the number of students with disabilities served and the pre-employment transition services they received.
- Provides explanation for these performance trends, such as the effect of orders of selection, changes in the VR program made by *WIOA*, and the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Describes data RSA is required to collect under Section 116(b) of *WIOA*, including data concerning the demographics of VR program participants and barriers to employment experienced by some individuals, as well as the performance of State VR agencies on the joint performance accountability measures established for the core programs in the workforce development system.
- Highlights the monitoring and technical assistance activities RSA undertook to improve the ability of State VR agencies to administer the program and the quality of services delivered. This includes revising monitoring protocols in collaboration with State VR agencies and issuing multiple sub-regulatory guidance announcing, among other things, flexibilities in the use of Federal VR program funds when providing pre-employment transition services and the manner in which these agencies must adhere to prior approval requirements.
- Summarizes RSA's collaboration with agencies within the U.S. Department of Labor and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, among others, for the purpose of improving the employment of individuals with disabilities.

RSA provides similar information and data for three additional employment-related programs: the State Supported Employment Services program, the vending facility program authorized under the *Randolph-Sheppard Act* and the use of VR program funds to support the program, and the American Indian Vocational Rehabilitation Services program. Other formula grant programs RSA covers in this report include the Independent Living Services for Older Individuals Who Are Blind, Client Assistance, and Protection and Advocacy of Individual Rights programs.

RSA makes discretionary grant investments to improve the field of vocational rehabilitation through the Rehabilitation Training and Demonstration and Training programs and this report describes the activities and performance of the Rehabilitation Long-Term, Innovative, Interpreter, and Braille Training programs. Additionally, RSA describes the wide variety of ways it uses discretionary grant funds to improve the number and skills of personnel engaged in the delivery of VR services through model demonstration, and technical assistance and training projects. Thus, for example, this report includes information about projects designed to expand career pathways for individuals with disabilities; information and training centers that support parents and guardians of individuals and students with disabilities so they can better access VR services, including pre-employment transition services; and technical assistance centers that support State VR agencies as they provide services to youth with disabilities and individuals with disabilities who are traditionally underserved or are from targeted communities, assist students with disabilities to transition from secondary education to postsecondary education and competitive integrated employment, and implement the requirements of *WIOA*.

Finally, RSA briefly describes programs authorized under the *Rehabilitation Act* that it does not administer, such as the Architectural and Transportation Barriers Compliance Board, the National Council on Disability, and the independent living programs administered by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, along with the non-discrimination provisions in *Title V* of the *Rehabilitation Act* for which other Federal agencies and ED, as applicable, are responsible.

# THE *REHABILITATION ACT*: AN OVERVIEW

Federal interest and involvement in rehabilitation issues and policy initially date from 1920 with the enactment of the *Civilian Vocational Rehabilitation Act*, commonly called the *Smith-Fess Act*. The *Smith-Fess Act* marked the beginning of a Federal and State partnership in the rehabilitation of individuals with disabilities. Although the law was passed shortly after the end of World War I, its provisions were specifically directed at the rehabilitation needs of persons who were industrially injured rather than the needs of veterans with disabilities.

A major event in the history of the Federal rehabilitation program was passage of the *Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Rehabilitation Act)*, which provides the statutory authority for programs and activities that assist individuals with disabilities<sup>4</sup> in the pursuit of gainful employment, independence, self-sufficiency, and full integration into community life. Under the *Rehabilitation Act*, the following Federal agencies and entities are charged with administering a wide variety of programs and activities: the Departments of Education, Labor, Health and Human Services, and Justice; the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission; the Architectural and Transportation Barriers Compliance Board (Access Board); and the National Council on Disability.

The U.S. Department of Education (ED) has primary responsibility for administering the *Rehabilitation Act*. The Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) is the administrative entity responsible for oversight of the programs under the *Rehabilitation Act* that are funded through ED. It is the principal agency for carrying out *Titles I, III, VI*, and specified portions of *Title V* and *VII* of the *Rehabilitation Act*. Portions of *Title V* are administered by ED's Office for Civil Rights. The titles by name are as follows.

- Title I Vocational Rehabilitation Services
- Title II Research and Training
- Title III Professional Development and Special Projects and Demonstrations
- Title IV National Council on Disability
- Title V Rights and Advocacy
- Title VI Employment Opportunities for Individuals with Disabilities
- Title VII Independent Living Services and Centers for Independent Living

RSA conducts monitoring, provides technical assistance (TA), disseminates information to public and private nonprofit agencies and organizations, and works collaboratively with other Federal agencies to facilitate individuals with disabilities' meaningful and effective participation in employment and in the community.

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<sup>4</sup> *Individual with a disability* is defined, for purposes of programs funded under the *Rehabilitation Act*, at Section 7(20).

The largest program RSA administers is the State VR program. This program funds State vocational rehabilitation (VR) agencies to provide employment-related services for individuals with disabilities so that they may prepare for and engage in competitive, integrated, and gainful employment that is consistent with their strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities, interests, and informed choice.

For more than 100 years, the VR program has supported individuals with physical disabilities to prepare for and enter the workforce. In 1943 the program expanded to serve individuals with psychiatric disabilities. Nationwide, the VR program serves more than one million individuals with disabilities each year. More than 91 percent of the people who use State VR services have significant physical or psychiatric disabilities that seriously limit one or more functional capacities (mobility, communication, self-care, self-direction, interpersonal skills, work tolerance, or work skills) (Section 7(21)(A)(i)). These individuals often require multiple services over an extended period. For them, VR services are indispensable for attaining employment and increased independence.

The *Rehabilitation Act* has been a driving force behind major changes that have affected the lives of millions of individuals with disabilities in this country. This report, covering FYs 2017 through 2020, describes all the major programs and activities authorized under the *Rehabilitation Act* and the success of the Federal government in carrying out the purposes and policies of the *Rehabilitation Act*.

# PROGRAMS UNDER THE *REHABILITATION ACT*

Through partnerships with other Federal and non-Federal agencies, RSA reports on a wide variety of programs, initiatives, and activities that are authorized under the *Rehabilitation Act*. Many of these are funded or supported by RSA, while some are funded or supported by other agencies. For the purpose of this report, these programs, initiatives, and activities are organized into five major areas: Employment Programs; Independent Living Services and Centers for Independent Living; Technical Assistance, Training, and Support; Evaluation, Research, and Information Dissemination; and Advocacy and Enforcement. Within each area, this report describes the discrete program, initiative, or activity. The programs<sup>5</sup> authorized under the *Rehabilitation Act*, organized by these areas, are:

## **Employment Programs**

- State Vocational Rehabilitation Services program
- Supported Employment Services program
- Support for Business Enterprise Programs for blind vendors under the *Randolph-Sheppard Act*
- American Indian Vocational Rehabilitation Services program

## **Independent Living Services and Centers for Independent Living**

- Independent Living Services program\*
- Centers for Independent Living program\*
- Independent Living Services for Older Individuals Who Are Blind program

## **Technical Assistance, Training, and Support**

- Traditionally Underserved Populations
- Demonstration and Training programs
- Rehabilitation Training program

## **Evaluation, Research, and Information Dissemination**

- The National Clearinghouse of Rehabilitation Training Materials

## **Advocacy and Enforcement**

- Client Assistance Program

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<sup>5</sup> Programs marked with an asterisk are those administered by Federal agencies other than ED and RSA but are described in this report. The nondiscrimination provision in programs receiving Federal financial assistance, located in *Title V* of the *Rehabilitation Act*, is enforced by ED and other Federal agencies (marked with two asterisks here).

- Protection and Advocacy of Individual Rights program
- Employment of People with Disabilities\*
- Architectural and Transportation Barriers Compliance Board (Access Board) \*
- Electronic and Information Technology\*
- Employment Under Federal Contracts\*
- Nondiscrimination in Programs that Receive Federal Financial Assistance\*\*
- National Council on Disability\*

# EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMS

RSA administers four programs that assist individuals with disabilities to achieve employment outcomes. Two of these programs, the State VR program, and the Supported Employment Services program, are State formula grant programs. Through the American Indian Vocational Rehabilitation Services program, a discretionary grant program, RSA makes competitive awards for up to a five-year period. RSA also administers the *Randolph-Sheppard Act*, which requires Federal agencies to give a priority to blind vendors to operate vending facilities on Federal and other properties. Under the VR program, State VR agencies that serve individuals who are blind are authorized to use VR program funds for specified purposes to support blind vendors to operate these vending facilities.

## VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SERVICES PROGRAM

Authorized under Sections 100–111 and 113 of the *Rehabilitation Act*  
Managed by the Rehabilitation Services Administration,  
U.S. Department of Education

The VR program is authorized by *Title I* of the *Rehabilitation Act*, as amended by *Title IV* of *WIOA* (29 U.S.C. § 720 et seq.), to provide support to each State

- to assist in operating a statewide comprehensive, coordinated, effective, efficient, and accountable State program as an integral part of a statewide workforce development system; and
- to assess, plan, and provide VR services to individuals with disabilities so that those individuals may prepare for and engage in competitive integrated employment consistent with their unique strengths, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities, interests, and informed choice.

VR agencies may provide a wide variety of services to individuals with disabilities, including career counseling, work-based learning experiences (e.g., internships, apprenticeships, and short-term employment), financial support for vocational training and postsecondary education, rehabilitation technology and training, transition and pre-employment transition services, supported employment services, transportation, and other services and supports necessary for individuals with disabilities to achieve employment. The VR program is administered by 78 VR agencies<sup>6</sup> at the State level, which includes the 50 States, the District of Columbia, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, American Samoa, Guam, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

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<sup>6</sup> Section 101(a)(2) of the *Rehabilitation Act* provides States with flexibility in the organizational structures they choose to administer and operate the VR program, which includes the ability to establish separate agencies that serve only individuals who are blind or visually impaired. Currently, there are 22 VR agencies serving only individuals who are blind or visually impaired, 22 VR agencies serving individuals with all other disabilities, and 34 VR agencies serving individuals with all types of disabilities, including blindness and visual impairments.

The *Rehabilitation Act* provides flexibility to the States for positioning the VR program within the State government. The VR program can be located in one of two types of State agencies. The first is any State agency that is primarily concerned with VR or vocational and other rehabilitation for individuals with disabilities. The other is a designated State VR unit that is primarily concerned with VR or vocational and other rehabilitation for individuals with disabilities and is also responsible for the administration of the State agency’s VR program under the State Plan. Structurally, VR agencies are located primarily in State governmental departments or agencies such as education, labor and workforce, social services, and disability-related agencies or independent commissions. For American Samoa, Section 101(a)(2)(A)(iii) of the *Rehabilitation Act* identifies the governor’s office as the VR agency.

RSA distributes funds to the 78 VR agencies on a formula basis that considers each State’s population and average per capita income. The Federal government covers 78.7 percent of the program’s total costs through financial assistance to the States for program services and administration with a required State match of 21.3 percent of the State’s total expenditures under the program.

Table 1 presents the total Federal VR program appropriations from FYs 2017 through 2020. The total amounts include any reductions due to sequestration, the automatic spending cuts that occur through the withdrawal of funding for certain government programs. The Federal participation in the VR program increased from \$3.2 billion in FY 2017 to \$3.4 billion in FY 2020.

**Table 1. State Vocational Rehabilitation Services Program Federal appropriations: FYs 2017–2020**

Fiscal year	Federal appropriation in billions
FY 2017	\$3.2
FY 2018	\$3.2
FY 2019	\$3.3
FY 2020	\$3.4

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Department of Education Budget Tables, FYs 2017 through 2020.

Table 2 presents the non-Federal share for the VR program. The total non-Federal expenditures from VR grantees decreased from \$915 million in FY 2017 to \$905 million in FY 2020.

**Table 2. State Vocational Rehabilitation Services program non-Federal share: FYs 2017–2020**

Fiscal year	VR non-Federal share in millions
FY 2017	\$915
FY 2018	\$926
FY 2019	\$915
FY 2020	\$905

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, Rehabilitation Services Administration, Federal Financial Report (SF-425), FYs 2017 through 2020.

In addition to receiving Federal VR program appropriations, a VR agency may receive program income from other sources, such as reimbursements from the Social Security Administration for individuals served through the VR program who are Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) beneficiaries or Supplemental Security Income (SSI) recipients who achieve paid employment at a level of earnings high enough to be terminated from receiving their SSDI or SSI benefits.

## VR PROGRAM PERFORMANCE

The VR program provides services to individuals with significant disabilities,<sup>7</sup> including individuals with the most significant disabilities,<sup>8</sup> assisting them to achieve and maximize competitive integrated employment outcomes. RSA, in its relationship with the States, has continued to emphasize the priorities of high-quality employment outcomes and increased services to individuals with significant disabilities, including individuals with the most significant disabilities. Helping State agencies to achieve continuous improvement in their performance in serving individuals with disabilities requires a robust system of monitoring, technical assistance, and collaboration to address identified needs of VR program grantees and the individuals with disabilities they serve.

Administering the VR program requires State agencies to manage a complex array of service delivery methods and funding mechanisms. By monitoring State programs, RSA can identify areas of need so it can support agencies' efforts to improve performance and comply with the *Rehabilitation Act* and its implementing regulations.

<sup>7</sup> *Individual with a significant disability* is defined in Section 7(21)(A), as "an individual with a disability—

- (i) who has a severe physical or mental impairment which seriously limits one or more functional capacities (such as mobility, communication, self-care, self-direction, interpersonal skills, work tolerance or work skills) in terms of an employment outcome;
- (ii) whose vocational rehabilitation can be expected to require multiple vocational rehabilitation services over an extended period of time; and
- (iii) who has one or more physical or mental disabilities resulting from amputation, arthritis, autism, blindness, burn injury, cancer, cerebral palsy, cystic fibrosis, deafness, head injury, heart disease, hemiplegia, hemophilia, respiratory or pulmonary dysfunction, intellectual disability, mental illness, multiple sclerosis, muscular dystrophy, musculo-skeletal disorders, neurological disorders (including stroke and epilepsy), paraplegia, quadriplegia and other spinal cord conditions, sickle cell anemia, specific learning disability, end-stage renal disease, or another disability or combination of disabilities determined on the basis of an assessment for determining eligibility and vocational rehabilitation needs to cause comparable substantial functional limitation."

<sup>8</sup> *Individual with a most significant disability*, as defined in Section 7(21)(E) of the *Rehabilitation Act*, with respect to an individual in a State, means an individual with a significant disability who meets criteria established by the State under Section 101(a)(5)(C) of the *Rehabilitation Act*. States must provide VR services to individuals with the most significant disabilities first when establishing an order of selection.

Within RSA, the State Monitoring and Program Improvement Division (SMPID) is responsible for monitoring State VR agencies. SMPID personnel are assigned to State teams that work collaboratively with State agencies, consumers, service providers, and other interested parties to implement a continuous, performance-based monitoring process that identifies areas for program improvement, areas of noncompliance, and effective practices. Each State is assigned a SMPID State liaison who serves as the single RSA point of contact for that State.

In FYs 2017 through 2020, RSA conducted 47 on-site monitoring and TA visits and off-site reviews of combined, general, and blind VR agencies in the following States and territories: Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Delaware, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Indiana, Kansas, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota, Northern Marianas Island, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Puerto Rico, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, and Wisconsin. RSA has published reports covering these monitoring visits and off-site reviews on its website at <https://rsa.ed.gov/about/programs/vocational-rehabilitation-state-grants/monitoring-of-vocational-rehabilitation-program>.

In FY 2020, RSA collaborated with VR agencies to revise and improve its monitoring process by incorporating shared fundamental values in the monitoring approach. As such, RSA's monitoring: 1) values and supports the Federal/State partnership; 2) focuses on areas designed to meet the needs of State VR agencies and RSA; 3) addresses the characteristics and circumstances of individual VR agencies with respect to the areas reviewed and the conduct of the monitoring; 4) fosters transparent and thoughtful verbal and written communication; 5) promotes the use of and improves the validity and reliability of programmatic and fiscal data; 6) makes efficient and effective use of RSA and State VR agency personnel and time devoted to the process; 7) delivers accurate, targeted, purposeful, and timely technical assistance, balanced with the need to assure compliance with fiscal and programmatic requirements; 8) maximizes results for VR participants; 9) leads to continuous improvement in the VR program; and 10) supports alignment with the public workforce system. RSA will implement this revised monitoring approach beginning in FY 2021 and is committed to these values as it partners with State VR agencies in the conduct of monitoring to foster continuous improvement in outcomes for individuals with disabilities.

In addition to monitoring the VR program, RSA issues sub-regulatory guidance and technical assistance to State agencies routinely to address identified needs. For example, in FY 2020, RSA issued a series of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) documents to address issues that arose as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. That year, RSA also responded to questions raised by State agencies and stakeholders related to the use of reserved funds for the provision of pre-employment transition services by publishing on February 27, 2020, in the *Federal Register*, a Notice of Interpretation clarifying policy regarding the use of Federal VR funds reserved for the provision of pre-employment transition services to pay for auxiliary aids and services needed by all students with disabilities to access or participate in required pre-

employment transition services under Section 113(b) of the *Rehabilitation Act*, regardless of whether they had applied and been determined eligible for the VR program and by announcing a change in policy with respect to additional VR services needed by eligible students with disabilities that may be paid for with Federal VR grant funds reserved for the provision of pre-employment transition services and the circumstances under which those funds may be used to pay for those additional VR services. To further support the transition of students with disabilities from school to post-school activities, RSA collaborated with the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) to publish guidance related to the importance of collaboration between special education and VR regarding secondary transition of students with disabilities, and transition of students and youth with disabilities to postsecondary education and employment.

RSA provides technical assistance to VR agencies designed to help them to manage the complex Federal requirements governing the fiscal administration of the VR program. In FY 2020, for example, RSA and OSEP in OSERS issued FAQs providing flexibility and reducing administrative burden when complying with prior approval requirements in the Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards.

Throughout the period covered by this report, RSA issued guidance and instructions related to reporting performance and administering the joint unified planning, performance accountability, and one-stop service delivery requirements in Title I of WIOA. In coordination with WIOA Federal partners, RSA jointly issued guidance regarding submission of the Unified or Combined State Plans and modifications, as well as guidance on the calculation, implementation, and reporting of the performance accountability measures. For a complete view of sub-regulatory guidance issued by RSA, visit <https://rsa.ed.gov/statute-legislation-and-policy/sub-regulatory-guidance#other-documentation-section>.

RSA also coordinates and collaborates with other Federal agencies to leverage information and resources that assist State VR agencies and stakeholders. RSA routinely interacts with the Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education (OCTAE) and the U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration (ETA) in matters related to the implementation of jointly-administered requirements under WIOA and the workforce development system. Additionally, RSA confers regularly with the U.S. Department of Labor's Wage and Hour Division to develop technical assistance and address issues concerning the implementation of Section 511 of the Rehabilitation Act, which places limitations on the use of subminimum wage. RSA also participates on numerous interagency committees and work groups with partners in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the Social Security Administration, the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs, and others to ensure the transmittal of information to enhance the provision of VR services to individuals with disabilities. Representing the Department on the AbilityOne Commission, RSA participates in the regular functions of the AbilityOne Commission related to the administration of the AbilityOne program authorized under the *Javits-Wagner-O'Day Act*. Other cross-agency participation includes the Coordinating Council on Access and Mobility, the U.S. Access Board, the

Interagency Committee on Disability Research, among others with missions designed to improve employment and independence for individuals with disabilities and support the work of State VR agencies.

RSA shares performance data with the 78 VR agencies prior to and during off-site reviews, on-site monitoring visits, and technical assistance visits; during quarterly calls with each VR agency; through quarterly data dashboards and annual reports to Congress; and in response to individual requests from VR agencies, researchers, other Federal agencies, and stakeholders. The review of the data assists VR agencies to improve performance and identify strategies resulting in, as well as barriers to, program improvement. During monitoring visits, RSA also may use information obtained by reviewing service records to assess the effectiveness of a VR agency's internal controls in ensuring the accuracy and validity of data reported to RSA. As a result of its analysis of performance data and other information gathered during review activities, including discussions with key VR agency officials and staff, RSA may develop recommendations intended to assist the VR agency in its efforts to improve identified areas of performance.

