

Nebraska Commission for the Blind & Visually Impaired
Public Meeting
Saturday, June 22, 2013; 10:00 A.M.
4600 Valley Road, Lincoln NE
Room 4A, Fourth Floor

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Call to order. Welcome and introductions. Announcement concerning public comment periods, meeting agendas, open meeting act, proof of publication, recordings, lunch arrangements & other logistics.

Julie Johnson, Chairman of the Board of Commissioners, called the meeting to order at 9:07 a.m. and she welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Commissioners present: Julie Johnson, Chairperson, York; Mike Hansen, Designee of the National Federation of the Blind of Nebraska, Lincoln; Jim Jirak, Vice Chairperson, Designee of the American Council of the Blind of Nebraska, Omaha; Nancy Oltman, Hastings; Darrell Walla, Omaha.

Commission staff present, all from Lincoln: Dr. Pearl Van Zandt, Executive Director; Kathy Stephens, Administrative Assistant; Carlos Serván, Deputy Director VR; Bob Deaton, Deputy Director IL; Connie Daly, Lincoln District Supervisor; Conchita Hernandez, VR Counselor.

Public Present: Hubert Paulson, meeting recorder; Dan Bird, Omaha Driver; Kenda Slavin, Mark Bulger, Alex Castillo, Tony Olivero, Brad Loos, Barbara Loos, Paulette Monthei, Barbara Epworth, Carol Gibilisco, Glennie Weiland and Norm (Omaha driver).

It was noted that public comments are always welcome regarding the agenda items. Hubert Paulson recorded the meeting and the recordings are available on the website.

A copy of the Nebraska Open Meeting Act was available, in both print and Braille format. The Notice of the Meeting was published in the Lincoln Journal Star, the State Government Calendar, NCBVI Website, NFB Newsline® and Radio Talking Book. The Notice was also sent to ACB and NFB, the NCBVI List Serve

Approval of May 4 Minutes

Commissioner Jirak moved to approve the Minutes of the May 4, 2013 Commission Meeting. Commissioner Walla seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken and it was unanimous in favor of the motion.

Chairperson Johnson noted that the Minutes are located on the NCBVI website for review.

Discuss & Act on State Plan

Director Van Zandt reported that the Commission Board discussed the State Plan at the May 2013 Commission Board meeting and they waited on the portion where they needed to get some results from the Federal Standards and Indicators before goals could be set.

Director Van Zandt noted that the first 20 pages of the State Plan are called the pre-print. This is where boxes are checked indicating the things the Commission does and does not do. This part is basically taken from the Rehab Act. The Attachments begin on page 21. Director Van Zandt discussed each of the Attachments. The final approved State Plan 2014 will be posted on the NCBVI Website.

Attachment 4.2(c) Input of State Rehabilitation Council

This agency is an independent commission. The Commission Board serves the SRC role.

Attachment 4.7(b)(3) Request for Waiver of Statewideness

NCBVI is not requesting a waiver of statewideness.

Attachment 4.8(b)(1) Cooperative Agreements with Agencies Not Carrying Out Activities Under the Statewide Workforce Investment System

Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (NCBVI) works across the state of Nebraska to establish interagency cooperation with, and utilization of the services of all relevant entities, including entities which are not within the Workforce Investment System. NCBVI administrative personnel communicate and cooperate with representatives of the statewide or corporate level of such entities. Counseling and other staff of our District and area rehabilitation offices do so in their areas. There are no State Use Contracting programs in Nebraska.

In each office, NCBVI staff members identify and network with a wide range of agencies in both the public and the private sectors. Doing so serves multiple purposes. We become well-versed in the resources and opportunities available to blind consumers across Nebraska. We are able to make our services known to those same entities, to educate them about the tremendous resource available to them from blind and visually impaired community members. In some cases, NCBVI Counselors participate with local Chambers of Commerce, Lions Clubs, Rotary Clubs, Commissions or Area Agencies on Aging, Community Networking Councils, and related organizations.

The United States Rural Development Agency (RDA) administers programs related to self-employment, business opportunities, housing, and other community economic development activities. NCBVI collaborates by providing information to counseling staff about the RDA programs which might benefit their clients. We also provide information to RDA representatives about our work to assist blind and visually impaired Nebraskans to access funds available for developing self-employment and business opportunities.

We are working to assure that all the programs of the RDA in Nebraska are made available to our clients. We also are available to provide training about NCBVI services,

and about blindness, to RDA personnel. With this training they are able to provide reciprocal referrals to persons participating in their programs who might be eligible for services from NCBVI.

NCBVI offices are located in six locations; NCBVI staff work in all communities across the State of Nebraska. We go to where the referrals and clients live, to provide the rehabilitation services specific to each individual. In each area and statewide, we work with the local, state, and regional resources available. These include, but are not limited to small business, women's and minority business initiatives, community commercial, recreational and educational programs, religious entities (churches, synagogues, mosques), and whatever private or public organizations are available and relevant to helping blind Nebraskans achieve their employment goals.

The State Use Contracting program is not applicable to NCBVI.

Attachment 4.8(b)(2) Coordination with Education Officials

Consistent with requirements of the Workforce Investment Act, NCBVI coordinates with entities within the WIA system, including teachers of the visually impaired and education officials, to facilitate the transition of students with disabilities from school to the vocational rehabilitation service system. We have developed a number of strategies to address the seamless transition from school to work for blind students. The most formal is a Cooperative Agreement, signed and updated periodically.

The agreement delineates the responsibilities of the Commission (NCBVI), the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) Special Populations Division, the Nebraska Center for the Education of Children who are Blind or Visually Impaired (NCECBVI), and school districts and Educational Service Units across Nebraska. The purpose is to coordinate and promote the cooperation of the programs and services available to students who are blind, deaf-blind and visually impaired during the transition process.

NDE is responsible for assuring that a free, appropriate public education, in accordance with federal and state laws, rules and regulations, to children with disabilities from date of diagnosis to age 21 or graduation. Local school districts and Educational Service Units operate under the structure of NDE and are responsible to fund the education of children with disabilities who are in that particular district. This may include direct provision of educational services in the district itself or at the NCECBVI.

In the past, Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (NCBVI) coordinated a statewide Transition Team for Students who are Blind, Deaf-Blind or Visually Impaired. The Team was comprised of NCBVI Counselors, Deputy Director for Vocational Rehabilitation Services, and NCBVI Executive Director; the Executive Director of the Nebraska Foundation for Blind Children; Director of the Nebraska Center for the Education of Children who are Blind or Visually Impaired (NCECBVI); WinAHEAD (Western Iowa and Nebraska Association on Higher Education and Disabilities); the Parent Training Institute (PTI); teachers for the visually impaired (TVIs); representatives from Nebraska Department of Education, Deaf-Blind Project and other entities for low incidence populations and special education.

The Team was established to promote and develop positive working relationships to assure that children with visual impairments, including multiple disabilities, are provided the best opportunities for education and for transition into adulthood and the world of

work. A final work product of the Team is now provided to parents, educators, and other partners throughout the State of Nebraska. The tool, *Opening Doors: A Transition Guide*, provides a continuum of transitional services, recommended practices protocol for all the entities involved, descriptions and prescribed roles of each entity for children in different age groupings (from birth to adulthood). Training has been provided in various settings and will continue to occur as needed.

Opening Doors was developed using a facilitated process involving many stakeholders, including service providers, parents, and consumers. It serves to inform all involved about other components of the system, allow stakeholders to better understand each other, and to establish positive working relationships amongst the individuals and entities involved; including outreach to and referral of students with disabilities who are eligible for rehabilitation services.

Staff members of our agency collaborate with educators, parents, and other service providers on an ongoing basis, to assure that children who are blind and have additional disabilities, will receive high quality education and rehabilitation services in all parts of Nebraska. The NCBVI Executive Director is a member of the State of Nebraska Board of Education's Transition Advisory Committee. We collaborate with the Deaf-Blind Project, Parent Training Institute, WinAHEAD, Centers for Independent Living across the state, the Nebraska Center for the Education of Children who are Blind or Visually Impaired, and other entities providing services for children and youth in transition. Particularly in the Omaha and Lincoln School Districts, which have the highest populations and the most students experiencing vision impairments, NCBVI Counselors are systematic in outreach efforts to Teachers of the Visually Impaired. We meet with them in groups, present at TVI training events, and communicate individually with the educators.

NCBVI counselors attend Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings at school districts throughout the State of Nebraska when appropriate. NCBVI counselors initiate the process of developing Individualized Plans for Employment (IPE) when the young student and the IEP Team exhibit interest in participating in our group programs for blind youth. This occurs at least by age 16 and sometimes by age 14, as established by IDEA and the Rehabilitation Act. For Transition aged blind students who have not participated in NCBVI's transition programs, new policies have been written to ensure that the IPE is written before the student graduates or ages out of educational services. The Counselor attending IEP meetings will initiate the process for application of vocational rehabilitation services and development of the IPE well before the student leaves the school setting.

During the NCBVI 2013 Annual State Staff Meeting, a training session was provided to all field counselors on the IEP process. The presenter was from Nebraska Department of Education/Special Populations. She provided specific training on the role of our vocational rehabilitation counselors in the IEP process and implementation; working with educators, families, and students in the public school system. Time was allowed for discussion and questions. The presenter encouraged counselors to communicate with her department and educators statewide as we work with school age persons in Nebraska.

Ongoing communication amongst NCBVI, educators, parents, and students, are an important strength to the overall transition efforts in Nebraska. NCBVI counselors and administrators will continue a process of educating educators and service providers about the services we provide to children who are blind.

Students of NCECBVI and those attending school in their local school districts also have the opportunity to participate in specialized NCBVI programs for children and youth. We invite educators to also attend and observe our programs for students. NCBVI youth programs are offered each year. The impact of the events is clear in terms of self-confidence, blindness skills, and elevated expectations. We can see qualitatively that many if not most adults who have attended such programs in previous years, are active, competent members of the workforce and their communities. NCBVI has developed a data management system which will enable us to track the results quantitatively as well, in future years.

Project Independence (PI) is a five day summer program for pre-transition age students. PI provides counseling on attitudes about blindness, self-esteem building, recreational and social experiences. It enables students to develop and to utilize relevant skills in conjunction with the discussions and activities. The opportunity to be with other blind and visually impaired children is a vital factor to the success of the program participants.

Winnerfest retreats are offered once or twice per school year, from Thursday evening through Saturday noon. Transition aged students from across the state participate in the opportunity for fellowship with blind and visually impaired peers. The curriculum focuses on personal achievement, goal setting, and communication skills. Through videos, role play activities and group discussion, young people explore a variety of topics relative to their everyday lives and to their career aspirations. Participants have the opportunity to learn from and with each other about how to be competent and successful in all aspects of their lives.

WAGES (Work and Gain Experience in the Summer) is a summer employment program for students as they approach high school graduation. WAGES provides students with work experience, peer interaction, and the opportunity to enhance pre-vocational and independent living skills. Participants are trained in job-readiness skills, perform actual jobs with businesses in the community, and practice the behaviors needed to maintain employment. WAGES also enhances entities within the workforce system, particularly those participating employers who learn the value of employees who are blind or visually impaired.

NCBVI staff members work with local Workforce Investment Boards and Youth Councils to inform them of the program and to develop the job opportunities for the young blind participants.

Attachment 4.8(b)(3) Cooperative Agreements with Private Nonprofit Organizations

NCBVI rehabilitation counselors actively network in their geographic areas, to be familiar with resources and service providers which might be appropriate for the needs of their clients over time. The counselors also educate community resources about services provided by the Commission. Thus, if a private non-profit vocational rehabilitation service provider happens to have a customer who is blind or visually impaired, it will be possible for us to work cooperatively to provide the services needed by that individual.

The primary focus in the workforce development environment is to increase the level of awareness and cooperative efforts with private non-profit organizations. NCBVI is very active in communicating our mission to such entities and in learning about what resources are available in communities around the State of Nebraska. The existence and continued strengthening of reciprocal knowledge and understanding of each other's scope of service will enable all parties to quickly access appropriate resources for individuals whom we serve.

