



REHABILITATION SERVICES ADMINISTRATION REPORT FOR FISCAL YEARS 2021-2022

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

SEPTEMBER 2024

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

U.S. Department of Education

Miguel A. Cardona, Ed.D.

Secretary

Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services

Glenna Wright-Gallo

Assistant Secretary

Rehabilitation Services Administration

Danté Q. Allen

Commissioner

This report is in the public domain. Authorization to reproduce it in whole or in part is granted. While permission to reprint this publication is not necessary, the citation should be U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, *Rehabilitation Services Administration Report for Fiscal Years 2021-2022, Report on Federal Activities under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973*, Washington, D.C.

This publication is available at: <https://rsa.ed.gov/about/rsa-annual-reports-to-congress>.

This document contains contacts and website addresses for information created and maintained by other public and private organizations. This information is provided for the reader's convenience. The U.S. Department of Education does not control or guarantee the accuracy, relevance, timeliness, or completeness of this outside information. Further, the inclusion of information, addresses, or websites for particular items does not reflect their importance, nor is it intended to endorse any views expressed or products or services offered.

Notice to Limited English Proficient Persons

If you have difficulty understanding English, you may request language assistance services for U.S. Department of Education information that is available to the public. These language assistance services are available free of charge. If you need more information about interpretation or translation services, please call 800-872-5327 (TTY: 800-437-0833) or email us at Ed.Language.Assistance@ed.gov. Or write to U.S. Department of Education, Information Resource Center, 400 Maryland Ave. SW, Washington, DC 20202.

CONTENTS

Contents	iii
Tables	iv
Acronyms	vi
Preface	vii
Report Highlights	viii
The <i>Rehabilitation Act</i> : An Overview	1
Programs under the <i>Rehabilitation Act</i>	3
Employment Programs	5
State Vocational Rehabilitation Services Program	5
State Supported Employment Services Program	23
American Indian Vocational Rehabilitation Services Program	27
Independent Living Program	32
Independent Living Services for Older Individuals Who Are Blind Program	32
Technical Assistance, Training, and Support	37
Traditionally Underserved Populations	37
Demonstration and Training Programs	39
Rehabilitation Training Program	47
Evaluation, Research, and Information Dissemination	56
The National Clearinghouse of Rehabilitation Training Materials	56
Advocacy and Enforcement	58
Client Assistance Program	58
Protection and Advocacy of Individual Rights Program	60
Programs under the <i>Rehabilitation Act</i> Not Administered by the Rehabilitation Services Administration	64

TABLES

Table 1. State Vocational Rehabilitation Services Program Federal Appropriations: FYs 2021-2022.....	6
Table 2. State Vocational Rehabilitation Services Program Non-Federal Share: FYs 2021-2022	6
Table 3. Number of Applicants, Eligible Individuals, and Eligible Individuals Receiving Vocational Rehabilitation Services Under Individualized Plans for Employment: FYs 2021-2022	11
Table 4. Employment Outcomes at Exit and Employment Rate: FYs 2021-2022	13
Table 5. Median Hourly Wages and Median Hours Worked Per Week of Individuals Exiting with Employment Outcome at Exit: FYs 2021-2022	13
Table 6. Vocational Rehabilitation Program Participant Data Specific to <i>Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act</i> Reporting: PYs 2020-2021	14
Table 7. Vocational Rehabilitation Program Participant Characteristics by Sex, Age, and Ethnicity or Race: PYs 2020-2021	16
Table 8. Vocational Rehabilitation Program Participant Barriers to Employment: PYs 2020-2021	17
Table 9. <i>Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act</i> Performance Accountability: PYs 2020-2021	19
Table 10. Numbers and Percentages of Students with Disabilities Who Received Pre-Employment Transition Services: PYs 2020-2021	20
Table 11. Pre-Employment Transition Services Provided to Students with Disabilities: PYs 2020-2021	22
Table 12. State Supported Employment Services Program Federal Appropriations: FYs 2021-2022.....	24
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 2021-2022	25

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 2021-2022.....	26
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 2020-2021	26
Table 16. Number of Grants and Total Amount Awarded to Support American Indian Vocational Rehabilitation Services Tribal Projects: Fys 2021-2022	28
Table 17. Number of Individuals with Disabilities Served, Exiting Program After Receiving Services, and Achieving Employment Through the American Indian Vocational Rehabilitation Services Program: FYs 2021-2022	28
Table 18. Percentages of Cost Per Employment Outcome and Per Participant: FYs 2021-2022	29
Table 19. Independent Living Services for Older Individuals Who Are Blind Program Funding, Expenditures, and Individuals Served: FYs 2021-2022	33
Table 20. Percentage of Scholars Fulfilling Payback Requirements Through Qualifying Employment or by Employment in State Vocational Rehabilitation Agencies and Number of Graduates and Enrolled Scholars: FYs 2020-2022.....	50
Table 21. Output Measures by Number and Percentage for Client Assistance Program Services and Closed Cases: FYs 2021-2022	59
Table 22. 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 2021-2022	62

ACRONYMS

Acronym	Full Term
ADA	<i>Americans with Disabilities Act</i>
AIVRS	American Indian Vocational Rehabilitation Services
AIVRTTAC	American Indian Vocational Rehabilitation Training and Technical Assistance Center
ALN	Assistance Listing Number
CAP	Client Assistance Program
ED	U.S. Department of Education
ETA	U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration
FY	Fiscal Year
IDEA	<i>Individuals with Disabilities Education Act</i>
IL	Independent Living
IL-OIB	Independent Living Services for Older Individuals Who Are Blind
IPE	Individualized Plan for Employment
NCRTM	National Clearinghouse of Rehabilitation Training Materials
OIB-TAC	Older Individuals Who Are Blind Technical Assistance Center
OSEP	Office of Special Education Programs
P&A	Protection and Advocacy
PAIR	Protection and Advocacy of Individual Rights
PTI	Parent Training and Information
PY	Program Year
RLTT	Rehabilitation Long-Term Training
RSA	Rehabilitation Services Administration
SE program	Supported Employment Services Program
SSDI	Social Security Disability Insurance
SSI	Supplemental Security Income
TANF	Temporary Assistance for Needy Families
VR	Vocational Rehabilitation
WIOA	<i>Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act</i>

PREFACE

The *Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Rehabilitation Act)*¹ 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)*, signed into law on July 22, 2014.

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, during Federal fiscal years (FYs) 2021 through 2022, 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*.² Through its administration of programs authorized under the *Rehabilitation Act*, RSA supports the Biden-Harris administration's efforts to ensure full participation and equality for individuals with disabilities by increasing access to and advancing high-quality competitive integrated employment leading to economic self-sufficiency.

¹ 29 U.S.C. § 701 et seq.

² Data used in this report are from Federal, U.S. Department of Education (ED), Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, 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 2021 through 2022. 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 three programs described in the “Employment Programs” section of this report designed to assist individuals with disabilities to achieve employment outcomes in 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 documents 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 two additional employment-related programs: the State Supported Employment Services 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 Program, 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 lists programs authorized under the *Rehabilitation Act* that it does not administer.

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 disabilities³ 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 U.S. 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.

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.

The largest program RSA administers is the State Vocational Rehabilitation Services program (VR program). This program funds State vocational rehabilitation (VR) agencies to

³ *Individual with a disability* is defined, for purposes of programs funded under the *Rehabilitation Act*, at Section 7(20).

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, nearly all of whom have significant physical or mental 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 fiscal years (FY) 2021 through 2022, 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 programs⁴ authorized under the *Rehabilitation Act*, organized by these areas, are:

Employment Programs⁵

- State Vocational Rehabilitation Services program
- Supported Employment Services program
- 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
- Protection and Advocacy of Individual Rights program
- Employment of People with Disabilities*
- Architectural and Transportation Barriers Compliance Board (Access Board)*

⁴ Programs marked with an asterisk are those administered by Federal agencies other than ED and RSA. 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).

⁵ Previous versions of this report, including that covering FYs 2017 through 2020, issued May 2022, contained information on Business Enterprise Programs for blind vendors under the *Randolph-Sheppard Act* and the use of VR funds to support the program. Because the use of VR funds to support the Randolph-Sheppard vending facility program is only one aspect of the program's administration and operation, RSA has determined it appropriate to issue a separate report on the activities under the Randolph-Sheppard Act for FYs 2021 through 2022 and future fiscal years.

- Electronic and Information Technology*
- Employment Under Federal Contracts*
- Nondiscrimination in Programs that Receive Federal Financial Assistance**
- National Council on Disability*

EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMS

RSA administers three programs that assist individuals with disabilities to achieve employment outcomes. Two of these programs, the State VR Services program, and the Supported Employment Services program (SE program), are State formula grant programs. Through the American Indian Vocational Rehabilitation Services (AIVRS) program, a discretionary grant program, RSA makes competitive awards for up to a five-year period.

STATE 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 the *Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (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.

State 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 State VR agencies⁶ 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.

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

⁶ 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.

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, State 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 State 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 share of 21.3 percent of the total expenditures under the program.

Table 1 presents the total Federal VR program appropriations from FYs 2021 through 2022. The total amounts include any reductions due to sequestration, the automatic spending cuts that occur through the withdrawal of funding for certain government programs.

Table 1. State Vocational Rehabilitation Services Program Federal Appropriations: FYs 2021-2022	
Fiscal year	Federal appropriation in billions
FY 2021	\$3.41
FY 2022	\$3.46

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Department of Education Budget Tables, FYs 2021 through 2022.

Table 2 presents the non-Federal share for the VR program in FYs 2021 and 2022.

Table 2. State Vocational Rehabilitation Services Program Non-Federal Share: FYs 2021-2022	
Fiscal year	VR non-Federal share in millions
FY 2021	\$909.77
FY 2022	\$920.82

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, Rehabilitation Services Administration, Vocational Rehabilitation Financial Report (RSA-17), FYs 2021 through 2022.

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,⁷ including individuals with the most significant disabilities,⁸ assisting them to achieve and maximize employment outcomes in competitive integrated employment. 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 VR 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 VR 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. 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 2021 through 2022, RSA conducted 21 on-site monitoring visits and off-site reviews of State VR agencies to assess statutory and regulatory compliance and provide technical assistance. RSA has published these monitoring reports on its website at: <https://rsa.ed.gov/about/programs/vocational-rehabilitation-state-grants/monitoring-of-vocational-rehabilitation-program>.

⁷ *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."

⁸ *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.

In FY 2020, RSA collaborated with State 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 State 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 implemented this revised monitoring approach in FYs 2021 and 2022 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 FY 2022, RSA again began working collaboratively with a representative group of State VR agencies to focus future monitoring on the use and expenditure of available Federal funds to maximize program performance through the provision of comprehensive VR services leading to improved employment outcomes for VR program participants.

In addition to monitoring the VR program, RSA issues sub-regulatory guidance and TA to State agencies routinely to address identified needs. For example, in FY 2022, RSA issued a TA circular entitled *Prohibition Against Applying Financial Needs Tests or Requiring Cost Participation as a Condition for the Receipt of VR Services for SSI and SSDI Recipients*⁹ to clarify the requirement that individuals eligible for SSI or SSDI do not participate in the cost of any VR services. In addition, on March 21, 2022, RSA issued a final notice of interpretation regarding the use of Federal VR funds reserved for pre-employment transition services in the Federal Register (87 FR 15889) to clarify current policy regarding the permissibility of using funds reserved for pre-employment transition services for auxiliary aids and services, and to announce a change in policy regarding the use of Federal VR funds reserved for pre-employment transition services. In FY 2022, RSA, in partnership with the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Community Living and Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, published *A Framework for Community Engagement: Pathway to Competitive Integrated Employment*,¹⁰ which presents a joint Federal vision for community engagement by individuals with disabilities. Community engagement, supported by a variety of service systems, enables individuals with disabilities to expand skills and experience so that they may secure high-quality and personally satisfying careers and jobs and the benefits of employment.