RSA has a long history of ensuring accountability in the administration of the various programs under its jurisdiction, particularly the VR program. In FY 2020, the VR program celebrated its 100th anniversary. On June 2, 1920, President Woodrow Wilson signed into law the *Smith-Fess Act of 1920*, also known as the *Industrial Rehabilitation Act*, and referred to as *The National Civilian Vocational Rehabilitation Act*. Throughout its history, the VR program was expanded and enhanced to maximize opportunities for individuals with disabilities to achieve high-quality employment outcomes and self-sufficiency.

Since its inception in 1920, the VR program has collected robust outcome data on which to assess its performance, including its performance in assisting individuals to achieve employment outcomes. Over the years, RSA has used these basic performance data, or some variation, to evaluate the effectiveness of State VR agencies. With the passage of *WIOA*, RSA transitioned from established performance standards and indicators to revised standards and indicators to align with the performance accountability system requirements under *WIOA*. Although *WIOA* was signed into law on July 22, 2014, the performance accountability system requirements of Section 116 of *WIOA* did not take effect until July 1, 2016 (Section 506(b) of *WIOA*). Sections 101(a)(10) and 106 of the *Rehabilitation Act* make clear that the performance accountability system and its requirements, as set forth in Section 116 of *WIOA*, are applicable to the VR program.

The data *WIOA* requires, as compared to data required by the *Rehabilitation Act* as amended by *WIA*, are fundamentally different. For example, prior to *WIOA*, VR agencies collected and reported data only on those individuals who had exited the VR program; under *WIOA*'s requirements, State VR agencies now must collect and report data on all program participants while they are still actively engaged with the program plus data on those who have exited the program. As another example, prior to *WIOA*, State VR agencies collected and reported data annually on a Federal fiscal year basis (October 1 through September 30); under *WIOA*'s requirements, State VR agencies now must

report quarterly on a program year (PY) basis (July 1 through June 30). Given the scope and breadth of the data collection and reporting requirement changes from the *Rehabilitation Act*, as amended by *WIA*, to the *Rehabilitation Act*, as amended by *WIOA*, ED used the transition authority in Section 503(a) and (e) of *WIOA* to give State VR agencies sufficient time to reconfigure their data collection systems. To that end, ED did not implement the data collection requirements of *WIOA* until PY 2017, which began July 1, 2017. As a result, for purposes of this report, ED has three full program years of data post implementation of *WIOA*'s data collection and reporting requirements, i.e., PYs 2017, 2018, and 2019 (July 1, 2017, through June 30, 2020). RSA has published annual reports for PYs 2017, 2018, and 2019 at: <https://rsa.ed.gov/wioa-resources/wioa-annual-reports>. This includes national-level summaries and reports for each State VR program for each program year.

By conducting an in-depth and integrated analysis of core VR and Supported Employment program data, RSA assesses the achievement of quality employment outcomes by individuals with disabilities who have received training and services in the VR program. The data used in the following analysis are largely those that VR agencies collected and reported through the Case Service Report (RSA-911) (OMB control no: 1820-0508). The data collected through the RSA-911 include those elements captured under common *WIOA* reporting requirements that are necessary for calculating primary indicators of performance established in *Title I* of *WIOA* for all core programs in the workforce development system, including the VR program. The data tables generally measure VR agencies' performance based on data for eligible individuals with open and closed service records.

## VR PROGRAM DATA

VR program data are presented based on the FY (October 1 through September 30) or PY (July 1 through June 30), as appropriate. The *WIOA* performance accountability system is structured around the PY. As a result, these data (e.g., performance indicator results) are always presented based on the PY. Other information obtained through the RSA-911 may be presented based on the FY. Table 3 demonstrates a decline in the number of applicants for the VR program from 569,530 individuals in FY 2017 to 321,894 individuals in FY 2020. Similarly, the number of individuals with disabilities determined eligible annually declined from 536,483 individuals in FY 2017 to 298,969 individuals in FY 2020. Data for eligible individuals receiving services under an individualized plan for employment (IPE) include individuals who began receiving services under an IPE in a prior year. This number varied across the four-year period from 975,359 individuals in FY 2017 to 844,426 individuals in FY 2020. RSA did not have sufficient information at the time of this report to determine the extent to which national economic conditions, State conditions, and other external factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic shaped these performance trends. Changes in VR data reporting as well as programmatic changes, after enacting *WIOA*, likely affected the reported number of individuals served. For instance, unlike the data for FYs 2017 and 2018, which are derived from the RSA-113 and include applicants and eligible individuals in the current fiscal year as well as those carried over from a previous fiscal year, the data

for FYs 2019 and 2020, which are drawn from the RSA-911, are not cumulative and reflect only applicants and eligible individuals reported during FYs 2019 and 2020, respectively. This difference in reporting from FYs 2017 and 2018 to FYs 2019 and 2020 likely accounts, in part, for decreases, as shown in table 3, regarding the number of applicants in FY 2018 (528,386) to FY 2019 (446,919) and the number of eligible individuals in FY 2018 (484,674) to FY 2019 (399,587).

**Table 3. Number of applicants, eligible individuals, and eligible individuals receiving vocational rehabilitation services under individualized plans for employment: FYs 2017–2020**

	FY 2017	FY 2018	FY 2019	FY 2020
Applicants	569,530	528,386	446,919	321,894
Eligible individuals	536,483	484,674	399,587	298,969
Eligible individuals receiving services under IPE	975,359	925,706	906,755	844,426

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, Rehabilitation Services Administration, Cumulative Caseload Report (RSA-113), FYs 2017 and 2018; U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, Rehabilitation Services Administration, Case Service Report (RSA-911), FYs 2019 and 2020.

Changes in how VR agencies implemented orders of selection during FYs 2017 through 2020 also may contribute to the performance trends shown in table 3. In accordance with Section 101(a)(5) of the *Rehabilitation Act* and 34 C.F.R. § 361.36, VR agencies must implement an order of selection when they have insufficient resources to serve all eligible individuals in the State. Individuals with the most significant disabilities are given priority for services, and eligible individuals are assigned to a waiting list based on the priority category to which they are assigned. Before *WIOA* was enacted, the number of VR agencies implementing orders of selection varied slightly, ranging from 34 to 37 of all VR agencies. During this period, VR agencies reported in their State Plans and through monitoring and other TA activities that the implementation of orders of selection, including changes in closing priority categories, largely resulted from the lack of State matching funds, which limited the Federal funds available to them and limited staff resources needed to provide VR services. After *WIOA* was enacted, the number of agencies implementing orders of selection rose to 41 of the 78<sup>9</sup> VR agencies in FY 2019, 31 of which had closed one or more categories. Of the 31 VR agencies with closed categories, eight VR agencies had all categories closed, which means that all new applicants determined eligible for VR services were placed on a waiting list in their respective priority categories.

While the lack of State matching funds may have played a role in implementing orders of selection after *WIOA* was enacted, some VR agencies also attributed their need to implement orders and close additional priority categories to the requirement to reserve at least 15 percent of their Federal allotments for providing pre-employment transition

<sup>9</sup> After the passage of *WIOA*, Kentucky and Texas reorganized the two separate VR agencies in their States, one of which served only individuals who are blind and visually impaired, into a single VR agency serving individuals with all types of disabilities. As a result, the total number of VR agencies decreased from 80 to 78.

services, pursuant to Sections 110(d)(1) and 113(a) of the *Rehabilitation Act*, thereby causing a lack of funds sufficient to provide all other VR services to eligible individuals with disabilities. Whatever the VR agencies' reasons for implementing orders of selection, individuals with disabilities may be reluctant to apply for VR services if they would be assigned to a closed priority category and not receive services, and some VR agencies have attributed the decline in applicants and, therefore, the number of individuals determined eligible, to the implementation of an order of selection.

The data shown in table 3 do not account for the increased number of students with disabilities who had not applied and been determined eligible for VR services (students with disabilities<sup>10</sup> who were "potentially eligible" for VR services) and who received pre-employment transition services from VR agencies under Section 113(a) of the *Rehabilitation Act*, as amended by *Title IV of WIOA*. Potentially eligible students with disabilities are students who have not applied or been determined eligible for VR services (34 C.F.R. § 361.48(a)(1)). Based on data from the RSA-911, VR agencies provided pre-employment transition services to 85,245, 137,780, and 144,346 potentially eligible students in PYs 2017, 2018, and 2019 respectively, the three years for which these data are available. Additionally, in July 2016, VR agencies began providing the services required by Section 511 of the *Rehabilitation Act*, including counseling and information and referral services, to individuals with disabilities seeking or engaging in subminimum wage employment. Except for youth with disabilities, these individuals are not required to apply for the VR program and, therefore, are not captured in the data in table 3.

Although VR agencies are not required by the *Rehabilitation Act* to report to RSA the number of individuals they are serving, pursuant to Section 511 of the *Rehabilitation Act*, data obtained from the U.S. Department of Labor's Wage and Hour Division may be illustrative. As of January 1, 2020, 100,302 workers were paid subminimum wages by certificate holders under Section 14(c) of the *Fair Labor Standards Act*.<sup>11</sup> VR agencies have reported through monitoring and other TA activities that, since FY 2016, these Section 14(c) certificate holders routinely refer all individuals covered by special wage certificates to VR agencies for counseling and information and referral services. However, many of these individuals did not apply for VR services and, therefore, it is likely that a large percentage of these individuals are not captured in the table 3 data for FYs 2017 through 2020. Since *WIOA* was implemented, potentially eligible students with disabilities who received pre-employment transition services and individuals with disabilities who received services pursuant to Section 511 represent a considerable number of individuals for whom VR agencies devoted financial and staff resources prior to these individuals applying, being determined eligible for, and receiving VR services under an IPE. Since there is a change in data collection, the current data does not account for all the individuals the VR agencies serve in the performance trends shown in table 3.

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<sup>10</sup> A student with a disability is an individual who is in an educational program, meets certain age requirements, and is eligible for and receiving special education and related services under the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)*, or is an individual with a disability for purposes of Section 504 of the *Rehabilitation Act* Section 7(37) *Rehabilitation Act* and 34 C.F.R. § 361.5(c)(51).

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/whd/workers-with-disabilities/section-14c/certificate-holders>

The employment rate presented in table 4 is calculated by dividing the number of individuals with disabilities exiting with employment outcomes after receiving services by the total number of individuals who exited with and without employment after receiving services and multiplying this fraction by 100. Table 4 shows a decline in the employment rate for individuals who received VR services under an IPE and exited with employment. VR agencies, as they transitioned to reporting on both open and closed cases beginning in PY 2017, closed cases of individuals who were no longer actively engaged in the VR process due to clients relocating or the inability to contact them. As a result, VR agencies reported these individuals as exiting from the VR program without employment, which affected the employment rate. VR agencies also began serving an increased number of students and youth who required services for a longer time, including services such as postsecondary and vocational training. Consequently, VR agencies were assisting fewer adults who were ready to seek or achieve employment, thereby reporting fewer employment outcomes in any given year.

**Table 4. Employment outcomes at exit and employment rate: FYs 2017–2020**

	FY 2017	FY 2018	FY 2019	FY 2020
Individuals exiting with employment outcome	175,458	153,293	142,523	116,524
Individuals exiting without employment outcome	179,003	171,205	170,521	149,297
Employment rate	49.5%	47.23%	45.5%	43.8%

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, Rehabilitation Services Administration, Case Service Report (RSA-911), FYs 2017 through 2020.

In addition, as VR agencies have implemented orders of selection and closed priority categories, they have served a greater number of individuals with the most significant disabilities, including youth, as required under Section 101(a)(5) of the *Rehabilitation Act* and 34 C.F.R. § 361.36. Some VR agencies have informed RSA that by serving individuals, including youth, with the most significant disabilities, they are assisting fewer individuals with less significant disabilities, who they report achieve employment outcomes at a higher rate than those individuals with the most significant disabilities. Furthermore, VR agencies reported in their State Plans that they are experiencing a high degree of staff turnover and vacancies, particularly among VR counselors and other service delivery staff. Some of these VR agencies reported that VR counselors are serving increased numbers of individuals on their caseloads, including potentially eligible students with disabilities receiving pre-employment transition services. Consequently, VR counselors have less time to devote to serving each individual with the complex array of individualized services needed to keep these individuals engaged in the VR process and ultimately to achieve employment. Finally, the COVID-19 pandemic may have contributed negatively to the availability of employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities leading to fewer employment outcomes and an increased exit of participants whose services and training may have been substantially interrupted or modified because they were less amenable to virtual service provision and due to a lack of providers.

Table 5 shows the median hourly wage for individuals with an employment outcome increased steadily from FY 2017 to FY 2020, remaining above the Federal minimum

wage. Increases may reflect those States and localities that recently increased their State minimum wage. The median hours worked per week remained stable at 30 hours per week. The trend may reflect that individuals with the most significant disabilities may be unable to or choose not to pursue full-time employment.

**Table 5. Median hourly wages and median hours worked per week of individuals exiting with employment outcome at exit: FYs 2017–2019**

	FY 2017	FY 2018	FY 2019	FY 2020
Median hourly wages	\$10.00	\$11.00	\$11.25	\$12.00
Median hours worked per week	30	30	30	30

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, Rehabilitation Services Administration, Case Service Report (RSA-911), FYs 2017 through 2020.

### **WIOA Performance Accountability Data and Primary Indicators of Performance (PYs 2017, 2018, and 2019)<sup>12</sup>**

WIOA establishes primary indicators of performance and reporting requirements to assess the effectiveness of States and local areas in achieving positive outcomes for individuals served by the workforce development system’s six core programs,<sup>13</sup> including the VR program. RSA captures data elements through the RSA-911 needed to assess the performance accountability measures and those related to barriers in employment listed in Section 116(b) of WIOA. The RSA-911 was issued through Policy Directive 16-04, dated June 14, 2017. VR agencies began using this significantly revised RSA -911 to collect and report these data, including many new data elements they did not report prior to enactment of WIOA (e.g., post-exit data), on a quarterly basis in PY 2017 (July 1, 2017, through June 30, 2018). WIOA requires ED make available to the Committee on Education and Labor of the U.S. House of Representatives and to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions of the U.S. Senate the performance reports for the VR program authorized under *Title I* of the *Rehabilitation Act*, as amended by *Title IV* of WIOA, and a summary of those reports. Following each program year, ED annually notified these Committees that the PY 2017, PY 2018, and PY 2019 reports and summaries were available on RSA’s website.<sup>14</sup>

The data presented in tables 6, 7, 8, and 9 include data for the VR program nationally as reported by VR agencies on the WIOA Statewide Annual Performance Report (ETA-9169) (OMB control number 1205-0526) for PYs 2017, 2018, and 2019.

Table 6 presents data reported in the first three program years that VR agencies reported WIOA data to RSA. Across all data points, slight declines are evident from

<sup>12</sup> For purposes of this report, ED is describing three full program years of data post implementation of WIOA’s data collection and reporting requirements, i.e., PYs 2017, 2018, and 2019 (July 1, 2017, through June 30, 2020). This period covers the last quarter of FY 2017 (July 1 through September 30, 2017) through the first three quarters of FY 2020 (October 1, 2019 through June 30, 2020). RSA will describe data for PY 2020 (July 1, 2020 through June 30, 2021) in the Annual Report to Congress for FY 2021.

<sup>13</sup> The six core programs are the Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth programs, authorized under WIOA, *Title I* and administered by the U.S. Department of Labor; the *Adult Education and Family Literacy Act* program, authorized under WIOA, *Title II* and administered by ED; the Employment Service program authorized under the *Wagner-Peyser Act*, as amended by WIOA, *Title III* and administered by the U.S. Department of Labor; and the VR program authorized under *Title I* of the *Rehabilitation Act*, as amended by WIOA, *Title IV* and administered by ED.

<sup>14</sup> <https://rsa.ed.gov/wioa-resources/wioa-annual-reports>

PY 2017 to PY 2019, except for the number of VR program participants who received career services and training services,<sup>15</sup> these groups increased slightly in PY 2018.

**Table 6. Vocational rehabilitation program participant data specific to *Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act* reporting: PYs 2017–2019**

Participant Information	PY 2017	PY 2018	PY 2019
Total participants served	932,835	896,528	872,862
Number of participants receiving career services	732,077	744,777	698,773
Funds expended on career services	\$1,137,680,343	\$1,088,353,317	\$1,003,773,358
Cost per participant on career services	\$1,554	\$1,461	\$1,436
Number of participants receiving training services	287,453	295,175	264,663
Funds expended on training services	\$696,517,362	\$684,929,093	\$499,331,301
Cost per participant on training services	\$2,423	\$2,320	\$1,888
Total participants exited	311,748	295,165	280,593
Percent of participants enrolled in more than one core program	15.5%	11.1%	8.6%

Source: U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, *WIOA* Statewide Annual Performance Report (ETA-9169) PYs 2017 through 2019.

Table 7 shows VR program participant characteristics by sex, age, and ethnicity or race for PYs 2017 through 2019.<sup>16</sup> In each year, more participants who indicated their sex identified as male than female. The age data demonstrate the increased emphasis, under *WIOA*, for the VR program to serve youth and students with disabilities. These data do not include the numbers of students and youth receiving services who have not applied to, been determined eligible for, and received VR services pursuant to an IPE under the VR program. The *Rehabilitation Act* and *WIOA* require VR agencies to collect and report data on program “participants” as that term is defined for purposes of the VR program, which does not include “potentially eligible” students with disabilities (34 C.F.R. § 361.150(a)(1)). Data available after *WIOA*<sup>17</sup> was implemented demonstrate that in PYs 2017, 2018, and 2019, the percentage of youth with disabilities (participants under age 25) increased each year (48.9 percent in PY 2017, 50.5 percent in PY 2018, and 51.1 percent in PY 2019). When potentially eligible students with disabilities receiving pre-employment transition services are factored into those receiving services in PYs 2017, 2018, and 2019 (85,245, 137,780, and 144,346, respectively), the data indicate that youth and students with disabilities are being served in substantially greater numbers by the VR program than before *WIOA* was implemented. Commensurate with the increase in the percentages of youth with disabilities served from the periods before and after *WIOA* was implemented, the percentages of adults served during this same period decreased substantially. The reporting of ethnicity/race

<sup>15</sup> Section 134(c)(2) of *WIOA* describes career services and Section 134(c)(3) of *WIOA* describes training services.

<sup>16</sup> The data in table 7, if summed, do not equal the data in table 6 due to how RSA aggregates the quarterly reports into an annual file.

<sup>17</sup> <https://rsa.ed.gov/sites/default/files/publications/state-of-vr-program-after-wioa.pdf>

in the VR program is based on self-identification primarily and is only required for students with disabilities in secondary education. Individuals may choose multiple categories.

**Table 7. Vocational rehabilitation program participant characteristics by sex, age, and ethnicity or race: PYs 2017–2019**

	PY 2017 number of participants	PY 2018 number of participants	PY 2019 number of participants
<b>Participant characteristic: sex</b>			
Female	416,002	396,930	385,597
Male	516,060	498,129	484,284
<b>Participant characteristic: age</b>			
<16	12,563	14,115	15,698
16 – 18	248,187	262,809	257,971
19 – 24	196,220	175,938	171,211
25 – 44	241,666	226,227	221,208
45 – 54	126,878	114,160	105,234
55 – 59	56,193	52,436	49,885
60+	51,700	50,953	51,655
<b>Participant characteristic: ethnicity/race</b>			
American Indian/Alaska Native	18,541	18,951	18,167
Asian	22,420	22,491	22,336
Black/African American	219,303	214,838	210,593
Hispanic/Latino	161,303	157,445	154,970
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Island	6,284	5,843	5,608
White	681,296	646,484	625,860
More than one race	175,620	170,981	22,534

Source: U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, *WIOA Statewide Annual Performance Report (ETA-9169)* PYs 2017 through 2019.

*WIOA* requires the core workforce development programs, including the VR program, to report prescribed data related to 11 barriers to employment. Table 8 illustrates individuals with disabilities receiving VR services experience multiple barriers to employment in addition to disability, and the data show that a high percentage of VR program participants have low incomes and experience long-term unemployment.