Attachment 4.8(b)(4) Arrangements and Cooperative Agreements for the Provision of Supported Employment Services

Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (NCBVI) enters into cooperative agreements with other state agencies and providers of supported employment when specific clients are identified as candidates for those services. The agreements are based on a model utilized for the purpose of providing supported employment, including the assurance of long term services. The NCBVI Deputy Director for Independent Living has lead responsibility for Supported Employment. He is the point of contact for the Nebraska Department of Human Services-Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD). NCBVI Field Supervisors and Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors typically identify providers of supported employment services and make the necessary contractual arrangements.

Each blind and visually impaired individual with a developmental disability has a case service coordinator employed by the Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD). The case service coordinator is responsible for developing an Individualized Program Plan (IPP) for mutual clients served by NCBVI and DDD. When supported employment services are involved, the IPP includes financial support provided by NCBVI and DDD. DDD pays for hourly rates charged by the supported employment service provider; NCBVI provides incentive payments at specific intervals (start of job search, start of employment, 30 days following the start of employment, stabilization, and 90, 180, and 270 days following stabilization). This arrangement is in accordance with the "milestones" model used by the Nebraska general rehabilitation agency to serve clients shared with DDD.

The NCBVI Deputy Director for Independent Living Services described the milestone model as applicable to NCBVI clients at a statewide gathering of 30 local field office supervisors coordinated by DDD in November 2012. The NCBVI Lincoln district supervisor and vocational rehabilitation counselors and the NCBVI Deputy Director for

Independent Living Services also met with DDD supervisors and case service coordinators from various local field offices in southeastern Nebraska in December 2012, and efforts will be made to establish closer working relationships with DDD local field offices in other parts of the state. One supported employment case has been closed successfully since the milestones model was initiated. There are two active supported employment cases currently being served in the Omaha district using the milestones model. Another case shows the potential for developing into a supported employment case using the milestone approach in the coming year. As closer relationships are established with DDD, more referrals are anticipated.

NCBVI collaborated with the Department of Education, Special Education and Vocational Rehabilitation (NE-G) in the development of policies and procedures more clearly delineating the responsibilities of the different agencies and institutions involved and the scope and nature of services available to younger persons with disabilities in transition from school. The Collaborative Agreement between NCBVI, Department of Education - Special Populations, and the Nebraska Center for the Education of Children who are Blind or Visually Impaired, applies to persons who are likely to require supported employment or extended services in the future, as well as those students without this need.

Attachment 4.10 Comprehensive System of Personnel Development

NCBVI staffing complement totals forty-five point seven five (45.75) FTEs; forty-five full-time staff persons and one permanent part-time. Ten are vocational rehabilitation (VR) counselors; three Field supervisors, who carry a VR caseload and one Center supervisor; thirteen are rehabilitation teachers (orientation counselors); three are program specialists in technology, one in older blind services, one in business enterprises; five positions are vocational rehabilitation technicians.

There are also nine administrative/business personnel (8.75 FTE).

Administrative/business includes the executive director, two deputy directors, one business manager, one technology manager, one personnel officer, an administrative assistant, a staff assistant and a part-time accounting clerk.

The Nebraska Business Enterprise (NBE) program consists of a Team: one Program Specialist (FT), one Accounting Clerk (PT), and part of the time of the VR Deputy Director and two people in the Business Office. These positions are all included in the total agency staffing, mentioned above.

All NCBVI Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors do meet the state standard by having achieved the status of Certified Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor for the Blind (CVRCB). Sixteen staff members hold graduate degrees of a Masters or higher, including one Ph.D. and one J.D.

Staffing Levels and Projections

We project the total number of persons served by vocational rehabilitation (all statuses, from applicant through full services) during FY 2014 to total 560. The ratio of applicants and eligible individuals served to personnel will be 12.24 to 1. The current staffing level does enable NCBVI to provide core services to customers. Generally, the number of individuals served each year does not change a great deal.

When numbers of referrals increase, we work to find ways to effectively streamline our processes to enable us to continue meeting customer needs. Budgetary considerations and state regulations which limit personnel per agency prevent us from changing our staffing to any great extent. We do, of course, monitor services to assure that all core services are provided and that all active Individualized Plans for Employment are carried out in full. Policy and procedures are in place to implement Order of Selection should it ever be imminent. As stated, though, to date we are able to manage the number of personnel who will be needed by the Commission to provide vocational rehabilitation services to all eligible individuals.

During the next five years, we project that the number of individuals served including those with significant disabilities, will neither increase nor decrease significantly from the current level. We project vacancies during the next five years, based on potential retirement age and age of the individual, as follows: one (1) Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor, one (1) Orientation Counselor, and one (1) Voc Rehab Technician (support staff). Some who could retire have indicated that they do not plan to retire anytime soon, so the projections might not occur. It is likely that after six years, the Executive Director, one (1) Deputy Director, and the Business Manager will retire; that information will be reassessed and added in next year's State Plan.

The plan is to hire new persons to replace any who retire. Other positions will be considered at the time with overall needs. With this small number involved, the process will be manageable without major effort. When any vacancy occurs, we assess client needs statewide, to determine whether to change the staffing patterns. We may decide to move any vacant position to a different location in the State or to put the resources toward a different position.

There are no institutions of higher education in Nebraska that are preparing vocational rehabilitation professionals. The State law mandating standards for Certified Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor for the Blind (CVRCB) enables NCBVI to hire, train and maintain qualified staff. This is especially important because there is no Master's degree program in Rehabilitation Counseling within Nebraska. It is extremely rare that our job candidates have a CRC, and rarely do applicants have a Master's Degree in Rehabilitation Counseling specifically. There are no institutions of higher education in Nebraska receiving funds under Title III of the Rehabilitation Act, to prepare vocational rehabilitation professionals in the disciplines designated in the Act [29 usc 771(b)(1)(B)].

Currently, there are no vacancies for pre-existing vocational rehabilitation personnel at Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired. When vacancies occur within our VR positions, NCBVI recruits through local and statewide newspapers, State of Nebraska Personnel services, consumer organizations of blind persons, University graduate programs beyond our immediate geographic area, and related list-serves.

There are however, some such graduate programs in the Midwest. NCBVI has contacted the university placement offices of nine institutions. All have indicated that they will post any job openings that we transmit to them. During 2014, we will begin to do this on a routine basis. The goal will be to recruit recent graduates to apply for open positions with NCBVI in the future.

The qualifications to be a certified vocational rehabilitation counselor for the blind in Nebraska are: (a) to have a bachelor's degree from an appropriate educational program

approved by the NCBVI Executive Director; (b) to have completed six hundred (600) hours of immersion training under sleep shades (for persons with any functional vision) at the Nebraska Center for the Blind (operated by NCBVI); and (c) to have completed appropriate continued education training credits as approved by the NCBVI Executive Director.

Non-Discriminatory Plan

NCBVI always strives to be non-discriminatory in hiring, retention, and promotion of staff from minority backgrounds and with disabilities. To recruit qualified personnel including those from minority backgrounds and those with disabilities, NCBVI follows federal Affirmative Action guidelines. We recruit via national consumer groups of blind individuals. To prepare and retain all personnel, including those from minority backgrounds and those with disabilities, the initial training and the ongoing training plan are individualized according to each person's specific training needs and also encompasses training issues that will maximize the agency's effectiveness and efficiency.

Staff Development

Supervisors have provided data regarding their subordinates' education, including degrees held. As mentioned above, the CVRCB Certification requirement is a Bachelor's degree approved by the Executive Director, and 600 hours of intensive training at the NCBVI Nebraska Center for the Blind. We encourage VR Counselors to pursue additional academic work. NCBVI has six offices across the State of Nebraska. Some of these locales are many hours away from colleges or universities with graduate programs relevant to this endeavor. Distance learning is an option for some parts of a degree program, but may not fulfill all requirements for such a program.

Many activities are conducted in the team setting. This enables mentoring of staff less experienced by those with more expertise in a particular area. Individual staff members may also schedule time with others to expand their own knowledge, skills and experience in areas needing to be strengthened.

One example that is proving to be highly productive is training in Motivational Interviewing (MI). With support from TACE, as well as agency funds, work units have each scheduled sessions with MI trainers, to develop, expand and fine tune the MI skills of NCBVI Counselors. The training will continue in 2014.

NCBVI coordinates efforts with institutions of higher education, organized consumer groups and professional associations to recruit, prepare, and retain qualified personnel, including personnel from minority backgrounds, and personnel who are individuals with disabilities. We work to ensure that all personnel are adequately trained and prepared to meet standards that are based on the highest requirements in the State and to become certified in accordance with State Law. NCBVI also works to ensure the availability of personnel internally (or from external resources) who are, to the maximum extent feasible, trained to communicate in the native language or mode of communication of an applicant or eligible individual. Ongoing staff development activities will ensure that all NCBVI personnel receive appropriate and adequate training.

Funds from several segments of the NCBVI budget are committed to developing personnel, including funding training from the Nebraska Center for the Blind, as well as tuition and related expenses for expanding the capacities of NCBVI staff. The In-Service Training Grant assists in accomplishing CSPD Objectives. It will be utilized to increase the skills and competencies of all staff, particularly in areas such as job development and job placement that directly relate to goals and priorities of the Workforce Investment Act and other issues related to delivery of vocational rehabilitation services in general, and for the blind, in particular.

Ongoing training is made available to all staff on relevant and timely topics. Retaining qualified personnel is particularly important because of the investment we make with the intensive Center Training as well as our willingness to reimburse tuition for course work.

The long-range plan for ongoing development of staff is based upon needs identified by our annual processes for comprehensive statewide needs assessment. The plan is updated and kept current with ideas or issues identified from ongoing client satisfaction surveys, employee requests for additional training on specific topics, analyses of agency performance on the RSA Standards and Indicators, and internal data collection from the NCBVI data management system. It is also a result of priorities established by the Workforce Investment Act and the 1998 Amendments to the Rehabilitation Act.

Personnel to Address Individual Communication Needs

NCBVI has several employees across the State of Nebraska with bilingual skills in English and Spanish. We contract as needed to obtain services from individuals who are able to communicate in the native language of applicants or clients who have limited English speaking ability or in appropriate modes of communication. Contracts have included, but are not limited to American Sign Language, including Tactile Signing for Deaf-Blind individuals, Spanish, French, Turkish, Arabic, Vietnamese, Burmese, Karen, Swahili and others according to the needs of applicants and eligible individuals.

Coordination of Personnel Development Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act

NCBVI coordinates with the Comprehensive System of Personnel Development under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in several ways. NCBVI and a team of educators and other stakeholders established a Protocol for educators and NCBVI counselors, for providing high quality services to blind and visually impaired children and youth in Nebraska. The handbook is titled Opening Doors: A Transition Guide. This tool serves as a vehicle for educating parents and families, service providers, educators, and others about the best way for children from birth through transition age, to obtain the education and rehabilitation services that will move them into adulthood successfully.

NCBVI provides information to educators and to VR personnel about training opportunities relevant to personnel development in the fields of both education and vocational rehabilitation. A series of personnel training sessions relating to the handbook were held in a coordinated effort between NCBVI and personnel covered by IDEA. In FFY 2014, NCBVI Counselors will continue to provide the tool, and instructions as needed, statewide to educators, parents, and other persons involved with educating blind and visually impaired school students within Nebraska.

Additional joint personnel development efforts will be held when specific issues of mutual concern are identified. For example, teachers of blind children from the public school system provide presentations to NCBVI at Staff Meetings. At the NCBVI Annual State Staff Meeting in 2013, we arranged for a speaker from Nebraska Department of Education/Special Populations to give a presentation on the IEP process and the role of VR Counselors in that process, working with educators, families and students.

NCBVI staff members provide presentations to training session of the school system, university and college classes, and other opportunities which arise. We will continue to explore ways to assure success in education and quality employment. One avenue will be collaborating with the WinAHEAD organization (Western Iowa and Nebraska Association on Higher Education and Disabilities). On an ongoing basis, the primary emphasis will be individual communication between NCBVI counselors and parents, teachers and others in the education system.

