

**Assessments; Estimates; Goals and Priorities; Strategies; and Progress Reports -
State's Strategies and Use of Title I Funds of Innovation and Expansion Activities**

Strategies to Achieve the Goals and Priorities of the Division

The State Plan Attachment 4.11(c) identifies goals established by the Board of Vocational Rehabilitation and the Division of Rehabilitation Services. These goals are related to assisting individuals with disabilities to obtain good jobs, economic self-sufficiency, personal independence, and full inclusion into the community. The strategies listed below are key steps in accomplishing these goals.

- Strategy 1.1: Improve consumer retention of employment status;
- Strategy 1.2: Track the earnings for SSA beneficiaries and implement actions to increase the earnings and employment rate of consumers who are SSA beneficiaries;
- Strategy 1.3: Provide specialized support services based upon individual's unique needs to keep their employment;
- Strategy 1.4: Evaluate and respond to the needs of service providers;
- Strategy 1.5: Strengthen the Benefits Specialists services for VR consumers;
- Strategy 1.6: Strengthen the Ticket to Work initiatives for Social Security beneficiaries;
- Strategy 1.7: Increase work experience opportunities for adults with disabilities.
- Strategy 1.8: Promote the development & utilization of vocational skills training for individuals in South Dakota.
- Strategy 2.1: Raise awareness and understanding of different disabilities and related functional limitations;
- Strategy 2.2: Strengthen partnerships with the business community;
- Strategy 2.3: Strengthen partnerships with organizations serving Native Americans and other minorities with disabilities;

- Strategy 2.4: Coordinate vocational rehabilitation services with the elementary and secondary school systems;
- Strategy 2.5: Strengthen working relationships with entities, agencies, and organizations to enhance the delivery of vocational rehabilitation services to underserved rural areas.
- Strategy 3.1: Explore the tools for assessing motivational state for VR consumers.
- Strategy 3.2: Assess critical strengths and deficits in the consumer's personal life skills.
- Strategy 3.3: Build the assessments into the initial VR process.
- Strategy 3.4: Develop potential provider supports for life skills development.
- Strategy 3.5: Increase the utilization of self-employment as an employment outcome for VR consumers.
- Strategy 4.1: Coordinate vocational rehabilitation services for VR consumers who are attending post secondary programs;
- Strategy 4.2: Increase and strengthen transition services for eligible students who are exploring their employment future;
- Strategy 4.3: Educate teachers, students and their parents about Vocational Rehabilitation Services;
- Strategy 4.4: Expand transition services that have demonstrated effectiveness through evidence based practices such as Indicator 14.

Availability and Utilization of Assistive Technology

The Division of Rehabilitation Services makes assistive technology available to our Vocational Rehabilitation consumers during each stage of the rehabilitation process. The primary provider of assistive technology in South Dakota is Dakota Link. This provider has AT resource areas throughout the state and they provide AT assessment for VR applications and consumers. Many of the Career Centers have resource rooms available and have computers with assistive devices for individuals with disabilities.

Outreach Activities to Identify and Serve Individuals with the Most Significant Disabilities Who are Minorities

South Dakota's racial mix consists of 92.5% white/Caucasian, 7% Native American and .5% all other racial groups. Native Americans represent the only significant minority group in South Dakota. South Dakota has seven separate tribal reservations with autonomous governing bodies. Collectively they represent the Great Sioux Nation and share a common culture and language. Typically these reservations are very rural, isolated, with high poverty, and high unemployment rates. Nearly half of all Native Americans in South Dakota live on reservations.

The Division of Rehabilitation Services has counselors who serve each of the reservation areas. These counselors meet with local Indian Health Services and tribal government staff to identify potential referrals. Generally staff work out of tribal offices when meeting with consumers on reservations. Native Americans living on reservations face unique challenges. First, they are eligible for a combination of tribal, federal and state programs to meet their vocational and health care needs. This requires extensive coordination and cooperation between agencies. Secondly, they are faced with significant cultural and economic barriers. Unemployment on South Dakota's reservations varies from 70 % to 80%. There is very little private employment. Most individuals are employed by either tribal or federal governments.