**Table 8. Vocational rehabilitation program participant barriers to employment: PYs 2017–2019**

<b>Barriers to employment</b>	<b>PY 2017 number of participants</b>	<b>PY 2018 number of participants</b>	<b>PY 2019 number of participants</b>
Displaced homemakers	36,852	13,033	11,708
English language learners, low levels of literacy, cultural barriers	299,520	280,525	270,519
Exhausting TANF <sup>a</sup> within 2 years	13,412	11,596	10,456
Ex-offenders	74,541	76,969	77,665
Homeless individuals/runaway youth	44,491	24,204	23,490
Long-term unemployed (27 or more consecutive weeks)	348,558	354,067	350,335
Low-income individuals	454,702	449,786	437,091
Migrant and seasonal farmworkers	2,602	10,582	4,986
Individuals with disabilities (including youth)	928,198	896,489	872,862
Single parents	50,027	50,707	52,365
Youth in foster care or aged out of system	21,190	19,109	20,773

<sup>a</sup> Temporary Assistance for Needy Families

Source: U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, *WIOA Statewide Annual Performance Report (ETA-9169) PYs 2017 through 2019*.

*WIOA* establishes six primary indicators of performance:

1. **Employment Rate — Second Quarter After Exit:** The percentage of participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the second quarter after exit from the program;
2. **Employment Rate — Fourth Quarter After Exit:** The percentage of participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the fourth quarter after exit from the program;
3. **Median Earnings — Second Quarter After Exit:** The median earnings of participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the second quarter after exit from the program;
4. **Credential Attainment Rate:** The percentage of those participants enrolled in an education or training program (excluding those in on-the-job training and customized training) who attain a recognized postsecondary credential or a secondary school diploma, or its recognized equivalent, during participation in or within one year after exit from the program. A participant who has attained a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent is included in the percentage of participants who have attained a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent only if the participant also is employed or is enrolled in an education or training program leading to a recognized postsecondary credential within one year after exit from the program;

5. **Measurable Skill Gains Rate:** The percentage of program participants who, during a program year, are in an education or training program that leads to a recognized postsecondary credential or employment and who are achieving measurable skill gains, defined as documented academic, technical, occupational, or other forms of progress, toward such a credential or employment; and
6. **Effectiveness in Serving Employers:** *WIOA* requires the Departments of Education and Labor to establish a primary indicator of performance for effectiveness in serving employers. The Departments are currently piloting three approaches designed to gauge three critical workforce needs of the business community<sup>18</sup>.

In PY 2017, the first year of *WIOA* performance reporting for purposes of the VR program, VR agencies reported data for one primary indicator: Measurable Skill Gains Rate. In the second year of *WIOA* performance reporting, PY 2018, VR agencies reported data for this indicator of performance and for Employment Rate — Second Quarter after Exit and Median Earnings — Second Quarter after Exit for participants who exited from the VR program during PY 2017. In PY 2019, VR agencies reported data for these indicators for different cohorts of exiters and for Employment Rate — Fourth Quarter after Exit and Credential Attainment Rate for participants who exited the VR program from January 1, 2018, through December 31, 2018. VR agencies reported data for all six indicators beginning in PY 2019.

Table 9 shows an increase in the Measurable Skill Gains Rate from PY 2017 to PY 2019 (21.1 percent and 31.4 percent, respectively). It also describes the outcomes for the additional primary indicators in PYs 2018 and 2019. Data demonstrating VR program performance on the primary indicators for Employment Rate — Second Quarter after Exit and for Median Earnings show modest increases from PY 2018 through PY 2019.

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<sup>18</sup> The Effectiveness in Serving Employers primary indicator of performance is not included in table 9 because it was being piloted from PY 2017 to PY 2019. Because States could choose which pilot measures to implement, there is not one measure to report. Further, the piloted measures represent how all six *WIOA* core programs engaged with employers.

**Table 9. Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act performance accountability: PYs 2017–2019**

<b>WIOA primary indicators of performance and number of participants employed</b>	<b>PY 2017</b>	<b>PY 2018</b>	<b>PY 2019</b>
Measurable Skill Gains Rate	21.1%	23.4%	31.4%
Employment Rate — Second Quarter after Exit	N/A	50.4%	51.3%
Number of participants employed in second quarter after exit	N/A	147,768	144,938
Median Earnings — Second Quarter after Exit	N/A	\$3,875	\$3,931
Employment Rate — Fourth Quarter after Exit	N/A	N/A	43.6%
Number of participants employed in fourth quarter after exit	N/A	N/A	129,692
Credential Attainment Rate	N/A	N/A	11.2%

Source: U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, *WIOA Statewide Annual Performance Report (ETA-9169) PYs 2017 through 2019*.

### **Provision of Pre-Employment Transition Services to Students with Disabilities (PYs 2017, 2018, and 2019)**

Students with disabilities may receive pre-employment transition services if they are eligible for VR services or if they are potentially eligible, i.e., those students with disabilities who have not applied for or been determined eligible for VR services.

Table 10 demonstrates that in PYs 2017, 2018, and 2019, the percentages of students with disabilities, including both those who were eligible and potentially eligible for VR services who received one or more pre-employment transition service were 34.2 percent, 38.9 percent, and 36.3 percent, respectively. Of those students with disabilities who received pre-employment transition services in PYs 2017, 2018, and 2019, the percentages of those who applied for VR services and received pre-employment transition services were 52.6 percent, 44.5 percent, and 41.7 percent, respectively. Students with disabilities who are potentially eligible or eligible for the VR program may receive pre-employment transition services over multiple years if they continue to meet all criteria in the definition of “student with a disability.” An increasing number of students with disabilities are receiving pre-employment transition services and applying for VR services. Before PY 2017, VR agencies did not report comparable data for pre-employment transition services because providing these services to students with disabilities was not required until *WIOA*.

**Table 10. Numbers and percentages of students with disabilities who received pre-employment transition services: PYs 2017–2019**

<b>Students with disabilities</b>	<b>PY 2017 number/ percent of students</b>	<b>PY 2018 number/ percent of students</b>	<b>PY 2019 number/ percent of students</b>
Number of students with disabilities reported	525,958	638,601	682,237
Number of students with disabilities who received a pre-employment transition service	179,716	248,336	247,926
Percent of students with disabilities reported who received a pre-employment transition service	34.2%	38.9%	36.3%
Number of potentially eligible students with disabilities who received a pre-employment transition service	85,245	137,780	144,346
Number of students with disabilities, who applied for VR services, and received a pre-employment transition service	94,471	110,556	103,580
Percent of students with disabilities, who applied for VR services, and received a pre-employment transition service	52.6%	44.5%	41.7%

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, Rehabilitation Services Administration, Case Service Report (RSA-911), PYs 2017 through 2019.

Students with disabilities may receive one or more of five required pre-employment transition services over one or multiple years and may receive the same service more than once.

1. Job exploration counseling may be provided in a classroom, community setting, or individually and may include information regarding in-demand industry sectors and occupations as well as non-traditional employment, labor market composition, administration of vocational interest inventories, and identification of career pathways of interest to the students.
2. Work-based learning experiences may be provided in a group setting or individually and may include coordinating a school-based program of job training and informational interviews to research employers, work-site tours to learn about necessary job skills, job shadowing, mentoring opportunities in the community, short-term paid or unpaid work experiences to explore the student's area of interest through paid and unpaid internships, apprenticeships, fellowships, or on-the-job training located in the community.
3. Counseling on opportunities for enrollment in comprehensive transition or postsecondary educational programs at institutions of higher education may include information on course offerings, career options, the types of academic and occupational training needed to succeed in the workplace, postsecondary opportunities associated with career fields or pathways, advising students and

parents or representatives on academic curricula, college application and admissions processes, and completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid. Counseling may also include resources that may be used to support individual student success in education and training, which could include disability support services.

4. Workplace readiness training may include programming to develop social skills and independent living, such as communication and interpersonal skills, financial literacy, orientation and mobility skills, job-seeking skills, understanding employer expectations for punctuality and performance, as well as other “soft” skills necessary for employment. These services may include instruction, as well as opportunities to acquire and apply knowledge. These services may be provided in a generalized manner in a classroom setting or be tailored to an individual’s needs in a training program provided in an educational or community setting.
5. Instruction in self-advocacy may include generalized classroom lessons in which students learn about their rights, responsibilities, and how to request accommodations or services and supports needed during the transition from secondary to postsecondary education and employment.

Further individual opportunities may be arranged for students to conduct informational interviews or to be mentored by educational staff such as principals, nurses, teachers, or office staff. Students may also be mentored by individuals employed by or volunteering for employers, boards, associations, or organizations in integrated community settings. Students may also participate in youth leadership activities offered in educational or community settings.

Table 11 shows the total number of pre-employment transition services provided to students with disabilities in each of the required activities for PYs 2017, 2018, and 2019, which nearly doubled from PY 2017 through PY 2019 (747,837 to 1,349,877).

**Table 11. Pre-employment transition services provided to students with disabilities: PYs 2017–2019**

Pre-employment transition services	PY 2017 number provided	PY 2017 percent of total pre-employment transition services provided	PY 2018 number provided	PY 2018 percent of total pre-employment transition services provided	PY 2019 number provided	PY 2019 percent of total pre-employment transition services provided
Total pre-employment transition services provided	747,837	-	1,227,841	-	1,356,415	-
Job exploration counseling	199,562	26.7%	314,245	25.6%	338,084	24.9%
Work-based learning experiences	127,067	17.0%	218,415	17.8%	234,735	17.3%
Counseling on enrollment opportunities	114,045	15.2%	198,040	16.1%	225,408	16.6%
Workplace readiness training	193,874	25.9%	292,807	23.8%	311,771	22.9%
Instruction in self-advocacy	113,289	15.1%	204,334	16.6%	246,417	18.2%

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, Rehabilitation Services Administration, Case Service Report (RSA-911), PYs 2017 through 2019.

VR agencies have reported several challenges resulting from the requirement to provide, or make available, pre-employment transition services to all students with disabilities in their States. During RSA monitoring and other TA activities, some VR agencies reported that they are experiencing difficulties meeting the VR needs of individuals with disabilities over the work lifespan because of the focus on serving students with disabilities. Funds previously available to meet the VR service needs of all eligible individuals have been reduced due to the required reserve of a minimum of 15 percent for providing pre-employment transition services. Therefore, although VR agencies may be providing more services to students with disabilities, those individuals with disabilities who are not students are affected by the reduction in resources available to them for their needed services. At the same time, some States have requested flexibilities in using pre-employment transition services as they struggled to expend the required reserve (which ED addressed in a Notice of Interpretation published in the *Federal Register* on February 28, 2020, 85 FR 11848), while other States have expended far more than the 15 percent to provide the required activities for

the large numbers of students with disabilities in their States. Additionally, more than half of the State VR agencies reported that they have implemented orders of selection to manage the fiscal and staff resource demands of serving all students with disabilities in the State, including those students who have not applied and been determined eligible for the VR program, resulting in their inability to address the needs of all eligible individuals with disabilities. While there is general agreement that there is tremendous benefit in reaching students with disabilities early to help them initiate their pathway toward competitive integrated employment, VR agencies made significant operational, programmatic, and fiscal adjustments to accommodate this *W/OA* initiative.

## **SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES PROGRAM**

**Authorized under Sections 601–610 of the *Rehabilitation Act*  
Managed by the Rehabilitation Services Administration,  
U.S. Department of Education**

Through the Supported Employment Services program (SE program), RSA provides supplemental funds to State VR agencies, in conjunction with *Title I* VR State grant funds, to provide supported employment services to individuals with the most significant disabilities. Supported employment means competitive integrated employment, including customized employment, or employment in an integrated work setting in which individuals with the most significant disabilities, including youth with the most significant disabilities, are working on a short-term basis toward competitive integrated employment (Section 7(38) of the *Rehabilitation Act*). Supported employment is recognized as an effective strategy in assisting individuals who, because of the nature and severity of their disability, need ongoing support services to engage in and maintain competitive integrated employment. Such supports may include regular monitoring at the worksite from the time of job placement until transition to extended services.<sup>19</sup>

Under the SE program, State VR agencies collaborate with appropriate public and private nonprofit organizations to provide supported employment services. State VR agencies are authorized to provide eligible individuals with the most significant disabilities supported employment services identified in an individual's IPE for a period following job placement not to exceed 24 months unless a longer period to achieve job stabilization is needed. The IPE describes the services and specific employment outcome that the eligible individual has chosen, consistent with the individual's unique strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities, career interests, and informed choice (Section 102(b)(4)(A) and (B) of the *Rehabilitation Act*). Once this period has ended, the State VR agency must arrange for other appropriate State agencies, private nonprofit organizations, or other sources to provide extended services for the duration of that employment, except that VR agencies may provide extended services to youth with the most significant disabilities for a period of up to four years or

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<sup>19</sup> *Extended services* is defined in Section 7(13) of the *Rehabilitation Act* as "ongoing support services and other appropriate services, needed to support and maintain an individual with a most significant disability in supported employment, that— (A) are provided singly or in combination and are organized and made available in such a way as to assist an eligible individual in maintaining supported employment; (B) are based on a determination of the needs of an eligible individual, as specified in an individualized plan for employment; and (C) are provided by a State agency, a nonprofit private organization, employer, or any other appropriate resource, after an individual has made the transition from support provided by the designated State unit."

until a youth turns 25, whichever occurs first, as authorized under Section 604(b)(2) of the *Rehabilitation Act*.

Table 12 shows the total Federal SE program appropriations from FYs 2017 through 2020, with a decrease from \$27 million in FY 2017 to \$22 million in FYs 2019 and 2020. The amounts represent the Federal appropriation less the funds set aside to support projects authorized under Section 21 of the *Rehabilitation Act*, not the full appropriation.

**Table 12. State Supported Employment Services Program Federal appropriations: FYs 2017–2020**

Federal fiscal year	Federal appropriation
FY 2017	\$27,272,520
FY 2018	\$22,322,520
FY 2019	\$22,322,520
FY 2020	\$22,322,520

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, Rehabilitation Services Administration (2017-2020), Section 603 of the *Rehabilitation Act of 1973*, as amended by the *Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act*.

WIOA’s amendments to the SE program, which included requiring States to reserve at least 50 percent of their SE program allotment for providing supported employment services, including extended services, to youth with the most significant disabilities and requiring States to provide a non-Federal share of 10 percent of the portion of the allotment reserved for that purpose, made clear that youth with the most significant disabilities must be given every opportunity and support to receive supported employment services. However, some States have found it challenging to meet these requirements, which has resulted in a significant amount of SE program funds being relinquished by States in reallocation and unused SE funds being returned to the U.S. Department of the Treasury at the end of the grant award.

For FY 2019, supported employment grantees returned \$2,040,684 in unused funds at grant closeout. In FY 2020, 23 grantees did not provide any matching funds for their supported employment award and 15 grantees did not spend any of their FY 2020 supported employment funds required to be used for youth with most significant disabilities. This resulted in an unused balance of SE Federal funds at the end of the award period. Additionally, States relinquished \$1.2 million in supported employment funds during the FY 2020 reallocation period.

An individual’s potential need for supported employment must be considered as part of the assessment to determine eligibility for the VR program. The requirements pertaining to individuals with an employment goal of supported employment are the same in both the *Title I* VR program and the *Title VI* SE program. A State VR agency may support an individual’s supported employment services solely with VR program (*Title I*) grant funds, or it may fund the cost of supported employment services in whole or in part with SE program (*Title VI*) grant funds. *Title VI* supported employment funds may only be used to provide supported employment services and to supplement *Title I* funds.

## SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM PERFORMANCE

Table 13 shows the number of participants with the most significant disabilities receiving supported employment services slightly increased from FY 2017 to FY 2018 but declined significantly from FY 2019 to FY 2020 (48,323 and 39,522, respectively). Similarly, the number of participants exiting with supported employment outcomes declined from FY 2019 to FY 2020 (10,483 and 8,921, respectively). The COVID-19 pandemic may have contributed negatively to the availability of employment opportunities for individuals with the most significant disabilities leading to fewer supported employment outcomes and an increased exit of participants whose services and training may have been substantially interrupted or modified due to a variety of factors, including limited availability of supported employment services providers or on-site job coaches, business closures or operational changes. Additionally, supported employment services typically are provided in person and may have been less amenable to virtual service provision.

**Table 13. Number of participants with most significant disabilities receiving supported employment services and number of participants exiting with employment outcomes in supported employment: FYs 2017–2020**

	FY 2017 <sup>a</sup>	FY 2018	FY 2019	FY 2020
Number of participants receiving supported employment services	42,487	49,410	48,323	39,522
Number of participants exiting with employment outcome in supported employment	10,004	10,841	10,483	8,921

<sup>a</sup> During FY 2017, State VR agencies reported information only for participants who had exited the VR program; therefore, the number of participants receiving supported employment services during FY 2017 does not include information for participants whose cases were open.

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, Rehabilitation Services Administration, Case Service Report (RSA-911), FYs 2017 through 2020.

From FY 2017 through FY 2020, participants with the most significant disabilities exiting with employment outcomes in supported employment experienced an increase in median hourly wage each year, from \$9.00 in FY 2017 to \$10.00 in FY 2020. The median hours worked per week remained steady at 20 hours across the four-year period. Due to the severity of their disabilities, individuals with the most significant disabilities have historically worked part-time. Table 14 shows the hourly wage gain by year.

**Table 14. Median hourly wages and median hours worked per week of participants with most significant disabilities exiting with employment outcome in supported employment at exit: FYs 2017–2020**

	FY 2017	FY 2018	FY 2019	FY 2020
Median hourly wages	\$9.00	\$9.50	\$9.69	\$10.00
Median hours worked per week	20	20	20	20

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, Rehabilitation Services Administration, Case Service Report (RSA-911), FYs 2017 through 2020.

Applying the *WIOA* performance indicators to the sub-population of participants with the most significant disabilities achieving supported employment outcomes, the percentage of participants in unsubsidized employment during the second quarter after exit from the program decreased from 56.6 percent in PY 2018 to 51.5 percent in PY 2019, as shown in table 15. In PY 2019 in the fourth quarter after exit (the first time data became available), the percentage of participants with the most significant disabilities in unsubsidized employment was 44.4 percent. Future data trends may assist in understanding patterns of sustained employment by participants with the most significant disabilities.

**Table 15. Employment rate of participants with most significant disabilities who received supported employment services in the second and fourth quarters of program years after exit: PYs 2017–2019**

	PY 2017	PY 2018	PY 2019
Employment rate of participants who received supported employment services in the second quarter after exit	N/A	56.6%	51.5%
Employment rate of participants who received supported employment services in the fourth quarter after exit	N/A	N/A	44.4%

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, Rehabilitation Services Administration, Case Service Report (RSA-911), PYs 2017 through 2019.

## **SUPPORT OF BUSINESS ENTERPRISE PROGRAMS OF BLIND VENDORS UNDER THE *RANDOLPH--SHEPPARD ACT***

**As authorized under Section 103(b)(1) of the *Rehabilitation Act*  
Managed by the Rehabilitation Services Administration,  
U.S. Department of Education**

Section 103(b) of the *Rehabilitation Act* authorizes VR agencies to provide services for the benefit of groups of individuals with disabilities. These services may include management and supervision services, the acquisition of vending facilities or other equipment, initial stocks and supplies, and initial operating expenses to improve businesses operated by individuals with significant disabilities (Section 103(b)(1) of the *Rehabilitation Act*). Under this authority, VR agencies support the management and operation in the States of the vending facility program for individuals who are blind established pursuant to the *Randolph-Sheppard Act*.

The vending facility program, which includes the licensing and operation of vending facilities by blind vendors under the *Randolph-Sheppard Act*, is supported by a combination of VR program funds, State appropriations, unassigned Federal vending machine income, and State levied set-asides from vendors. The vending facility program provides individuals who are blind with remunerative employment and self-support by operating vending facilities on Federal and other property. The program recruits qualified individuals who are blind, trains them on managing and operating small business enterprises, and then licenses qualified blind vendors to operate the facilities.