Attachment 4.11(a) Statewide Assessment

Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (NCBVI) is the Designated State Agency responsible under State law for operating the vocational rehabilitation program for the blind in Nebraska. A governing board of persons who are blind or visually impaired (appointed by the Governor of the State of Nebraska) serves to assure the agency is consumer-controlled. NCBVI undertakes the functions set forth in section 105(c)(4) of the Act, to review and analyze the effectiveness of services and consumer satisfaction with services provided by the Commission, vocational rehabilitation services provided by other states, public and private entities, and employment outcomes achieved by eligible individuals receiving vocational rehabilitation services from NCBVI, to assure high quality, career track employment outcomes, with health and other employment benefits, wages comparable to state wages for non-disabled persons, and equity for persons of minority status.

During FFY 2013, we established a contract for a formal Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment. We are working with the National Research and Training Center on Blindness and Low Vision (NRTC), Mississippi State University Research Unit. The assessment includes surveys of blind clients who were closed either in status 26 or 28, members of NCBVI staff, and employers who have had experience with NCBVI staff and clients. Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with other key informants. In addition, existing data from various sources will be analyzed, such as the RSA-911 data for NCBVI, American Community Survey data, and Bureau of Labor Statistics labor and economic forecasts. Data gathering began in March 2013 and continues through August 2013. Analysis will be conducted primarily during the final quarter of Fiscal year 2013. The report will be drafted, reviewed and finalized during the first three months of FFY 2014.

Throughout the rest of FFY 2014, the agency will work to understand and assess the study's results. Implications for practice and policy will be considered. Steps will be taken to move forward on the recommendations of the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment.

We also will work with the TACE Center of Missouri, looking forward to develop a three or five year plan to focus on assessing and addressing unmet needs, especially as they may relate to people with the most significant disabilities, transition, minorities,

supported employment, unserved and underserved populations, and individuals with disabilities who are served through other components of the statewide workforce investment system.

Throughout each year, NCBVI conducts comprehensive, statewide assessments on an ongoing basis in a number of different formats and settings. Throughout each year, NCBVI holds public forums to elicit opinions and comments from consumers regarding the services currently being provided and the needs of consumers that are not being addressed. In some cases, the sessions are conducted jointly with other providers including the general vocational rehabilitation agency, centers for independent living, education, health and human services, etc. Other forums are conducted as a part of our presentations to statewide meetings of consumer or peer support groups of the blind: National Federation of the Blind of Nebraska, American Council of the Blind of Nebraska, Nebraska Association of the Blind, and other more local groups. The NCBVI Board of Commissioners holds quarterly public meetings during which they encourage consumers and interested persons to make comments and suggestions.

Consumers are informed that the current NCBVI State Plan is posted on the website and is otherwise available to anyone requesting a copy in alternate format. The public meetings serve as focus groups to solicit consumer input. The event locations and logistics are scheduled to best elicit input from and ideas about the needs of persons with the most significant disabilities, disabled individuals of minority or ethnic background, areas that may be underserved, and those who may be served by other entities such as the Nebraska Workforce System or other partner entities.

During Federal Fiscal Year 2013, we held or participated in forums in the following Nebraska locations: Omaha, Lincoln, Kearney, Fremont, Beatrice, and North Platte. The consumer-controlled Commission Board handles all functions delegated to a State Rehabilitation Council, with added responsibility for governance in accordance with State Law.

Notes are taken at each forum or meeting to track consumers' ideas. Following such sessions, action is taken to explore ideas to determine what will help to improve services provided by NCBVI and when appropriate and possible, to implement new strategies. Frequently, the same types of comments are made; some of which we may not have any real way to address as a vocational rehabilitation agency. It is very common for individuals at public forums to have questions specific to services, thus generating referrals. We respond by connecting the person with NCBVI staff in their area.

We use assessment tools throughout each year to evaluate service effectiveness. Doing so adds depth to the ongoing statewide needs assessment, as the service evaluations may point to unmet needs which had not been articulated in the more public settings.

Clients of the Nebraska Center for the Blind are invited to participate in a confidential telephone interview three months after completing their Center training. Surveys are conducted by an objective, non-agency person to explore the client's perspectives about various aspects of their training. Results of the surveys are shared with the Center Director and Staff, the NCBVI Executive and Deputy Directors, and the Governing Board. In general, most clients are satisfied or enthusiastically positive with

the training and state that they greatly benefited from it. Many comment that the staff are too busy, but most feel that is part of the nature of the Center. Occasionally, problems are mentioned. When this occurs, the Center Director and the Executive Director follow up on such comments to examine the problems and improve service delivery.

We contract with a neutral external resource to conduct telephone interviews with Vocational Rehabilitation clients at various stages of case service and after closure. The interviews are conducted at status 10, 18, 20, and four months after all closures. The interview results are used in the same way as the interviews following Center training. The comments help to assure quality services, correct any problems not discovered earlier, and to work on continuous improvement. The person surveyed is assured that content of the interview will be confidential and that the results will be used to help evaluate and improve services provided to blind Nebraskans. For current clients, assurance is given that any comments will not impact their service in a negative way; rather, that our desire is to assure that we are meeting their needs.

Another assessment tool is a basic satisfaction survey, mailed to all independent living clients after case closure. The vast majority of respondents say that the services they received were excellent. Some make no comments at all. It is rare that we receive negative responses on these surveys. These surveys are also confidential. If the individual does include their name, and if they have any questions or negative comments, a follow-up contact is made to determine whether it is appropriate for any additional service delivery to address the unmet need. If no name is given, but negative comments are made, we discuss and remind all counseling staff of issues to which they need to be sensitive. Assessments from persons served through the Independent Living (IL) services also help to assure that the ongoing statewide assessment is comprehensive. The IL track sometimes leads to a person applying for Vocational Rehabilitation services; thus assessing IL services is linked to the overall comprehensive statewide assessment.

Attachment 4.11(b) Annual Estimates

The prevalence of visual impairment and blindness has been established based upon causes of blindness and occurrence in various age cohorts. Computing those rates with total population figures for Nebraska, we project that there are approximately 30,386 persons with a severe visual impairment. The basis for services is a functional definition of blindness; thus, the potential target population includes persons who are not legally blind, but who have significant limitations to functions and activities of daily life and vocation due to vision loss. It is also the case that not everyone with legal, or even total, blindness is in need of vocational rehabilitation services and that some individuals who could benefit from services remain in a state of denial of their vision loss or do not want services for other reasons.

The majority of blind and visually impaired people are in the older age ranges: one in twenty persons between ages 65 to 74 has a significant visual impairment; one in ten in the 75 to 84 age range, and 1 in 4 in the 85-plus population. Thus, many needed services are provided through Title VII Chapter 2 funds. As people live longer, healthier lives, there is a trend to continue working longer and retiring later or to retire and then return to full or part time work. Title I Vocational Rehabilitation services are appropriate

for such adults, regardless of their age. NCBVI places an emphasis upon enabling persons of all ages to understand their full range of choices. Neither age, ability to see, nor additional disabilities need to limit the options and life choices open to the individual. Transition services are provided to younger persons while still in school, to facilitate a smooth transition from school to work, despite blindness, visual impairment or multiple disabilities.

The total number of persons served in all Vocational Rehabilitation statuses during fiscal year 2012 was 559. Total number served in all Independent Living statuses for the same time period was 770.

It is not uncommon for persons, even of the traditional working age range, to enter our system requesting only basic assistance or financial support. We have found that with the initial onset of blindness, it is common to limit personal expectations and to seek charitable help or basic independent living skills. As people learn about vision loss, develop non-visual skills, and gain confidence in their own abilities, they are likely to expand their personal expectations and move to the vocational rehabilitation track of service delivery.

The average cost of services for an individual client is computed to be about \$7,500. This portrays an inaccurate image because the program is so highly individualized. Some people require only basic information, marking of appliances, and being set up with ancillary resources such as talking books. Many others require much more, including orientation teaching; guidance and counseling; tuition, books and other expenditures related to achieving their vocational goal; and so on. The increased need for technological aids and devices, particularly computer adaptive software and hardware, has increased the level of case service expenditures for some individuals. We work on an ongoing basis to assure the best possible services, addressing each individual's personal goals and aspirations, while maximizing the efficient appropriation of resources toward that end.

Given the Nebraska Commission's commitment to improving overall services and high quality employment placement, in particular, it is expected that the total number of clients served will remain relatively constant over the next several years.

Based upon previous years, we project that in FY2014 there will be 560 persons served by Title I funds, and up to 30 persons served by Title VI, Part B. NCBVI is not under an Order of Selection. At present, we do not anticipate the need to establish an order of selection unless State or Federal budget shortfall increases in the future and the Commission budget is impacted dramatically. We do have provisions in the NCBVI Rules and Regulations for instituting order of selection if the need arises.

Title I Funds (\$3,834,259) served all eligible individuals with the most significant disabilities (Category 1), all with significant disabilities (Category 2), and all other eligible individuals (Category 3). Individuals served with Title I Funds, in all statuses, totaled 559. Technically, again since we are not in Order of Selection, all persons served were in Category 1. The average cost of services was \$6,859 per person. Our estimate for Title I funds in FFY 2014 is \$4,000,000; serving an estimated 560 clients. The estimated average cost per person is \$7,143.

Title VI funds served 42 clients and totaled \$24,033. The average cost per person served was \$616. For FFY 2014, the grant funds are expected to total \$28,470; average cost per person estimate is \$949.

Attachment 4.11(c)(1) State Goals and Priorities

Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (NCBVI) is an independent, consumer-controlled Commission. As such, it does not have a State Rehabilitation Council. A Board of Commissioners governs NCBVI, the majority of whom must be blind consumers. To date, all Commissioners appointed by the Governor of the State of Nebraska have been individuals who are blind or visually impaired. The Board of Commissioners works together with the agency Executive Director to develop and agree to annual goals and priorities.

The mission of Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (NCBVI) is “Empowering Blind Individuals, Promoting Opportunities, and Building Belief in the Blind.” Our primary priority is to enable persons who are blind and visually impaired, including those who also have multiple disabilities, to achieve their individual goals for competitive employment (including supported employment). Our secondary priority is to enable persons who are blind and visually impaired, including those who also have multiple disabilities, to achieve their individual goals to live independently, and to be full participants in their communities. With both priorities, we work with clients to elevate their personal goals beyond what they might have expected a blind person to be able to achieve. As people learn to understand blindness and learn to utilize the alternative skills of blindness, they develop self-confidence and determination to establish personal goals that embody elevated expectations for themselves and for their future.

NCBVI goals are based on factors identified through analysis of the comprehensive statewide assessments, both the contracted research project and the ongoing public forums, results of federal RSA Monitoring, and the federal standards and indicators.

1. Increase the number and percentage of clients achieving competitive employment outcomes.
2. Increase the rehabilitation rate for transition aged clients achieving competitive employment outcomes.
3. Improve the quality assurance system.

To achieve the goals and priorities of achieving high-quality successful employment for clients, including those of transition age, we are using many approaches. Each situation is individualized, thus the strategies and solutions for each client is unique. This approach is productive in itself. It also helps to model for the individual that throughout life, one can accomplish new things by thinking creatively and having the confidence to try new approaches.

The overall priority of high-quality employment includes the traditional working age client, persons in transition from school to work, persons with multiple disabilities (e.g. Deaf Blind) or other special needs (e.g. Supported Employment candidates). Older applicants or persons who express interest in NCBVI's Independent Living (IL) programs are encouraged to explore vocational rehabilitation in addition to IL services. Clients of all ages are encouraged to examine whether, if not for blindness, he or she

would still be in the workforce. If so, counselors help individuals to understand blindness and to raise personal expectations and aspirations. This process often does lead to employment goals for individuals who otherwise would not have believed it possible to be employed as a blind or visually impaired person.

The system of Standards and Indicators established by RSA is the primary benchmark we use to measure the extent to which our program goals were achieved and as a result, the effectiveness of our program. Additional evaluation processes are described in detail in Attachment 4.11(e)(2).

Supported Employment Goals

The primary goal for our Title VI-B Program is to develop supported employment situations for persons who experience the additional involvement of a developmental disability. When competitive employment without ongoing support is not an option, particularly for individuals with developmental disabilities in addition to blindness, supported employment is explored as an option that may be more conducive for that individual. A system is in place within the Nebraska Health and Human Services System to provide the expertise and resources, including ongoing support, to develop and sustain individualized services.

