

Illinois Department of Human Services Division of Rehabilitation Services
Draft Goals and Strategies for FY2015 State VR Plan

Goal 1: Employment Outcomes

DRS will increase the number of competitive employment outcomes to 5,750 in FY2015. In FY2012 DRS achieved 4,959 outcomes and 5,151 outcomes in FY2013.

Strategies: DRS is pursuing several strategies to increase the number of employment outcomes, including: increasing business partnerships through the NET and other approaches; providing job placement training to all VR counselors; establishing performance based contracts with community provider agencies; providing personal organization training to VR counselors; establishing outreach efforts to increase referrals to the VR program.

Goal 2: Average Wages

DRS will increase the average hourly wage earned by individuals achieving a competitive employment outcome to \$10.95 in FY2015. DRS achieved an average of \$10.54 in FY2012 and an average of \$10.59 in FY2013.

Strategies: DRS is following two main strategies to increase wages. The first is to increase the number of individuals enrolled in university and community college programs. These individuals have higher earnings than those with less education. A second strategy is to identify individuals with work experience who may benefit from return-to-work services through the VR program. DRS has one community provider contract that focuses on return-to-work and it has higher than average earnings for the individuals it serves.

Goal 3: Average Hours Worked

DRS will increase the average hours worked per week by individuals achieving a competitive employment outcome to 28.5 in FY2015. DRS achieved an average of 27.4 hours per week in FY2012 and an average of 27.2 hours in FY2013.

Strategies: The average hours worked per week statistic will be impacted by identifying individuals in the return-to-work category as well as by the increase in persons completing university and community college training. Higher wages and longer work weeks are associated with higher levels of education and greater work experience. In addition employer contacts through the NET will lead to more work opportunities at larger companies with a national presence, many of whom have full-time jobs available.

Goal 4: Rehabilitation Rate

DRS will increase the rehabilitation rate to 56.0 in FY2015. DRS achieved a rehab rate of 54.3 in FY2012 and a rate of 53.6 in FY2013.

Strategies: Training for VR counselors in caseload management is expected to improve the rehab rate by preventing cases from being closed as not rehabilitated due to inattention or poor service coordination. In addition, job placement training is expected to increase the placement rate for VR counselors.

Goal 5. University Enrollment

DRS will increase the number of individuals pursuing a degree and enrolled in a university to 2,200 in FFY2015. As of May 31, 2014 there were 1,366 VR customers enrolled in university training.

Strategies: DRS is pursuing a partnership approach where each university will have a liaison assigned from a local VR office (either a supervisor or a counselor) to the disability services office at the university. This single point of contact approach for coordinating referrals to VR and for exchanging information should lead to increased enrollment of VR customers and additional employment outcomes in future years.

Goal 6: Community College Enrollment

DRS will increase the number of individuals enrolled in community colleges pursuing a degree or credential to 1,000 in FY2015. As of May 31, 2014 there were 870 VR customers enrolled in community college programs.

Strategies: DRS will use a similar approach for community colleges. A liaison will be assigned as the primary point of contact with the community college disability services office. This will improve the appropriateness and timeliness of referrals to VR and increase enrollment in community college programs.

Goal 7: Return to Work Services

DRS will increase the number of VR cases receiving services in order to return to work to 150 in FY2015. DRS does not currently have any baseline data on individuals in this category.

Strategies: DRS intends to conduct outreach to rehabilitation hospitals, orthopedic clinics, physical therapy clinics and other professionals who are likely to be in contact with individuals who have disabilities and a work history but who are currently not working. DRS will work with the communications office to develop materials that will effectively communicate a message about how the VR program can benefit the individuals served by these professionals.

Goal 8: Expand Transition Services

Goal 8.1: In FY2015 DRS will expand transition services to individuals from minority populations through effective outreach, increasing the number of minority transition age youth receiving services by 750 compared to FY2014. As of May 31, 2014 DRS had 9,383 open transition cases, of which 3,872 were minority youth.

Goal 8.2: DRS will increase the number of transition graduates achieving employment outcomes within the first year of leaving school to 1,500 in FY2015. As of June 1, 2014 DRS had assisted 1,267 transition students who graduated in 2013 in achieving an employment outcome.