At the outset, the program placed sundry stands in the lobbies of Federal office buildings and post offices, selling items such as newspapers, magazines, candies, and tobacco products. Through the years, the program has grown and broadened from Federal locations to include State, county, municipal, and private installations as well as interstate highway rest areas. In addition, vending facility operations expanded to include military mess halls, cafeterias, snack bars, cart services, miscellaneous shops, and vending machines.

VR agencies that provide services to individuals who are blind may also serve as State licensing agencies (SLA) under the *Randolph-Sheppard Act*. These SLAs may use Federal VR program funds to purchase, maintain, and replace equipment in vending facilities, provide management services, such as accounting, inspection, and quality control, and provide crucial in-service training and related services on a systematic basis to support and improve the vending facilities operated by individuals who are blind. Table 16 shows the amounts and percentages of Federal support for the Business Enterprise Programs (BEPs) under the *Randolph-Sheppard Act* for FYs 2017 through 2020. In FY 2017, VR agencies used \$50,294,869 in Federal VR funds to support these programs. In FYs 2018 and 2019, this amount decreased to \$43,642,921 and \$41,997,219, respectively. However, the amount increased to \$46,497,616 in FY 2020. These amounts represent 56.9 percent, 53.5 percent, 51.6 percent, and 56.0 percent, respectively, of all funds used to support the BEPs of blind vendors under the *Randolph-Sheppard Act* from FYs 2017 through 2020.

**Table 16. Amount of Federal funds and percent of all funds used to support the Business Enterprise Programs of blind vendors under the *Randolph-Sheppard Act*: FYs 2017–2020**

	FY 2017	FY 2018	FY 2019	FY 2020
Federal VR funds used to support the Business Enterprise Programs under the <i>Randolph-Sheppard Act</i>	\$50,294,869	\$43,642,921	\$41,997,219	\$46,497,616
Federal share of total <i>Randolph-Sheppard Act</i> , Business Enterprise Programs expenditures	56.9%	53.5%	51.6%	56.0%

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, Rehabilitation Services Administration. Vending Facility Program Report (RSA-15), FYs 2017 through 2020.

The blind vendors support their BEPs under the *Randolph-Sheppard Act* through set-aside charges assessed by some States against the net proceeds of each vending facility. Like Federal VR program funds, set-aside charges may be used to purchase, maintain, and replace equipment in vending facilities and provide management services. In addition, set-aside charges may be used to provide for a fair minimum return to blind vendors and establish retirement, pension, health care, and paid vacation/sick leave for individuals participating in the program. Table 17 shows the amounts and percentages of vendors' set-aside funds in FYs 2017 through 2020 used

to support the BEPs under the Randolph-Sheppard Act. While the amount decreased from FY 2017 to FY 2018, it increased from FY 2019 to FY 2020. The percentage of total Randolph-Sheppard Act BEP expenditures paid for by set-aside funds has increased from 15.2 percent in FY 2017 to 18.2 percent in FY 2020. It is important to note that these set-aside funds, if spent on allowable VR expenditures under Section 103(b)(1) of the *Rehabilitation Act*, also help States to meet their Federal match and maintenance of effort requirements.

**Table 17. Amount of vendors' set-aside funds and percent of all funds used to support the Business Enterprise Programs of blind vendors under the *Randolph-Sheppard Act*: FYs 2017–2020**

	FY 2017	FY 2018	FY 2019	FY 2020
Vendors' set-aside funds used to support the Business Enterprise Programs under the <i>Randolph-Sheppard Act</i>	\$13,513,609	\$13,192,775	\$14,134,946	\$15,075,779
Set-aside share of total <i>Randolph-Sheppard Act</i> , Business Enterprise Programs expenditures	15.2%	16.2%	17.4%	18.2%

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, Rehabilitation Services Administration. Vending Facility Program Report (RSA-15), FYs 2017 through 2020.

RSA collects data that assesses the increase in average earnings of individuals in the program. Table 18 provides the comparison of FYs 2017 through 2020 data on income and earnings and the number of vendors and vending locations, and shows:

- The total gross income for the program was \$664.7 million in FY 2017 compared to \$564.9 million in FY 2020;
- The total earnings of all vendors were \$120.6 million in FY 2017 and \$95 million in FY 2020;
- The national average annual net earnings of vendors were \$66,240.65 in FY 2017 and \$55,958.12 in FY 2020;
- The number of vendors at the end of FY 2017 was 1,821 compared to 1,697 in FY 2020; and
- The total number of vending facilities at the end of FY 2017 was 2,090 compared to 2,183 in FY 2020.

Decreases in gross and net income and vendor earnings, from FY 2019 to FY 2020, is likely attributed to the negative effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on opportunities under the *Randolph-Sheppard Act* since many Federal and other government buildings were closed and many government workers continue to work remotely. While gross sales, vendor income, and average vendor earnings steadily increased between FYs 2017

through 2019, all these categories steeply declined during the pandemic. Based on meetings with SLAs, and Elected Committees of Blind Vendors, RSA expects that full recovery from the pandemic will not occur until calendar year 2022 at the earliest.

**Table 18. Vendor income and earnings, the number of vendors by type of location, and the number of facilities by location for the Business Enterprise Programs under the *Randolph--Sheppard Act*: FYs 2017–2020**

	FY 2017	FY 2018	FY 2019	FY 2020
<b>Income and earnings</b>				
Gross income	\$664,746,154	\$698,843,564	\$717,007,108	\$564,923,463.5
Vendor earnings	\$120,624,225	\$127,370,311	\$130,783,764	\$94,960,934
Average earnings	\$66,240.65	\$69,906.87	\$74,098.45	\$55,958.12
<b>Number of vendors</b>				
Federal locations	609	607	600	593
Non-Federal locations	1,212	1,215	1,165	1,104
<b>Total vendors</b>	<b>1,821</b>	<b>1,822</b>	<b>1,765</b>	<b>1,697</b>
<b>Number of vending facilities</b>				
Federal locations	749	772	762	767
Non-Federal locations	1,341	1,437	1,401	1,416
<b>Total facilities</b>	<b>2,090</b>	<b>2,209</b>	<b>2,163</b>	<b>2,183</b>

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, Rehabilitation Services Administration. Vending Facility Program Report (RSA-15), FYs 2017 through 2020.

As required by the implementing *Randolph-Sheppard Act* regulations, 34 C.F.R. Part 395, SLAs authorized to administer the Randolph-Sheppard program must receive approval from the Secretary for any change in State rule, policy, or regulation affecting the operation of the BEP for blind vendors under the Randolph-Sheppard Act, to ensure that such changes comply with the *Randolph-Sheppard Act*. In FY 2020, RSA approved 10 submissions from States seeking to amend their State rules, regulations, or policies.

During the COVID-19 pandemic in FY 2020, RSA responded to approximately 30 inquiries, which included expediting approvals to changes in the SLAs' rules and regulations. For example, approvals included several one-time distributions of fair minimum return, retirement, or other set-aside payments to offset the losses that vendors experienced in different States.

# AMERICAN INDIAN VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SERVICES PROGRAM

Authorized under Section 121 of the *Rehabilitation Act*  
Managed by the Rehabilitation Services Administration,  
U.S. Department of Education

Through the American Indian Vocational Rehabilitation Services (AIVRS) program, RSA provides grants to governing bodies of Indian Tribes located on Federal and State reservations (and consortia of such governing bodies) to establish and operate tribal vocational rehabilitation programs to deliver VR services to American Indians with disabilities who live on or near such reservations.

Awards are made through the competitive process for a period of up to five years to provide a broad range of VR services including, where appropriate, services traditionally used by Indian Tribes, designed to assist American Indians with disabilities to prepare for and engage in gainful employment. Applicants assure that the broad scope of rehabilitation services provided will be, to the maximum extent feasible, comparable to the rehabilitation services the State VR agencies provide. The AIVRS program is supported through a mandatory set-aside under Section 110(c) of the *Rehabilitation Act*, which requires not less than 1 percent and not more than 1.5 percent of the funds appropriated for the VR program be reserved for carrying out the AIVRS program. As funding for the VR program increases annually, the amount of the set-aside funding to support the AIVRS program increases.

The number of grants decreased slightly in FY 2019 because four of the applicants, whose previously funded awards ended in FY 2019, did not receive new awards under the FY 2019 competition as the scores on their applications were below the fundable range. A competition was planned in FY 2020, but due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the adverse effects it had on the Tribes' ability to submit applications, the Department granted an extension to the FY 2016 awards for a sixth year.

Section 121(b)(4) of the *Rehabilitation Act* requires that projects previously funded under the program be given preference in competing for a new grant award. Previously funded projects that re compete for new grants often request higher levels of funding because they have increased their capacity to effectively serve more individuals with disabilities. As a result, the funding levels increased in FYs 2019 and 2020 as compared to FYs 2017 and 2018. Table 19 presents the number of grants and the total award amounts for FYs 2017 through 2020. The funding levels do not include the set-aside allocated for the American Indian Vocational Rehabilitation Training and Technical Assistance Center.

**Table 19. Number of grants and total amount awarded to support American Indian Vocational Rehabilitation Services Tribal projects: FYs 2017–2020**

Fiscal year	Total grants	Total award amounts
2017	88	\$39,742,648
2018	88	\$39,465,410
2019	86	\$42,226,000
2020	86	\$44,345,000

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, Rehabilitation Services Administration, Annual Performance Report for the American Indian Vocational Rehabilitation Services Program, FYs 2017 through 2020.

The *Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA)* requires the development of program goals and measures for all federally supported programs. For the AIVRS' program goals, the grantees report data on the number of eligible individuals served, the number of individuals who exited the program after receiving services, and the number of individuals who achieved an employment outcome. Table 20 provides the program outcome data from the AIVRS annual program performance database for FYs 2017 through 2020.

Based on data in table 20, in FY 2017, 2,363 (68.2 percent) of the 3,465 American Indians with disabilities who received services and exited the program achieved an employment outcome. In FY 2018, these numbers and percentage decreased when 2,128 (67.6 percent) of the 3,148 American Indians with disabilities who received services and exited the program achieved an employment outcome. In FY 2019, this trend continued when 2,067 (58.4 percent) of the 3,539 American Indians with disabilities who received services and exited the program achieved an employment outcome. The FY 2019 data do not include data from two grantees who were unable to submit their data in a timely manner given they did not have access to the necessary resources needed to complete their reports due to the release of staff upon notification that they did not receive a grant in the FY 2019 competition. Both Tribes received a one-year no-cost extension in FY 2020. That year, the numbers continued to decrease when only 1,557 (57 percent) of the 2,733 American Indians with disabilities who received services and exited the program achieved an employment outcome.

The number served calculation in table 20 includes the number of individuals who received services under an IPE during the fiscal year or a prior fiscal year and individuals who were carried forward from a previous grant cycle.

**Table 20. Number of individuals with disabilities served, exiting program after receiving services, and achieving employment through the American Indian Vocational Rehabilitation Services program: FYs 2017–2020**

Fiscal year	Number served <sup>a</sup>	Total number exiting after receiving services	Number achieving employment
2017	7,790	3,465	2,363
2018	7,944	3,148	2,128
2019	7,547	3,539	2,067
2020	6,295	2,733	1,557

<sup>a</sup> The number served calculation includes the number of individuals who received services under an IPE during the fiscal year, in a prior fiscal year, and/or who were carried forward under a previous grant cycle.

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, Rehabilitation Services Administration, Annual Performance Report for the American Indian Vocational Rehabilitation Services Program, FYs 2017 through 2020.

ED established two efficiency measures for the AIVRS program to examine the cost per employment outcome and cost per participant. Table 21 presents the comparison of FYs 2017 through 2020 data with the established target performance levels.

The cost per employment outcome measure examines the percentage of projects whose average annual cost per employment outcome is no more than \$35,000. Under this measure, the cost per employment outcome is calculated by dividing a project's total Federal grant by the number of employment outcomes reported. The target performance level for this efficiency measure is 76 percent. In FY 2017, the efficiency measure for cost per employment outcomes was 77 percent and increased to 84.1 percent in FY 2018. In FY 2019, the efficiency measure dropped to 59.3 percent, but rebounded slightly in FY 2020, to 60 percent. In FY 2019, the economy and labor markets on American Indian reservations began a significant decline that reduced viable employment opportunities for American Indians with disabilities.

The cost per participant measure examines the percentage of projects whose average annual cost per participant is no more than \$10,000. Under this measure, the average cost per participant is calculated by dividing the project's total Federal grant by the number of participants served under an IPE. The target performance level for this measure is 80 percent. In FY 2017, the efficiency measure for cost per participant was 74 percent and dropped slightly in FY 2018, to 72.7 percent. In FY 2019, the efficiency measure decreased to 66.3 percent, and fell further to 64 percent in FY 2020.

**Table 21. Percentages of cost per employment outcome and per participant:  
FYs 2017–2020**

	Target	FY 2017	FY 2018	FY 2019	FY 2020
Percent for the cost per employment outcome measure	76%	77%	84.1%	59.3%	60%
Percent cost per participant measure	80%	74%	72.7%	66.3%	64%

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, Rehabilitation Services Administration, Annual Performance Report for the American Indian Vocational Rehabilitation Services Program, FYs 2017 through 2020.

Due to the FY 2019 decline in the economy and labor markets on American Indian reservations and the COVID-19 pandemic that began in FY 2020, RSA anticipates that AIVRS program performance data will continue to show a downward trend in FYs 2021 and 2022. RSA continues to monitor AIVRS projects and provide extensive technical assistance to support program effectiveness.

Section 121(c) of the *Rehabilitation Act* requires the RSA Commissioner to reserve not less than 1.8 percent and not more than 2 percent of the funds set aside from the State VR program for the AIVRS program (funded under Section 121(a) of the *Rehabilitation Act*) to provide training and TA to governing bodies of Indian Tribes that have received an AIVRS grant. This grant was awarded to Northern Arizona University in FY 2015 to fund the American Indian Vocational Rehabilitation Training and Technical Assistance Center (AIVRTTAC). While the activities of the first year of this grant, FY 2016, have been previously reported, this report includes information that reflects the full five-year grant period through FY 2020.

AIVRTTAC provided universal TA that included using the YouTube channel to archive webinars, Talking Circles, and informational videos. Dissemination efforts occurred through AIVRS programs listservs and telephone contact with AIVRS program directors and in partnership with the Consortia of Administrators for Native American Rehabilitation (CANAR). In FYs 2019 and 2020, the AIVRTTAC archived 44 live or virtual training events on the following topic areas:

- COVID-19 response;
- data, reporting, and evaluation;
- program management;
- policies and procedures;
- transition;
- case management;

- culturally responsive services;
- mental health issues and vocational rehabilitation; and
- employment services.

AIVRTTAC completed targeted TA activities that reached staff members with 79 of the 86 AIVRS programs and staff members with several State VR agencies. Targeted TA included 42 events through webinars and in-person conference events, including training at the 2020 Oklahoma Tribal Vocational Rehabilitation virtual conference, the twice yearly CANAR conferences, and the Northern Arizona University Institute for Human Development annual conferences. On average, participants attended three or four targeted TA events, with some participants attending up to 24 targeted TA events.

AIVRTTAC provided intensive TA with a heavy focus on foundational aspects of VR to specific AIVRS programs implementing the VR process. This included 1) managing case files, 2) updating policies and procedures, 3) establishing or reestablishing a collaborative working relationship with the State VR agency, and 4) ensuring that the program personnel/staff have appropriate skills and training to complete their jobs and provide effective case management services. The AIVRTTAC added TA in a new category of employer partnerships/job development to some intensive TA agreements (ITA) in FYs 2019 and 2020 at the request of Tribal AIVRS program directors.

Over the five-year grant period, the AIVRTTAC provided intensive TA to 21 AIVRS programs. While seven AIVRS programs continue to implement their ITAs, 13 AIVRS programs have completed all activities in the ITA. One ITA was terminated due to a Tribal administration change. Depending on the goals of the specific ITA, activities resulted in increased numbers of consumers achieving successful case closures with a transition into competitive integrated employment; increased identification of new personnel development opportunities for AIVRS staff; strengthened and improved policies, procedures, and case file management; and the development of the memoranda of understanding specific to the relationship between an AIVRS program and State VR agencies.

AIVRTTAC personnel also developed 14 products/tools that are published on the National Clearinghouse of Rehabilitation Training Materials (NCRTM) website. Of particular note are a toolkit for new AIVRS directors and a seven-part series of webinars and toolkits on the VR process. The AIVRTTAC received a one-year extension of the grant through FY 2021 because RSA was concerned that it would not be able to receive quality applications while institutions of higher education and other potential applicants were in lockdown at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, and AIVRTTAC was well positioned to continue to provide training and TA during the pandemic. As a result, development of new webinars and toolkits continued through FYs 2020 and 2021. Webinar and toolkit topics included a four-part series on mental health, a seven-part series on the VR process, and products focusing on business engagement and services to employers.

# INDEPENDENT LIVING PROGRAM

## INDEPENDENT LIVING SERVICES FOR OLDER INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE BLIND PROGRAM

Authorized under *Title VII, Chapter 2, of the Rehabilitation Act*  
Managed by the Rehabilitation Services Administration,  
U.S. Department of Education

Through the Independent Living Services for Older Individuals Who Are Blind (IL-OIB) program, grantees deliver training and independent living (IL) services to individuals who are 55 years of age or older and whose significant visual impairment makes competitive integrated employment difficult to attain but for whom IL goals are feasible. These services promote adjustment to vision loss and assist older individuals who are blind with managing activities of daily living and increasing their functional independence by providing adaptive aids and services, orientation and mobility training, training in communication skills and braille instruction, information and referral services, peer counseling, and individual advocacy instruction. Through such services, the IL-OIB program preserves or increases independence and extends the quality of life for older Americans with visual impairments while offering alternatives to costly long-term institutionalization and care.

The *Rehabilitation Act* provides that, in any Federal fiscal year in which appropriations to this program exceed \$13 million, grants will be made on a formula basis rather than on a discretionary basis. Annual appropriations have exceeded \$13 million since FY 2000. Therefore, formula grants have been made to all State VR agencies serving individuals who are blind since FY 2000. States participating in this program must match every \$9 of Federal funds with \$1 in non-Federal cash or in-kind resources in the year for which the Federal funds are appropriated. This funding promotes the sustainability of the State-operated programs nationwide and builds the capacity of States to address the vastly growing numbers of older individuals who are blind or visually impaired.

In FY 2017, the total IL-OIB grant awards made to States was \$32,013,489, and by FY 2020, this funding had increased to \$32,384,124. In addition to receiving Federal funding, the IL-OIB program received non-Federal support. In FY 2017, the total non-Federal sources of funding and in-kind support for the 56 IL-OIB grantees was \$16,661,168, and by FY 2020, this funding had increased to \$17,420,194. In FY 2017, expenditures under the IL-OIB program from all funding sources, including Federal IL-OIB funds, other Federal funds,<sup>20</sup> non-Federal funds (cash and in-kind resources) totaled \$57,651,564, which is approximately a 9 percent decrease from the total amount expended in FY 2016. By FY 2020, total funding had increased slightly to \$58,632,912, a 4 percent increase from FY 2019. Table 22 demonstrates the funding changes,

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<sup>20</sup> Pursuant to Section 108 of the *Rehabilitation Act*, VR agencies are permitted to transfer the funds they receive from the Social Security Administration to the IL-OIB program for its use at their discretion.

funding percentage differences, and the number of individuals served in FYs 2017 through 2020.

In FY 2017, 55,721 individuals age 55 or older who were blind or visually impaired benefited from the IL services provided through the IL-OIB program, a decrease of 5 percent from FY 2016 (58,555). The total number of individuals served further decreased in FYs 2018 and 2019. Because of COVID-19 pandemic restrictions in FY 2020, the IL-OIB program saw a marked decrease in the number of individuals with blindness or visual impairment served, down to 47,764 individuals, a decrease of 12 percent from FY 2019, as shown in table 22.