Each individual with a developmental disability has a case manager service coordinator, employed by the Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD). The case manager is responsible for developing an Individual Program Plan for each client. The Plan normally includes provision for ongoing support from DDD when supported employment is involved. We have generally worked with the client (or supported job coaching) for 90 days after stabilization. We use the milestones system. The client remains in active status for about a year after employment. The arrangements are made on a case-by-case basis and mirror the approach in place between the Nebraska general agency (VR) and DDD.

There are also some persons who could benefit from ongoing support, but who do not have developmental disabilities. For the most part, these individuals have traumatic brain injuries or mental health issues with the onset of disability occurring after age 21. NCBVI works to enhance the potential to achieve employment outcomes in many cases which often require maximizing resources and creativity.

We expected to serve 30 clients with Supported Employment Goals in FY2012. This goal was surpassed; 42 were served.

Title VI-B funds are also utilized for training of clients who are Deaf-Blind or have other multiple disabilities. We have sent a client to the Helen Keller National Center (HKNC) for intensive training, not available in Nebraska. We are seeing more Deaf-Blind individuals who have personal goals to become employed, who qualify for Supported Employment and for whom Supported Employment is indicated. In addition to the actual job coaching and ongoing supports, it is crucial for such individuals to enhance their capabilities for productive lives.

Chairperson Johnson stated that since clients using SE funds would also be a VR client, could NCBVI also use the main funding source for a portion of their needs. Director Van Zandt stated that this is correct. For the specific defined service of SE clients must

be eligible for continuation services from Developmental Disabilities. It is more involved.

Chairperson Johnson noted that there has been a lot of talk lately about the increase (real or perceived) of clients with additional disabilities beyond just blindness including things which would fall into the SE category. Chairperson Johnson asked if there is an increasing trend.

Director Van Zandt noted that last year it was higher than ever before. Some years NCBVI does not even get to 30. There are definitely more people with multiple disabilities, but who is eligible for Development Disabilities services and SE is much narrower. Director Van Zandt noted that this issue would be a good Focus Topic at a future Board meeting. Director Van Zandt noted that at some point there will no longer be a separate amount of funding for SE as it will all be included in the overall grant. NCBVI will still have the same funds; they just will not be separated.

Chairperson Johnson noted that she is looking at the long term view as it relates to SE and the State Plan since NCBVI is getting more clients with multiple disabilities. These clients will most likely need more equipment and job coaching.

Attachment 4.11(c)(3) Order of Selection

This agency is not implementing an Order of Selection.

Attachment 4.11(c)(4) Goals and Plans for Distribution of Title VI, Part B Funds

The primary goal for the Title VI, Part B Supported Employment (SE) program of NCBVI is to develop appropriate individualized SE placements for blind and visually impaired persons with developmental disabilities. It is also the goal of NCBVI's SE program to develop appropriate individualized SE placements for blind and visually impaired persons with significant secondary disabilities including brain injury, mental illness, hearing impairment, or other multiple disabilities occurring after consumers have reached the age of 21.

Each blind and visually impaired individual with a developmental disability has a case service coordinator employed by the Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD). The case service coordinator is responsible for developing an Individualized Program Plan (IPP) for mutual clients served by NCBVI and DDD. When supported employment services are involved, the IPP includes financial support provided by NCBVI and DDD. DDD pays for hourly rates charged by the supported employment service provider; NCBVI provides incentive payments at specific intervals (start of job search, start of employment, 30 days following the start of employment, stabilization, and 90, 180, and 270 days following stabilization). This arrangement is in accordance with the "milestones" model used by the Nebraska general rehabilitation agency to serve clients shared with DDD.

The NCBVI Deputy Director for Independent Living Services described the milestone model as applicable to NCBVI clients at a statewide gathering of 30 local field office supervisors coordinated by DDD in November 2012. The NCBVI Lincoln district supervisor and vocational rehabilitation counselors and the NCBVI Deputy Director for Independent Living Services also met with DDD supervisors and case service coordinators from various local field offices in southeastern Nebraska in December

2012, and efforts will be made to establish closer working relationships with DDD local field offices in other parts of the state. One supported employment case has been closed successfully since the milestones model was initiated. There are currently two active supported employment cases using the milestones model, and at least one more is expected within the next few months. As closer relationships are established with DDD, more referrals are anticipated.

Some blind and visually impaired persons with non-developmental disabilities, primarily those with traumatic brain injuries, mental health issues, or other significant disabilities occurring after age 21 might benefit from supported employment services; however, state funding for support extending beyond eighteen (18) months to such persons is not available in Nebraska. In such cases, the Deputy Director of Independent Living Services, Supported Employment Administrator, works with the NCBVI Counselor involved to identify possible resources for the ongoing support (i.e., PASS plans, natural supports, personal resources). Continued training regarding Supported Employment services is provided to NCBVI counselors, statewide.

The total amount of Title VI, Part B funds projected for FY 2014 is expected to be \$28,470 due to Sequestration; down from \$30,000, which it had been for many years. Our ability to serve more SE clients is limited. We work to assure efficiency so that the limited funding will be as effective as possible. As appropriate, additional funding will be available from Title I funds. SE services provided to approximately 30 clients are expected in FY 2014.

Overall, NCBVI Management staff will work to implement creative strategies to most effectively utilize Title VI, Part B funds to maximize the benefit for those individuals in the program's target population. For example, Project SEARCH is a joint effort between Voc Rehab (NE-G) and NCBVI, along with school districts, hospitals and other businesses in several communities. Project SEARCH is not specifically supported employment, but it is designed to benefit people with developmental disabilities in transition, some of whom will be eligible for SE services.

Additional Project SEARCH programs were added during 2012 and 2013. These partnerships between NCBVI, Voc Rehab, schools and businesses are expanding. New projects include a major hotel and hospitals. Outreach to transition aged persons with multiple disabilities will enable us to identify youth who are appropriate for this opportunity and to provide the vocational preparation and experience that will serve them well into adulthood.

Attachment 4.11(d) State's Strategies

METHODS TO EXPAND AND IMPROVE SERVICES

To expand services to individuals who are blind, NCBVI staff members travel to all parts of the state. They meet with clients and potential referrals in their homes, schools and community locations. Vocational Rehabilitation staff travel their catchment areas to meet with referrals and clients, to educate the general public, including employers, and to reach out to individuals who may need our services. Networking contacts are made with businesses to explore potential opportunities for employment.

We contact groups or organizations of minority populations or other underserved people, such as the Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Indian Reservations, community groups in areas of poverty, and many others. Frequent talks and in-services are given statewide, in rural and urban areas, to inform people about the services which can be provided for anyone who loses their vision. We also work with community rehabilitation programs and independent living centers to assure that services are coordinated and meeting the needs of Nebraskans with disabilities, especially those who are blind or visually impaired along with multiple disabilities.

Our districts also organize Group Teaching training for youth, deaf-blind, seniors, and those who are looking for jobs. These trainings help to reach more clients and provide more training, one to one, as well as allowing consumers build a network of support.

The NCBVI Executive Director serves on the Lincoln-Lancaster Multi-Cultural Advisory Committee; the Deputy Director for VR services is on the board of Disability Rights Nebraska.

In response to the most recent Monitoring Report, we are particularly working toward improvement and expansion of services to individuals who are blind or visually impaired from ages 16 (or 14 where appropriate) through 24. We have excellent programs for transition aged clients, but we also see many cases closing without employment outcomes. Activities have been initiated as strategies for determining the factors involved with unsuccessful closures. We will then be establishing new approaches to enable more youth achieve employment outcomes. Statewide, VR Counselors are taking more initiative in contacting and working directly with local school districts and educational service units, to reach students who are blind or visually impaired. Training is being provided to our counselors in Motivational Interviewing (MI), as an approach to more effectively serve this target population. Other approaches will be developed as assessments are made regarding unsuccessful closures over the past several years.

PROVISION OF ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY – Throughout the Process and Across the State of Nebraska

At each stage of the rehabilitation process, assistive technology services and devices are particularly important to successful employment for the blind and visually impaired. NCBVI's Technology Team includes a Technology Program Manager and three Technology Specialists, one located in each of the three District NCBVI offices. As a part of the Administrative and Technology Teams, the Program Manager provides leadership statewide in computer access technology for our staff, consumers, business and State of Nebraska technology infrastructure entities; develops NCBVI's IT Plan and strategies; develops and enforces procedures and guidelines related to assistive technology; and generally works to assure that technology services continue to be cohesive and effective.

The Technology Specialists provide several important services. They meet individually with clients and/or referrals to assess the person's need for technology and to determine what types of devices would be most appropriate. They work together with NCBVI Counselors and Teachers, to assure that the correct technology services and devices are provided, in conjunction with the client's informed choice and Individualized Plan for Employment. The Specialists do task analysis at worksites, to assess potential employment opportunities and to educate business people about how blind persons can

be employed in that location or company. They also keep up to date with developments in technology; disseminating new information with agency personnel, clients, and consumers in general.

The Technology Specialists are directly supervised by the Technology Program Manager, forming the Technology Team. With recommendations from the Technology Team, Counselors provide specific assistive technology devices to clients with loans and demonstration of various devices, to determine the best fit for the individual and the task needing to be accomplished. Many of our counselors and teachers have knowledge of assistive technology and equipment. Furthermore, in our Training Center we have a teacher who provides full time training in assistive technology. All parts of the State of Nebraska have the same amount of access to assistive technology devices and services.

In 2013, we built a computer lab in Lincoln, so that clients can be provided with more training, especially with advances on adaptive technology. Our Technology Team and four more NCBVI staff were given training on using MAC computers, by bringing an expert to Nebraska (MAC Academy). Over the next year, we plan to train more staff members so they can help consumers who are still in the public schools. In addition, in 2013 we conducted a Technology Expo and Training where business, teachers of the blind from the public schools, and consumers will be coming. We are partnering with South East Community College so attendees can get CEUs. During FFY 2014, we will continue to follow up on the partnerships initiated by the accomplishments of 2013.

We collaborate with the Assistive Technology Partnership (ATP) to provide access to a wide range of disability related devices, via an online program called AT4ALL. AT4ALL allows individuals and entities to borrow, loan, sell, buy, and have demonstrations of many different items. Both online and in person services are all provided on a statewide basis. A member of the NCBVI Technology Team also serves on the ATP Advisory Committee.

We also communicate and partner with local education associations and other entities addressing the needs of students who are blind and visually impaired. The Nebraska Foundation for Children who are Blind and Visually Impaired has funds that can be used to provide students with assistive technology devices needed beyond the school setting. For transition aged clients, we often collaborate with educators and community resources to provide the tools needed for success in education and employment.

The Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired also performs limited web accessibility consulting work. For the most part, this work is completed by the Technology Program Manager. Though it is not the primary goal of the Commission's Technology Team to serve as web accessibility consultants, there are some cases in which the work is beneficial and necessary. This is most important when sites and services are utilized by Commission staff members to complete their daily work. These types of sites and services might include State Government accounting systems, Benefits Open Enrollment Applications, or statewide performance appraisal systems that affect Commission employees because they are employed by State Government.

Sites and services that are used by Commission clients are also tested for usability and accessibility. This is to ensure that screen access software will work with an on-the-job

application, or that a mobile application is accessible with screen reading software used on a particular mobile platform. We also test services that provide access to classroom materials or that allow the purchase of books or other reading materials. Testing these applications, sites, and services ensures that clients can compete on terms of equality with their sighted counterparts.

OUTREACH TO PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES, OF MINORITY POPULATIONS AND WITH THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES

NCBVI works to ensure that individuals with disabilities from minority backgrounds have equal access to VR services. Our statewide plan for outreach and tracking is specific to each geographic area. Activities target the minority populations present in each area; the plan indicates frequency and specific type of contact which is to occur for each identified group, organization, or other community resource relevant to the target populations. A report is updated in each office, whenever relevant contacts are made. Reports are reviewed by a NCBVI Deputy Director every six months. If any follow-up is needed, he takes the steps necessary to assure that the plan is implemented systematically. We partner on various events or public information efforts with other entities, such as the Native American Commission, the Mexican American Commission, Centro Las Americas, the Asian Center, Malone Center, and others statewide.