Goal 8.3: In FY2015 DRS will work to improve the consistency and timeliness of service delivery to transition students through implementation of quality control procedures.

Strategies: DRS is pursuing a number of activities relating to transition services. DRS is establishing contracts with community agencies to conduct outreach activities to identify minority individuals who may benefit from VR services. In addition DRS is working with the University of Illinois at Chicago in a major restructuring of transition services provided to students of the Chicago Public Schools, the third largest school district in the United States. DRS anticipates that enrollment, particularly of minority youth, will be greatly increased through these efforts.

DRS has also developed an arrangement with the state's protection and advocacy agency to conduct outreach activities targeted at minority youth with disabilities across the state. Equip for Equality has offices across the state and a network of relationships with youth-related service entities that will enable more productive outreach to this population.

DRS also has established new rates and payment methods for contractors in its Secondary Transitional Experience Program (STEP). Beginning in July 2013 at least 75 percent of funding to STEP contractors will be based on achievement of community based, employer paid employment targets for students while they are in school. DRS believes that this enhanced focus on paid employment will result in greater workforce attachment and increased employment outcome closures for transition youth.

DRS is working with the State Rehabilitation Council to develop a quality control checklist which is designed to improve the consistency of service delivery for transition customers, as well as improve timely performance of key activities. SRC members believe that implementing these procedures will result in more consistent and timely services for transition age youth and increase the chances of their achieving a successful outcome.

Goal 9: Expand Business Partnerships

In FY2015 DRS will expand the number of business partnerships developed in conjunction with the National Employment Team (the NET) by 25 percent compared to the number for FY2014. The baseline figure is 40 NET-related business partnerships.

Strategies: DRS strongly supports the NET concept developed by CSAVR. Having a single point of contact in Illinois for national employers has led to increased employment through those employers, as well as an expanded range of employment options for VR customers. DRS believes that this type of communication and interaction with employers is a highly effective method of engagement that leads directly to employment results for customers. DRS has provided ongoing training to VR counselors on the best means of making effective use of NET partnerships. Consequently DRS intends to continue expansion of this option.

Goal 10: Strategic Planning

In FY2015 DRS will work with the State Rehabilitation Council to complete a VR Strategic Plan that will provide direction for the program for the next five years.

Strategies: For several years DRS participated in a strategic planning effort coordinated by the larger Department of Human Services. That process has not been active in at least two years, so DRS feels it is a good time to develop its own strategic plan in conjunction with the State Rehabilitation Council, which is a strong proponent of such a plan.

Goal 11: Enhance Workforce Partnerships

In FY2015 DRS will increase the number of VR customers receiving vocational training funded all or in part through WIA funds to 500. Of that number, at least 300 will achieve an industry-recognized credential as a result of participation in training.

Strategies: While DRS has been an active partner in Illinois' workforce efforts for many years, there has been some inconsistency in the degree of involvement in workforce areas around the state. DRS intends to strengthen relationships between local offices and workforce centers, focusing on the issue of WIA-supported training and its availability to VR customers. In recent years many workforce centers have placed an emphasis on specific occupational categories that are eligible for training funds. DRS counselors need to become knowledgeable about these occupational categories in their local areas and work with VR customers who can benefit from training related to those occupations. DRS anticipates that improved communication will result in many more VR customer being able to use WIA funds to support training services.

Goal 12: Expand IPS Services

In FY2015 DRS will establish IPS pilot projects in 16 new locations, including expansion of IPS service concepts to persons with developmental disabilities and youth with disabilities.

Strategies: The IPS program in Illinois has been highly effective in assisting individuals with a serious mental illness to achieve an employment outcome. The partnership between DRS, the Division of Mental Health and community provider agencies has been highly productive. In FY2015 DRS is also working closely with the Division of Developmental Disabilities and the LEAD Center to develop innovative projects that extend IPS concepts to youth with mental illness and to youth and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities. These projects will also make use of the discovery concept associated with customized employment. Working with nationally recognized subject matter experts DRS anticipates starting 16 new projects under the IPS framework in the coming year.