**Table 22. Independent Living Services for Older Individuals who are Blind program funding, expenditures, and individuals served: FYs 2017–2020**

IL-OIB Program	FY 2017	FY 2018	FY 2019	FY 2020
Total IL-OIB awards to States	32,013,489	32,361,874	31,654,982	32,344,124
Total non-Federal funds including in-kind	16,661,168	15,958,113	15,467,175	17,420,194
Total expenditures including in-kind	57,651,564	58,273,540	56,193,504	58,632,912
Percentage difference from previous year expenditures	9% decrease	3% increase	4% decrease	4% increase
Total individuals served in reporting year	55,721	54,790	54,167	47,764

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, Rehabilitation Services Administration, Annual Performance Report (RSA 7-OB) for the Independent Living Services for Older Individuals Who Are Blind Program, FYs 2017 through 2020.

Section 751A(a) of the *Rehabilitation Act* requires the RSA Commissioner to reserve not less than 1.8 percent and not more than 2 percent of the funds set aside from the funds appropriated to carry out IL-OIB activities to provide training and TA to State agencies or to other providers of IL services for older individuals who are blind that are funded under the IL-OIB program. Mississippi State University received these training and TA funds through a competitive process for a five-year award in FY 2015 and again in FY 2020 for the Older Individuals Who Are Blind Technical Assistance Center (OIB-TAC). The OIB-TAC provided intensive training and TA, which included on-site visits, to 16 IL-OIB grantees in the areas of community outreach; best practice in the provision and delivery of services; program performance, including data reporting and analysis; and financial and management practices, including practices to ensure compliance with grant administration requirements. The OIB-TAC provided targeted and universal training and TA to IL-OIB grantees through online training modules and participation in national conferences. IL-OIB grantees identify TA needs in the annual submission of the RSA 7-OB report by each program.

The following examples of IL-OIB grantee activity and performance in FY 2020 include descriptions of successes and challenges.

## **Kentucky Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR)**

In FY 2020, OVR closed 195 comprehensive IL-OIB cases. Comprehensive is defined as having goals in a minimum of two skill training areas such as communications, daily living, or low vision/magnification. In the 195 comprehensive cases closed, 181 individuals met their goals, representing 93 percent of the total. OVR closed 46 IL-OIB cases defined as noncomprehensive, meaning the goal was in one single area. In all 46 noncomprehensive cases, individuals met their goals.

COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, such as no in-person services, resulted in about half as many closures as in the previous year. To complete satisfaction surveys, OVR placed random calls to 70 of the 195 individuals whose comprehensive case was closed in FY 2020. Of these, 68 people participated in the survey, representing 35 percent of the total comprehensive cases closed.

Survey results demonstrate that 80 percent of the respondents were satisfied with services in the areas of daily living, communications, and mobility, and indicated the training made it easier to complete those tasks. In addition, 100 percent of the respondents stated they had received at least one assistive technology device with instruction to use it and added comments about the helpfulness of the items.

OVR reported that TA provided by the OIB-TAC continued to be valuable in adapting the program to a remote service delivery/case management model and assuring that an equitable quality level of services is available across regions of the State. However, one of the biggest challenges for the program was recruiting qualified staff and maintaining experienced employees within the parameters of the State personnel system and salary restrictions. OVR stated that TA for creating an environment of attracting and maintaining specialized staff would be useful.

## **Oregon Commission for the Blind (OCB)**

OCB staff serve 100 percent of individuals in Oregon who are referred and who have requested services. OCB uses internal measures to ensure prompt service to new referrals. In FY 2020, the agency averaged 13.9 days (counting weekends) from the date of referral to execution of the application for services.

In FY 2020, OCB surveyed all 661 individuals served that year. OCB received 172 surveys, representing a 27.6 percent completion rate with the following results.

- 98.8 percent felt their rehabilitation instructors were well prepared and knowledgeable
- 99.4 percent were satisfied/very satisfied in program staff treating them professionally and with respect
- 97 percent felt their services were provided in a timely manner
- 97 percent were satisfied with the quality of their services

- 85 percent felt more independent after their training
- 83 percent reported that services contributed to them living more independently and doing things themselves
- 99.4 percent would recommend OCB's services to others

### **New Jersey Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (CBVI)**

In recent years, CBVI experienced an increase in the number of individuals 55 and older who are blind, vision impaired, and deaf-blind who were seeking services, and it expanded its programs in the areas of support services, assistive technology training, deaf-blind services, and senior retreats.

In FY 2020, CBVI completed an external evaluation of its IL-OIB services. CBVI contracted with the National Research and Training Center (NRTC) on Blindness and Low Vision at Mississippi State University to complete an external evaluation of their older blind services. CBVI provided the NRTC a list of consumers whose services were concluded during FY 2020. All consumers were mailed surveys. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, the introductory questions about receiving services (i.e., services were provided in a timely manner, staff were attentive to their needs, and overall satisfaction with services) were asked separately for in-person and remote instruction.

Analyses of 99 completed surveys indicated the following results.

- 91 percent (in-person) and 44 percent (remote) of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that services were provided in a timely manner
- 92 percent (in-person) and 42 percent (remote) agreed or strongly agreed that staff were attentive to their needs
- 98 percent agreed or strongly agreed that staff were familiar with aids and techniques used by individuals with vision impairments
- 93 percent (in-person) and 42 percent (remote) reported overall satisfaction with services
- 95 percent rated the importance of CBVI's services to help consumers remain independent in their home as somewhat important or very important

Respondents were asked to rate their agreement about positive outcomes for each service area and for overall services.

- Daily living activities: of the 70 consumers who reported receiving instruction on activities around their home, 99 percent agreed or strongly agreed that they were better able to complete daily living tasks because of this service.
- Orientation and mobility: of the 40 consumers who reported they received this service, 98 percent agreed or strongly agreed that they were more confident moving around their community.

- Eye health: of the 27 consumers who said they received services from an eye health nurse, 96 percent agreed or strongly agreed that they felt more confident about managing their health.
- Assistive technology: of the 35 consumers who said they received instruction to use cell phones or computers, 83 percent agreed or strongly agreed that they were able to complete tasks using technology.
- Low vision exam: of the 66 consumers who reported they had a low vision exam, 89 percent agreed or strongly agreed that they were better informed about their vision loss and how to use their low vision.

In addition, in response to whether they felt more confident performing activities they had given up because of their vision loss, 84 percent of the 70 consumers who responded, agreed, or strongly agreed; however, 16 consumers reported they had not given up any activities. Overall, 82 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed they were more independent because of the services received.

# TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE, TRAINING, AND SUPPORT

RSA uses its discretionary grant investments to support the central work of the VR program and to address the new and emerging needs of individuals with disabilities. These grants may, for example, provide TA for more efficient management of service provision, open opportunities for traditionally underserved populations, initiate partnerships with the business community, and help promote independence and self-confidence among individuals with disabilities that foster competitive integrated employment. They include training efforts designed to increase qualifications of new personnel and expand the knowledge and skills of current professionals through recurrent training, continuing education, and professional development.

## TRADITIONALLY UNDERSERVED POPULATIONS

Authorized under Section 21 of the *Rehabilitation Act*  
Managed by the Rehabilitation Services Administration,  
U.S. Department of Education

The *Rehabilitation Act* requires that at least 1 percent of funds appropriated each year for programs under *Titles II, III, VI, and VII* be reserved to carry out activities under Section 21. The annual available funding (\$910,490) has remained consistent over FY 2017 to FY 2020 but could vary in future years depending on the appropriations for the referenced titles in future years. These funds are to be used to make awards to minority entities and American Indian Tribes either to carry out activities under the *Rehabilitation Act* or to conduct research, training, technical assistance, or a related activity to improve services provided under the *Rehabilitation Act*, especially services provided to individuals from minority backgrounds or the funds can be used to make awards to States or public or private nonprofit agencies to support capacity-building projects designed to provide outreach and TA to minority entities and American Indian Tribes to promote their participation in activities under the *Rehabilitation Act*.

The *Rehabilitation Act* defines *minority entities* as “historically black colleges and universities, Hispanic-serving institutions of higher education, American Indian Tribal colleges or universities, and other institutions of higher learning whose minority student enrollment is at least 50 percent.” Capacity-building projects are designed to expand the service-providing capabilities of these entities and American Indian Tribes and increase their participation in activities funded under the *Rehabilitation Act*. Training and TA activities funded under the *Rehabilitation Act* may include training on RSA’s mission, RSA-funded programs, disability legislation, and other pertinent subjects to increase awareness of RSA and its programs.

In FY 2015, RSA funded a project to the Northwest Indian College (NWIC), in partnership with Western Washington University, to create a Vocational Rehabilitation Training Institute (Institute). The Institute provided culturally relevant courses that help current and future AIVRS personnel gain foundational knowledge, skills, and practice in

Tribal VR to improve and expand services to American Indians with disabilities in Tribal communities. The Institute conducted outreach and recruitment to all 88 AIVRS projects and developed and delivered seven training modules for AIVRS project personnel and individuals interested in the AIVRS program.

By the end of FY 2020, 211 individual participants completed one module with 145 individual participants completing two or more modules and 55 participants earning an award of completion by successfully completing all seven modules. Participants completed capstone projects in areas such as developing program policies and procedures, intake forms, traditional spiritual activities assessments, file organization checklists, VR program information documents for urban and non-urban populations, a resource directory, and cultural sensitivity training materials for non-Tribal partners. The Institute also provided follow-up TA to current and former participants through one-on-one contact by phone or email, online TA forum, and topical presentations delivered by guest speakers.

During the project, the Institute developed five new courses: Addictions and Tribal VR Services, Medical Aspects of Disability in Tribal VR, Mental Health Disabilities and Tribal VR, Advanced Counseling Techniques, and Ethics in Tribal VR Services; it also completed Section 508 captioning of videos for 12 Institute courses. The Institute compiled all online course content into a hard copy and a PDF accessible handbook that was widely disseminated and available on the Institute's website and on RSA's National Clearinghouse of Rehabilitation Training Material. This material is highly beneficial to AIVRS programs as a resource and to those academic programs in institutions of higher education and Tribal colleges and universities that want to focus more on Tribal VR within the current structure of their degree programs (both undergraduate and graduate). The handbook supports those programs in implementing course material the Institute developed.

In FY 2017, NWIC received a supplement from RSA in the amount of \$69,120 to address an ongoing need for training to support effective financial management of AIVRS projects. The Institute developed a financial management toolkit and an accompanying 10-week long course that became part of its course offerings in the fourth year of the project.

In FY 2020, due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the immediate needs of the AIVRS projects ED extended the Institute for an additional year, up until September 30, 2021, to continue to provide the AIVRS projects direct training and TA related to operating in the COVID-19 environment when such assistance was most needed.

## DEMONSTRATION AND TRAINING PROGRAMS

Authorized under Section 303 of the *Rehabilitation Act*  
Managed by the Rehabilitation Services Administration,  
U.S. Department of Education

The Demonstration and Training programs provide competitive grants to—and authorize RSA to enter into contracts with—entities to expand and improve the provision of rehabilitation and other services authorized under the *Rehabilitation Act*. The purposes of these grants and contracts are to further the purposes and policies of the *Rehabilitation Act* and to support activities that increase the provision, extent, availability, scope, and quality of rehabilitation services under the *Rehabilitation Act*, including related research and evaluation activities. In FYs 2017 through 2020, the appropriation for this program was \$5.8 million per year.

Section 303(b) of the *Rehabilitation Act* authorizes projects to demonstrate and implement methods of service delivery for individuals with disabilities and includes activities such as TA, service demonstrations, systems change, special studies and evaluation, and the dissemination and use of project findings. It also includes small scale, short duration evaluation and data analysis projects, program improvement activities, and evaluation activities. Entities eligible for grants under Section 303(b) include State VR agencies, community rehabilitation programs, Indian Tribes and Tribal organizations, and other public and nonprofit agencies or organizations. Competitions may be limited to one or more type of entity. The program supports projects for up to five years. During that period, projects are intended to demonstrate the application of innovative procedures that could lead to an increase in the number of successful employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities.

Section 303(b) projects develop strategies that enhance the delivery of rehabilitation services by community-based programs and State VR agencies to meet the needs of underserved populations or underserved areas. Projects have been successful in creating intensive outreach and rehabilitation support systems, including benefits counseling, career development, and job placement assistance.

Special demonstration projects vary in their objectives. The objective for a number of the projects funded in the past has been to provide comprehensive services for individuals with disabilities that lead to successful employment outcomes. However, some projects funded under this authority do not relate directly to employment of individuals with disabilities. For example, some projects focus on training parents of youth with disabilities and others focus on braille training. While these projects will ultimately affect employment and entry into the VR program, such outcomes may occur only indirectly or many years after the project ends. For this reason, the program's outcome measure is as follows:

Projects will be judged to have successfully implemented strategies that contribute to the expansion of services for the employment of individuals with

disabilities according to the percentage of projects that met their goals and objectives as established in their original applications.

Using this measure allows each project to be included in any evaluation of the Demonstration and Training Programs.

Special Demonstration projects supported in FY 2017 included the following:

### **Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) Demonstration**

RSA provided a second no-cost extension to one grantee under this program, the Institute on Community Inclusion at the University of Massachusetts-Boston, to complete services to participants in the Substantial Gainful Activity (SGA) project in Kentucky and Minnesota through FY 2017, the fiscal year in which the project ended.

The purpose of this project was to identify, develop, and implement a model demonstration project to improve outcomes for individuals receiving SSDI who are served by State VR agencies. The project consisted of three phases including: 1) identifying high-performing State VR agencies and their “candidate factors and practices,” leading to in-depth case studies of the high-performing State VR agencies and their agencies’ factors and practices; 2) creating a demonstration laboratory for evaluating an intervention model with a core component of providing substantive training and TA and in which selected State VR agencies serve as “incubators” for the intervention model; and 3) disseminating and replicating, to include the development of training materials, curricula, procedures, and on-demand TA initiatives. The Institute on Community Inclusion continued to work with Mathematica Policy Research on developing the research methodology for studying the project’s proposed model.

The project’s major activities in FY 2017 were to:

- continue to support implementation teams in participating States;
- assist States to make needed policy, procedure, and process changes (such as early identification of SSDI customers, presumptive eligibility policies, and ability to convene job placement personnel before the development of the IPE);
- identify and make needed vendor contracting changes;
- identify and implement data collection needs that take advantage of the VR agency’s case management system;
- customize the model to fit within the State VR agency’s activities;
- identify and provide personnel training and TA as needed; and
- continue to support the intervention model.

Both Kentucky and Minnesota made significant changes and invested heavily in creating the intervention model. Minnesota hired staff dedicated to implementing the project. Both States initially had minimal financial education and work incentives

counseling capacities but developed substantial sustainable resources to provide these services.

The Kentucky Office of Vocational Rehabilitation began implementation on April 1, 2015, and completed recruiting the required sample size of 500 SGA project participants across the eight sites. Evaluation results indicate that the percentage of SGA project participants in the treatment group that achieved an employment outcome with earnings above SGA was about 8 percent, compared to about 3 percent for the control group. The agency was able to fund expanding the intervention model statewide using increased reimbursement payments from the Social Security Administration for placing individuals receiving SSDI into employment with earnings above the SGA level.

Minnesota VR officially launched the SGA project on August 3, 2015, with the enrollment of SSDI-only applicants in the eight sites. Minnesota VR reached the required sample size of 500 SGA project participants in FY 2016. Evaluation data for Minnesota has shown increases in employment and in employment with earnings above SGA. Employment outcomes increased from 22 percent of participants achieving an employment outcome after regular services to 27.7 percent of participants achieving an employment outcome after receiving enhanced services under the model. The percentage of individuals who achieved earnings above SGA increased from 4.2 percent for those receiving regular services to 5.5 percent for those receiving enhanced services under the model. However, these increases were not statistically significant.

Minnesota VR also negotiated with other State agencies to continue the project model statewide beginning in FY 2018, after the end of the grant project. The partners in funding and maintaining the model included Minnesota VR and the Minnesota State welfare and human services agencies. As a result, the State's network of independent living centers will provide ongoing benefits counseling to Minnesota VR participants.

Both the Kentucky and Minnesota VR agencies saw value in the system changes made during the project and were able to sustain the changes made in providing services to individuals on SSDI after the end of the project.

### **Career Pathways for Individuals with Disabilities (CPID)**

From FY 2015 through FY 2019, RSA awarded nearly \$3.5 million annually to the Georgia, Kentucky, Nebraska, and Virginia State VR agencies to develop and demonstrate the use of career pathways to support VR-eligible individuals with disabilities to obtain quality employment in high demand occupations and industries. In September 2020, RSA approved no-cost extensions for the Georgia, Nebraska, and

Virginia agencies to provide scheduled services to individuals and to complete planned agency-wide replication and dissemination activities in FY 2021.

Through CPID, participating VR agencies have helped hundreds of individuals with disabilities, including youth and individuals with significant disabilities, to achieve competitive integrated employment in promising careers through the sequential, industry-recognized post-secondary credentials and marketable skills obtained through CPID-funded education, training, and supports.

CPID grantees implemented the following strategies and initiatives:

- Partnerships with employers, business associations, community rehabilitation programs, State and local education agencies, career and technical educational institutions, and other workforce development partners;
- hands-on career exploration and work-based learning academies in diverse fields, from STEM to health professions to advanced manufacturing;
- secondary school career-readiness curricula and supports;
- pre-apprenticeship, apprenticeship, customized employment, and workforce upskilling opportunities involving labor unions and large national employers; and
- integration of career pathways principles and practices into participating VR agencies' broad efforts to serve transition-age students, youth, and adults.

The following are among the aggregate performance outcomes the four CPID grantees achieved between October 1, 2017, and September 30, 2020, after the initial project set-up year:

- CPID participants accessed 109 career pathways in diverse occupational clusters such as advanced manufacturing, healthcare, information technology, construction and architecture, and transportation, distribution, and logistics;
- a total of 5,250 CPID participants, including more than 2,000 students with disabilities, received career exploration and counseling, education, training, job development, job placement, and other services and supports;
- 840 CPID participants achieved competitive integrated employment after attaining the requisite postsecondary credentials;
- CPID participants' average weekly earnings increased from \$543 in FY 2017 to \$683 in FY 2020, and their median weekly earnings increased from \$448 to \$560 during the same period; and
- the proportion of CPID employment outcomes that included employer-provided health insurance increased from 43 percent in FY 2017 to 57 percent in FY 2020.

Sections 303(c) and (d) of the *Rehabilitation Act* authorize projects designed specifically to make information and training available to parents of individuals with disabilities and to provide braille training.

### **Parent Training and Information (PTI) Projects**

OSERS supports two parent training programs. First, the OSEP funded program, authorized under the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)*, supports families through the provision of training and resources to participate effectively in their children's education and development. Second, PTI projects funded by RSA and authorized under the *Rehabilitation Act*, provide training and information to enable individuals with disabilities and the parents, family members, guardians, advocates, or other authorized representatives of the individuals to participate more effectively with professionals in meeting the vocational, independent living, and rehabilitation needs of individuals with disabilities. These regional projects are designed to meet the unique training and information needs of those individuals who live in the area to be served, particularly those who are members of populations that have been unserved or underserved by programs under the *Rehabilitation Act*. The national PTI center assists in establishing, developing, and coordinating the TA provided by the regional PTI projects funded under Section 303(c) of the *Rehabilitation Act*. All these RSA-funded grantees must collaborate with the *IDEA* PTI grantees funded by OSEP.

In FYs 2017, 2018, and 2019, RSA funded the third, fourth, and fifth years of seven regional PTI projects, totaling \$914,835 per year. The national PTI center was funded at \$250,000 per year in FYs 2017, 2018, and 2019 for its third, fourth, and fifth years of operation. In FY 2019, RSA published a notice of final waiver and extension to extend the seven regional PTI projects and the national PTI center for a sixth year to bring them onto the same competition cycle as the regional PTI centers that OSEP funds so the RSA- and OSEP-funded PTI centers could more closely align and coordinate their activities. The extension allowed RSA to provide an additional year of funding so as not to have a gap in critical services. That year, the seven regional PTI projects received a total of \$914,835, and the national PTI center received \$250,000.