NCBVI is an active member of the Tri-County Workforce Investment Board (TCWIB), located in Omaha Nebraska. We are collocating counselors at the Workforce Center. The TCWIB is located in an Empowerment Zone and serves many individuals from underserved minority populations. We expect to be more effective in the identification of and serving individuals that previously we have not reached.

The Hispanic population has been rapidly increasing in our State. To aid in reaching individuals from this population, we have recently hired three counselors who are bilingual in Spanish and English. We will be working to continue increasing the service rate for minorities who are referred for or who seek information about the services they might receive from the Commission.

PLANS TO ESTABLISH, DEVELOP OR IMPROVE COMMUNITY REHABILITATION PROGRAMS

NCBVI collaborates with a wide range of community partners statewide, especially the community rehabilitation programs (CRP). NCBVI works together with CRPs to develop and improve services. We are an active partner with the Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC). As part of the State Plan for Independent Living, to assure that IL services are available statewide, we provide 15.5% of the budget for Panhandle Independent Living Services (PILS).

Job coaching to our Supported Employment clients is provided through contracts with community rehabilitation programs. We also work with CRPs and independent living centers to assure that services are coordinated and meeting the needs of Nebraskans with disabilities, especially those who are blind or visually impaired along with multiple disabilities.

NCBVI partners with community rehabilitation programs (Outlook Nebraska, Goodwill, Martin Luther Homes, Community Alternatives of Nebraska, Quality Living) and other entities. Outlook Nebraska, Inc. (ONI) of Omaha is a private nonprofit providing

employment and training that allow blind and visually impaired persons to achieve personal and career goals. NCBVI works cooperatively with ONI and other service providers to serve mutual clients or consumers. In addition to services specific to individuals, we collaborate on other projects. We have worked with ONI in providing cane travel instruction to all their employees. We worked with each of three work shifts to demonstrate appropriate cane technique and staff walked all through their work area, break area utilizing canes (Two Point Touch, Shore lining, Pencil Grip, Sighted Guide). We will work with ONI management to make this an annual training event. We are planning a training session for ONI blind employees on Social Security Benefit, the benefits of earning SGA and understanding Social Security. We are also exploring a workshop on Tasks of Daily Living.

The activities enable NCBVI to inform many persons about the services available to individuals who are blind, thus expanding opportunities to those who are, or who may become, eligible for services of the Vocational Rehabilitation or the Supported Employment program. The agency website is updated continuously and provides information to the public about available services and resources, avenues to apply for services, and ask questions, and so forth.

We collaborate with the Nebraska Division of Developmental Disabilities services (DDD) to identify potential clients, coordinate service ~plans and share funding for those individuals in the System who are described as blind and visually impaired. For the most part, job coaching to SE clients is provided through contracts with community rehabilitation programs. DDD provides ongoing funding for the job supports. Our contracts with CRPs and our coordination for services all serve to expand, develop and improve such programs across the State of Nebraska.

IMPROVING PERFORMANCE ON STANDARDS AND INDICATORS

Each year, performance on RSA Standards and Indicators are examined and discussed by administrators, supervisors, and the NCBVI Commission Board. We analyze the results, compare with previous years, and consider implications and relevant factors. Those areas needing improvement are identified, with an approach to better performance in the future. Those which were at or above standard are also examined, to see where our strong points are and to work to keep those services strong.

NCBVI supervisors and counselors approach rehabilitation services for the blind based on a common understanding of blindness and what blind people can do. This pervasive philosophical foundation is developed and reinforced during fifteen weeks of immersion training in the alternative skills of blindness (using sleepshades for those with some vision) provided to all new staff members. This training promotes a deep-seated intuitive belief in the capabilities of people who are blind that goes beyond an intellectual understanding of blindness. New staff members are also trained to regard high-quality employment as the most desired outcome of services provided to blind and visually impaired consumers. In this way, a culture is created within which employment represents the highest priority of the agency.

VR Counselors work intensively with clients toward each person's Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE). Throughout the year, data is compiled and distributed to all staff. The Deputy Directors and District Supervisors review progress toward increasing and improving performance on all the RSA Standards and Indicators. Comparisons are

made to the previous fiscal year as a whole and to the same time in the year as the previous year (e.g. June 2012 compared to June 2013). Case Reviews are held in each office, where management meets with VR counselors to discuss individual clients' progress towards achieving their vocational goals. Strategies specific to each individual client and that person's IPE, to determine how best to proceed toward success.

All staff approach services with high expectations of clients, and work to motivate blind persons to raise their personal expectations for setting and achieving employment goals. The focus is on planning and activities that will enable them to become competitively employed, work full time, earn good wages, and have opportunities for advancement. Benefits counseling is provided to help clients understand their options and make informed choices. Blind vendors in the Nebraska Business Enterprise (NBE) program are encouraged to operate more facilities with higher earning potential. Employment conferences give clients the chance to hone their job-seeking skills and to meet with business people who may be seeking job candidates. These events also help to inform businesses about the potential of blind Nebraskans as a valuable resource to their firms. Career classes and small group training sessions are held in each district from time to time, so that VR clients can learn from each other on ways to enhance their own opportunities for achieving competitive employment goals.

All of the strategies and practices discussed throughout this State Plan are related to accomplishing an increase in clients who become employed, the percentage who achieve competitive employment, a high rate of hourly earnings, the proportion of clients with significant disabilities who achieve competitive employment, becoming self-supporting at closure, and the ratio of clients we serve from diverse minority populations. The standards and indicators do not focus separately on transition age clients. However, it is clear that the increased emphasis on achieving competitive employment outcomes, better wages, and more self-support after services, for all clients, will have an equally valuable impact on the results achieved by transition aged clients.

STRATEGIES TO ASSIST THE WORKFORCE INVESTMENT SYSTEM SERVE INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES.

NCBVI Rehabilitation Counselors and Supervisors work with local and regional Workforce Boards at the workforce centers and satellites. NCBVI employees are now official member of all three local area Workforce Boards in the state. Referrals are made between our agency and Workforce statewide, to assure that job-seekers receive the services needed. NCBVI consults with the Centers and Satellites regarding the accessibility of facilities and resources within WIB locations. When funding was available, Nebraska Workforce has supported our summer youth employment program, WAGES. We will collaborate with them on this program to the greatest extent possible during FFY 2014, partnering for job opportunities more than funding which is not generally available from Workforce currently.

The NCBVI Executive Director is working with the Director of the Nebraska General VR agency and Director of Workforce Services to assess how effectively the workforce system is assisting individuals with disabilities. This affects potential clients of both blind and general VR agencies. We will specifically examine referrals from Workforce to VR and work to prevent persons from falling through the cracks and not receiving

assistance to achieve employment from any component of the statewide workforce system.

AGENCY STRATEGIES FOR ACHIEVING GOALS AND PRIORITIES, SUPPORT INNOVATION & EXPANSION, AND IDENTIFY AND OVERCOME BARRIERS.

The Goals of Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired are:

1. Increase the number and percentage of clients achieving competitive employment outcomes.
2. Increase the rehabilitation rate for transition aged clients achieving competitive employment outcomes.
3. Improve the quality assurance system.

NCBVI utilizes strategies identified in the text above and in the Rehabilitation Act to achieve our goals and priorities, to support innovation and expansion activities, and to overcome barriers to accessing the Commission's vocational rehabilitation and supported employment programs. There are six physical offices throughout the State of Nebraska, to reach blind and visually impaired persons in their home communities. Vocational Rehabilitation staff travel their catchment areas to meet with referrals and clients, to educate the general public, including employers, and to reach out to individuals who may need our services.

There is an increasing emphasis upon providing effective services to the transition population of our clientele. From the RSA perspective, as well as this agency, it is crucial to increase successful outcomes for clients who begin rehabilitation services from the age of 16 (or 14 where appropriate) through age 24. NCBVI has implemented a strategy that will continue through 2014, to closely review all transition cases which were closed without achieving employment outcomes. This process will enable us to analyze our approaches and services, to determine how we can decrease the unsuccessful closures. At the same time, we are implementing case reviews on all transition cases closed which did achieve employment outcomes. We will especially examine the level and types of services provided and the success achieved based upon benchmarks established by RSA's Standards and Indicators.

Workshops are provided in various locations around Nebraska to spotlight the capabilities of blind individuals. We partner with other agencies, consumer organizations, communities, and groups; including Disability Rights Nebraska, Nebraska Assistive Technology Partnership (ATP), the Statewide Independent Living Council, Workforce Development Councils, educational entities, hospitals, multi-cultural centers, community rehabilitation programs (Goodwill, Martin Luther Homes, Community Alternatives of Nebraska, Quality Living), and a wide range of other entities. The activities enable NCBVI to inform many persons about the services available to individuals who are blind, thus expanding opportunities to those who are, or who may become, eligible for services of the Vocational Rehabilitation or the Supported Employment program. The agency website is updated continuously and provides information to the public about available services and resources, avenues to apply for services, and ask questions, and so forth.

In 2014, we will continue with employment conferences for clients. The conferences are an effective approach to expand and improve efforts to secure high quality employment

outcomes for job ready consumers. Included in the conferences are motivational speakers, sessions on resume writing, interviewing and related skills, technology demonstrations, mock interviews with local business people, and a job fair with local businesses present. Employers have an opportunity to meet blind job candidates in a setting conducive to exploring the options for both blind consumers and for business representatives. Clients learn and practice many skills necessary to succeed in the world of work.

Instructional videos developed and produced by NCBVI are now being used by clients, for self-study on blindness skills, between appointments with Rehabilitation Counselors and Teachers. Over the past several years, staff training included intervention strategies promoting greater effectiveness working with people with Traumatic Brain Injury, Deaf-Blindness, autism, and other significant disabilities. These activities will enable more blind consumers to obtain employment and to be full participants in their families and communities.

Every year, NCBVI conducts comprehensive, statewide assessments on an ongoing basis. Throughout each year, NCBVI holds public forums to elicit opinions and comments from consumers regarding the services currently being provided and the needs of consumers that are not being addressed. In some cases, the forums are conducted jointly with other providers (e.g. the general vocational rehabilitation agency, centers for independent living, education, health and human services, etc.). Other forums are conducted as a part of our presentations to statewide meetings of consumer or peer support groups of the blind: National Federation of the Blind of Nebraska, American Council of the Blind of Nebraska, Nebraska Association of the Blind, and others. The NCBVI Board of Commissioners also holds quarterly public meetings during which they encourage consumers and interested persons to make comments and suggestions.

Consumers are informed that the current NCBVI State Plan is posted on the website and is otherwise available to anyone requesting a copy in any format. The forums serve as focus groups to solicit consumer input. The event locations and logistics are scheduled to best elicit input from and ideas about the needs of persons with the most significant disabilities, disabled individuals of minority or ethnic background, areas that may be underserved, and those who may be served by other entities such as the Nebraska Workforce System or other partner entities.

We work toward achieving the third goal (Improve the quality assurance system) with the following strategies:

Each fiscal year, a percentage of Title I funds are used to develop and implement innovative approaches to expand and improve services. During recent years (FY2010 through 2012), Innovation and Expansion funds were allocated to further our ability to manage data systematically.

Our new data management system, eForce, has been live since April 9, 2009. Each year, we have held training sessions for NCBVI personnel to operate the system, both inputting data and accessing information. There will be more programming and training efforts required to fully utilize the system, on an ongoing basis as the system is developed and refined. As with any data management system, facets needing to be fine-tuned will become evident after we use it over time. The programming and training

costs will be funded with a combination of Title I and Social Security Reimbursement funds.

Day to day enhancement of the system and provision of the service are specific areas for which resources are needed. During FY 2014, we will allocate Title I Innovation and Expansion funds to cover that enhancement and service provision function. We will also work on the process of programming to link the client data system with the agency's state financial system, for better planning and tracking of service related expenditures and obligations.

Our work to implement the new data management system will address all four goals. eForce will enable us to analyze the effectiveness of all parts of our system. We can then use the data based results to add value to our overall efforts, achieve established goals, and to identify future needs and challenges.