⁹ RSA-TAC-22-03: https://rsa.ed.gov/sites/default/files/subregulatory/RSA-TAC-22-03_0.pdf (April 22, 2022).

¹⁰ https://rsa.ed.gov/sites/default/files/subregulatory/A%20Framework%20for%20Community%20Engagement_0.pdf (August 3, 2022)

RSA provides TA to State VR agencies designed to help them to manage the complex Federal requirements governing the fiscal administration of the VR program. In FYs 2021 and 2022, RSA continued to provide grantees specific TA related to fiscal management of the program during the pandemic.

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>. 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 ED's Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education 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 TA 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 as one of the 15 Commissioners on the AbilityOne Commission, RSA's Deputy Commissioner 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, and 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 State VR agencies prior to and during off-site reviews, on-site monitoring visits, and TA visits; during quarterly calls with State VR agencies; through quarterly data dashboards and annual reports to Congress; and in response to individual requests from State VR agencies, researchers, other Federal agencies, and stakeholders. The review of the data assists State 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. 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*. RSA has published these performance results in *WIOA* annual reports for PYs 2017 through 2022 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 SE 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 State 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 State 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 an increase in the number of applicants for the VR program from 312,521 individuals in FY 2021 to 359,133 individuals in FY 2022. Similarly, the number of individuals with disabilities determined eligible annually increased from 273,940 individuals in FY 2021 to 322,090 individuals in FY 2022. From FY 2021 to FY 2022, there was a slight decrease of 5,496 eligible individuals receiving services under an individualized plan for employment (IPE).

Table 3. Number of Applicants, Eligible Individuals, and Eligible Individuals Receiving Vocational Rehabilitation Services Under Individualized Plans for Employment: FYs 2021-2022

	FY 2021	FY 2022
Number of Individuals who Applied for VR Services	312,521	359,133
Number of Individuals Determined Eligible for VR Services	273,940	322,090
Eligible Individuals Receiving Services under IPE	815,718	810,222

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, Rehabilitation Services Administration, Case Service Report (RSA-911), FYs 2021 and 2022.

Changes in how State VR agencies implemented orders of selection during FYs 2021 through 2022 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, State 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. At the end of FY 2021 and the beginning of FY 2022, 17 of 38 State VR agencies with an order of selection had all categories open; 21 State VR agencies had one or more categories open; and zero State VR agencies had no categories open. This represents a significant improvement from the beginning of FY 2021 in which 14 of the 38 State VR agencies had all categories open; 19 State VR agencies had one or more categories open; and six State VR agencies had no categories open.

While some State VR agencies attribute the lack of State matching funds as a reason for implementing orders of selection, some State VR agencies also attribute 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 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 State 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 State VR agencies have attributed any 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 disabilities¹¹ who were “potentially eligible” for VR services) and who received pre-employment transition services from State 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, State VR agencies provided pre-employment transition services to 203,638 students with disabilities in PY 2020 and 250,784 students with disabilities in PY 2021.

Additionally, in July 2016, State 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 State 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 of the downward trend in the number of workers paid subminimum wages by certificate holders under Section 14(c) of the *Fair Labor Standards Act*.¹² State 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 State 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 2021 through 2022. 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 State VR agencies devoted financial and staff resources prior to these individuals applying, being determined eligible for, and receiving VR services under an IPE.

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.

¹¹ 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) of the *Rehabilitation Act* and 34 C.F.R. 361.5(c)(51)).

¹² <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/whd/workers-with-disabilities/section-14c/certificate-holders>.

Table 4. Employment Outcomes at Exit and Employment Rate: FYs 2021-2022

	FY 2021	FY 2022
Individuals exiting with employment outcome	112,656	120,287
Individuals exiting without employment outcome	141,357	148,421
Employment rate	44.4%	44.8%

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, Rehabilitation Services Administration, Case Service Report (RSA-911), FYs 2021 through 2022.

State VR agencies reported factors contributing to their performance on the employment rate, including experiencing a high degree of staff turnover and vacancies, particularly among VR counselors and other service delivery staff. Some of these State 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 from FY 2021 to FY 2022. Increases may reflect those States and localities that recently increased their State minimum wage. The median hours worked per week also increased slightly.

Table 5. Median Hourly Wages and Median Hours Worked Per Week of Individuals Exiting with Employment Outcome at Exit: FYs 2021-2022

	FY 2021	FY 2022
Median hourly wages	\$13.00	\$14.19
Median hours worked per week	32	33

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, Rehabilitation Services Administration, Case Service Report (RSA-911), FYs 2021 through 2022.

WIOA Performance Accountability Data and Primary Indicators of Performance (PYs 2020 and 2021)

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,¹³ 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*. *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 reports and summaries were available on RSA's website and did so for PYs 2020 and 2021.¹⁴

The data presented in tables 6, 7, 8, and 9 include data for the VR program nationally as reported by State VR agencies on the *WIOA* Statewide Annual Performance Report (ETA-9169) (OMB control number 1205-0526) for PYs 2020 and 2021.

Table 6. Vocational Rehabilitation Program Participant Data Specific to Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Reporting: PYs 2020-2021

Participant Information	PY 2020	PY 2021
Total participants served	811,591	808,303
Number of participants receiving career services	614,283	598,960
Funds expended on career services	\$921,237,566	\$1,044,824,891
Cost per participant on career services	\$1,500	\$1,744
Number of participants receiving training services	205,767	208,815
Funds expended on training services	\$466,676,959	\$482,829,322
Cost per participant on training services	\$2,268	\$2,312
Total participants exited	248,643	265,481
Percent of participants enrolled in more than one core program	9.7%	9.7%

Source: U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, *WIOA* Statewide Annual Performance Report (ETA-9169) PYs 2020 through 2021.

¹³ 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 title III of *WIOA*, and administered by the U.S. Department of Labor; and the VR program authorized under *Title I* of the *Rehabilitation Act*, as amended by title IV of *WIOA*, and administered by ED.

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

Table 7 shows VR program participant characteristics by sex, age, and ethnicity or race for PYs 2020 and 2021.¹⁵ 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 State 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 the implementation of *WIOA* demonstrate that in PYs 2020 and 2021, the percentage of youth with disabilities (participants under age 25 remained above 50 percent each year. When potentially eligible students with disabilities receiving pre-employment transition services are factored into those receiving services in PYs 2020 and 2021 (102,495 and 137,807, respectively), the data indicate that youth and students with disabilities are being served in substantially greater numbers by the VR program than before *WIOA* implementation.

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 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.

¹⁵ 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.

Table 7. Vocational Rehabilitation Program Participant Characteristics by Sex, Age, and Ethnicity or Race: PYs 2020-2021

	PY 2020 number of participants	PY 2021 number of participants
Participant characteristic: sex		
Female	358,398	355,396
Male	450,687	448,817
Participant characteristic: age		
<16	16,057	17,575
16 – 18	240,827	239,610
19 – 24	162,074	161,801
25 – 44	205,775	205,255
45 – 54	93,694	89,904
55 – 59	45,259	43,985
60+	47,905	50,172
Participant characteristic: ethnicity/race		
American Indian/Alaska Native	16,868	17,019
Asian	21,945	23,326
Black/African American	192,231	188,764
Hispanic/Latino	149,884	152,045
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Island	5,550	5,845
White	583,178	581,030
More than one race	21,680	22,545

Source: U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, WIOA Statewide Annual Performance Report (ETA-9169), PYs 2020 through 2021.

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 2020-2021

	PY 2020 number of participants	PY 2021 number of participants
Barriers to employment		
Displaced homemakers	9,633	9,029
English language learners, low levels of literacy, cultural barriers	246,169	241,014
Exhausting TANF ^a within 2 years	27,293	23,932
Ex-offenders	71,344	67,688
Homeless individuals/runaway youth	20,384	18,190
Long-term unemployed (27 or more consecutive weeks)	330,200	329,341
Low-income individuals	397,110	387,711
Migrant and seasonal farmworkers	3,800	3,589
Individuals with disabilities (including youth)	811,591	808,303
Single parents	50,331	44,882
Youth in foster care or aged out of system	11,150	12,187

^a Temporary Assistance for Needy Families

Source: U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, *WIOA Statewide Annual Performance Report (ETA-9169) PYs 2020 through 2021*.

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.¹⁶

For PYs 2020 and 2021, State VR agencies reported data for five primary indicators and continued to report data for the effectiveness in serving employers primary indicator on a statewide basis.

Table 9 shows a slight decline for Measurable Skill Gains Rate for PYs 2020 and 2021 (43.3 percent and 43.0 percent, respectively). It also describes the outcomes for the additional primary indicators in PYs 2020 and 2021. Data demonstrating VR program performance on the primary indicators for Employment Rate – Second Quarter after Exit, Median Earnings – Second Quarter after Exit, Employment Rate – Fourth Quarter after Exit, and Credential Attainment Rate each show increases over the two-year period.

¹⁶ The Effectiveness in Serving Employers primary indicator of performance is not included in table 9 because it was being piloted during PYs 2020 and 2021. 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 2020-2021**

WIOA primary indicators of performance and number of participants employed	PY 2020	PY 2021
Measurable Skill Gains Rate	43.3%	43.0%
Employment Rate — Second Quarter after Exit	48.6%	52.5%
Number of participants employed in second quarter after exit	132,886	123,952
Median Earnings — Second Quarter after Exit	\$4,280	\$4,776
Employment Rate — Fourth Quarter after Exit	44.0%	48.0%
Number of participants employed in fourth quarter after exit	128,532	112,284
Credential Attainment Rate	23.2%	30.8%

Source: U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, WIOA Statewide Annual Performance Report (ETA-9169) PYs 2020 through 2021.

Provision of Pre-Employment Transition Services to Students with Disabilities (PYs 2020 and 2021)

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 2020 and 2021, 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 31.8 percent and 36.9 percent, respectively. Of those students with disabilities who received pre-employment transition services in PYs 2020 and 2021, the percentages of those who applied for VR services and received pre-employment transition services were 48.0 percent and 43.2 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.” Since PY 2017, an increasing number of students with disabilities are receiving pre-employment transition services and applying for VR services.

Table 10. Numbers and Percentages of Students with Disabilities Who Received Pre-Employment Transition Services: PYs 2020-2021

	PY 2020 number/percent of students	PY 2021 number/percent of students
Students with disabilities		
Number of students with disabilities reported	622,528	663,920
Number of students with disabilities who received a pre-employment transition service	197,724	244,724
Percent of students with disabilities reported who received a pre-employment transition service	31.8%	36.9%
Number of potentially eligible students with disabilities who received a pre-employment transition service	102,784	139,017
Number of students with disabilities, who applied for VR services, and received a pre-employment transition service	94,940	105,707
Percent of students with disabilities, who applied for VR services, and received a pre-employment transition service	48.0%	43.2%

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, Rehabilitation Services Administration, Case Service Report (RSA-911), PYs 2020 through 2021.