In FY 2020, RSA funded eight regional PTI projects totaling \$2,400,000 per year for five years and a national PTI center at \$300,000 per year for five years. These new projects are designed to meet the information and training needs of individuals with disabilities and their families so individuals with disabilities can achieve their employment and independent living goals. Unlike the previous model, these projects were funded to ensure PTI center services would be available in each state, with two PTI projects in each of the OSEP-funded Regional Parent Technical Assistance Center regions to allow for closer coordination and collaboration.

## **Braille Training**

RSA supports training in the use of braille for personnel providing VR services or educational services to youth and adults who are blind, thereby building the capacity of service providers who work with those individuals.

In FYs 2017 and 2018, RSA funded three Braille Training grantees for their fourth and fifth years totaling \$328,585 per year. In FY 2019, the Braille Training grants were re-competed and three new awards were funded for a total amount of \$341,920. In FY 2020, the continuation awards for the second year of these grants were awarded for a total amount of \$341,920.

## **National Technical Assistance Center on Transition (NTACT)**

From FYs 2016 through 2020, RSA funded one five-year TA center, the National Technical Assistance Center on Transition. In a joint funding effort with OSEP, RSA provides \$400,000 annually in supplements to support cooperative agreements to improve transition to postsecondary education and employment for students with disabilities. The NTACT assisted State educational agencies (SEAs), local educational agencies (LEAs), State VR agencies, and other VR service providers to implement evidence-based and promising practices and strategies to ensure that students with disabilities, including those with significant disabilities, graduate from high school with the knowledge, skills, and supports needed for success in postsecondary education and employment. In addition, this funding supports State VR recipients with intensive TA; State VR agencies, VR counselors, and other VR professionals in targeted and universal TA efforts, such as webinars and products specific to State VR agencies; and collaborative intensive, targeted, and universal TA with other RSA-funded TA centers.

The NTACT provided intensive TA to 12 States and territories. Of these, NTACT worked with 10 States to develop formal agreements between VR agencies and SEAs. The NTACT measured student-level outcomes as well as the effect of the TA on capacity, collaboration, and sustainable practices. Within these 10 States, the required inclusion of VR in this grant cycle resulted in in-depth collaboration and partnership among SEAs, LEAs, and VR agencies in Alaska, North Dakota, Delaware, Idaho, Maryland, Nevada, and Oregon. In addition to the base award of \$400,000 per year, RSA provided a total of \$325,683 in supplemental funding in FY 2017 for the remaining years to support the NTACT's provision of targeted TA with a particular focus on outcomes for students with complex disabilities and on States with a large percentage of rural communities.

The NTACT also provided targeted and universal TA. For example, the NTACT hosted joint webinars with the Workforce Innovation Technical Assistance Center (WINTAC) and partnered with WINTAC in providing targeted TA to support States' efforts to implement customized employment initiatives. Similarly, the NTACT, WINTAC, and the Vocational Rehabilitation Technical Assistance Center- Youth with Disabilities (VRTAC-Y) worked together with States interested in implementing peer mentoring programs. The NTACT also provided collaborative professional development for career and technical educators and special educators regarding VR services, worked with sites to

develop data sharing plans and to streamline service delivery and seamless transitions across agencies, and drafted and planned initial implementation of a workforce readiness curriculum.

On September 10, 2019, OSERS published in the *Federal Register* a notice of final waiver and extension for the NTACT to receive funding for an additional budget period, to end by September 30, 2020. The intent of the extension was, in part, to enable RSA and OSEP to align, coordinate, and improve the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of direct training and TA services focused on transition-age children and youth with disabilities and their families. This extension also avoided a lapse in the critically needed resources that the NTACT provided. To support a nine-month extension—January 1 through September 30, 2020—beyond the end of the five-year performance period, RSA provided \$378,000 to the NTACT in its final year of funding. During the extension period, the NTACT provided TA to States focused on increased collaboration between career and technical education, VR, and special education; support for States implementing transition institutes; implementation of data-driven decision making efforts; support of State efforts to improve performance as measured by State Performance Plan/Annual Performance Report Indicators under *IDEA* Part B efforts to expand collaborative service delivery to improve outcomes for all students; and efforts in collaboration with other federally funded centers.

In FY 2020, RSA and OSEP jointly funded a new five-year NTACT in the amount of \$4,099,950 annually: \$2,099,986 from OSEP's Technical Assistance and Dissemination funds and \$1,999,964 from RSA's Demonstration and Training Program funding. Beginning its activities in FY 2021, the NTACT is assisting States, based on their unique needs, to improve educational and vocational rehabilitation outcomes for students and youth with disabilities. To ensure that there is communication between each level of the special education and VR system and that there are systems in place to support the use of effective transition practices from school to college and careers, the NTACT is working with appropriate levels of the education and VR system (e.g., SEAs, LEAs, State VR agencies, VR service providers, career and technical education and vocational education, charter schools, private industry, employers, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services personnel, U.S. Department of Labor personnel, dropout prevention specialists, transition-related professionals, postsecondary education professionals, regional TA providers, and parents and families).

## **REHABILITATION TRAINING PROGRAM**

**Authorized under Section 302 of the *Rehabilitation Act*  
Managed by the Rehabilitation Services Administration,  
U.S. Department of Education**

The purpose of the Rehabilitation Training program is to ensure that skilled personnel are available to serve the rehabilitation needs of individuals with disabilities assisted through VR, supported employment, and IL programs. To that end, the program supports training and related activities designed to increase the number of qualified

personnel trained in providing rehabilitation services. In FYs 2017, 2018, 2019, and 2020, the appropriation for this program was \$29,388,000 per year.

Grants and contracts under this program authority are awarded to States and to public and private nonprofit agencies and organizations, including institutions of higher education, to pay part of the cost of conducting training programs. Awards can be made in any of 30 long-term training fields, in addition to awards made for continuing education, rehabilitation short-term training, innovative rehabilitation training, training interpreters for individuals who are deaf or hard-of-hearing and individuals who are deaf-blind, and TA centers. These training programs vary in terms of content, methodology, and audience.

In FYs 2017 and 2018, RSA supported continuation awards for all grants funded under the Rehabilitation Training program. In FY 2019, RSA held competitions for new awards under the Rehabilitation Long-Term Training (RLTT) program and the Innovative Rehabilitation Training program. In FY 2020, RSA held competitions for new awards under the RLTT program and the Innovative Rehabilitation Training program. In addition, RSA competed two Vocational Rehabilitation Technical Assistance Centers.

### **Rehabilitation Long-Term Training**

The RLTT program supports academic training grants that are awarded to colleges and universities with undergraduate and graduate programs in the field of vocational rehabilitation. Grantees must direct at least 65 percent of their total project costs to trainee scholarships. Section 302(b)(5) of the *Rehabilitation Act* requires trainees who receive assistance either to 1) work two years for every year of assistance in public or private nonprofit rehabilitation or related agencies, including professional corporations or professional practice groups that have service arrangements with a State agency, or 2) pay back the assistance they received. Grant recipients under the RLTT program are required to build closer relationships between training institutions and State VR agencies, promote careers in VR, identify potential employers who would meet the trainee's payback requirements, and ensure that data on the employment of trainees are accurate.

### **Training of Interpreters for Individuals Who Are Deaf or Hard of Hearing and Individuals Who Are DeafBlind**

The purpose of the Training of Interpreters for Individuals Who Are Deaf or Hard of Hearing and Individuals Who Are DeafBlind program is to establish interpreter training programs or to provide financial assistance for ongoing interpreter training programs to train a sufficient number of qualified interpreters throughout the country. The grants are designed to train interpreters to effectively interpret and transliterate using spoken, visual, and tactile modes of communication, ensure the maintenance of the interpreting skills of qualified interpreters, and provide opportunities for interpreters to improve their skills and meet both the highest standards approved by certifying associations and the communication needs of individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing and individuals who are DeafBlind.

In FY 2016, RSA funded two five-year programs under this authority. First, the Experiential Learning Model Demonstration Center for Novice Interpreters and Baccalaureate Degree American Sign Language (ASL) – English Interpretation Program under ALN 84.160C supports one grant designed to increase the number and quality of nationally certified ASL-English interpreters. The grant funds an experiential learning model demonstration center to prepare novice interpreters to work in VR settings. Second, the Training of Interpreters in Specialty Areas under ALN 84.160D funds four grants to provide training for ASL-English interpreter training specialty areas to working interpreters (i.e., interpreters with a baccalaureate degree in ASL-English who possess a minimum of three years of relevant experience as an interpreter or the equivalent). The following presents activities of these grant programs during their first four years of operation from FYs 2017 through 2020.

- ALN 84.160C Experiential Learning Model Demonstration Center

St. Catherine University in St. Paul, Minnesota, developed an experiential learning model demonstration center for novice interpreters that could be implemented through baccalaureate degree American Sign Language (ASL)-English interpretation programs or through partner organizations. The center's goal is to prepare novice interpreters to work in VR settings.

St. Catherine University developed a literature review on experiential learning in education in general, as well as specifically in interpreting. Over 100 references are cited, creating an excellent resource list. The center completed an individualized development plan for educators and novice interpreters, a framework for mentors and novice interpreters, and a guidebook for agencies supervising novice interpreters during their practicum experience. The project is developed in a modular format so that programs or agencies can replicate the curriculum and its activities in whole or in part for either pre-service or in-service learning.

A self-directed track was added to the program to expand access to novice interpreters so that they have the necessary resources to successfully obtain the National Interpreting Certificate. Additionally, St. Catherine University created a seven-module preparatory training course to better inform novice interpreters about the information and resources available to prepare for the National Interpreting Certificate exam, including recent changes and updates to the exam that became effective in FY 2021.

St. Catherine University is on track to enroll 100 participants by the end of the program. The project is on target to meet its goal of 50 percent of the total number of participants passing the National Interpreting Certificate exam. As of FY 2020, 47 percent of participants passed the exam, and the project is awaiting results for five additional tests, which were delayed due to COVID-19 related testing site schedule changes. Finally, the project is on track to reduce the length of time between graduation to certification from 18 to 24 months to 9 to 12 months. RSA anticipates the COVID-19 pandemic will affect scheduling tests

during the remainder of the grant, which could potentially impact the goal of reducing the length of the time from graduation to certification.

- ALN 84.160D Training of Interpreters in Specialty Areas

Four grantees are developing curricula to support interpreter training in specialty areas focusing on cultivating legal interpreters from minority backgrounds, behavioral and mental health settings, dysfluent language competencies, and interpreting for individuals who are DeafBlind. Project goals are to increase the number of working interpreters who are trained to work with individuals who are deaf who require specialized interpreting and to increase the number of interpreters trained in specialty areas who obtain or advance in employment in the areas for which they were prepared. To achieve these goals, grantees develop and deliver training of sufficient scope, intensity, and duration for working interpreters to achieve increased skill, knowledge, and competence in specialty areas. Grantees are developing new training programs or stand-alone modules that could also be incorporated into an existing baccalaureate degree ASL-English program. RSA anticipates the COVID-19 pandemic could potentially impact the goal of increasing the number of working interpreters in specialty areas.

Through FY 2020, the grantees made the following progress with the projects.

- University of Northern Colorado, Denver, Colorado (Specialty Area: Cultivating legal interpreters from minority backgrounds) completed 18 online training modules to prepare legal interpreters and legal interpreter supervisors and mentors. The project made progress toward its goal to train 100 working interpreters in the specialty area of Legal Interpreter Training. The project also developed a skills-focused remote supervision series that will result in a total of 20 contact hours.
- St. Catherine University, St. Paul, Minnesota (Specialty Area: Training interpreting specialists to work in behavioral health settings) completed six self-directed interactive mini courses that provide introductory online learning activities on behavioral health topics. St. Catherine University also completed four online training modules that provide more in-depth learning for certified working interpreters.
- Northeastern University, Boston, Massachusetts (Specialty Area: Interpreting for consumers with dysfluent language competencies) completed an annotated bibliography consisting of 31 articles, books, presentations, and video resources about language dysfluency, and these resources informed the content of specialized trainings. The project is on track to meet its goal to enroll 72 working interpreters (average 18 annually) in the program of study. The project has far exceeded enrollment and completion targets in the online self-paced training. To date, 2,002 participants have enrolled and, of those, 645 successfully completed online training. The project also developed 12 interpreting

scenarios and various decision points where the interpreter must decide how to proceed.

- Western Oregon University, Monmouth, Oregon (Specialty Area: Enhance communication access for persons who are DeafBlind by increasing the number of interpreters able to effectively interpret using tactile and other strategies) completed a comprehensive needs assessment report, which included baseline data, results from a needs assessment survey, focus groups, interviews, and vetting competencies and key findings. In the absence of face-to-face training because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the project developed a comprehensive online community of practice to engage DeafBlind mentors with interpreters and focus on the theoretical frames of DeafBlind interpreting. Western Oregon University created 75 videos with linguistic content, which added to the project's work and catalog for interpreters.

## **Innovative Rehabilitation Training**

The Innovative Rehabilitation Training program is designed to develop 1) new types of training programs for rehabilitation personnel and to demonstrate the effectiveness of these new types of training programs for rehabilitation personnel in providing rehabilitation services to individuals with disabilities; 2) new and improved methods of training rehabilitation personnel so that there may be a more effective delivery of rehabilitation services to individuals with disabilities by designated State rehabilitation agencies and designated State rehabilitation units or other public or nonprofit rehabilitation service agencies or organizations; and 3) new innovative training programs for VR professionals and paraprofessionals to have a 21st-century understanding of the evolving labor force and the needs of individuals with disabilities so they can more effectively provide VR services to individuals with disabilities.

In FY 2019, RSA funded seven five-year grants under the Innovative Rehabilitation Training program in these areas: VR counseling (one award), VR services to individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders (one award), VR services to individuals with intellectual disabilities (two awards), career assessment for VR service recipients (one award), employer engagement in the VR process (one award), and pre-employment transition services (one award). In FY 2020, the first year of grant activities, projects focused on developing and piloting training modules. Many projects assembled curriculum advisory teams, technical panels, and conducted surveys to gather input to inform the curriculum design.

In FY 2020, ED awarded one five-year grant related to assisting and supporting individuals with disabilities pursuing self-employment, business ownership, and telecommuting, and another in the area of forensic rehabilitation and vocational evaluation.

These grants will begin program activities in FY 2021 and are designed to foster flexible and affordable paths to obtaining knowledge and skills and to meet the unique needs of

individuals with disabilities. Specifically, grantees are required to develop current and, to the extent possible, evidence-based training modules for inclusion in rehabilitation counseling education programs and to use as stand-alone modules to develop or implement pathways to recognized postsecondary credentials and provide work-based learning experiences such as apprenticeships, internships, and practica. Further, under this program, grantees may help VR professionals and paraprofessionals learn how to meet the unique needs of individuals with disabilities; create or expand opportunities for students and youth receiving transition services; assist individuals with disabilities to obtain recognized postsecondary credentials, including postsecondary credentials in science, technology, engineering, mathematics, or computer science, as they pursue careers; and expand partnerships with appropriate entities, such as State VR agencies, SEAs, LEAs, schools, businesses, not-for-profit professional organizations, and organizations of, or representing, individuals with disabilities. This program also promotes economic opportunity for individuals with disabilities.

## Technical Assistance

- National Disability Rights Network (NDRN)

From FYs 2017 through 2020, RSA provided \$200,000 annually to NDRN under the Short-Term Training Program to increase the capacity of Client Assistance Program (CAP) staff to inform, assist, and advocate on behalf of VR clients and applicants nationwide, in accordance with Section 112 of the *Rehabilitation Act*, as amended by *Title IV* of *WIOA*.

NDRN provides training and TA on the following broad subject areas through the following modes and platforms.

- Management training on skills needed for strategic and operational planning and direction of CAP services;
- advocacy training on skills and knowledge CAP staff need to assist individuals with disabilities to gain access to and to use the services and benefits available under the *Rehabilitation Act* with particular emphasis on new statutory and regulatory requirements;
- systemic advocacy training on skills and knowledge CAP staff need to address programmatic issues of concern;
- training and TA on CAP best practices; and
- training on skills and knowledge CAP staff need to perform additional responsibilities required by *WIOA*.

NDRN has consistently met or exceeded all performance measures related to quality, relevance, usefulness, and reach. In FY 2020, for example, 164 CAP professionals participated in at least one of its webinars, conferences, specialized trainings, individual consultations, or web-accessed specialized materials. Between 97 and 100 percent of the CAP professionals responding to different

post-evaluation surveys indicated that the trainings increased the knowledge, skills, or abilities needed to perform their CAP responsibilities. Between 85 and 95 percent of the respondents reported satisfaction with the quality, relevance, and usefulness of the CAP trainings and TA. Similar results were reported in FYs 2017 through 2019.

- Job-Driven Vocational Rehabilitation Technical Assistance Center (JDVRTAC)

In FY 2014, a presidential memorandum directed Federal agencies to take action to address job-driven training for the nation's workers.<sup>21</sup> The JDVRTAC was funded in FY 2014 as a three-year cooperative agreement between RSA and the Institute for Community Inclusion within the School for Global Inclusion and Social Development at the University of Massachusetts-Boston. The purpose of the JDVRTAC was to identify, define, implement, and evaluate these four job-driven activities identified in the January 2014 Presidential Memorandum on Job-Driven Training for Workers: Business Engagement; Labor Market Information; Employer Supports; and Customized Training. The JDVRTAC was funded as a national center to provide TA to State VR agencies and related rehabilitation professionals and service providers throughout the United States and its territories.

By the end of FY 2017, the third and final year of the cooperative agreement, the JDVRTAC had met or exceeded the minimum number of required activities established in the cooperative agreement. The JDVRTAC had established an extensive tool kit for each topic area, produced 37 webinars, conducted five topical forums, and facilitated eight communities of practice. These resources supported the JDVRTAC in providing intensive TA to 19 State VR agencies. In addition, 18 State VR agencies made changes to their business engagement and employer support practices that were designed to improve State VR agency relationships with employers, support employers to provide services to employees with disabilities, and create employment and internship opportunities for students and adults with disabilities; 14 State VR agencies used labor market information to improve vocational planning and services for VR program participants and to better understand employers' needs; and two State VR agencies worked with employers to develop customized training programs tailored to meet the knowledge and skills needs specific to one or more employers.

Rather than let the cooperative agreement end in FY 2017 and the JDVRTAC's innovative work stop, RSA approved a no-cost extension for FY 2018 to allow for transferring the activities of the JDVRTAC to the Workforce Innovation Technical Assistance Center (WINTAC) and to complete activities included in the ITAs. As a result, the WINTAC continued to provide training and TA to State VR agencies in the critical areas of business engagement and employer supports and use of labor market information.

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<sup>21</sup> <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/01/30/presidential-memorandum-job-driven-training-workers>

- Workforce Innovation Technical Assistance Center (WINTAC)

The WINTAC was initially funded in FY 2015 to provide training and universal, targeted, and intensive TA to State VR agencies and related agencies, rehabilitation professionals, and service providers in topic areas related to changes made by *WIOA*. The topic areas included

- providing pre-employment transition services to students with disabilities and supported employment services to youth with disabilities;
- implementing the requirements in Section 511 of the *Rehabilitation Act*;
- providing resources and strategies to help individuals with disabilities achieve competitive integrated employment, including customized employment and supported employment;
- integrating the State VR program into the workforce development system;
- transitioning to the new common performance accountability system under Section 116 of *WIOA*, including collecting and reporting common data elements;
- business engagement;
- labor market information/The Career Index Plus; and
- apprenticeships.

In addition, the project carried out pilot implementation projects in three areas: peer mentoring, use of an artificial intelligence digital assistant program called the Semi-Autonomous Rehabilitation Assistant, and the labor market information tool called “The Career Index Plus” that was integrated into the Labor Market Information topic area.

For this five-year project, FYs 2016 through 2020, the WINTAC website was visited 282,239 times by 161,977 unique visitors under universal TA. The most frequently visited webpages of universal TA provided information about pre-employment transition and accessing archived training. Targeted TA for this project included live training, webinars, communities of practice, and direct services aimed at State VR agencies and their partners. Over the grant’s five years, the WINTAC

- supported eight communities of practice, generally oriented around each of the eight topic areas, with total participation reaching 6,868 unique individuals;
- conducted 64 live or virtual training sessions reaching 28,556 individuals; and
- provided direct TA services to 11,909 individuals.