Attachment 4.11(e)(2) Evaluation and Reports of Progress

Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) and Supported Employment (SE) Goals

The mission of Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (NCBVI) is "Empowering Blind Individuals, Promoting Opportunities, and Building Belief in the Blind." Our primary priority is to enable persons who are blind and visually impaired, including those with multiple disabilities (hearing impairment, brain injury, mental illness, etc.) to achieve their individual goals for competitive employment (including supported employment). Our secondary priority is to enable persons who are blind and visually impaired, including those who also have multiple disabilities, to achieve their individual goals to live independently and to be full participants in their communities.

NCBVI goals are based on factors identified through analysis of the comprehensive statewide assessments, both the contracted research projects and the ongoing public forums, as well as the federal standards and indicators.

Agency program goals of the 2013 State Plan have been reviewed with the following results:

1. Increase the number and percentage of clients achieving full-time (31+ hours per week) competitive employment outcomes.
2. Increase the ratio of average hourly earnings of clients who become employed compared to average earnings in the state, to .72.
3. Increase the rehabilitation rate for transition aged clients to 35%.
4. Improve the quality assurance system.

The primary goal for the Title VI, Part B program of NCBVI is to develop appropriate individualized Supported Employment (SE) placements for persons who experience the additional involvement of a developmental disability. A system is in place to provide both the expertise and resources, including ongoing support, to develop and sustain individualized services within the Nebraska Health and Human Services System.

The overall priority of high-quality employment includes the traditional working age client, including persons with multiple disabilities (e.g. Deaf-Blind) or other special needs who may be Supported Employment candidates. When competitive employment

without ongoing support is not an option, particularly for individuals with developmental disabilities in addition to blindness, supported employment is explored as an option that may be more conducive to that person. There are also some persons who could benefit from ongoing support, but who do not have developmental disabilities. For the most part, these individuals have traumatic brain injuries or mental health issues with the onset of disability occurring after age 21.

A small number of blind and visually impaired persons with non-developmental complications, primarily those with traumatic brain injuries or mental health issues occurring after age 21, might benefit from supported employment services. Generally, however, funding for extended support beyond eighteen (18) months to such persons is not available in Nebraska. In such cases, the Deputy Director of Independent Living, Supported Employment Administrator, works with the NCBVI Counselor involved to identify possible resources for the ongoing support, such as developing a PASS (Plan to Achieve Self Sufficiency) with the assistance of WIPA (Work Incentives and Assistance Program). The Deputy Director also works to keep NCBVI Counselors informed and updated on the Supported Employment program, so that eligible clients do, in fact, obtain the services they require. Continued training regarding Supported Employment services is provided to counselors, statewide.

It is difficult to establish meaningful measures for the Title VI, Part B program. SE clients can require extremely high expenditures to accomplish successful supported placements. The funds are limited and fixed. During FY2012, 42 clients were served in Supported Employment. The goal had been to serve 30 and was achieved.

The NCBVI Title VI, Part B budget has been at \$30,000 per year since the inception of the program. One client may require all or most of the total funds available. In some years, we have several clients identified as SE, with initial work done toward an SE placement. By the end of the year, however, they might all have ended their service plan due to a wide range of complicating factors. Some or all might continue in preliminary stages to supported job placement, again due to complicating factors beyond our control. During 2012, NCBVI spent \$24,033 for SE clients. Average cost per person served was \$616.

We collaborate with the Nebraska Division of Developmental Disabilities Services (DDD) to identify potential clients, coordinate service plans and share funding for those individuals in the System who are described as blind and visually impaired. For the most part, job coaching to SE clients is provided through contracts with community rehabilitation programs. DDD provides ongoing funding for the job supports.

We train persons with experience in blindness and alternative techniques as short term Job Coaches, to provide some short term job coaching for blind and visually impaired clients of NCBVI's Title I vocational rehabilitation services. NCBVI contracts with third party entities for ongoing job coaching required for SE clients. Five Commission staff positions are currently classified as Vocational Rehabilitation Technicians. In collaboration with the TACE, training is being provided on a District basis to NCBVI counselors and other staff, to build skills and understanding in this area. The Deputy Director in charge of the Title VI, Part B program continues to investigate training opportunities which would be available to our staff.

Overall, NCBVI Management staff works to implement creative strategies to most effectively utilize Title VI, Part B funds to maximize the benefit for those individuals in the program's target population. We will pursue OJT or OJE options for SE clients, when possible.

The system of Standards and Indicators (S & I) established by RSA is key benchmark we use to measure the extent to which our program goals were achieved and as a result, the effectiveness of our program. The following are results of our status in meeting those parameters for quality vocational rehabilitation services to blind and visually impaired Nebraskans. (Note: some figures below differ from results reported earlier, as the S & I does include a formula-based combination of 2010 & 2011 data.)

Standard 1.1: Change in number of Employment Outcome - Difference must be greater than previous year. In 2011 NCBVI had 94 closures with employment outcomes; 2012 data show 126 successful closures, an increase of 32 closures with employment outcomes. NCBVI did strongly pass this standard. We continue to work to increase the number of clients served and those who achieve employment outcomes during the coming year, in addition to emphasizing high quality employment outcomes.

Standard 1.2: Percentage of persons receiving services who become employed must be 68.9% or better. For 2012, the percentage of individual clients achieving employment outcomes was 56.5% (an increase from 42.15% in 2011). This result was better, but still below the standard. We are working to assure that a higher percentage of people served do achieve quality employment outcomes. We are examining the factors involved with the standard, to identify trends that might be impacting the outcomes as well as to strengthen our ability to help individuals achieve their employment goals.

Standard 1.3: Percent of Employment Outcomes that were Competitive Employment. The percentage must be 35.4% or better. In 2012, Competitive Employment closures were 95.24% of total Employment closures. NCBVI achieved well above the required level and also exceeded the percentage level from previous years, thus passing the standard. Continuing with this strong focus on competitive outcomes will help to assure that we pass the standard every year, so that the clients we serve will continue to obtain competitive jobs.

1.4: Proportion of Individuals with Competitive Employment Outcomes who had Significant Disabilities was 100% for NCBVI. The level required is 89% with significant disabilities. This standard was passed.

1.5 Average Hourly Earnings: Ratio must be .59 or better. In 2012, the average hourly wage for NCBVI clients achieving competitive employment outcomes was \$15.29; the weighted average hourly wage in Nebraska was \$18.56. The ratio of wages earned by NCBVI clients, compared to the average in the state, was .824. NCBVI did pass this standard, well above the required ratio, and also exceeded the previous year ratio. We will continue to work with clients and employers to assure that the outcomes achieved are high quality job placements, with good wages or salaries.

1.6 Self Support at Closure compared to Application: Percentage must be 30.4% or better. For 2012, of clients achieving Competitive Employment Outcomes, the difference between the percent self-supporting at closure and at application was 33.33%, thus passing the standard. We continue to emphasize the importance of achieving job

placements which help individuals to become self-supporting as a result of the newly achieved earnings.

2.1 Minority Ratio - all agencies must attain a ratio level of greater than .80 (for states serving more than 100 minority persons). States with smaller minority populations are not held to the standard, but must have a strategy to assure outreach to people with disabilities in minority populations. During 2012, NCBVI served 24 individuals from a minority background. The NCBVI ratio for 2012 was .928.

We practice statewide procedures to ensure that individuals with disabilities from minority backgrounds have equal access to VR services. Our statewide plan for outreach and tracking is specific to each geographic area, targets the minority populations present in each area, and indicates frequency and specific type of contact which will occur for each identified group, organization, or other community resource relevant to the target populations. Reports are reviewed by a NCBVI Deputy Director every six months. If any follow-up is needed, he takes the steps necessary to assure that the plan is implemented systematically. The process is repeated as necessary. In 2013, we began co-location with a workforce center to increase our ability to reach and serve eligible individuals from underserved, minority populations. It is expected to continue as a fruitful opportunity throughout 2014.

Ongoing communication between NCBVI client and NCBVI counselor provides an informal mechanism for evaluation. Counselors are trained in working with clients to be receptive to changes that need to be made in order to better meet the needs of individuals. Caseload reviews between Counselors, Supervisors, and the Deputy Directors in charge of Vocational Rehabilitation and Independent Living provide a vehicle for additional evaluation and input regarding services delivered. Ideas from the discussions often impact the direct service offered, improving the likelihood of achieving goals and priorities, and accomplishing positive outcomes for clients.

NCBVI obtains data on level of satisfaction with services from individuals closed from Vocational Rehabilitation services through telephone interviews. We contract with an outside person who conducts the interviews at status 10, 18, 20, and four months after closure in statuses 26, 28, and 36. Calls are made to all clients at 18 and 28; randomly to the remaining clients.

A satisfaction survey is sent in Large Print format to all Independent Living clients, upon case closure. The surveys go to IL clients under age 55, as well as to clients of the Older Blind Program, over age 55. These are returned to us on a voluntary and anonymous basis, unless the respondent chooses to self-identify. Generally, responses are positive. When there are specific issues mentioned, the Deputy Director follows up to resolve the issues involved. In these cases, it is not unusual for the individual to list his/her own name or to identify the staff person involved. If negative comments are made, we discuss the issue with supervisors and remind counseling staff of issues to which they need to be sensitive. This allows us to make changes if needed to facilitate better services in the future.

NCBVI operates a residential program, the Nebraska Center for the Blind, providing intensive training in the skills of blindness, self-confidence building, philosophical understanding and focus on achieving employment goals. Many clients from across the State come to the Center for this training. Toward the end of training, each individual

client writes an article to describe what they have experienced while at the Center. Three months after students leave the Center, they receive a telephone call and are asked to answer questions related to Center training. This occurs whether or not the individual completes the training. 87.8 percent of Center clients successfully achieve their employment goals.

In some cases, a student may leave because of health or other personal reasons. The Deputy Director of Vocational Rehabilitation Services trains objective interviewers who conduct the telephone interviews. Results of each interview are provided to the Center Director who then changes the client name to a code number and forwards the results to Center Staff, the Executive Director of NCBVI, and to the Board of Commissioners.

These interviews have proven to be a very useful tool for assessing a major component of our overall service system. In addition to evaluating our Center program, comments sometimes relate to Field Services which individuals receive in preparation for attending the Center, or which occur during the months following training. The interviewee is assured that comments will be held in confidence. Much of the feedback is very positive regarding the productive impact felt as a result of attending the Nebraska Center for the Blind. The more negative comments have included the need for more one-on-one training or are specific to the student's personal expectations and needs. When trends are noticed or issues of concern are raised, we discuss the issue with the Center Director and find ways to revise our approach so that services continue to be improved.

During FY07, NCBVI contracted with Mississippi State University for a research study which assessed the comprehensive needs of blind and visually impaired consumers in Nebraska. The study surveyed NCBVI clients who were closed during FY06 in status 26 and status 28. It also surveyed all open clients in the Transition Age Group, from age 19 to 26. Age 19 is the legal age of adulthood in Nebraska; for research purposes, the study deals with adults only. Finally, a staff survey component obtained data about the needs identified by rehabilitation professionals employed by NCBVI.

The issues identified in the study have been discussed in small groups and with all staff during State Staff Meetings. The planning process continues in District and Management meetings. Each rehabilitation team works to assure consideration of the issues raised in the context of work done with clients' Individualized Plans for Employment.

During 2010 and 2011, we utilized ARRA funds to support needs identified in the statewide comprehensive needs assessment (providing technology and low vision aids and devices to clients, training in assistive technology for both clients and personnel, a variety of services related to job creation and job placement, including exploration of career options, self-employment, and job accommodations). We will continue to address identified needs in 2013 with Title I funds, as well as with other grants and Social Security Reimbursement dollars as appropriate.

Each fiscal year, a portion of Title I funds are used to develop and implement innovative approaches to expand and improve services. During FY 2013, Innovation and Expansion funds were allocated to further our ability to manage data systematically. Our internal data management system, eForce, went live on April 9, 2009. We held training sessions for NCBVI personnel to operate the system: inputting data, tracking case services, client status and activity, running reports, and other case management work.