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, in a 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 2020 and 2021.

Table 11. Pre-Employment Transition Services Provided to Students with Disabilities: PYs 2020-2021

Preemployment transition services	PY 2020 number provided	PY 2020 percent of total pre-employment transition services provided	PY 2021 number provided	PY 2021 percent of total pre-employment transition services provided
Total preemployment transition services provided	977,466	-	1,426,393	-
Job exploration counseling	200,896	20.6%	331,920	23.3%
Work-based learning experiences	166,919	17.1%	242,210	17.0%
Counseling on enrollment opportunities	173,226	17.7%	235,774	16.5%
Workplace readiness training	238,301	24.4%	336,881	23.6%
Instruction in self-advocacy	198,124	20.3%	279,608	19.6%

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, Rehabilitation Services Administration, Case Service Report (RSA-911), PYs 2020 through 2021.

State VR agencies have reported several challenges resulting from the requirement to provide or arrange for the provision of, pre-employment transition services to all students with disabilities in their States. During RSA monitoring and other TA activities, some State 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 State 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, some 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 achieving an employment outcome in competitive integrated employment, State VR agencies made significant operational, programmatic, and fiscal adjustments to accommodate this WIOA initiative.

STATE 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 State 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.¹⁷

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

¹⁷ *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.”

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 State VR agencies may provide extended services to youth with the most significant disabilities for a period of up to four years or 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 appropriation for FYs 2021 and 2022 remained unchanged at \$22.3 million. The amounts represent the Federal appropriation less the funds set aside to support projects authorized under the *Rehabilitation Act*, not the full appropriation.

Table 12. State Supported Employment Services Program Federal Appropriations: FYs 2021-2022	
Federal fiscal year	Federal appropriation in millions
FY 2021	\$22.3
FY 2022	\$22.3

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, Rehabilitation Services Administration (2021-2022), 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 to provide 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 period of performance.

For FY 2021, supported employment grantees returned \$3.3 million in unused funds at grant closeout. In FY 2021, 24 grantees did not provide any matching funds for their supported employment award, and 25 grantees did not spend any of their FY 2021 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 \$1.89 million in supported employment funds during the FY 2022 reallocation period. In FY 2022, 29 grantees did not provide any matching funds for their supported employment award, and 18 grantees did not spend any of their FY 2022 supported employment funds required to be used for youth with most significant disabilities.

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 increased from FY 2021 to FY 2022 (43,167 and 46,342, respectively). Similarly, the number of participants exiting with supported employment outcomes increased from FY 2021 to FY 2022 (9,423 and 11,018, respectively). Emergence from the COVID-19 pandemic may have contributed to the increasing availability of employment opportunities for individuals with the most significant disabilities. In prior years of the pandemic, 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 are typically 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 2021-2022

	FY 2021	FY 2022
Number of participants receiving supported employment services	43,167	46,342
Number of participants exiting with employment outcome in supported employment	9,423	11,018

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, Rehabilitation Services Administration, Case Service Report (RSA-911), FYs 2021 through 2022.

From FY 2021 through FY 2022, participants with the most significant disabilities exiting with employment outcomes in supported employment experienced an increase in median hourly wage each year, from \$10.30 in FY 2021 to \$11.60 in FY 2022. The median hours worked per week remained steady at 20 hours across the two-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 2021-2022

	FY 2021	FY 2022
Median hourly wages	\$10.30	\$11.60
Median hours worked per week	20	20

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, Rehabilitation Services Administration, Case Service Report (RSA-911), FYs 2021 through 2022.

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 increased from 61.3 percent in PY 2020 to 65.3 percent in PY 2021, as shown in table 15. In PYs 2020 and 2021, in the fourth quarter after exit, the percentage of participants with the most significant disabilities in unsubsidized employment was 53.8 percent and 55.7 percent, respectively. 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 2020-2021

	PY 2020	PY 2021
Employment rate of participants who received supported employment services in the second quarter after exit	61.3%	65.3%
Employment rate of participants who received supported employment services in the fourth quarter after exit	53.8%	55.7%

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, Rehabilitation Services Administration, Case Service Report (RSA-911), PYs 2020 through 2021.

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 VR programs to deliver VR services to American Indians with disabilities who live on or near such reservations. AIVRS grants cover 90 percent of the costs of the Tribes' provision of VR services. Tribes are required to provide the 10 percent non-Federal share of the cost of the AIVRS project in cash or in kind.

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. In FY 2021, the set-aside amount for the AIVRS program was 1.38 percent and in FY 2022, the set-aside amount for the AIVRS program was 1.34 percent. As funding for the VR program increases annually, the amount of the set-aside funding to support the AIVRS program increases.

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 recompile for new grants often request higher levels of funding because they have increased their capacity to effectively serve more individuals with disabilities. Table 16 presents the number of grants and the total award amounts for FYs 2021 and 2022. The total number of grants in FY 2021 was fewer (83) than in FY 2022 (87) because projects that were funded in FY 2015 ended and one grantee relinquished their grant and was not counted in the total. Some of the FY 2021 grantees requested a no-cost time extension, which were not counted in the total. The funding levels do not include the set-aside allocated for the American Indian Vocational Rehabilitation Training and Technical Assistance Center (AIVRTTAC).

Table 16. Number of Grants and Total Amount Awarded to Support American Indian Vocational Rehabilitation Services Tribal Projects: FYs 2021-2022

Fiscal year	Total grants	Total award amounts
2021	83	\$49,637,002
2022	87	\$49,637,002

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 2021 through 2022.

For the purpose of reporting under 34 C.F.R. 75.110, the Department has established performance measures for the AIVRS program. The AIVRS 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.

Beginning in March of 2020 and continuing through FY 2022, American Indian reservations experienced high rates of COVID-19 infections. Many AIVRS grantees took actions to limit the spread of COVID-19 by requiring their non-essential personnel to shelter at home to avoid exposure to COVID-19; however, they had limited access to the necessary technology to telework, such as personal computers, Wi-Fi, or internet availability to connect to workplace servers or workplace resources. This limited their ability to access the resources needed to provide VR services as described in Tribes' approved grant applications.

Table 17 provides the program outcome data from the AIVRS annual program performance database for FYs 2021 and 2022. As table 17 shows, in FY 2021, of the 4,919 American Indians with disabilities who received services, 1,409 (68 percent) of the 2,059 American Indians with disabilities who exited the program achieved an employment outcome. In FY 2022, of the 5,440 American Indians with disabilities who received services, 1,416 (55 percent) of the 2,552 American Indians with disabilities who exited the program achieved an employment outcome.

Table 17. Number of Individuals with Disabilities Served, Exiting Program After Receiving Services, and Achieving Employment Through the American Indian Vocational Rehabilitation Services Program: FYs 2021-2022

Fiscal year	Number served ^a	Total number exiting after receiving services	Number achieving employment
2021	4,919	2,059	1,409
2022	5,440	2,552	1,416

^a The number served calculation includes the number of individuals who received services under an IPE developed during the fiscal year or in a prior fiscal year.

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 2021 and 2022

ED established two efficiency measures for the AIVRS program to examine the cost per employment outcome and cost per participant. Table 18 presents the comparison of FYs 2021 and 2022 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 2021, the actual performance level for this efficiency measure for cost per employment outcome was 53 percent. In FY 2021, the economy and labor markets on American Indian reservations had a significant decline that reduced viable employment opportunities for American Indians with disabilities. The economic downturn that began in FY 2019 adversely affected the Tribes' ability to achieve the target of 76 percent. In FY 2022, the performance measure for cost per employment outcome dropped to 38 percent. The cost per employment outcome varied significantly across projects ranging from \$7,222 to \$564,977. Four Tribes had no consumers that had employment outcomes and three Tribes had employment outcomes for only one consumer.

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, as table 18 shows, 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 75 percent. In FY 2021, the actual performance level for this efficiency measure for cost per participant was 42 percent. The economic downturn adversely affected the Tribes' ability to achieve the target of 75 percent. In FY 2022, the performance level for cost per participant rose slightly to 47 percent. The cost per participant varied significantly across projects ranging from \$3,064 to \$451,896. There were at least two outliers who were not able to hire key personnel and appointed the project director about halfway through the fiscal year. The recruitment process was hindered again by the pandemic and the safety measures that were implemented, as a result, prevented the progress of some projects. There were programs, however, that achieved outlier status by way of serving more participants than proposed.

Table 18. Percentages of Cost Per Employment Outcome and Per Participant: FYs 2021-2022

	Target	FY 2021	FY 2022
Percent for the cost per employment outcome measure	76%	53%	38%
Percent cost per participant measure	75%	42%	47%

RSA continues to monitor AIVRS projects and provides extensive TA to support program effectiveness.

The American Indian Vocational Rehabilitation Training and Technical Assistance Center (AIVRTTAC)

Section 121(c)(1) of the *Rehabilitation Act* requires the RSA Commissioner to reserve not less than 1.8 percent and not more than 2 percent of the mandatory set aside from the State VR program that funds the AIVRS program (authorized under Section 121(a) of the *Rehabilitation Act*) to provide training and TA to the governing bodies and consortia of governing bodies of Indian Tribes that receive an AIVRS grant. This grant was awarded through a cooperative agreement to Northern Arizona University in FY 2015 and again in FY 2021 for five years to fund the AIVRTTAC.

Although the AIVRTTAC grant was supposed to expire in FY 2020, 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 quarantining at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the AIVRTTAC was well-positioned to continue to provide training and TA during the pandemic.

During FY 2021, the AIVRTTAC developed three products/tools that were available to all AIVRS projects and were designed to be used as a means of universal TA. The three products/tools included 1) an Employment Development and Placement Handbook; 2) VR Process Online Resources; and 3) a Case File Example. In addition, the AIVRTTAC provided universal TA that included using its YouTube channel to archive 23 accessible webinars and publishing 29 products and tools to the National Clearinghouse for Rehabilitation Training Materials (NCRTM) website. Further, the AIVRTTAC was instrumental in the success of the two-hour VR 100 – Celebration of AIVRS Program webinar that had 463 virtual attendees representing 49 U.S. States and territories. In FY 2022, the AIVRTTAC formed a partnership with the Northwest Indian College's Tribal Vocational Rehabilitation Institute (TVR Institute), formerly funded under the 84.315C grant (Traditionally Underserved Populations). In this new grant period, the AIVRTTAC underwent staff restructuring to implement the new project design in order to better address the various needs of the AIVRS projects across the country. The new model has four interconnected hubs (Evaluation; Training and Technical Assistance; Knowledge Translation; and Capacity Building) with two support components (State-of-the-Art IT Platform/Universal Training and Technical Assistance and Traditional Cultural Guidance and Support) to ensure that training and technical assistance are effective as well as culturally appropriate and responsive.

The following performance measures were established for the purpose of Department reporting under 34 CFR 75.110 to be implemented in FY 2022. The FY 2022 outcomes are included for each measure.