Pre-employment transition services was the topic area of most emphasis. For example, 27 training activities were conducted on pre-employment transition related topics.

Intensive TA in this context refers to TA provided to support a State VR agency implementing changes in methods of operation or delivery of services with the assistance of the WINTAC, as outlined in an ITA the State VR agency and the WINTAC signed. The ITA identifies the changes to be addressed, the activities needed to implement the changes, who is responsible for conducting and funding the activities, and the measurable results to be achieved. The WINTAC was required to develop ITAs with 23 State VR agencies over the life of the grant. The final total for the project was 50 ITAs including 53 State VR agencies. The topic areas most included in ITAs were pre-employment transition services (37), common performance measures (33), competitive integrated employment (21), integration into the workforce system (20), and Customized Employment pilots (19).

To coordinate the activities of its TA centers to reduce burden on the State VR agencies and to reduce duplicating activities and competing for State VR agency attention and resources, RSA encouraged collaboration among TA centers by supporting the ITAs that included more than one TA center when appropriate. The WINTAC participated in 26 ITAs that included at least one other TA center or partner.

An independent evaluator, focusing on the ITAs, found that 81 percent of the ITA activities were completed, another 10 percent were more than 75 percent completed, and 77 percent of all planned outputs were completed. While system change outcomes often require longer periods to manifest themselves in data collection, 62 percent of all outcomes were achieved by the end of the grant period, with 75 percent well on their way to completion. Many of the WINTAC ITA activities included sustainability plans (for example, development of customized employment service delivery systems). The evaluator stated, "We cannot summarize the overall impact on individuals with disabilities in terms of employment outcomes yet, but the impact on increased service delivery is apparent. For example, the Alaska VR agency was able to increase pre-employment services to youth with disabilities by 384 percent in three and one-half years."

- Technical Assistance Center for Vocational Rehabilitation Agency Program Evaluation and Quality Assurance (PEQA-TAC)

In FY 2015, RSA funded the PEQA-TAC at the University of Wisconsin-Stout to support a cooperative agreement for a training and TA center that assisted State VR agencies to improve performance management by building their capacity to carry out high quality program evaluations and quality assurance practices for program improvement. The PEQA-TAC assisted State VR agencies in building capacity by educating VR staff who wished to become program evaluators through

a basic certificate program and by educating current program evaluators who needed advanced studies in special topical areas. In FY 2015, RSA funded this five-year grant at \$500,000 annually. To effectively meet the projected needs of State VR agencies to have trained qualified program evaluators on staff, an annual supplemental award of \$75,000 for years two through five, totaling \$300,000, supported the Certificate in Program Evaluation training program. In FY 2020, RSA provided the PEQA-TAC a one-time no-cost extension to continue carrying out the project activities in FY 2021.

During the project performance period, 76 VR professionals from 38 State VR agencies participated in seven cohorts of the Certificate in Program Evaluation training program, and 26 of the participants successfully completed both the online training and capstone project components of the PEQA Program. Thirty participants presented their capstone projects to national VR audiences at national conferences or webinars. Seventeen PEQA capstone articles have been published in the PEQA Special Issue (Vol 10, Issue 2) of the Rehabilitation Counselors and Educators Journal (RCEJ), <https://doi.org/10.52017/001c.29550>. The articles are available fully online in an open-access format and are indexed through Google Scholar with the intent of making them available to a broad audience (i.e., no permission is needed to access or share the information). In addition, there are four (4) additional PEQA capstone manuscripts 'in press' and five (5) more in development. These nine additional articles will be added to the online special issue.

The PEQA-TAC played a substantial role in supporting and organizing the national Summit Conference on Performance Management Excellence in FYs 2017 through 2020, which provided training opportunities for more than 100 VR professionals, including VR program evaluators, each year. The 2020 summit conference was held online using a virtual format due to the COVID-19 pandemic. A total of 988 individuals, representing all 50 States as well as Guam, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands, participated in the event. Recorded presentations from the 2019 Summit Conference, 2020 Summit Conference, Participant Capstone Presentations, and Special Topical Trainings are all captioned and available in the PEQA TAC YouTube channel, <https://www.peqatac.org/>.

- Vocational Rehabilitation Technical Assistance Center for Targeted Communities (VRTAC-TC)

In FY 2015, RSA provided \$2.5 million annually to the VRTAC-TC under a five-year cooperative agreement with Southern University and Agricultural & Mechanical College at Baton Rouge. The objective of the VRTAC-TC, known as Project E3, was to increase the VR participation rates and competitive integrated employment outcomes of historically underserved groups of individuals with disabilities. The grantee provided intensive training and TA in selected economically disadvantaged communities in 12 States: California, Illinois, Kentucky, Louisiana, Montana, New Mexico, New Hampshire, New Jersey, North Carolina, Oregon, South Carolina, and Virginia.

The VRTAC-TC provided intensive training and TA onsite through long-term relationships with local VR agency personnel, community-based organizations, and other key community stakeholders. The training and TA were delivered in four phases.

- Community outreach and orientation to increase VR referrals and applications to include public announcements tailored to reach the priority populations in targeted communities, targeted outreach to local community-based organizations and advocacy groups serving the priority populations, and meetings promoting knowledge about and participation in VR services.
- Community gatherings to identify local needs and resources to overcome barriers to VR participation and employment in each targeted community to include local advisory councils, focus groups, and community-based participatory research convenings.
- Capacity-building for VR agency and community-based organization staff to improve VR service delivery to priority populations in targeted communities, expand employment opportunities for priority populations in targeted communities, and develop comprehensive community supports for VR participants, including integrated research teams and other strategies.
- Sustainability and systems change to integrate promising strategies and practices from Project E3 into the policies and practice of the VR agencies and the community-based organizations beyond the life of the grant through, for example, agency-wide trainings and web-based repositories of information.

Recent focus groups with Project E3 training and TA recipients suggest the following qualitative impacts of the activities described above.

- Increased engagement/improved relationships between local VR and community-based organizations;
- increased community-based organization awareness and recognition of the importance of VR;
- increased quantity and improved quality of referrals to VR;
- improved engagement and retention of individuals referred through Project E3 activities; and
- continued opportunities for sustained partnerships between VR agencies and community-based organizations.

Quantitative data reveal the following outcomes with respect to the *GPRA* measures established for the project.

- Aggregate applications, eligibility, IPEs, services under an IPE, employment outcomes, and employment rates for priority population

groups in the targeted communities were proportionally relative to the priority population groups in the rest of their respective States. Improvements were particularly noteworthy regarding IPE development and competitive integrated employment attainment after an IPE, in which individuals from priority groups in targeted communities achieved 11 and 9 percentage-point improvements, respectively, relative to their counterparts in the rest of their States.

- Although these indicators declined by FY 2019—likely due to the orders of selection adopted by VR agencies in most of the participating States and the disproportionate impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the priority populations in the targeted communities—the declines were consistent with the statewide declines.
- As a result of the project’s community capacity-building activities, 368 community-based organizations and stakeholder groups participated in VRTAC-TC advisory committees and other initiatives to strengthen comprehensive support systems in the targeted communities; 121 community-based organizations provided direct support services to VR clients, primarily through 65 formal partnership agreements.

In September 2020, RSA approved a no-cost extension totaling \$800,000 to provide scheduled services to individuals and to complete planned agency-wide replication and dissemination activities in FY 2021.

- Vocational Rehabilitation Technical Assistance Center-Youth with Disabilities (VRTAC-Y)

In FY 2015, RSA funded a cooperative agreement to establish the VRTAC-Y at the Institute for Educational Leadership. This center provided TA to State VR agencies to improve services to and outcomes of

- students with disabilities, as defined in Section 7(37) of the *Rehabilitation Act*, who are in school and who are not receiving services under *IDEA*; and
- youth with disabilities, as defined in Section 7(42) of the *Rehabilitation Act*, who are no longer in school and who are not employed, often referred to as dropouts.

The VRTAC-Y assisted State VR agencies to improve postsecondary education and employment outcomes for these two groups. The VRTAC-Y received approximately \$1.5 million each year in FYs 2017 through 2019. In FYs 2017, 2018, and 2019, the VRTAC-Y provided training to VR counselors and partners in core competencies for effectively serving youth in several areas, including Alaska, Arizona, Iowa, Michigan, Nevada, New York, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Missouri, Vermont, and Virginia. This grant received a no -cost extension from October 1, 2020, through December 30, 2020, and all activities were completed.

- National Clearinghouse for Rehabilitation Training Materials (NCRTM)

In FYs 2017 through 2020, RSA also used training funds to support the NCRTM, which is described in the “Evaluation, Research, and Information Dissemination” section of this report.

## REHABILITATION TRAINING PROGRAM PERFORMANCE DATA

Beginning in FY 2018, RSA changed the methodology for calculating the measures to increase the accuracy of the reporting and changed some of the descriptions. Therefore, FY 2017 data is presented separately and is not included in table 23.

For FY 2017, the following data represent the Rehabilitation Training program’s performance.

- The percentage of master’s-level counseling graduates who received assistance under the Rehabilitation Long-Term Training program and who reported fulfilling their payback requirements through qualifying employment was 71 percent, a decrease from the 73 percent who reported achieving qualifying employment in FY 2016.
- The percentage of master’s-level counseling graduates who received assistance under the Rehabilitation Long-Term Training program and who reported fulfilling their payback requirement through employment in State VR agencies was 29 percent, a slight decrease from the 30 percent who reported being employed in State VR agencies in FY 2016.
- 3,769 RSA-supported scholars graduated, an increase from the 3,524 scholars who graduated in FY 2016.
- 1,514 current scholars were supported by RSA scholarships, an increase from 1,445 in FY 2016.

The percentage of master’s-level counseling scholars who graduated in FY 2015 and received assistance under the Rehabilitation Long-Term Training program was 88 percent for those who reported fulfilling their payback requirements through qualifying employment by FY 2018; it increased to 94 percent for those who graduated in FY 2016 and reported fulfilling payback requirements through qualifying employment by FY 2019; and it decreased back to 88 percent for those who graduated in FY 2017 and reported fulfilling payback requirements through qualifying employment by FY 2020.

The percentage of master’s-level counseling scholars who graduated in FY 2016 and received assistance under the Rehabilitation Long-Term Training program was 36 percent for those who reported fulfilling their payback requirement through employment in State VR agencies by FY 2018. This percentage slightly decreased to 35 percent for those who reported fulfilling their payback requirement through employment in State VR agencies by FY 2019 and increased to 39 percent for those

who reported fulfilling their payback requirement through employment in State VR agencies by FY 2020.

The number of RSA-supported scholars that graduated decreased from 664 in FY 2018 to 615 in FY 2019 and further decreased to 479 in FY 2020. The number of current scholars supported by RSA scholarships also decreased from 2,040 in FY 2018 to 2,010 in FY 2019 and further decreased to 1,887 in FY 2020. The decrease in the number of RSA scholars in FY 2019 and the further decrease in FY 2020 are a direct result of the reduced number of grant awards, and the resulting number of scholars supported, in each year. RSA funded 101 Rehabilitation Long-Term Training awards in FY 2018, 90 in FY 2019, and 84 in FY 2020.

**Table 23. Percentage of scholars that fulfilled payback requirements through qualifying employment or by employment in State agencies and number of graduates and current scholars: FYs 2018–2020**

Measure	FY 2018	FY 2019	FY 2020
Percentage of master’s-level counseling scholars who graduated three-years prior, who received assistance under the RLTT program and who reported fulfilling their payback requirements through qualifying employment by the fiscal year	88	94	88
Percentage of master’s-level counseling scholars who graduated three-years prior, who received assistance under the RLTT program and who reported fulfilling their payback requirements through qualifying employment in State VR agencies by the fiscal year	36	35	39
Number of RSA-supported scholars that graduated	664	615	479
Number of current scholars supported by RSA scholarships	2,040	2,010	1,887

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Payback Information Management System, FYs 2018-2020.

# EVALUATION, RESEARCH, AND INFORMATION DISSEMINATION

To improve the delivery of services to individuals with disabilities, the *Rehabilitation Act* requires the distribution of practical and scientific information regarding state-of-the-art practices, scientific breakthroughs, and new knowledge regarding disabilities. To address those requirements, RSA funds and promotes a variety of research and demonstration projects, training programs, and a range of information dissemination projects designed to generate and make available critical data and information to appropriate audiences.

## THE NATIONAL CLEARINGHOUSE OF REHABILITATION TRAINING MATERIALS

Authorized under Section 15 of the *Rehabilitation Act*  
Managed by the Rehabilitation Services Administration,  
U.S. Department of Education

RSA's National Clearinghouse of Rehabilitation Training Materials (NCRTM) hosts and facilitates sharing training and educational materials for the VR community. These activities support RSA's leadership role in supporting the development of skilled VR personnel. Primary NCRTM users include RSA staff, VR administrators, RSA stakeholders, Federal partners, discretionary grantees, educators, non-Federal partners, businesses, VR counselors and paraprofessionals, interpreter educators, certified interpreters, and others.

The NCRTM was awarded in FY 2016 for a five-year period to New Editions Consulting, Inc. (New Editions). New Editions

- Improved, updated, and maintained information for new and prospective applicants;
- Improved, updated, and maintained information on the NCRTM for new and prospective applicants.
- Ensured that all grant products submitted to the clearinghouse, as well as pre-application PowerPoint presentations and meeting transcripts exceeded 508 accessibility standards and were posted on time or early to support deadlines;
- Disseminated discretionary grant products<sup>22</sup> through monthly newsletters and the VR Workforce Studio podcast featuring individuals with disabilities and stories of competitive integrated employment, businesses that hire individuals with disabilities, and the work of VR professionals.

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<sup>22</sup> Discretionary grant products include training curriculum, toolkits, instructor-led materials, guides, technical assistance resources, and other materials relevant to individuals with disabilities, parents, families, rehabilitation educators, and VR professionals.

- Produced a virtual series of webinars featuring technical assistance centers and other demonstration projects, the results of their projects, lessons learned, and ideas for the future that was viewed approximately 1,760 times.
- Created a virtual event in partnership with the VR Workforce Studio and the Wilson Workforce and Rehabilitation Center, a Division of the Virginia Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services, for VR's 100th Anniversary, celebrating a century of success. The event showcased "Success Stories" of how the VR program helped change the lives of students and adults with disabilities and has been viewed approximately 7,000 times.

Since the first quarter of FY 2016, 925 records have been added to the library. A total of 181 new records were added to the NCRTM library in FY 2020. The NCRTM exceeded all performance metric targets and significantly outperformed in YouTube views (128 percent over target), web page views (14 percent over target), records (10 percent over target), and newsletter subscribers (470 percent over target).

New Editions was also proactive in safeguarding the NCRTM from potential cybersecurity threats and met all Federal and ED cyber security and risk management directives, including installing necessary applications and required testing to ensure compliance with all new cybersecurity measures.

# ADVOCACY AND ENFORCEMENT

Through the programs and activities described in this report, Congress and the Federal government are doing much to improve opportunities for employment and community integration for persons with disabilities. However, full independence cannot be achieved if individuals are not able to protect their rights under the law. Recognizing this need, Congress has created a number of programs to assist and advocate on behalf of individuals with disabilities. RSA administers several of these programs, which include the Client Assistance Program (CAP) and the Protection and Advocacy of Individual Rights (PAIR) program. Each of these programs directs its advocacy efforts to a particular group of individuals with disabilities or to a specific issue.

## CLIENT ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

**Authorized under Section 112 of the *Rehabilitation Act*  
Managed by the Rehabilitation Services Administration,  
U.S. Department of Education**

The Client Assistance Program (CAP) informs and advises its clients and client applicants of all available benefits under the *Rehabilitation Act*. Upon request of those individuals, the CAP assists and advocates for them in their relationships with projects, programs, and services provided under the *Rehabilitation Act*. This includes providing assistance and advocacy in pursuing legal, administrative, and other appropriate remedies to ensure the protection of the rights of such individuals and facilitating access to the services funded under the *Rehabilitation Act* through individual and systemic advocacy. In addition, the CAP is authorized to provide information on clients' rights under the *Americans with Disabilities Act*. Primarily, CAPs assist individuals in their relationships with the VR program.

Each State governor designates a public or private agency to operate a CAP. This designated agency must be independent of any agency that provides services under the *Rehabilitation Act*, except in those cases where the *Rehabilitation Act* "grandfathered" CAPs already housed within State agencies providing services. If one of these State agencies providing services under the *Rehabilitation Act* restructures, the *Rehabilitation Act* requires the governor to redesignate the CAP to an agency that does not provide services under the *Rehabilitation Act*. Currently, only a few "internal" CAPs (e.g., those housed within a State VR agency or other agency providing services under the *Rehabilitation Act*) remain.

Table 24 shows data for 57 CAPs in the 50 States, the American Indian consortium, the District of Columbia, and the five U.S. territories. FYs 2017 through 2020 data on the CAPs were collected using the RSA-227 instrument. Over this four--year period, the number of information and referral services varied considerably from 34,488 in FY 2017, peaking at 40,917 in FY 2018, and decreasing to 18,681 in FY 2020. The difference in

data is likely due to factors in each State such as changes in State law or because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The percentage of extensive services provided involving applicants for or recipients of services from the VR program remained relatively steady from FYs 2017 through 2020 (varying from 92 percent to 96 percent). The average number of closed cases in FYs 2017 through 2020 was 3,244 per year. The percentage of closed cases resolved by explaining controlling policies ranged from 39 percent in FY 2017 to 42 percent in FY 2020. On average, 15 percent of closed cases were resolved by reestablishing communication between the individuals and other parties. The number of cases resolved in the individual's favor remained above 70 percent for FYs 2017 through 2020.

**Table 24. Output measures by number and percentage for Client Assistance Program services and closed cases: FYs 2017–2020**

<b>Output measures</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2020</b>
Number of information and referral requests	34,488	40,917	28,709	18,681
Number of extensive services provided to individuals	4,608	4,308	4,359	3,533
Percentage of extensive services provided involving applicants for or recipients of services from the VR program	96%	94%	92%	94%
Percentage of all case issues related to the VR process or delivery of VR services	95%	94%	90%	86%
Total number of cases closed by CAP grantees	3,576	3,267	3,293	2,840
Percentage of closed cases resolved by explaining controlling policies	39%	40%	40%	42%
Percentage of closed cases resolved by developing or implementing an IPE	21%	22%	20%	19%
Percentage of closed cases resolved by reestablishing communication between the individuals and other parties	14%	14%	17%	15%
Percentage of closed cases resolved in the individual's favor	72%	73%	75%	79%

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, Rehabilitation Services Administration, Annual Client Assistance Program Report (RSA-227), FYs 2017-2020.

Examples of CAP activities in FYs 2017 through 2020 include the following:

- In Missouri, the CAP assisted a 46-year-old individual diagnosed with brittle bone disease and a hearing impairment in obtaining services from the VR agency. The individual sought additional job training and certification that would allow him to be employed. The individual had been an electrician when he became disabled due to bone fusions. VR had previously assisted the individual to obtain associate's and bachelor's degrees in Information Technology Project

Management. However, the individual was unable to find employment in the field of his choice and determined that additional training and certification was needed for this field. The CAP advocate attended the individual's IPE development meeting with the VR agency; the IPE then described the individual's goal for employment as an information technology project manager. The VR agency agreed to assist the individual in obtaining the proper certifications for A+, Networking, and Security with a one-to-one instructor from a local college and to assist in job placement.