South Dakota is fortunate to have four American Indian Vocational Rehabilitation Services Programs (AIVRS). These programs have greatly improved access to vocational rehabilitation services for those Native Americans served by these AIVRS Programs. The Division has established an on-going working relationship with each of the programs. We have assigned a counselor to work with each Project to assist them in program development. Native American consumers living on reservations have the choice of either being served by the AIVRS, the state unit or jointly by both programs. We encourage consumers to be served either by the AIVRS Program or jointly by both projects. The AIVRS Programs have a better grasp of the cultural and the service delivery barriers that exist on reservations. The state agency has access to specialized programs and services which are not feasible for a AIVRS Program to maintain. On those reservations where a AIVRS Program exists, the Division does not plan to conduct extensive outreach activities. This function can more effectively be conducted by the AIVRS Programs. Our efforts will be to network with the AIVRS Programs to ensure that Native American consumers have access to the full range of vocational rehabilitation services. DRS has a formal cooperative agreement with each AIVRS Programs.

A number of Native American consumer organizations have developed in the state. The Division works closely with these organizations to identify special needs and strategies to meet these needs. One of these organizations, Tateya Topa Ho, is an independent living center serving all seven reservations. Working in conjunction with the Statewide Independent Living Council, the Division has expanded its financial support for this organization. This organization has local liaisons on each reservation who refer directly

to vocational rehabilitation. Both the Board of Vocational Rehabilitation and the Independent Living Council have Native American representation. These individuals provide guidance and consultation to the Division on policy issues affecting Native Americans.

Overcome Barriers to Equitable Access to and Participation in the Vocational Rehabilitation and Supported Employment Programs

The Division has been very proactive in overcoming barriers for applicants and consumers to access and participate in the Vocational Rehabilitation and Supported Employment Programs. Follow is a list of key activities implemented to assure equitable access:

- All District Offices are in accessible locations.
- All District Offices have a TTY and advertise this number to consumers and providers.
- All DRS public meetings are held in locations that are physically accessible to people with disabilities.
- All applicants and consumers are informed that alternative formats for information (Braille, diskette, large print, and auxiliary aids and reasonable accommodations) are available upon request for all Division events.
- The Division makes special efforts to provide interpreters for individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing, individuals who speak foreign languages, and individuals who speak Lakota, Dakota or Nakota.
- The Division participates in a “Loss Control Committee”. The purpose of this committee is to evaluate the accessibility and safety issues of all area offices.
- The Division’s Internet Home Page is accessible for individuals with disabilities who may be using assistive devices to access the information. The home page was evaluated for accessibility utilizing an application called “Bobby Approved”.
- The Division has implemented a policy to coordinate referrals for the provision of state wide assistive technology devices and services to ensure consumers can overcome barriers they encounter during the rehabilitation process.
- The Division administers a telecommunication adaptive devices (TAD) program for free distribution of accessible telephone equipment to South Dakota residents with disabilities.
- Division staff are working with all partners in the Work Investment Act Job Service Offices to assure physical access, program access and services access.

Future Utilization of Innovation and Expansion Funds

Section 101 (a)(18) of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 as Amended requires the State Vocational Rehabilitation Agency to reserve and use a portion of the funds for:

(i) the development and implementation of innovative approaches to expand and improve the provision of vocational rehabilitation services to individuals with disabilities, particularly individuals with the most significant disabilities, consistent with the findings of the statewide assessment and goals and priorities of the State; and

(ii) to support of the State Rehabilitation Council and the Statewide Independent Living Council.

The Division of Rehabilitation Services has reserved a budgeted amount for the utilization of the Innovation and Expansion. These funds will be used for the following activities:

- ✓ Support the cost of the Board of Vocational Rehabilitation. This includes staff cost, accommodations and other direct costs involved in VR Board activities.
- ✓ Support the cost of the State-Wide Independent Living Council (SILC). This includes staff cost, accommodations and other direct costs involved in SILC activities.
- ✓ Initiatives approved by the Board of VR to expand and improve the provision of vocational rehabilitation services to individuals with disabilities, particularly individuals with the most significant disabilities, consistent with the findings of the statewide assessment and goals and priorities of the State.
- ✓ Support the functions of the VR Board as described in Section 105 (c) of the Rehabilitation Act.
- ✓ Improve use of assistive technology services and devices through the assistive technology advisory committee and collaboration with the assistive technology systems change project.
- ✓ Establishment, development and improvement of community rehabilitation programs.
- ✓ Improvement in service provision as measured through standards and indicators.
- ✓ Assist partners in the statewide workforce investment system in assisting individuals with disabilities.