- *Measure* - Of all AIVRS project staff, the number and percentage of AIVRS project staff that complete at least one personnel preparation class offered by the AIVRTTAC.
Outcome - 105 individual students completed at least one personnel preparation class offered by the Capacity Building Hub through the TVR Institute.
- *Measure* - Of all AIVRS projects, the number and percentage of AIVRS projects that have at least one staff member that has completed at least one personnel preparation class offered by the AIVRTTAC.
Outcome - 52 different AIVRS projects had at least one staff member who completed at least one personnel preparation class offered by the Capacity Building Hub through the TVR Institute.
- *Measure* - Of all AIVRS project staff, the number and percentage of AIVRS project staff that receive a certificate based on classes offered by the AIVRTTAC.
Outcome - 15 students received an award of completion from the TVR Institute by completing the required classes offered through the Capacity Building Hub.
- *Measure* - Of AIVRS projects that received intensive training and technical assistance, the number and percentage of AIVRS projects that completed all activities in the intensive TA agreement.
Outcome - During the reporting period, the AIVRTTAC entered into ITTA agreements with eight AIVRS projects, and while progress was made, activities were not completed by the end of the first year due to the comprehensiveness of goals, objectives, and activities outlined in the agreements.

The AIVRTTAC continues to provide intensive TA with a heavy focus on foundational aspects of VR to specific AIVRS projects implementing the VR process. This included managing case files; updating policies and procedures; establishing, or reestablishing, a collaborative working relationship with the State VR agency; and ensuring that the project personnel/staff have appropriate skills and training to complete their jobs and provide effective case management services. Beginning in FY 2019, at the request of AIVRS project directors, the AIVRTTAC added a new TA category of employer partnerships/job development to some intensive TA agreements (ITAAs). Depending on the goals of the specific intensive TA, 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; and strengthened and improved policies, procedures, and case file management.

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 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 2021 and FY 2022, the total IL-OIB grant awards made to States remained consistent at \$32,384,124 each year, respectively. In addition to receiving Federal funding, the IL-OIB program received non-Federal support. In FY 2021, the total non-Federal sources of funding and in-kind support for the 56 IL-OIB grantees was \$15,042,812, and in FY 2022, this funding decreased to \$11,568,633. In FY 2021, expenditures under the IL-OIB program from all funding sources, including Federal IL-OIB funds, other Federal funds,¹⁸ non-Federal funds (cash and in-kind resources) totaled \$56,523,407, which is approximately a 4 percent decrease from the total amount expended in FY 2020. In FY 2022, total funding, from all sources, had increased to

¹⁸ 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.

\$62,169,969, a 10 percent increase from FY 2021. Table 19 demonstrates the funding changes, funding percentage differences, and the number of individuals served in FYs 2021 and 2022.

In FY 2021, 45,972 individuals aged 55 or older who were blind or visually impaired benefited from the IL services provided through the IL-OIB program, a decrease of 4 percent from FY 2020 (47,764). In FY 2022, 50,211 individuals were served through the IL OIB Program, a 9 percent increase from FY 2021, as shown in table 19.

Table 19. Independent Living Services for Older Individuals Who Are Blind Program Funding, Expenditures, and Individuals Served: FYs 2021-2022

IL-OIB Program	FY 2021	FY 2022
Total IL-OIB awards to States	32,384,124	32,384,124
Total non-Federal funds including in-kind	15,042,812	11,568,633
Total expenditures including in-kind	56,523,407	62,169,969
Percentage difference from previous year expenditures	4% decrease	9% increase
Total individuals served in reporting year	45,972	50,211

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 2021 through 2022.

Section 751A(a) of the *Rehabilitation Act* requires the RSA Commissioner to reserve not less than 1.8 percent and not more than two 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). From the total appropriation in FY 2021 for the IL-OIB program of \$33,317,000, \$599,706 was used to fund the TA center. The IL-OIB TA center was funded at the same level in FY 2022. In FYs 2021 and 2022, the OIB-TAC provided intensive training and TA, which included both virtual and on-site visits, to three 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. In FYs 2021 and 2022, 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 7OB report by each program.

The following examples of IL-OIB grantee activity and performance in FY 2022 include descriptions of successes and challenges.

Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services (ADRS)

In FY 2022, ADRS was able to serve 805 individuals, with 532 completing an individualized plan for services with an Orientation and Mobility Specialist or Vision Rehabilitation Therapist. Those who completed their program received over 3,300 hours of instruction and received over \$134,000 in equipment collectively. For the year, ADRS purchased over \$43,000 in new assistive technology devices such as electronic magnifiers and optical character recognition readers for consumers. Consumers received services in a variety of areas: 94 percent received AT related services, 86 percent received services in at least one area of daily living, 47 percent received at least one orientation and mobility service, and 71 percent received training in communication skills. The demographic makeup of ADRS consumers remained largely the same as in previous years: 71 percent were women, and 73 percent were white, 26 percent were African American, and a small percentage were of other groups. Additionally, 64 percent were over the age of 75, with macular degeneration and glaucoma being the leading age-related causes of vision loss, with 46 percent legally blind and 54 percent significantly visually impaired.

California Department of Rehabilitation (DOR)

Service providers in the California DOR's IL-OIB program reported a 99 percent or higher level of positive consumer outcomes, which indicates a very high level of consumer satisfaction. The evaluation of the reporting requirements for IL-OIB is an in-house program evaluation activity. Careful documentation of service provision and consumer outcomes helps measure performance and effectiveness and identify TA needs. Furthermore, the evaluations augment accountability, strengthen quality assurance, and identify where program policy revisions are needed. The evaluation process includes all components of the data collection requirements established by RSA. When monitoring programs, DOR focuses significant time on reviewing services, methods of service delivery, successful outcomes, and consumer satisfaction. Overall, the IL-OIB service providers reported a high percentage of consumers who are very satisfied and feel more independent because of the services they received. DOR's ongoing virtual and on-site (when possible) monitoring will continue to promote accurate documentation of outcomes and follow-up with consumers to ensure they are completing services and meeting goals. This review process also allows DOR to consult with the service providers on many of their program aspects, helping ensure that the objectives established in grant agreements are being tracked and adjustments are made with a focus on providing comprehensive IL-OIB services that meet consumer needs.

Kansas Rehabilitation Services (KRS)

IL-OIB services are delivered by KRS through sub-grants to four community-based organizations. KRS awarded grants on July 1, 2021. This was a request for proposal with four sub-grantees receiving funding for three cycles: FYs 2022, 2023, and 2024. In FY 2022, outreach continued to be a priority for the four sub-grantees. The sub-grantees partnered with 161 community organizations to provide information and education to the public about the services available to them. Community partners included local schools, community centers, nursing homes, assisted living centers, and hospitals. Some of the activities conducted were informational sessions and educational classes about the various resources as well as building relationships and peer to peer support. A total of 115 outreach events were held with more than 2,500 individuals attending. A few events continue to be held virtually, but most activities were held in person and out in communities. Some of these events occurred at senior citizen centers or with support groups and included presentations to target underserved and unserved populations. Individualized follow up and services were provided as needed after the outreach events. Collaboration is key to reaching local communities and bringing awareness to the services provided by the sub-grantees. Sub-grantees are using a recently implemented uniform satisfaction survey to measure the level of satisfaction with the services provided through the IL-OIB program. The State and the grantees will continue to explore ways to improve the tool and make it a more streamlined process. Although 98 percent of consumers reported being satisfied or very satisfied with services provided in FY 2022, KRS faces multiple challenges with IL-OIB services. Providing orientation and mobility training across the State continues to be an issue due to limited staff and the large geographic areas some centers cover. KRS, its staff, and its consumers would benefit from more remote access to training programs and group support services, a platform for staff to check in remotely and train consumers without having to travel far distances to provide the same level of service, and a better outreach strategy across the State, particularly to reach rural areas and the unserved/underserved populations.

Maryland Division of Rehabilitation Services (DORS)

In FY 2022, Maryland DORS reported sustained time-tested and proven strategies for expanding its services. DORS staff worked collaboratively with community providers, vendors, families, consumers, and other professionals to ensure that a full spectrum of IL-OIB services is available for seniors in all areas of the State. Throughout the grant year, DORS staff educated the senior blind, their families, supporters, professionals in the field of vision loss, and community organizations about training and services. DORS' ongoing outreach efforts played an important role in identifying blind and low vision seniors in need of blindness skills training. By providing education to members of the public, community partners become better equipped and more willing to share valuable resource information. Statewide outreach efforts included speaking engagements, presentations, conferences, and literature dissemination targeting senior consumers, senior centers, retirement communities, blindness-related agencies, and professionals in the field to reach seniors in all areas of the state including those in rural, remote, and

underserved areas. DORS continue to provide a hybrid of services to individuals based on the consumer's preference. For some, virtual services have expanded the capacity and frequency of visits with DORS vision rehabilitation therapists. Throughout the fiscal year, discussions with program participants as well as compiled surveys produced very positive results. Seniors are encouraged to seek ongoing training through the many training options available to them. Following their participation in IL-OIB programming, they are motivated and hopeful for an independent future. Consumers are excited by the new possibilities that were unrealized prior to IL-OIB training. Peer supports are encouraged and established and are ongoing. Maryland DORS, however, continues to struggle with obtaining sufficient qualified and certified staff and vendors to provide the vast services needed all over the State. When an opening becomes available, the recruitment and hiring process is slow and often yields applicants who lack an expertise in blindness or aging.

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 for FY 2021 but could vary depending on the appropriations for the referenced titles in future years. These funds are to be used to make awards to minority entities and 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. Funds can also be used to make awards to States or public or private nonprofit agencies, such as institutions of higher education or Indian Tribes, to support capacity-building projects designed to provide outreach and TA to minority entities and 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 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.

RSA began funding a five-year project for the Northwest Indian College, in partnership with Western Washington University, to create a Vocational Rehabilitation Training Institute (Institute) in FY 2015. 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.

In FY 2021, 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 when such assistance was most needed.

By the end of the sixth and final year of the project, the Institute developed 13 two and three credit courses in Tribal VR foundations that were offered for college credit and resulted in 1,187 enrollments across 99 course offerings over 21 academic courses. For these courses, 248 unique participants from 66 AIVRS programs completed one or more classes, and 69 participants earned an award of completion after successfully completing seven courses for credit. The project achieved an 86 percent completion rate for participants enrolled in all courses over six years. All 13 courses were captioned by the end of the project. The growth of Tribal VR professionals was also witnessed by AIVRS program directors and supervisors. Directors noted that many closure rates improved once AIVRS program staff enrolled in the Institute and reported that staff were handling more complex cases.

Finally, the Institute compiled all online course content into a hard copy and a PDF accessible handbook that was widely disseminated and is available on RSA's NCRTM. 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 2021, while the Notice of Final Priority and Requirements— Activities for Traditionally Underserved Populations and Notice Inviting Applications for the program (Assistance Listing Number 84.315C) was published in the Federal Register on April 13, 2021, RSA received no applications; therefore, there was no new award made for the Activities for Traditionally Underserved Populations program (84.315C) for FY 2022. Those FY 2022 funds were used to frontload Rehabilitation Long-Term Training grants (ALN 84.129) for one year. The seven grantees selected for frontloading using section 21 funding were from Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) and Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSI). Frontloading of grantees under the Rehabilitation Long-Term Training with section 21 funds was limited to grantees who are HBCUs and HSIs to preserve the requirement that awards be made to minority entities and Indian Tribes.

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 contract 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 2021 and 2022, the appropriation for this program was approximately \$5.8 million.

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 may 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 2021 and FY 2022 included the following:

Vocational Rehabilitation Technical Assistance Center for Quality Management and Vocational Rehabilitation Technical Assistance Center for Quality Employment

RSA funded two VR technical assistance centers: the VR Technical Assistance Center for Quality Management and VR Technical Assistance Center for Quality Employment in FY 2020 under the authority of the *Rehabilitation Act*. Both TA centers focus on identified national needs and improvement of the number and quality of employment outcomes under the VR program and raise expectations for all people with disabilities.