There will also be additional programming efforts needed. As with any data management system, facets needing to be fine-tuned will become evident after we use it over time. The programming and training costs in recent years were funded with a combination of Title I and ARRA funds. The effort will continue in 2014 using Title I and Social Security Reimbursement funds.

Day to day enhancement of the system and provision of the service are specific areas for which resources are needed. During FY 2014, we will allocate Title I Innovation and Expansion funds to cover that enhancement and service provision function.

We expect that ramping up such efforts will result in achieving our goals:

1. to increase the number and percentage of clients achieving full-time competitive employment outcomes;
2. to increase the ratio of average hourly earnings of clients who become employed compared to average earnings in the state;
3. to increase the rehabilitation rate for transition aged clients; and to
4. Improve the quality assurance system.

Our work to implement the new data management system will address all four goals. eForce will enable us to analyze the effectiveness of all parts of our system. We can then use the data based results to add value to our overall efforts, achieve established goals, and to identify future needs and challenges.

Attachment 6.3 Quality, Scope, and Extent of Supported Employment Services

Supported Employment (SE) is a training option available to individuals with the most significant disabilities receiving services from the Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (NCBVI). An individual with the most significant disability is defined in rule (Title 192 Nebraska Administrative Code, Chapter 1) as an individual with a severe visual impairment or combination of visual, physical, or mental impairments which profoundly 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; and an individual whose vocational rehabilitation can be expected to require at least four extensive or intensive multiple core services for at least twelve months. Supported Employment requires the provision of a job coach for the initial, intensive training; and requires long-term, intermittent support to insure the individual is successful on the job. This long term support is provided for as long as the person has the job.

NCBVI provides financial support of supported employment services using Title VI Part B funds only if the placement is expected to meet the following conditions:

1. The placement is community-based.
2. The consumer is integrated into the workforce with other non-disabled individuals.
3. The consumer earns minimum wage or better.
4. The need for ongoing support is expected to continue indefinitely.

Each individual with a developmental disability has a case manager service coordinator, employed by the Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD). The case manager is responsible for developing an Individual

Program Plan for each client. The Plan normally includes provision for ongoing support from DDD when supported employment is involved. In the past, we have generally worked with the client (or supported job coaching) for 90 days after stabilization. We are now moving to using the milestones system. The client will remain in active status for about a year after employment. The arrangements will be on a case-by-case basis and will mirror the approach currently in place between the general agency (VR) and DDD.

NCBVI collaborated with the Department of Education, Special Education and Vocational Rehabilitation in the development of policies and procedures more clearly delineating the responsibilities of the different agencies and institutions involved and the scope and nature of services available to younger persons with disabilities in transition from school. The Collaborative Agreement between NCBVI, Department of Education/Special Populations, and the Nebraska Center for the Education of Children who are Blind or Visually Impaired, applies to persons who are likely to require supported employment in the future, as well as those students without this need.

Financial support by NCBVI for supported employment services is limited to 18 months unless there are compelling reasons to believe that extending NCBVI support will result in a more successful placement. For example, supported employment services may be provided by NCBVI for longer than 18 months in those cases involving consumers between the ages of 18 and 22. Developmental Disabilities (DDD) does not pick up the cost of supported employment services until individuals have reached the age of 22. In such cases, NCBVI will extend services for longer than 18 months until the age of 22 is reached. In those cases in which the consumer has a developmental disability, long-term financial support after NCBVI's support is discontinued is typically provided by the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Service-Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD).

A small number of blind and visually impaired persons with non-developmental complications, primarily those with traumatic brain injuries or mental health issues occurring after age 21, might benefit from supported employment services. Generally, however, funding for services extending beyond eighteen (18) months to such persons is not available in Nebraska. In such cases, the Deputy Director of Independent Living, Supported Employment Administrator, works with the NCBVI Counselor involved to identify possible resources for the ongoing support, such as developing a PASS (Plan to Achieve Self Sufficiency). The Deputy Director also works to keep NCBVI Counselors informed and updated on the Supported Employment program, so that eligible clients do, in fact, obtain the services they require. Continued training regarding Supported Employment services is provided to counselors, statewide.

NCBVI has service contracts with a number of providers in the Nebraska Developmental Disabilities system and with private providers of job coaching and related services. Contracts are developed on behalf of individuals with the most significant disabilities with both private and public providers who are actively seeking suitable work placements for them in integrated settings. The total amount of Title VI, Part B funds that we project to expend in FY 2014 is \$28,470. We expect to provide SE services to approximately 30 clients in FY 2014.

Commissioner Hansen asked if any of the Supported Employment Funds we get today go to help fund the WAGES program. Director Van Zandt stated that in past years – yes, but not this year.

Chairperson Johnson stated that she is thinking of the long term view as it relates to serving clients with multiple disabilities. Chairperson Johnson noted that she anticipates that there will be a greater need for financial investment for those with multiple disabilities because they will need more specialized equipment. Director Van Zandt stated the equipment is one aspect of it, but the job coaching can also be a large expense. NCBVI also provides a lot of training for staff who work with clients with varying disabilities.

Director Van Zandt noted that eForce is not a reporting system and as the federal government adds new regulations, the system needs to be modified. NCBVI is also looking to link our client data system with the financial system. NCBVI has begun looking at a system that we would purchase that is a full data management system. There are two systems that other agencies are currently using. One is AWARE and the other is LIBERA. These systems are not as expensive as they were years ago. NCBVI may purchase one of these systems starting in 2014. The new system would replace eForce. NCBVI is currently exploring the two systems.

Chairperson Johnson noted that NCBVI has had the goal to increase competitive employment on an on-going basis. However, if the Commission continues to do the same things, how are we going to increase? Director Van Zandt stated that the key piece is that the same result is that we do increase almost every year. We do want to have the result of increasing employment outcomes.

Carlos Serván noted that during Employment Conferences things are done differently each year in an attempt to improve. Connie Daly added that NCBVI has become involved in networking groups and attends their functions. NCBVI is also going to start a Business Advisory Council in the Lincoln District. The Commission is constantly looking at what it can do to be more effective.

Director Van Zandt noted that when she is working on the State Plan and the goals, one of the things she thinks about every time is that there is not a goal that talks about elevating expectations and confidence that people need to have in order to really get good jobs that have benefits and chances for promotions. However, this is absolutely a part of who we are and what we do.

The commissioners thanked Director Van Zandt for the detailed report.

Commissioner Hansen moved to approve the 2014 State Plan as prepared and presented today. Commissioner Walla seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken and all commissioners voted in favor of the motion.

Discuss & Act on Utilization of an Organizational Development Specialist

Commissioner Hansen gave an update on the plan for NCBVI to utilize an organizational development specialist. Commissioner Hansen reported that they have spoken to a consultant. Dr. Fred Schroeder came to the NCBVI Lincoln office two weeks ago and they spoke with him about the subject of utilization of an organizational development specialist. Dr. Fred Schroeder would not be the person who they would bring in to help us with this, but with his diverse background in the field they wanted to

ask him his opinion on the process. Dr. Schroeder provided them with some good feedback related to this. They have also reached out and spoken to three different companies as possible groups that could come in. One of the companies stated they were not interested in the project at this time. They also learned within the last few days that the State EAP Contract has been awarded to a different company. In the past it had been serviced by Best Care out of Omaha and now the contract will be with Deer Oak out of Houston, Texas. Commissioner Hansen will be contacting Deer Oak after July 1 when their contract begins.

Commissioner Walla asked if there will be a cost for this. Commissioner Hansen reported that if we go through a company that is handling the EAP contract there are certain services that are covered by the contract and this would be cost free for NCBVI. There are some types of things that we want help with are things that are outside of that contract so there would be some costs. If we go with a company other than what is offered through the EAP contract, then all the services would have a cost. At this time we do not know the exact fees.

Commissioner Jirak stated that assuming we decide to go down this road where does the funding come from? Also, if we hire someone we need to make sure that the costs do not jeopardize the services to the clients. Chairperson Johnson noted that at the May meeting the commissioners voted to go forward with hiring an organizational development specialist. Chairperson Johnson noted that NCBVI intends to use Social Security Reimbursement funds to pay for the services of an organizational development specialist.

Commissioner Walla asked if the consultant will look at what has changed over the last ten years. When he went through Center training years ago things were really cohesive and seemed to be wonderfully good. Will we be able to cut to the chase and figure out why there was a change in morale? We need to get to this issue.

Chairperson Johnson noted that this is the whole purpose of having a consultant come in. The consultant will be used to help the agency get through this. Chairperson Johnson, Commissioner Hansen and Director Van Zandt met about what they want to see from the organizational development specialist. The next step will be to continue to talk to various companies and a selection should be completed by August.

Director Van Zandt noted that NCBVI is already working internally on solutions for employee morale and services. In the offices across the state and in the Center they are already engaged in discussions on how they can bridge gaps that might be there, increase population in the Center, and enhance services overall and build job opportunities.

Discuss & Act on the Development of an Executive
Director Evaluation Procedure and the Methodology by which it should be carried out

Commissioner Jirak reported that at the suggestion of the Chairperson, he contacted the Attorney General's office regarding some feedback at the May 2013 Commission Board meeting regarding evaluating the Executive Director in a public session. Assistant Attorney General Jody Gittins informed him that according to the Open Meeting Act the executive director has a choice as to whether they want the evaluation in a public session or executive session. The evaluation procedure is somewhat spelled out in State Law Nebraska Revised Statute 84-1410 (1)(d).

Commissioner Jirak stated that Assistant Attorney General Gittins informed him that the Board needs to ask the executive director what her preference is as to public session or executive session for the evaluation.

The next issue to be discussed is the tool to be used for the evaluation of the executive director. Commissioner Jirak noted that the State of Nebraska is moving to a unified measuring tool for evaluating state employees. It was noted that at this time this tool is not accessible. It was stated at the May meeting that some staff did not like the current tool used for evaluating the executive director which is a staff survey. Commissioner Jirak mentioned that ACB President Paulette Monthei did forward to the Commission Board an evaluation assessment tool which she developed for another organization to use. Commissioner Jirak noted that he feels that this was an excellent document.

There are two issues to be decided. Does the Commission Board want to evaluate the executive director in a public session or an executive session come May 2014? Second, what evaluation assessment tool does the Board want to use in conducting the evaluation.

Chairperson Johnson reported that the tool that the State of Nebraska has developed to evaluate state employees is not accessible to blind users. Yet, the State of Nebraska has indicated this is only evaluation method that they are going to accept for state employees. This tool was developed for state employees, but not the executive directors of state agencies. The Board can choose any evaluation tool they wish for the executive director. Chairperson Johnson noted that her thinking was that for consistency, they would use the same tool to evaluate the executive director as is used for state employees. The issue becomes that this tool is currently not accessible. Director Van Zandt noted that NCBVI is currently not using the State Personnel evaluation tool until it is made to be accessible.

Director Van Zandt stated that she feels additional follow-up is needed regarding the executive director evaluation being conducted in a public session or in executive session. Commissioner Jirak and Director Van Zandt will work with the Attorney General's office to get a response to this issue in writing.

Commissioner Hansen suggested that the issue of what evaluation tool to use for conducting the evaluation of the executive director be tabled until the August meeting. He noted that he needs some additional time to review the assessment tool that Paulette Monthei sent and he needs additional information regarding the tool that the

State of Nebraska developed for state employees. A decision regarding what assessment tool to use will be decided hopefully by the August 2013 Commission Board meeting.

Chairperson Johnson suggested using two assessment evaluation tools for the May 2014 evaluation of the executive director. This would allow for comparison for how the two overlap. If you simply change the evaluation method, you have no history to compare it to.

Commissioner Jirak, Commissioner Walla and Paulette Monthei will look at the assessment tool developed by Paulette and other options for the evaluation and present this at the August 2013 Commission Board meeting. Paulette Monthei noted that the tool that she forwarded to the Board will need to be tweaked to accommodate NCBVI.

Discuss & Act on Conducting an Agency Forum

Chairperson Johnson noted that this agenda item is a follow-up from the April State Staff meeting. It was felt that at the end of the State Staff meeting there were some unresolved issues and perhaps we should have an Agency Forum to follow-up on them.