- In New Jersey, the CAP intervened on behalf of a 61-year-old individual diagnosed with mild cognitive and visual impairment resulting from brain surgery. The individual, formerly a teacher with 25 years of teaching experience, contacted the CAP when the VR agency determined it could not assist him. A CAP advocate attended the individual's meeting with the VR agency and advocated for providing appropriate VR services. The individual agreed to attend a 25-day program the VR agency recommended to evaluate his ability to work competitively. However, citing poorly defined provider program goals unrelated to his vocational goal, the individual expressed dissatisfaction with the assessment report's recommendation that he remain in the program an additional 60 days. Based on the individual's concerns, the CAP advocated for alternative services. An agreement was reached for the individual to attend a short-term cognitive rehabilitation program to address residual memory and organizational deficits. The individual completed the program and shortly afterwards secured part-time employment as a tutor in the school district where he was previously employed.
- In Illinois, an individual had participated in a high school transition program supported by the VR agency and was ready to transition to adult VR services. However, the VR counselor discouraged the individual, and the legal guardian, from pursuing VR services due to the individual's significant disabilities. CAP investigated the complaint and conferenced with the VR counselor to discuss the guardian's concerns, understand what occurred in the initial meeting, and explore the types of VR services that could benefit the individual. As a result, the VR counselor met with the legal guardian and individual and determined that the individual would be a good fit for customized employment. The individual was found eligible for VR services and an IPE was developed. The individual was referred to a community rehabilitation program for services and began working toward an employment goal.

## **PROTECTION AND ADVOCACY OF INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS PROGRAM**

**Authorized under Section 509 of the *Rehabilitation Act*  
Managed by the Rehabilitation Services Administration,  
U.S. Department of Education**

The Protection and Advocacy of Individual Rights (PAIR) program is a mandatory component of the protection and advocacy (P&A) system, established in each of the 50 States, District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and U.S. territories, as well as in the P&A system that serves the American Indian consortium pursuant to Part C of the

*Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act of 2000 (DD Act)*. The 57 PAIR programs provide information, advocacy, and legal representation to individuals with disabilities who are not eligible for other P&A programs serving persons with developmental disabilities and mental illness or whose issues do not pertain to programs funded under the *Rehabilitation Act*. Of all the various P&A programs, the PAIR program has the broadest mandate and potentially represents the greatest number of individuals. By providing information and conducting advocacy, PAIR programs help to ensure the protection of the rights of persons with disabilities under Federal and State law in a wide variety of areas, including employment, access to public accommodations, education, housing, and transportation. PAIR programs investigate, negotiate, or mediate solutions to problems expressed by individuals with disabilities. Grantees provide information and TA to requesting individuals and organizations. PAIR programs also provide legal counsel and litigation services.

Prior to making allotments to individual grantees, a portion of the total appropriation (\$17 million in each of FYs 2017 through 2020) must be set aside for each of the following two activities: 1) During any fiscal year in which the appropriation is equal to or exceeds \$5.5 million, the Secretary of ED must first set aside not less than 1.8 percent and not more than 2.2 percent of the amount appropriated for training and TA to eligible systems established under this program; and 2) in any fiscal year in which the total appropriation exceeds \$10.5 million, the Secretary must award \$50,000 to the eligible system established under the *DD Act* to serve the American Indian consortium. The Secretary then distributes the remainder of the appropriation to the eligible systems within the States on a population basis after satisfying minimum allocations of \$100,000 for States except for the territories of Guam, American Samoa, the United States Virgin Islands, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas Islands, which receive \$50,000 each. RSA also adjusts awards for inflation and to protect minimum award allotments.

Each year, PAIR programs must develop a statement of objectives and priorities, with public comment, including a rationale for selecting the objectives and priorities and a plan for achieving them. These objectives and priorities define the issues that PAIR will address during the year, whether through individual or systemic advocacy. Because PAIR programs cannot address all issues facing individuals with disabilities solely through individual advocacy, they seek to change public and private policies and practices that present barriers to the rights of individuals with disabilities, using negotiation and class action litigation.

Table 25 shows PAIR program data for FYs 2017 through 2020.

During the period covered by this report, the number of individuals represented by PAIR programs ranged from a high of 10,256 individuals in FY 2017 to a low of 9,428 individuals in FY 2020. From FY 2017 through FY 2020, the number of requests for information or referral to which PAIR programs responded also declined from 36,303 to 24,665.

Of the cases the PAIR programs handled in FY 2017, the greatest percentage of specified issues involved education (19 percent), health care (17 percent), and employment (13 percent). This trend varied only slightly in FY 2018. Of the cases PAIR programs handled that year, the greatest percentage of specified issues involved education (19 percent), health care (16 percent), and employment (13 percent). In FY 2019, housing (15 percent) replaced employment among the three issue areas most frequently involved in PAIR cases. In FY 2020, these issue areas again varied somewhat when housing (17 percent), employment (16 percent), and education (15 percent) represented those most frequently involved in PAIR cases.

From FY 2017 through FY 2020, the number and percentage of PAIR programs that reported that their activities resulted in changes in policies and practices benefiting individuals with disabilities ranged from a high of 54 of the 57 PAIR programs (95 percent) in FY 2019 to a low of 42 (74 percent) in FY 2020.

**Table 25. Number of individuals represented and requesting information or referral, percentages of the three greatest numbers of specified issues, and the percentage of agencies reporting systemic change for the Protection and Advocacy of Individual Rights program: FYs 2017–2020**

	2017 <sup>a</sup>	2018	2019	2020
Number of individuals represented	10,256	9,483	9,700	9,428
Number of requests for information or referral	36,303	32,674	30,893	24,665
Percentage of issues involving education	19%	19%	18%	15%
Percentage of issues involving health care	17%	16%	14%	–
Percentage of issues involving employment	13%	13%	–	16%
Percentage of issues involving housing	–	–	15%	17%
Percentage of PAIR programs that reported their systemic advocacy activities resulted in changes in policies and practices benefiting individuals with disabilities	89%	76%	95%	74%

<sup>a</sup> The table captures the three issues with the greatest activity each year. The blanks represent issue areas that were not among the top three in a particular year.

Source: U.S. Department of Education, OSERS, RSA, Annual Performance Report for the PAIR Program, FYs 2017 through 2020.

During the period covered by this report, examples of PAIR activities include the following:

- In FY 2018, the Minnesota Disability Law Center (MDLC) represented a man who was deaf. When the client received a summons from the court system to serve on a grand jury, he returned the questionnaire and informed the court he was deaf. He also informed the court he would need an ASL interpreter. The court responded by excusing the client from grand jury service even though he had not asked to be excused. The MDLC assisted the client by helping him file a Federal court lawsuit against the court system. MDLC then negotiated a settlement that changed the procedures of the court system for selecting grand jurors. The Minnesota Judicial Branch revised the juror questionnaire it uses to screen

persons who receive a summons for grand jury service, and it agreed to train judges and court administration staff about the correct procedures for reviewing juror questionnaires and selecting people for the pool of possible grand jurors. MDLC also negotiated a monetary settlement with the State that included payment to the client as compensation for the emotional harm he experienced because he was excluded from grand jury service. The settlement also included payment to the MDLC to settle claims for statutory attorney's fees.

- In FY 2019, Disability Rights Pennsylvania (DRP) advocated on a variety of accessibility issues in Philadelphia that impacted individuals with mobility disabilities. The agency engaged in discussions concerning several accessibility issues at a newly constructed "Rail Park," including the use of gravel that made the surface uneven and difficult for people in wheelchairs to use. Although the Center City District, an entity responsible for the Rail Park, indicated that it would make changes, those changes were inadequate. DRP staff, along with a disability advocate and a representative of a local neighborhood organization, met with staff of the Philadelphia Streets Department and the city's director of ADA compliance to discuss the city's policies and practices concerning repairing and replacing curb cuts. DRP identified noncompliant curb ramps and sidewalk barriers, which the city fixed. Finally, DRP met with the city's newly appointed ADA Coordinator to discuss issues of concern, including curb ramps, sidewalk access, and accessible voting machines.
- In FY 2020, Disability Law Colorado (DLC) received multiple reports of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) recipients with disabilities who were unable to get groceries delivered during the COVID-19 pandemic. Adults with disabilities are three times more likely than adults without disabilities to have heart disease, diabetes, cancer, or a stroke, placing them at greater risk once they contract COVID-19. They may also experience mobility issues, making it more difficult for them to physically distance themselves from others. Through some research and discussions with the state, DLC learned that Colorado was not approved for grocery delivery under the SNAP. DLC and its partners then successfully advocated for the admission of Colorado to participate in the SNAP Online Purchasing Pilot, which permits the use of SNAP benefits on grocery delivery.

# **PROGRAMS UNDER THE *REHABILITATION ACT* NOT ADMINISTERED BY THE REHABILITATION SERVICES ADMINISTRATION**

Requirements under the *Rehabilitation Act* call for the continuous review of policies and practices related to the nondiscrimination and affirmative employment of individuals with disabilities and their access to facilities and information. To carry out the responsibilities stemming from those requirements, the *Rehabilitation Act* authorizes a number of advocacy and advisory programs for the purpose of conducting periodic reviews of existing employment policies and practices. In addition, these programs are charged with developing and recommending policies and procedures that facilitate the employment of individuals who have received rehabilitation services to ensure compliance with standards prescribed by law.

Some of the advocacy programs also develop advisory information and provide appropriate training and TA, as well as make recommendations to the President, Congress, and the Secretary of ED.

Federal agencies are given enforcement authority to ensure that government agencies and private entities that receive Federal assistance comply with Federal laws governing the employment of individuals with disabilities. These agencies review complaints, conduct investigations, hold public hearings, conduct outreach to the education community, and provide TA. Enforcement may involve various remedies, including potential withholding of Federal funds.

## **EMPLOYMENT OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES**

**Authorized under Section 501 of the *Rehabilitation Act*  
Managed by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission**

Section 501 of the *Rehabilitation Act* authorizes the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) to enforce the nondiscrimination and affirmative employment provisions of laws and regulations concerning the employment of individuals with disabilities. As part of its oversight responsibilities, the EEOC conducts on-site reviews of Federal agency affirmative action employment programs. Based on these reviews, the EEOC submits findings and recommendations for Federal agency implementation. The EEOC then monitors the implementation of these findings and recommendations by performing follow-up on-site reviews. For more information, visit <https://www.eeoc.gov/overview>.

# ARCHITECTURAL AND TRANSPORTATION BARRIERS COMPLIANCE BOARD

(Access Board)

Authorized under Section 502 and Section 508 of the *Rehabilitation Act*

Section 502 of the *Rehabilitation Act* created the Architectural and Transportation Barriers Compliance Board, also known as the Access Board. Section 502 lays out the Access Board's duties under the *Architectural Barriers Act (ABA)*, which include ensuring compliance with standards issued under the *ABA*, developing, and maintaining guidelines for complying with the *ABA*, and promoting access throughout all segments of society. The Access Board also has the primary responsibility for developing and maintaining accessibility guidelines and providing TA under the *ADA* with respect to overcoming architectural, transportation, and communication barriers. The Access Board is responsible for developing and periodically updating guidelines under the *Telecommunications Act of 1996* that ensure access to various telecommunication products.

The Access Board is structured to function as a coordinating body among Federal agencies and to directly represent the public, particularly people with disabilities. Half of its members are representatives from Federal agencies, including ED. The other half are members of the public appointed by the President, a majority of whom must have a disability. The Access Board's key responsibilities include developing and maintaining accessibility requirements for the built environment, transit vehicles, telecommunications equipment, and electronic and information technology; providing TA and training on these guidelines and standards; and enforcing accessibility standards for federally funded facilities.

The 1998 amendments to the *Rehabilitation Act* expanded the Access Board's role and gave it responsibility for developing access standards for electronic and information technology under Section 508 of the *Rehabilitation Act*. The Access Board provides training and TA on all its guidelines and standards.

With its publications, hotline, and training sessions, the Access Board provides a range of services to private and public organizations. In addition, it enforces accessibility provisions of the *ABA*, *ADA*, and the *Telecommunications Act* by investigating complaints. The Access Board conducts its investigations through the responsible Federal agencies and strives for amicable resolution of complaints. For more information, visit <https://www.access-board.gov>.

## **ELECTRONIC AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY**

**Authorized under Section 508 of the *Rehabilitation Act*  
Activities Conducted by the Assistive Technology Team,  
Office of the Chief Information Officer,  
U.S. Department of Education**

Section 508 of the *Rehabilitation Act* requires that when Federal agencies develop, procure, maintain, or use electronic and information technology they must ensure that the electronic and information technology allows Federal employees with disabilities to have access to and use of information and data that are comparable to the access to and use of information and data by Federal employees who are not individuals with disabilities unless an undue burden would be imposed on the agency. Section 508 also requires that individuals with disabilities who are members of the public seeking information or services from a Federal agency have access to and use of information and data that is comparable to the access to and use of information and data by members of the public who are not individuals with disabilities unless an undue burden would be imposed on the agency. The intention is to eliminate barriers in accessing information technology, make new opportunities available for individuals with disabilities, and encourage development of technologies that will help achieve a more accessible society. The 1998 amendments to the *Rehabilitation Act* significantly expanded and strengthened the technology access requirements in Section 508.

ED's Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO) plays a lead role in implementing Section 508 through activities such as product performance testing and providing TA to government agencies and vendors on implementing the Section 508 standards. The OCIO Assistive Technology Team delivers assistive technology workshops, presentations, and demonstrations to other Federal agencies, to State and local education agencies, and at assistive technology and information technology industry seminars and conferences, and it conducts numerous conformance tests of high-visibility e-government-sponsored websites.

The OCIO, in conjunction with the Access Board, the General Services Administration, and a number of other government agencies, also participates in the Interagency Section 508 Working Group, an effort coordinated by the General Services Administration and the Office of Management and Budget, to offer TA and to provide an informal means of cooperation and information sharing on implementing Section 508 throughout the Federal government. For more information, visit <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocio/ocio.html>.

## **EMPLOYMENT UNDER FEDERAL CONTRACTS**

**Authorized under Section 503 of the *Rehabilitation Act*  
Managed by the Office of Federal Contract Compliance Program,  
U.S. Department of Labor**

Under Section 503 of the *Rehabilitation Act*, the U.S. Department of Labor Office of Federal Contract Compliance Program (OFCCP) is responsible for ensuring that employers with Federal contracts or subcontracts in excess of \$10,000 take affirmative action to employ and advance in employment qualified individuals with disabilities. OFCCP investigators conduct several thousand compliance reviews and investigate hundreds of complaints each year. OFCCP also issues policy guidance to private companies and develops innovative ways for these companies to comply with the law. For more information, visit <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ofccp>.

## **NONDISCRIMINATION IN PROGRAMS THAT RECEIVE FEDERAL FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE**

**Authorized under Section 504 of the *Rehabilitation Act*  
Enforced by the  
Civil Rights Division, U.S. Department of Justice, and the  
Office for Civil Rights, U.S. Department of Education, and all other Federal agencies awarding  
Federal financial assistance.**

Section 504 of the *Rehabilitation Act* prohibits discrimination by recipients of Federal financial assistance on the basis of disability. This provision is designed to protect the rights of any person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, has a record of such an impairment, or is regarded as having such an impairment. Major life activities include, but are not limited to, walking, seeing, hearing, speaking, breathing, learning, working, caring for oneself, and performing manual tasks.

Each Federal agency that distributes Federal financial assistance is responsible for ensuring that recipients of its assistance comply with Section 504. Through its Office for Civil Rights (OCR), ED enforces Section 504 with respect to State and local educational agencies and public and private elementary, secondary, and postsecondary schools that receive Federal financial assistance from ED. Under Executive Order 12250, the U.S. Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division (CRD), has overall responsibility for coordinating Federal agencies' implementation and enforcement of Section 504 of the *Rehabilitation Act*.

In addition, OCR and CRD, along with other Federal agencies, have enforcement responsibilities under the *ADA*. In the education context, OCR and CRD both enforce *Title II* of the *ADA*, which prohibits disability discrimination by State and local government entities, including public elementary, secondary, and postsecondary schools regardless of the receipt of Federal financial assistance. CRD enforces *Title III* of the *ADA*, which prohibits disability discrimination by private entities in places of public accommodation,

including private elementary, secondary, and postsecondary schools. For information on CRD, visit the website at <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/index.html>.

Examples of the types of discrimination prohibited by Section 504 and its implementing regulations include improperly denied access to educational programs and facilities, denials of a free appropriate public education for elementary and secondary students with disabilities, and improper denials of academic adjustments and auxiliary aids and services to postsecondary students. Section 504 of the *Rehabilitation Act*, the *ADA*, and their implementing regulations also prohibit employment discrimination and retaliation for filing or participating in any manner in an OCR complaint or proceeding or for advocating for a right protected by these laws. For information on OCR, visit the website at <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/index.html>.

## **NATIONAL COUNCIL ON DISABILITY**

**Authorized under Section 400 of the *Rehabilitation Act*  
An Independent Federal Agency**

Under Section 400 of the *Rehabilitation Act*, the National Council on Disability, an independent agency, promotes policies, programs, practices, and procedures that guarantee equal opportunity for all individuals with disabilities and that empower people with disabilities to achieve economic self-sufficiency, independent living, and inclusion and integration into all aspects of society. More specifically, the National Council on Disability reviews and evaluates laws, policies, programs, practices, and procedures conducted or assisted by Federal departments or agencies to see if they meet the needs of individuals with disabilities. The Council makes recommendations based on those evaluations to the President, Congress, the Secretary of ED, the RSA Commissioner, the Director of the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research, and officials of Federal agencies. For information on the National Council on Disability, visit the website at <https://www.ncd.gov/>.

## **INDEPENDENT LIVING SERVICES PROGRAM**

**Authorized under *Title VII, Chapter I, Part B of the Rehabilitation Act*  
Managed by the Administration for Community Living,  
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services**

The State Independent Living Services program amended by *WIOA* as the Independent Living Services program, provides formula grants, based on population, to States for the purpose of funding, directly and through grant or contractual arrangements, one or more of the following activities:

- Supporting the operation of statewide Independent Living Councils (SILC);
- demonstrating ways to expand and improve IL services;
- providing IL services;

- supporting the operation of Centers for Independent Living;
- increasing the capacity of public or nonprofit organizations and other entities to develop comprehensive approaches or systems for providing IL services;
- conducting studies and analyses, gathering information, developing model policies and procedures, and presenting information, approaches, strategies, findings, conclusions, and recommendations to Federal, State, and local policymakers to enhance IL services;
- training service providers, individuals with disabilities, and other persons on the IL philosophy; and
- providing outreach to populations that are unserved or underserved by IL programs, including minority groups and urban and rural populations.

To be eligible for financial assistance, States are required to establish a SILC and submit a State Plan for independent living that the SILC chairperson and the directors of the centers for independent living in the State jointly develop, and which the SILC chairperson, the designated State entity director, and not less than 51 percent of the directors for the centers for independent living in the State all sign. States participating in this program must match every \$9 of Federal funds with \$1 in non-Federal cash or in-kind resources in the year for which the Federal funds are appropriated. This program is administered by the Administration for Community Living in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. For information on the Independent Living Services Program, visit the website at <https://acl.gov/ils-programs>.

## **CENTERS FOR INDEPENDENT LIVING PROGRAM**

*Authorized under Title VII, Chapter I, Part C, of the Rehabilitation Act*  
**Managed by the Administration for Community Living,  
 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services**

The Centers for Independent Living program provides grants to consumer-controlled, community-based, cross-disability, nonresidential, private nonprofit agencies for individuals with significant disabilities (regardless of age or income) that are designed and operated within a local community by individuals with disabilities and provide an array of independent living services.

At a minimum, centers funded by the program are required to provide the following IL core services: information and referral, IL skills training, peer counseling, individual and systems advocacy, and services that 1) facilitate transitioning individuals with significant disabilities from nursing homes and other institutions to home and community-based residences, with the requisite supports and services; 2) provide assistance to individuals with significant disabilities who are at risk of entering institutions so that the individuals may remain in the community; and 3) facilitate the transition to employment and other post-school activities for youth with disabilities who were eligible for individualized

education programs under *IDEA* (20 U.S.C. § 1414(d)) and who have completed their secondary education or otherwise left school. Centers might also provide, among other services, psychological counseling, assistance in securing housing or shelter, personal assistance services, transportation referral and assistance, physical therapy, mobility training, rehabilitation technology, recreation, and other services necessary to improve the ability of individuals with significant disabilities to function independently in the family or community and to promote the integration and full inclusion of individuals with significant disabilities into the mainstream of American society. This program is administered by the Administration for Community Living in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. For information on the Centers for Independent Living, visit the website at <https://acl.gov/programs/aging-and-disability-networks/centers-independent-living>.

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