The VR technical assistance centers offer multiple levels of TA to the State VR agencies that range from universal to targeted to intensive TA. Universal TA is accessible at any time needed, including websites, resources, and on-demand trainings. Targeted TA includes specific State VR agency needs and requests, over a limited period, and can be accessed at any time and as often as needed. Intensive TA includes an analysis of the State VR agency strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats to improve service delivery and employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities. The intensive TA is provided through activities and outputs for an extended period, outcome measures, and a signed agreement.

VR Technical Assistance Center for Quality Management (VRTAC-QM)

San Diego State University Foundation was awarded the VRTAC-QM grant (Assistance Listing Number (ALN) 84.264J) for approximately \$3 million annually. The purpose of the VRTAC-QM is to provide intensive, targeted, and universal training and TA to State VR agencies on quality management strategies that will enable State VR agencies to improve service delivery to, and employment outcomes achieved by, individuals with disabilities. Further, the VRTAC-QM provides TA and training in fiscal and resource quality management of the VR program and general quality management of organizations.

The primary VRTAC-QM activities conducted during FYs 2021 and 2022 include:

1. Completion of four ITAAs in FY 2021 with State VR agencies, including Delaware Blind, Kansas Combined, Montana Combined, and Pennsylvania Combined. For FY 2022, eight more State VR agencies signed an ITAA with VRTAC-QM, including: Arkansas Blind, Florida General, Hawaii Combined, Maryland Combined, New Mexico General, South Carolina General, Washington Blind, and Wyoming Combined;

2. Development of ITAAs with the Kansas and Pennsylvania State VR agencies and the National Technical Assistance Center on Transition for Students and Youth with Disabilities;
3. Development of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) assessment tools and instruments and conduct of SWOT analyses for 12 State VR agencies;
4. Conducted four distinct community of practice groups for State VR agencies monitored by RSA in FYs 2021 and 2022;
5. Creation of a VR program and fiscal reporting timeline guide for State VR agencies to track and monitor the status of required Federal reporting (e.g., RSA-911 and RSA-17 reports) that was released to the field via RSA and other avenues;
6. Identification of gold standard benchmarks for quality management using an analytical framework and selection criteria;
7. Intensive and targeted TA provided to 65 State VR agencies out of the 78 agencies (83 percent) in FY 2021 and 74 of 78 State VR agencies (95 percent) in FY 2022;
8. Conducted 358 targeted TA events with 3,406 individuals receiving or accessing the targeted TA and training from the VRTAC-QM in 2021 and 781 targeted events serving 5,500 VR staff for FY 2022;
9. Creation of a website with hundreds of resources and tools available for State VR staff on quality management accessed by over 3,800 unique visitors, including the addition of 16 podcasts in FY 2022;
10. Completion of an initial comprehensive review of quality management strategies and practices for VR; and
11. Participation in multiple collaborative efforts with other Federal funded TA centers and led the ongoing TA centers' collaborative meetings.

VR Technical Assistance Center for Quality Employment (VRTAC-QE)

The University of Wisconsin – Madison was awarded the VRTAC-QE grant (264K) for just over \$3.3 million annually. The purpose of the VRTAC-QE is to upgrade and increase the competencies, skills, and knowledge of VR personnel to implement and sustain employment strategies and supporting practices that enable individuals with disabilities to achieve quality employment and career advancement, particularly competitive integrated employment, as defined in the *Rehabilitation Act*.

The primary VRTAC-QE activities conducted during FYs 2021 and 2022 include:

1. Developed and launched the VRTAC-QE website and 1,553 users/members registered on the website representing VR professionals from all 50 states and several U.S. territories for FY 2021 and 5,872 users/members by the end of FY 2022;
2. Conducted 161 universal TA trainings that provided continuing education credits supported by the Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification in FY 2021 and an additional 35 universal trainings in FY 2022;

3. Completed its analysis of State documents and review of the literature, and developed documents to be posted on its website in FY 2021;
4. Conducted an analysis of the national State VR needs assessment and the findings from the literature related to the topical areas of the project and developed multiple manuscripts submitted for publication in peer-reviewed outlets such as the *Rehabilitation Counseling Bulletin Rehabilitation Research, Policy, and Education*; *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*; and the *Rehabilitation Counselors and Educators Journal*;
5. Worked with five State VR agencies (Montana, Georgia, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, and Wisconsin) in FY 2021 to identify intensive TA needs and develop ITAAs. For FY 2022, the VRTAC-QE provided intensive TA to 14 State VR agencies including nine new ITAAs signed in FY 2022. Of the 14 State VR agencies, 11 are general or combined agencies: Wyoming, Indiana, Oklahoma, Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands, South Carolina, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, Washington, Michigan, and Kansas; and three are agencies for the blind: Idaho, Arkansas, and Iowa; and
6. Coordinated training and TA with other RSA funded TA centers, including the VRTAC-QM and the National Technical Assistance Center on Transition: The Collaborative to review project implementation, intensive TA plans for RID advisory board/steering committees.

Parent Training and Information (PTI) Projects

The Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services supports two parent training programs. The Office of Special Education Programs (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. The RSA funded Training and Information for Parents of Children with Disabilities—Parent Training and Information Centers and Parent Information and Training Program (PTI) (ALN 84.235F) projects, 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 FY 2020, RSA funded eight regional PTI projects totaling \$2.4 million per year for five years and a national PTI center at \$300,000 per year for five years. These 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. In FYs 2021 and 2022, the continuation awards for the second and third years of these grants were awarded for a total amount of \$2.4 million and a national PTI center at \$300,000 per year.

The following are examples of substantial progress made by RSA-funded PTI centers:

- In FY 2021, the Parent Education Advocacy Training Center, Inc (PEATC) (H235F200001) developed six resources, including a Parent Transition Assessment for Virginia; Professional Transition Assessment for Virginia; Parent Transition Assessment for Virginia in Spanish; and a Parent Transition Assessment for other States. In FY 2022, PEATC developed twelve trainings (one for parents/caregivers, and one for professionals in each of 6 States) 38 additional new resources, including seven in Spanish, and 25 State-specific fact sheets. In FY 2021, the REAL Transition Partners (H235F200002) assisted 19 parent centers in Region A-2 in their State and developed a needs assessment to address their gaps, ultimately assisting in the development of their one-year action plans. The 19 funded parent center partners in eight States received individualized and group assistance to develop and implement State/parent center action plans. In FY 2022, the REAL Transition Partners provided individual assistance to 11,851 parents/youth with disabilities (YWD), provided virtual trainings to 8,725 parents/YWD, and disseminated 1,574,058 information and resources through resource dissemination (in English & Spanish) through their website, e-newsletters, and social media.
- In FY 2021, the Federation for Children with Special Needs (H235F200003) provided in-person/virtual training to parents and youth with disabilities covering all related topics via 9,373 contacts on understanding VR and independent living programs and services, communicating more effectively with transition and VR personnel and other relevant professionals, receiving support for development of IPEs, obtaining information and support about rehabilitation and independent living programs, services, and resources, and understanding the provisions of the *Rehabilitation Act* particularly relating to employment, supported employment, and independent living. In FY22, the Federation for Children with Special Needs enhanced the capacity of professionals to partner more effectively with families/YWD by providing individual assistance via 2,607 contacts and training to 3,393 professionals covering all related topics.
- In FY 2021, the Pathfinder Service of North Dakota (PSND) (H235F200004), through the creation of the Midwestern Collaborative RSA Community of Practice and Peer to Peer Support groups, PTI partners and PTI Peer Support Specialists gathered to walk through current initiatives and activities that they were working on within their states. Data was collected from each PTI partner sub-grantee through projects, materials, and services as identified in their annual plans focusing on VR services. These projects, materials, and services range from delivery of live and virtual workshops, webinars, and through on-demand streaming webinars. It also included dissemination of products and information,

collaborative efforts with services providers and stakeholders and networking. In FY 2022, PSND continued to provide a resource repository, using an online platform that served as a one-stop shop for delivering program information and guidance to the PTI Partners, as well as resource sharing. The resource repository holds developed State resources and allows sister States access to fully developed curriculum and information sharing materials. This cloud-based storage system allows PTI partners to download resources from other parent resources and share their own resources they developed.

- In FY 2021, the PACER Center (H235F200010) developed and began to implement rural and urban parent and youth trainings in an eight-state area (Minnesota, Kentucky, Ohio, Indiana, Michigan, Illinois, Wisconsin, West Virginia). The project formed partnerships with State VR agencies, Centers for Independent Living, Workforce Centers, employers, and other PTI centers to provide information and training in support of the RSA's goal of meaningful employment, independent living, and full community inclusion outcomes. During the first six-month reporting period, more than 258,086 members of the community, including individuals with disabilities and their families, were informed about this project's activities and rehabilitation services. Workshops were publicized in PACER's newsletter the *PACESSETTER* which reached 135,682 persons and in PACER's e-newsletter that reached over 47,156 persons monthly. Website page views totaled 75,248. In FY 2022, the PACER Center exceeded its goal of providing five trainings to youth and family members by providing seven trainings for over 439 individuals. Topics included VR, qualifying for benefits, customized employment, and community resources. They also developed short videos on VR, social security, and community resources based on workshop presentation materials.

Braille Training

The Braille Training Program offers financial assistance to projects that will provide training in the use of braille for personnel providing VR services or educational services to youth and adults who are blind, develop braille training materials, develop methods used to teach braille, and develop activities used to promote the knowledge and use of braille and nonvisual access technology for youth and adults who are blind.

In FYs 2021 and 2022, RSA provided continuation funding for three Braille Training grants for a total amount of \$341,920 each year.

The following are examples of services and supports provided by the three Braille Training grants:

- California State LA University (H235E190002)—Braille Brain is an on-line training program used to teach Unified English Braille (UEB) and Nemeth codes. Braille Brain consists of resources for promoting literacy and STEM learning, including main products: 1) braille training materials and assessment that focus on UEB literacy braille and Nemeth Braille (mathematical and scientific notations) and 2) instructional materials and evidence-based practices that support braille literacy and STEM instruction. In FY 2021, the project successfully trained 28 pre-service

teachers and paraprofessional in UEB literary braille who know braille and who work with youth and adults who are visually impaired. In FY 2022, the project completed the development and refinement of Braille Brain training materials, as well as the development of the 21 braille training modules for the Nemeth Braille, which complements the previously developed 20 literary UEB braille modules in FY 2021. By the end of FY 2022, 123 pre-service teachers, family members, orientation and mobility specialists, paraprofessionals, and others were engaged in UEB literacy braille and Nemeth Braille training. Eighty-nine participants were actively enrolled in one of the online Braille Brain training courses. A total of 56 participants successfully completed the full Braille Brain UEB Literacy course. A total of 24 participants successfully completed the full Braille Brain Nemeth course.