Commissioner Hansen stated that this issue is something that could be talked about at a later time since we are moving forward with bringing in an Organizational Development Specialist. If NCBVI wishes to hold an Agency Forum we could work with the Organizational Development Specialist on moving forward. All commissioners agreed that we should incorporate everything into one project/plan.

Discuss & Act on Staff Leadership Training Opportunities

Commissioner Jirak noted that he placed this item on the agenda because he thought this was an unresolved issue. There were some comments on the staff survey that hinted that there may be an opportunity for staff to participate in leadership training and staff was not given the opportunity. After hearing remarks earlier today while talking about the State Plan it is pretty clear that this issue has been addressed.

Director Van Zandt noted that NCBVI provides a lot of opportunities for individual staff as well as groups of staff for a wide range of training. If there is any time that an individual staff member believes they are prevented from getting training they should talk to the executive director directly in order to address the issue. Director Van Zandt added that she is committed to training and continuous learning.

Public comment

Connie Daly – Connie stated that she admires how much the Board cares about NCBVI. She stated that this is very evident in everything they have been doing in the past few months. It is obvious that the Board is very concerned about NCBVI.

Connie noted that the concern she has about the staff survey is that the way that it has been utilized sometimes by staff to bring up issues that may or may not be exact. The commissioners read the comments and at times have stepped in and suggested things but commissioners don't work at NCBVI. Commissioners do not understand the politics. Connie stated that she thinks it can be very dangerous for the commissioners to do this. Connie stated that she understands the need to get staff input but she does not feel that the staff survey is a very good resource for that. In fact, at times it is used to attack other staff.

Conchita Hernandez – Conchita noted that she had a couple of comments, the first about staff in general. She gets the impression that the commissioners have not spoken to staff to make some of the decisions that they are making that directly effect staff. For example, the executive director evaluation. The thought of having two evaluations is probably something that the staff will not do. Staff is already hesitant to complete one.

Commissioner Johnson clarified that the two evaluations that they are talking about would be for only one year and it would be for the executive director's evaluation. The second evaluation assessment tool that the commissioners are looking at would not involve staff completing a survey. The way she sees it, it would be one more year with the staff survey and then the commission board would only use the one tool. If the staff survey was kept, it would be revised to be less about an evaluation tool and more about an agency survey.

Paulette Monthei noted that the evaluation tool that she is proposing does include some commissioner consultation with staff.

Conchita noted that staff morale is very low. She stated that she feels one reason that it is low is that staff does not get included in these decisions. Conchita recommended that commissioners speak to staff in a confidential manner to get their opinions.

Barbara Loos – Barbara stated that she wanted to talk about group sessions for people in the different districts. Barbara stated that she thinks that these can be a good thing. Barbara noted that she goes way back with NCBVI into the 1960's and she has worked with NCBVI as a client and as a staff person. One thing that use to happen is that there would be groups of people who got together to work on things for a period of time and then not. When they got feedback from the participants, everyone loved them. She feels that what needs to happen with things like this is that there needs to be something that that is to lead to. What can happen is that people can do well during the group teaching and then not progress towards what their actual goals are. Barbara stated that she feels that people need to get out of their comfort zone and get out there. She noted that she recently read a book entitled "Do It – Let's Get Off Our But's." This is where people say things like "I would do that, but." Sometimes individual comfort zones get in the way.

Mark Bulger – Mark thanked the Board for their service. Mark noted that he has a couple of concerns. First, he has an issue with Fred Schroeder. He is the same gentleman that is the Chair of the National Blindness Professional Certification Board who certified the NCBVI as a professional agency. He is also the person who says structured discovery and NFB philosophy is one of the same. With that being said, the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results. If NCBVI is having issues with its structured discovery Center, and you bring in a structured discovery expert to advise us, this causes him concern. He also feels that bringing in Fred Schroeder may be a conflict of interest. Mark noted that this is not a blindness problem, but this is a communication, morale problem.

Secondly, NCBVI is struggling to find out what the problem is. Mark stated he feels like there is an elephant sitting in the corner not speaking out. Mark noted several issues. Transition – we have children coming out of the school system trained in a variety of ways, low vision and nonvisual, depending on the circumstance. When these kids come to the center, the only training they get is braille. They have been forced to abandon the past years of training they have received. This is an issue from Transition. NCBVI needs to offer and supplement what is being taught in the schools. There are people in the schools that have four year degrees plus a Master's degree and they are training our kids based on a certification. Then we have people who have college degrees with 600 hours of sleep shade training thinking that they know as much as someone who has specialized training in that field. Mark stated that we need to look at the caliber of our staff. He stated he is not criticizing anyone, but there are experts out there who have four year degrees in vocational rehabilitation and orientation and mobility training. For whatever reason, NCBVI is not hiring these people. The next issue is that NCBVI does not pay enough. If it costs \$60,000 to get a Master's degree with someone who is an expert in vocational rehabilitation maybe we need to be paying that.

Third, only ten percent of the population is completely blind. Maybe 50 years ago, the days of a healthy blind person and rehabilitating them with no vision it may have been worthwhile. Today we are talking about individuals with multiple disabilities and you may have a person that because of their other disabilities, structured discovery is not the answer.

The next issue is the NCBVI Center. Is it in touch or in sync with the rest of our State agencies? If we have counselors out in the field that realize the needs of their clients and they are not getting sent to the Center, that tells him that there is an issue with what the Center is doing. NCBVI needs to figure out what the problem is. Mark stated that he thinks the best way for NCBVI to prove its results is success stories. If NCBVI has success stories, there will be people lined up. NCBVI does have some success stories, but based on the numbers that he has seen, there are not enough. While NCBVI may be doing okay compared to other states, it is not doing that well. NCBVI has a low success rate and the number of people that NCBVI is attracting is low.

Mark Bulger asked if anyone has ever asked Dr. Van Zandt if she feels NCBVI needs a consultant. Secondly, he has a problem when staff is given control over the future of the executive director. This is not fair. He feels we should take every staff person who criticizes her and have their clients sit in front them and critique them. There is never going to be complete satisfaction. Mark stated that he feels that Dr. Van Zandt's hands are being tied by some people who are a part of the problem.

Chairperson Johnson stated that yes; Director Van Zandt was in agreement to bringing in a consultant.

Commissioner Hansen noted that after the money is spent on a consultant it is the hope that clients will be better served. Therefore, it is definitely not a waste of taxpayer money.

Mark Bulger asked how much money NCBVI is spending on a consultant. Specifically, how much did NCBVI spend to bring in Dr. Fred Schroeder.

Director Van Zandt noted that there are a wide range of services that can be provided by an organizational development specialist. It could range from \$2,000 to \$50,000. The reason that there is not an exact dollar amount at this time is that it has not yet been determined exactly what services we want. Director Van Zandt stated that she and the Board are very mindful of cost and effectiveness of expenditures in everything that NCBVI does.

Mark Bulger asked if Dr. Fred Schroeder's services were free or if NCBVI paid him. Director Van Zandt stated that NCBVI did pay Dr. Fred Schroeder for his services, but she does not recall the exact amount that was paid.

Carlos Serván reported that Dr. Fred Schroeder's fee is \$2,400 per day and he was here for three days. Carlos Serván noted that this fee is comparable to fees that NCBVI has paid for other consultant's services. Director Van Zandt reported that Dr. Fred Schroeder was brought in, not for the full staff scope, but to meet her, Carlos, Bob and Wes to get a big picture on expertise in rehabilitation. Dr. Schroeder has a lot of experience, perspectives and wisdom about management and he basically met with them to help them identify ways that they can internally work with all of the NCBVI offices to make some changes.

Commissioner Hansen noted that Dr. Schroeder is an expert in rehabilitation. He is a former director of the New Mexico agency for the blind and he was a former commissioner of rehabilitative services for the United States.

Alex Castillo – Alex stated that he understands that there is an issue because it seems like it was a one-sided thing with the individual that was brought in since he is a member of NFB. However, this gentleman is certified to do what he is doing. Alex stated that the issues should be looked at.

As it relates to the NCBVI training Center and it being a structured discovery training Center, he does not feel that structured discovery is an issue. Alex noted that he did attend the training Center for a year. As it relates to multiple disabilities, if schools and universities had the time and resources to teach the way they wanted to teach, most reports out there show that they do something very similar to structured discovery. Structured discovery is just a name. Basically, it means that you teach a little bit at a time and let people figure out how to do things. Alex noted that if there were 100 training Centers in the country, about 95 of them are not structured discovery Centers. NCBVI would pay for a client to go to other Centers if they request it. Therefore, if a structured discovery Center does not suit a client because of multiple disabilities or for some other reason, the client could go to a different training Center. Alex asked if there can be a strategic plan to serve more minorities. Or, if such a plan already exists, can this be shared with staff. Director Van Zandt stated that the answer to this question is yes. A couple of years ago NCBVI instituted a methodology to do much more outreach to groups that represent different populations. Each District has a spreadsheet that they have listed all of the key groups or organization and there is a specific plan for when they will be contacted and then the counselors in those Districts fill out a report indicating that they have done that. Director Van Zandt noted that she also serves on the Mayor's Multi Cultural Advisory Committee and NCBVI is co-located at the One Stop in Omaha.

Connie Daly – Connie noted that she wanted to say in response to Mark's comments that staff do provide input on the evaluation of the executive director. Also, staff does seek feedback from clients about how their services are. The counselors want this feedback because they want to know what they can do better.

Mark Bulger – Mark asked if NCBVI offers low vision training. Mark also asked how a blind counselor could teach low vision techniques.

Conchita Hernandez – Conchita reported that NCBVI does offer low vision training. NCBVI recently had a low vision specialist come in and do training. NCBVI does not deny low vision services to clients.

It was mentioned that Low Vision Training would make a good Focus Topic discussion at a future NCBVI Commission Board meeting.

Commissioner Jirak stated that he feels that there should be an equal balance of individuals brought in. If someone from the NFB was brought in to offer consultation, then someone from the ACB should be brought in as well. This is not a ACB – NFB thing, simply a balance of power. It states on the NCBVI website that we are a consumer driven organization and if one side is going to be looked at then the other side should be looked at too. When it was mentioned to the Board that the agency was looking at bringing in someone to talk about the accessibility issues of the new personnel tool his hackles went up. Commissioner Jirak noted that he suggested that if an individual who belongs to NFB was going to be contacted, then someone who belongs to ACB should be contacted as well. At this time he forwarded to staff the

name of the President of the Blind and Visually Impaired Technology Specialist and he was assured that Wes Majerus did contact this person and did get his guidance and input.

Bob Deaton – Bob noted that he wanted to comment on progress and goal setting. Bob stated that he feels it is important to recognize that as long as he has been with the agency, it has been in the process of evolving culture and philosophy. It was thought at one time that it was inappropriate for NCBVI to do too much as far as a job search. Eventually, they realized that there are significant barriers to employment and NCBVI needed to be more involved. There are some clients who do not need much assistance, but there is a real spectrum. There are some clients who need NCBVI's support and guidance throughout the process. The culture is becoming more established all the time and it still evolving. There are some items that are difficult to put in a State Plan.

Director Van Zandt stated that this may be another area that may be a good future Focus Topic. Director Van Zandt noted that she wanted to address the business about low vision training. It was implied that it would be difficult to train a blind person to be knowledgeable in low vision. Dr. Van Zandt stated that the truth is that NCBVI does train all staff about the different kinds of low vision techniques and equipment that is available and how to use them.

Commissioner Jirak noted that the CCLVI would be willing to present on low vision as a future focus topic. Commissioner Jirak also noted that he is the President of CCLVI.

Next meeting – Saturday, August 10, 2013; Quality Inn and Suites, North Platte - Focus topic is Technology Program Manager Position.

Final Announcements

There were no final announcements.

Adjourn

Commissioner Jirak moved to adjourn the June 22, 2013 Commission Board meeting at 1:10 p.m. Commissioner Walla seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken and all commissioners voted in favor of the motion.

If you have an item that you would like to have placed on the agenda of the August 10, 2013 Commission Board meeting, please email it to the NCBVI Commission Board at ncbvi.commission-board@nebraska.gov.

Respectfully submitted,
Kathy Stephens, Administrative Assistant
NCBVI

Julie Johnson, Chairperson
NCBVI Board of Commissioners