- University of South Carolina (H235E190003)—The primary purpose of Project INSPIRE is to increase the ability of professionals to transcribe high-quality materials in Nemeth Code within UEB Contexts and UEB Technical. Professionals also gain skills in how to instruct students in grades 6-12, and young adults in building their skills in the two braille codes used in the United States for STEM classes. In addition, students and youth who are braille readers will increase their skills in mathematical and scientific braille notation through an online STEM Braille Boot Camp culminating in a STEM Braille Bowl Competition. In FY 2021, *The Geometry and Tactile Graphics for Students in Grades 3 to 8* course launched in the second quarter. One hundred and two professionals from 41 states completed the pretest and progressed through the course. In FY 2022, the same course was offered. The course included an introduction, a course walk-through video, seven lessons, an extensive annotated resource list, and two assignments. The course was accessible, including captioned videos, video transcripts, alternate text for photos, and both large print and braille files for individuals who are visually impaired and unable to see the slides in the videos for each lesson. The program exceeded their recruitment goal of 40 participants. Other project activities in FY 2022 included the development of the following: recruitment materials; an accessible database to monitor registration and student performance; a rubric to evaluate skill development; and braille materials to use during the event sessions.
- Educational Service Center (H235E190004)—The Braille Excellence for Students and Teachers (BEST) grant’s primary focus is to increase opportunities for Teachers of Visual Impairments working in rural communities, and a secondary focus is to increase the knowledge of Teachers of Visual Impairments, intervention specialists, general educators, paraprofessionals, and transcribers in obtaining and creating accessible documents thereby increasing equitable access to braille materials in inclusive settings. In FY 2021, the project completed 18 training activities, and three local braille production centers were set up in high-need school districts and agencies. To meet the needs of rural populations, one center was placed in the Appalachia region. In FY 2022, there were 10 trainings scheduled to accomplish goal one—three STEM focused trainings, and seven focused on the reading and writing of braille. There were 11 trainings/events scheduled to accomplish goal two— three focusing on

producing accessible documents; four giving educators software training to produce quality braille; one technology focused event; and three specialized presentations to university TVI students highlighting braille production, accessible documents, and assistive technology.

National Technical Assistance Center on Transition: The Collaborative

Beginning in FY 2020, OSEP and RSA co-funded the National Technical Assistance Center on Transition: The Collaborative (NTACT:C) for a five-year grant period. RSA and OSEP provide a total award amount of \$4.1 million annually; OSEP provides \$2.1 million annually from OSEP's Technical Assistance and Dissemination funds, and RSA provides \$2 million annually from RSA's Demonstration and Training Program funds. The NTACT:C provides specialized TA, training, dissemination, and informational services to Federal and State agencies, as well as to organizations, professionals, families, and others involved in providing services to students and youth with disabilities. The NTACT:C facilitates seven Communities of Practice that support advancing all students with disabilities' access to well-rounded, rigorous, and diverse learning opportunities and environments to support their success in school. Beginning its activities in FY 2021, the NTACT:C is assisting States, based on their unique needs, to improve educational and VR outcomes for students and youth with disabilities. To ensure there is communication between each level of the special education and VR system and there are systems in place to support the use of effective transition practices from school to college and careers, the NTACT:C is working with appropriate levels of the education and VR systems (State educational agencies, local educational agencies, 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).

In FY 2022, NTACT:C facilitated five Communities of Practice that support advancing all students with disabilities' access to well-rounded, rigorous, and diverse learning opportunities and environments to support their success in school. Topics for the communities included: (a) transition services for students with complex support needs, (b) Indicator B-14 (IDEA), (c) Pre-ETS for blind students, (d) special education, career-technical education, and VR partnerships, and (e) transition service delivery solutions. An evaluation of the communities of practice (CoP) showed 94% of respondents indicated their knowledge of effective transition practices or services increased and 86% indicated they implemented effective transition practices or services. Additionally, 42% of the respondents indicated their participation in the CoP increased the number of students with disabilities who are engaged in effective transition practices or services, and 98% indicated the CoP supports the State's strategic plan to improve transition services and outcomes for secondary students and youth with disabilities. NTACT:C also hosted a virtual Capacity Building Institute, attended by more than 500 individuals from 40 state teams. A participating team was typically inclusive of

representatives from the state’s education agency, VR agency, career and technical education department, adult disability services agency, local practitioners, parent training and information center (or equivalent), and higher education partners. However, teams ranged in size from two to more than a dozen individuals. During the Institute, teams developed strategic action plans with the support of facilitators trained by NTACTION: C and staff continued to support implementation of those plans. During FY 2022, the NTACTION: C entered into intensive (long term) or targeted (short-term) technical assistance agreements with 11 States, based on their unique needs, to improve educational and VR outcomes for students and youth with disabilities.

NTACTION: C’s website, transitionta.org, provides access to resources for the Center’s target audiences and the public, at large. It is the primary vehicle by which the Center disseminates information at the universal technical assistance level. The Center created and published six new documents, such as a “Pre-ETS Strategic Planning Checklist” and “Side by Side View of Transition Services”. NTACTION: C also developed the Graduation and Dropout Rate Calculator, in partnership with the IDEA Data Center. NTACTION: C hosted webinars approximately monthly on relevant topics including “The Connection Between Disability and Poverty: a Focus on Financial Capability in Transition”, “Strategies for Managing the 15% Reservation of Funds for Pre-Employment Transition Services”, and “Systems Level Interagency Collaboration.” NTACTION: C piloted a “short course” for VR and Education professionals entitled “Partnering for Assessment for Students with Complex Support Needs: Making Transition Planning Happen”. FY 2022 marked the “launch year” for www.transitionta.org. During that time period 7,341 users from each of the states, the Bureau of Indian Education and Tribal VR, the District of Columbia, Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas Islands, Puerto Rico, Guam, and U.S. Virgin Islands accessed the website.

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 2021 and 2022, the total available funding for this program was \$30,004,610. 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 FY 2021, RSA supported continuation awards for all grants funded under the Rehabilitation Long-Term Training programs (84.129B, 84.129H, 84.129P, and 84.129Q), 84 awards; and held competitions for new awards for the following programs: 1) Training of Interpreters for Individuals Who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing and Individuals Who are Deafblind Program (84.160D), seven awards; and 2) Rehabilitation Short-Term Training–Client Assistance Program (84.246K), one award. In FY 2022, RSA supported continuation awards for 84 grants funded under the Rehabilitation Long-Term Training program, Assistance Listing Numbers 84.129B, 84.129H, 84.129P, and 84.129Q.

Rehabilitation Long-Term Training (RLTT)

The RLTT program supports academic training grants that are awarded to colleges and universities with graduate and certificate 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.

For FY 2021, the following data represent the RLTT program's performance.

- The percentage of FY 2018 master's-level counseling graduates who received assistance under the RLTT program and who reported achieving qualifying employment was 84 percent, a decrease from the 88 percent who reported achieving qualifying employment by FY 2020.
- The percentage of FY 2018 master's-level counseling graduates who received assistance under the RLTT program and who reported achieving employment in State VR agencies was 39 percent, the same as those who reported being employed in State VR agencies by FY 2020 (39 percent).
- 540 RSA-supported scholars graduated, an increase from the 479 scholars who graduated in FY 2020.
- 1,884 scholars were supported by RSA scholarships, about the same as FY 2020 (1,887).

For FY 2022, the following data represent the RLTT program's performance.

- The percentage of FY 2019 master's-level counseling graduates who received assistance under the RLTT program and who reported achieving qualifying employment was 72 percent, a decrease from the 84 percent who reported achieving qualifying employment by FY 2021.

- The percentage of FY 2019 master’s-level counseling graduates who received assistance under the RLTT program and who reported achieving employment in State VR agencies was 33 percent, a decrease from the 39 percent who reported being employed in State VR agencies by FY 2021.
- 529 RSA-supported scholars graduated, a slight decrease from the 540 scholars who graduated in FY 2021.
- 1,511 scholars were supported by RSA scholarships, a decrease from the 1,884 who were supported by RSA scholarships in FY 2021.

The percentage of master’s-level counseling scholars who graduated in FY 2015 and received assistance under the RLTT program was 88 percent for those who reported achieving qualifying employment by FY 2018; it increased to 94 percent for those who graduated in FY 2016 and reported achieving qualifying employment by FY 2019. It decreased back to 88 percent for those who graduated in FY 2017 and reported achieving qualifying employment by FY 2020 and continued to decrease to 84 percent for those who graduated in FY 2018 and reported achieving qualifying employment by FY 2021. It decreased even further for those who graduated in FY 2019 to 72 percent by FY 2022. COVID does seem to have impacted the FY 2022 results, as these scholars who graduated in FY 2019 could have been seeking eligible employment during the pandemic in 2019-2021 when there were hiring freezes and other challenges to obtain eligible employment.

The percentage of master’s-level counseling scholars who graduated in FY 2016 and received assistance under the RLTT program was 36 percent for those who reported achieving employment in State VR agencies by FY 2018. This percentage slightly decreased to 35 percent for those who reported achieving employment in State VR agencies by FY 2019, increased to 39 percent for those who reported achieving employment in State VR agencies by FY 2020 and remained stable at 39 percent for those who reported achieving employment in State VR agencies by FY 2021. The percentage for those who graduated in FY 2019 and reported achieving employment in State VR agencies by FY 2022 decreased to 33 percent. COVID does seem to have impacted the FY 2022 results, as these scholars who graduated in FY 2019 could have been seeking eligible employment during the pandemic in 2019-2021 when there were hiring freezes in many State VR agencies and other challenges to obtaining eligible employment.

The number of RSA-supported scholars that graduated decreased from 540 in FY 2021 to 529 in FY 2022. The number of scholars supported by RSA scholarships decreased from 1,884 in FY 2021 to 1,511 in FY 2022. Table 20 presents the percentage of scholars fulfilling payback requirements through qualifying employment or by employment in State VR agencies and the number of graduates and enrolled scholars in FYs 2021 and 2022.

Table 20. Percentage of Scholars Fulfilling Payback Requirements Through Qualifying Employment or by Employment in State Vocational Rehabilitation Agencies and Number of Graduates and Enrolled Scholars: FYs 2021-2022

Measure	FY 2021	FY 2022
Percentage of master’s-level counseling scholars who graduated three-years prior, who received assistance under the RLTT program and who reported achieving qualifying employment by the fiscal year	84	72
Percentage of master’s-level counseling scholars who graduated three-years prior, who received assistance under the RLTT program and who reported achieving qualifying employment in State VR agencies by the fiscal year	39	33
Number of RSA-supported scholars that graduated	540	529
Number of enrolled scholars supported by RSA scholarships	1,884	1,511

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Payback Information Management System, FYs 2021-2022.

Training of Interpreters for Individuals Who Are Deaf or Hard of Hearing and Individuals Who Are Deaf-Blind

The purpose of the Training of Interpreters for Individuals Who Are Deaf or Hard of Hearing and Individuals Who Are Deaf-Blind 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 to meet the communication needs of individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing or deaf-blind. 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 the highest standards approved by certifying associations. RSA funded two five-year programs under this authority in FY 2016. 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). In FY 2021, both grant

programs completed their final year of activity, and RSA held a competition for another five-year grant cycle under ALN 84.160D.

The following are selected accomplishments of the 84.160C and 84.160D grant programs funded in FY 2016.

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 ASL-English interpretation programs or through partner organizations. The center's goal is to prepare novice interpreters to work in VR settings. Overall, 106 novice interpreters participated in the program cohorts, and 89 novice interpreters participated in comparison groups. Novice interpreters in year five (FY 2021) reported that the COVID-19 pandemic had a negative impact on both their interpreting work and their professional development. On average, those in year four (FY 2020) and in year five who did not pass the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) National Interpreter Certification (NIC) exam reported relatively stronger negative impacts of COVID-19 on their professional development compared to those who did pass. The overall pass rate for the RID NIC certification exam for novice interpreters in the cohorts was 16.8 percent. Looking at yearly results, the pass rate for novice interpreters in the cohorts was 23 percent in year two, 45 percent in year three, and then in each of years four and five during COVID-19 the pass rate was less than 10 percent. The overall pass rate for novice interpreters in the comparison groups was 17.7 percent. Combining all groups, 34 novice interpreters passed the exam with four of those passing when they took it an additional time. The average amount of time between graduation and certification for those in the cohorts was 13 months. At the same time, 50 percent who passed the RID NIC in the cohorts did so in 10 months or less.

ALN 84.160D Training of Interpreters in Specialty Areas:

Four grantees were 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 were 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.

In FY 2021, the grantees concluded their projects. The following are selected accomplishments:

- Northeastern University, Boston, Massachusetts (Specialty Area: Interpreting for consumers with dysfluent language competencies). Four cohorts of trainees (78 interpreters) completed a 12-month program that included six months of online learning modules, a practical application week, a 40-hour induction program, and Communities of Practice. Alongside the trainees, four cohorts of supervisors (36 interpreters) participated in a supervisor training module, and served as induction supervisors, while participating in a Community of Practice. Self-paced versions of the modules that were offered in the full Program of Study are available free to all interested stakeholders on the Center for Atypical Language Interpreting website. As of December 31, 2021, a combined total of 6,060 enrolled in the four Self-Paced modules. Finally, the project created and launched an online, interactive teaching tool called Unfolding Scenarios, focusing on complex decision making (i.e., when interpreters may need to request further assistance, as well as considering what factors may be of greater importance than others and how factors may be interrelated). This stand-alone resource contains 12 recorded interpreting scenarios and eight recorded sample responses and reflections from model interpreters and includes a learner handbook and curriculum guide.

In March FY 2021, RSA published in the Federal Register a Notice of Proposed Priorities (NPP) to solicit input on proposed priorities to meet the needs of training interpreters for individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing and Individuals who are DeafBlind. The following are some of the changes that were made as a result of the NPP and published in the Federal Register in the Notice of Final Priorities and the Notice Inviting Applications (NIA) in July 2021: (1) expansion of the definition of “working interpreter;” (2) allowance to propose field-initiated areas and the addition of a specialty area in cultural competency; (3) removal of the cost-share requirement; (4) development of a self-directed track for independent/remote learning and a curriculum guide for each module developed; (5) requirement to include induction experiences; and (6) addition of a requirement to measure outcomes of participants that completed an induction compared to those who did not complete an induction prior to successfully completing the program.

The following are selected accomplishments made in the first year (FY 2022) of the grant awards made to seven universities:

- St. Catherine University developed two training phases for cohort track participants: educational and induction. The educational phase consisted of 96 hours of online learning using a Learning Management System (LMS). As part of this learning, there were four mock interpreting scenarios. A total 183 cohort track applications were received, and 35 participants were selected. This project launched its website: <https://healthcareinterpreting.org/level-up-cohort> that features program details and advancing healthcare interpreter competencies by reducing the equity gaps in healthcare communication for Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and Deaf Blind individuals in healthcare settings.

- University Of Northern Colorado, developed and designed 450 hours of curricula using the ADDIE (Analyze, Development, Design, Implement, and Evaluate) instructional design model utilized by the Commission on Collegiate Interpreter Education (CCIE) accredited UNC American Sign Language/English Interpreting (ASLEI) program. As part of this learning curricula, the Connections, Opportunities, Resources and Education (CORE) Initiative cohorts had a total of 52 applications completed with 22-accepted, 3-waitlisted and 27- declinations to Improving Rural Interpreter Skills (IRIS). The project envisions increasing the quantity and quality of interpreters working and living in rural settings by cultivating educational opportunities and sustainable connections that support professional growth.

Innovative Rehabilitation Training

The purpose of the Innovative Rehabilitation Training Program is to develop 1) new types of training programs for State VR personnel and to demonstrate the effectiveness of these new training programs in providing rehabilitation services to individuals with disabilities; 2) new and improved methods of training rehabilitation personnel so 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.

Innovative Rehabilitation Training grants are designed to develop current and evidence-based training modules for use as stand-alone modules or to be incorporated into an existing academic degree program for educating VR counselors or other VR professionals and VR paraprofessionals or into short-term training for VR professionals, or both. The grants awarded in September 2019 under ALN 84.263C are focused on developing or implementing pathways to recognized postsecondary credentials and to provide work-based learning experiences such as apprenticeships and internships. The grants awarded in September 2020 under the Rehabilitation Experimental and Innovative Training program (ALN 84.263E and 84.263F) are focused on field-initiated project topic areas. The training must be of sufficient scope, intensity, and duration for VR professionals, paraprofessionals, and individuals studying to become VR professionals and paraprofessionals to achieve increased skill, knowledge, and competence in the topic area.

The following are the current Innovative Rehabilitation Training grants:

- VR Services to Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (H263C190004)
- Career Assessment for VR Service Recipients (H263C190006)
- VR Counseling (H263C190007)
- VR Services to Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities (H263C190011)
- Employer Engagement (H263C190012)

- Field-Initiated project in an area related to VR, Pre-Employment Transition Services (H263C190013)
- VR Services to Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities (H263C190015)
- Assisting and Supporting Individuals with Disabilities Pursuing Self-Employment, Business Ownership, and Telecommuting (H263E200005)
- Field-initiated projects in an area related to VR, Forensic Rehabilitation and Vocational Evaluation (H263F200004).

All Innovative Rehabilitation Training grantees achieved substantial progress in meeting the objectives established in their approved applications in FYs 2021 and 2022, despite the disruptions caused by COVID 19 early in the grants' periods of performance. A few examples are provided below.

- Ten VR agencies were increasingly engaged in the George Washington University Center for Innovative Counseling's VR Counseling 101 online training modules for onboarding new VR staff and for elevating veteran personnel's skills. The number of staff enrolled increased from 1,717 in 2021 to 2,009 in 2022. VR staff completed 67 percent of the modules, up from 54 percent in FY 2021. Additionally, six VR agencies have progressed to VR Counseling 101, Phase II, which allows the agencies to customize the Phase I curriculum to fit the agencies' particular characteristics and needs.
- The University of Massachusetts institute on Community Inclusion's Program on Innovative Rehabilitation Training on Employer Engagement completed four online modules on Strategic and Individualized Employer Engagement. The aggregate number of VR professionals and paraprofessionals enrolled in these modules (232) significantly exceeded the approved application target (150). The panel of VR agency evaluators gave the modules a 100% rating for quality, relevance, and usefulness, significantly exceeding the approved 80% targets. The grantee also made progress in developing the Train-the-Trainer guide and the Community of Practice that will be launched in FY 2023.

Rehabilitation Short-Term Training

National Disability Rights Network (NDRN) completed its 2015 grant in 2021, including a sixth year authorized under a waiver and extension notice published in the Federal Register on September 16, 2020. In FY 2021, NDRN completed the project of the Rehabilitation Short-Term Training –Client Assistance Training (CFDA # 84.246K) and submitted its Final Performance Report (FPR). Major accomplishments in its final project year, the FY 2021, included: succeeded in providing high-quality, relevant training and technical assistance to the CAP staff during the last project year, conducted a VR Orientation and three webinars to address the CAP staff members training needs of the Network, which were identified through the NDRN's electronic questionnaire in

project Year 1 and Year 3. As reported in the FPR, NDRN significantly changed the evaluation process for both NDRN training and technical assistance activities.

NDRN's FPR indicated that, as a result of the NDRN training and services provided to State employees -

- 98.8 percent of the CAP staff with 0-5 years of experience reported increased knowledge, skills and abilities as a result of NDRN trainings;
- 100 percent of the CAP staff with 5-10 years of experience reported increased knowledge, skills and abilities as a result of NDRN trainings;
- 97.5 percent of the CAP staff with 10+ years of experience reported increased knowledge, skills and abilities as a result of NDRN trainings;
- 92.5 percent of the staff reported that the NDRN trainings were relevant and useful to their work; and
- 97 percent of the staff reported that NDRN's technical assistance was of sufficient quality, relevance and usefulness.

NDRN was awarded a new grant of \$308,000 under the Short-Term Training Program in FY2022. The grant program is designed 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. Examples of NDRN's accomplishments in the first reporting year of its new award include the following:

- NDRN held the 2022 VR Orientation virtually from November 30 – December 3, 2022. A total of 48 individuals attended the training – the second highest number of attendees ever. The training is intended to be an introduction to the VR laws, regulations, and related issues. A pre-test and post-test assessment showed a 24% increase in knowledge among the attendees because of the training.
- NDRN conducted two web-based trainings during the first two quarters of the fiscal year. The topics addressed an overview of VR core services/VR processes as well as customized employment. All of the participants that completed the survey about the VR Scope of Services training said the presentation was high quality. Additionally, 96% of the participants said the presentation was relevant to the work that they do. Similarly, 95% of the respondents to the customized employment survey reported that, because of this training, they would be able to do their job more effectively.
- NDRN completed their first Semi-Annual Training and Technical Assistance Results Survey and 85.71% of the respondents reported that the training and TA provided by NDRN had an "impact" or a "high impact" on their CAP's overall effectiveness. In addition, NDRN conducted a Needs Assessment that focused on feedback from the CAP staff. One-on-one interviews were completed with one staff member from each CAP agency. These interviews identified the top training and technical assistance needs, the preferred training modalities, and commonly reported VR-related issues and concerns. This assessment will help to mold NDRN's work plan in the coming years.

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 satisfies Section 15 of the *Rehabilitation Act* through a National Clearinghouse of Rehabilitation Training materials (NCRTM) using Rehabilitation Training funds. The NCRTM facilitates the sharing of information and resource availability for individuals with disabilities and their families, VR personnel, as well as professionals in the field of VR, relevant public and private agencies, and the public. The NCRTM contains training and TA materials, research, practices supported by promising evidence, and curriculum designed to help individuals with disabilities eligible for VR services, including youth with disabilities, secure competitive integrated employment, as well as enable State VR agency personnel and other professionals in the VR field to manage available resources, improve effective service delivery, and increase the number and quality of employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities.

In FY 2021, the contract ended on April 30, 2021, and a new contract was awarded to New Editions Consulting, Inc. on May 1, 2021. The contract contains a 12-month base period and four option years. In FY 2021, the contractor completed a project management plan to modernize and enhance the NCRTM that was submitted before the deadline. The contractor worked closely with RSA to improve, update, and maintain the RSA Discretionary Grant page on the NCRTM, and ensured that all pre-application PowerPoint presentations and pre-application meeting transcripts exceeded Section 508 accessibility standards and were posted on time. The contractor produced a pre-recorded webinar and organized a live teleconference that focused on the Memorandum of Understanding between RSA and the AbilityOne Commission regarding Randolph-Sheppard opportunities and collaboration between the two agencies. The contractor provided both RSA and AbilityOne TA throughout the entire process by answering questions in a timely and professional manner and troubleshooting technical issues, preparing recording tips, and conducting a dry run with all of the presenters. The contractor ensured that both the recording and teleconference were prepared with the highest standards of accessibility. The pre-recorded webinar

included ASL interpreting, and the teleconference offered ASL interpreting and closed captioning through website links.

In FY 2022, Option Year 1 (May 1, 2022, to April 30, 2023) was exercised. During this period, the contractor began efforts to modernize and enhance the NCRTM website to improve user experience and align it with the 21st Century Integrated Digital Experience Act, Department of Education brand guidelines, and evolving Federal and Departmental-specific security requirements. The contractor worked closely with RSA to update and maintain the RSA Discretionary Grant page on the NCRTM website, ensuring that all pre-application PowerPoint presentations and pre-application meeting transcripts exceeded Section 508 accessibility standards and were posted on time. The contractor produced multiple pre-recorded webinars and organized live teleconferences for several RSA events, ensuring both recordings and teleconferences met the highest standards of accessibility, including ASL interpreting and closed captioning. The contractor conducted various outreach and engagement activities with Federal partners, vocational rehabilitation agencies, and disability-focused organizations to elevate NCRTM's recognition and promote the implementation of Section 15. The contractor continued to build NCRTM content, expanding the breadth and depth of education, training, and gainful employment-related information available to support vocational rehabilitation professionals and individuals with disabilities and their families.

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 several programs to assist and advocate on behalf of individuals with disabilities. RSA administers several of these programs, which include the Client Assistance Program and the Protection and Advocacy of Individual Rights 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 four "internal" CAPs (e.g., those housed within a State VR agency or other agency providing services under the *Rehabilitation Act*) remain.

Table 21 shows data for 57 CAPs in the 50 States, the American Indian consortium, the District of Columbia, and the five U.S. territories. FYs 2021 through 2022 data on the CAPs were collected using the RSA-227 instrument. Over this two-year period, the number of information and referral services increased slightly from 15,306 in FY 2021 to 15,600 in FY 2022. The percentage of extensive services provided involving applicants for or recipients of services from the VR program remained relatively steady from FYs 2021 through 2022 (varying from 89 percent to 90 percent, respectively). The average

number of closed cases in FYs 2021 through 2022 was 2,357 per year. The percentage of closed cases resolved by explaining controlling policies is 39 percent for FY 2021 and for FY 2022. On average across both years, 14 percent of closed cases were resolved by reestablishing communication between the individuals and other parties. The percentage of cases resolved in the individual's favor is 78 percent for FY 2021, with a marginal increase to 79 percent in FY 2022.

Table 21. Output Measures by Number and Percentage for Client Assistance Program Services and Closed Cases: FYs 2021-2022

Output measures	2021	2022
Number of information and referral requests	15,306	15,600
Number of extensive services provided to individuals	3,009	2,932
Percentage of extensive services provided involving applicants for or recipients of services from the VR program	89%	90%
Percentage of all case issues related to the VR process or delivery of VR services	76%	85%
Total number of cases closed by CAP grantees	2,458	2,256
Percentage of closed cases resolved by explaining controlling policies	39%	39%
Percentage of closed cases resolved by developing or implementing an IPE	20%	18%
Percentage of closed cases resolved by reestablishing communication between the individuals and other parties	15%	13%
Percentage of closed cases resolved in the individual's favor	78%	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 2021-2022.

Examples of CAP activities in FYs 2021 through 2022 include the following:

- In Texas, a client sought to advance her employment opportunities by obtaining a graduate degree and contacted the VR agency for assistance. She was informed that the VR agency only helps with trade school or the last 30 hours of a bachelor's degree. The client contacted CAP for assistance. CAP shared information with the client regarding the VR agency's services, the application process, eligibility, assessments, and the IPE. CAP attended meetings with the client advocating that the VR agency follow Federal guidelines in completing the application, determining eligibility, and planning services. Ultimately, the VR agency agreed to support the client's goal to become a professor by assisting with tuition, books, and transportation.

- In New Jersey, CAP intervened on behalf of a 28-year-old client diagnosed with a hearing impairment. The client contacted CAP and reported experiencing significant difficulties accessing various VR services, including communication technology, vocational training, and supported employment services. CAP investigated these concerns by reviewing documentation and attending meetings with the client at the VR agency. Despite CAP's advocacy, the VR agency delayed providing appropriate services. Based on these delays, CAP represented the client at an administrative review. As a result of the administrative review, the VR agency agreed to provide the client with a specialized assessment to determine technological communication needs and sponsor the client to attend a computer training course. The VR agency also agreed to assist the client with job search services after she completed computer training.
- In New Mexico, CAP intervened on behalf of a 52-year-old client who is hard of hearing and has a mental illness. The client contacted CAP because she was having trouble getting the VR agency to complete her IPE and having ongoing issues with her job developer. The CAP advocate worked with the client and the VR agency to meet all the requirements to finalize her IPE. The client and the VR agency discussed best practices to improve communication with her VR counselor and job developer. As a result of the CAP's work, the client obtained a new job developer and is in the process of applying for employment that best suits her skill sets.

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*. 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 (\$18,150,000 FY 2021 and \$19,150,000 in FY 2022) 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 not less than \$50,000 to the eligible system established under the *Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act of 2000* 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 a minimum of \$50,000 each. RSA 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 22 shows PAIR program data for FYs 2021 and 2022. During the period covered by this report, the number of individuals represented by PAIR programs increased from 8,771 individuals in FY 2021 to 9,022 individuals in FY 2022. From FY 2021 through FY 2022, the number of requests for information or referral to which PAIR programs responded increased from 22,503 to 22,605.

Of the cases the PAIR programs handled in FY 2021, the greatest percentage of specified issues involved housing (17 percent), employment (17 percent), and health care (14 percent). This trend varied only slightly in FY 2022. Of the cases PAIR programs handled that year, the greatest percentage of specified issues involved education (18 percent), housing (18 percent), and employment (17 percent). In both FY 2021 and FY 2022, the number and percentage of PAIR programs that reported that their activities resulted in changes in policies and practices or litigation benefiting individuals with disabilities was 55 of the 57 total programs, representing 96 percent of the programs.

Table 22. 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 2021-2022

	2021 ^a	2022
Number of individuals represented	8,771	9,022
Number of requests for information or referral	22,503	22,605
Percentage of issues involving education	-	18%
Percentage of issues involving health care	14%	-
Percentage of issues involving employment	17%	17%
Percentage of issues involving housing	17%	18%
Percentage of PAIR programs that reported their systemic advocacy activities resulted in changes in policies and practices benefiting individuals with disabilities	96%	96%

^aThe 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, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, RSA, Annual Performance Report for the PAIR Program, FY 2021 and FY 2022.

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

- In FY 2021, Disability Rights Florida’s PAIR staff advocated for accessible COVID-19 testing in several counties throughout Florida. PAIR staff had received complaints from advocates on behalf of individuals with disabilities who could not travel to mobile drive-through COVID-19 testing sites and wait in the long lines to receive testing. PAIR staff advocated for reasonable accommodations for qualified individuals with disabilities so they could participate in COVID-19 community testing by sending demand letters to the organizations who managed COVID-19 testing in each county. The counties who received demand letters engaged with PAIR staff regarding the reasonable accommodation requests and set up accessibility procedures to ensure qualified individuals would have access to COVID-19 testing. One county led the State by setting up a process by which qualified individuals could be tested for COVID-19 in their homes. This led to a decrease in complaints, and PAIR staff monitored the previously engaged counties for compliance with the agreed-upon reasonable accommodations.

- In December 2021, Disability Rights Maryland (DRM), in partnership with the Maryland Suspension Representation Project (MSRP), successfully reversed a zero-tolerance discipline policy in the Prince George's County Public Schools (PGCPS). It appeared that PGCPS was using a zero-tolerance discipline approach and was automatically referring students for extended suspension or expulsion for certain offense types. DRM, through its representation of a PGCPS student with a disability referred for expulsion, found evidence of this zero-tolerance approach in an illegal behavior contract used in the student's expulsion. MSRP, with DRM taking the lead, informed the district of its concerns regarding the district's zero-tolerance approach to discipline and use of the illegal behavior contract. MSRP included client summaries in the letter to illustrate its concerns and demanded that PGCPS make certain reforms. As a result, PGCPS agreed to, among other things: conduct trainings for all staff to inform them that behavior contracts are not to be used and remind them that zero tolerance is not practiced in PGCPS; send a memorandum to all staff reminding them that disciplinary decisions must be made on an individualized, fact specific basis; and add MSRP and DRM to the Community Resources List that is provided to students who are suspended.
- Disability Rights Pennsylvania participates in the Amtrak Disability Services/Accessibility Workgroup, a national workgroup organized by Amtrak to monitor its *Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)* accessibility improvements to its stations, rail cars, and equipment. Amtrak provides updated information to the workgroup about its efforts to come into compliance with the *ADA*. To date, 103 of 387 train stations have been made fully accessible and an additional 69 have been made accessible except for the platforms. In 2022, Amtrak completed all accessibility modifications in the Middletown Station. Of the remaining Pennsylvania stations, Amtrak reported that accessibility renovations to the Ardmore Station are expected to be completed in 2023, accessibility renovations to the North Philadelphia and Coatesville Stations are expected to be completed in 2025, and that the platform at the Johnstown station is expected to be made accessible in 2023. In addition to this work done in 2022, the workgroup voiced its concerns about the narrow aisle design of the Intercity train cars that Amtrak planned to purchase. This led Amtrak to make numerous adjustments to the design, including increasing the number of accessible seats on each trainset.

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 numerous 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. ED provides a listing and the corresponding websites here:

NATIONAL COUNCIL ON DISABILITY

Authorized under Section 400 of the *Rehabilitation Act*

An Independent Federal Agency

<https://www.ncd.gov/>

EMPLOYMENT OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Authorized under Section 501 of the *Rehabilitation Act*

Managed by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission

<https://www.eeoc.gov/overview>

ARCHITECTURAL AND TRANSPORTATION BARRIERS COMPLIANCE BOARD

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

<https://www.access-board.gov/>

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

<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.

<https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/index.html>

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

<https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocio/index.html>

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

<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

<https://acl.gov/programs/aging-and-disability-networks/centers-independent-living>

REFERENCES

- U.S. Department of Education, Department of Education Budget Tables (FYs 2021 through 2022)
<https://www2.ed.gov/about/overview/budget/tables.html>
- U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, Rehabilitation Services Administration (2021-2022), *Rehabilitation Act of 1973*, as amended
<https://rsa.ed.gov/sites/default/files/downloads/rehabilitation-act-of-1973-amended-by-wioa.pdf>
- U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, Rehabilitation Services Administration, Case Service Report (RSA-911), FYs 2021 through 2022 and PYs 2020 through 2021
<https://rsa.ed.gov/sites/default/files/subregulatory/pd-19-03.pdf>
- 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, G5 grant management system, FYs 2021 through 2022
- U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, Rehabilitation Services Administration, Payback Information Management System, FYs 2021 through 2022
- U.S. Department of Education, G5 grant management system, FYs 2021-2022
- U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, Rehabilitation Services Administration, Annual Client Assistance Program Report (RSA-227), FYs 2021 through 2022
<https://rsa.ed.gov/data/view-submission-rsa-227>
- U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, Rehabilitation Services Administration, Annual Performance Report for the Protection and Advocacy for Individual Rights Program, FYs 2021 through 2022
<https://rsa.ed.gov/data/view-submission-rsa-509>
- U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, *WIOA Statewide Annual Performance Report (ETA-9169)* PYs 2020 through 2021
<https://rsa.ed.gov/wioa-resources/wioa-annual-reports>

The U.S. Department of Education's mission is
to promote student achievement and preparation for
global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence
and ensuring equal access.
<https://www.ed.gov>