

VR Portion of WIOA State Plan for South Carolina Commission for the Blind FY-2018

Program-Specific Requirements for Vocational Rehabilitation (Blind)

The Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Services Portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan* must include the following descriptions and estimates, as required by section 101(a) of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended by WIOA:

* Sec. 102(b)(D)(iii) of WIOA

a. Input of State Rehabilitation Council

All agencies, except for those that are independent consumer-controlled commissions, must describe the following:

1. input provided by the State Rehabilitation Council, including input and recommendations on the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan, recommendations from the Council's report, the review and analysis of consumer satisfaction, and other Council reports that may have been developed as part of the Council's functions;

The South Carolina Commission for the Blind (SCCB) is an independent consumer controlled commission with a Governor appointed State Board that provides governance and program guidance, and as such is not required to submit this section. The results of the 2016 Comprehensive Statewide Assessment of Rehabilitation Needs and this subsequent State Plan submission has been reviewed and approved by the SCCB Board of Commissioners. Further, the SCCB program specific portion of the South Carolina Unified State Plan has been informed and aligned with the South Carolina Workforce Development Board's to Build a Competitive Workforce strategic plan.

2. the Designated State unit's response to the Council's input and recommendations; and

The South Carolina Commission for the Blind procured, participated in, and oversaw the development of the 2016 Comprehensive Statewide Assessment of Rehabilitation Needs and the development of the WIOA Unified State Plan. The SCCB Board assisted in the development of agency goals and strategies, and voted to approve the plan.

3. the designated State unit's explanations for rejecting any of the Council's input or recommendations.

N/A

b. Request for Waiver of State-wideness

When requesting a waiver of the state-wideness requirement, the designated State unit must identify the types of services to be provided by the program on a non-statewide basis. The waiver request must also include written assurances that:

1. a local public agency will provide the non-Federal share of costs associated with the services to be provided in accordance with the waiver request;

SCCB ensures all services are available on a statewide basis and is not requesting a waiver of state-wideness.

2. the designated State unit will approve each proposed service before it is put into effect; and

N/A

3. All State plan requirements will apply

requirements of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan will apply to the services approved under the waiver.

N/A

c. Cooperative Agreements with Agencies Not Carrying Out Activities Under the Statewide Workforce Development System.

Describe interagency cooperation with and utilization of the services and facilities of agencies and programs that are not carrying out activities through the statewide workforce development system with respect to:

1. Federal, State, and local agencies and programs;

SCCB has developed and signed Cooperative Agreements with the following agencies:

- South Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) to create administrative efficiencies and improve services to consumers statewide;
- South Carolina Worker's Compensation Commission (WCC) to facilitate the referral process of injured workers to SCCB to enhance return-to-work efforts;
- Social Security Administration (SSA) to collaborate on employment incentives and supports and maximize Social Security Administration/Vocational Rehabilitation (SSA/VR) reimbursement activity through the Ticket to Work Program;
- South Carolina Office of Veterans' Affairs (OVA) to help identify veterans who need additional supports in securing benefits, gaining employment, and accessing advocacy services;
- South Carolina Department of Disabilities and Special Needs (DDSN) to eliminate potential duplication of services and increase coordination of employment services provided to the shared consumer populations;

- South Carolina Department of Social Services (DSS) to eliminate duplication of services and increase coordination of employment services provided to the shared consumer populations;
- South Carolina Department of Mental Health to collaborate, coordinate, eliminate potential duplication of services, and enhance the employment outcomes of shared consumer populations.

2. State programs carried out under section 4 of the Assistive Technology Act of 1998;

SCCB has a cooperative agreement with the South Carolina Assistive Technology Program at the University of South Carolina School of Medicine to access comparable benefits, eliminate duplication of services, and increase coordination of employment services provided to shared consumer populations.

3. Programs carried out by the Under Secretary for Rural Development of the United States Department of Agriculture;

SCCB is working to develop partnerships with the local office of the U.S. Department of Agriculture to develop cooperative efforts to provide services to South Carolinians who are blind or visually impaired.

4. Non-educational agencies serving out-of-school youth; and

Non-educational agencies serving out of school youth participate in South Carolina's statewide workforce development system and are partnered with through the provisions of the Unified State Plan and the Workforce Development System.

5. State use contracting programs.

No such State Use Contracting Program is in place in South Carolina.

d. Coordination with Education Officials

Describe:

1. DSU's plans

The designated State unit's plans, policies, and procedures for coordination with education officials to facilitate the transition of students with disabilities from school to the receipt of VR services, including pre-employment transition services, as well as procedures for the timely development and approval of individualized plans for employment for the students.

SCCB has a current (2017) Cooperative Agreement with the South Carolina Department of Education, and has local area Memorandum of Understandings with Local Education Authorities (LEA's) to enhance, improve, and innovate programs and services provided to ensure a seamless and effective transition from school to post-secondary education, careers, and adult life for students with disabilities. Coordination with education officials is accomplished on three (3) distinct levels of the SCCB service delivery process.

These three levels include:

SCCB Children's Services Program: This program serves children between the ages of 3 and 14 years of age. The Children's Services Counselors coordinate care with educational entities such as the local school districts and the SC School for the Deaf and Blind (SCSDB). Service delivery includes evaluations for low vision aids and assistive technology, consultation and advocacy and information and referral services.

SCCB Career BOOST (Building Occupational Opportunities for Students in Transition): Is a contractual pilot program in partnership with South Carolina's Independent Living Centers, the National Federation of the Blind of South Carolina, and LEA's. Pre-Employment Transition Services are provided to eligible and potentially eligible students with disabilities in the public schools and other settings. These services include Self-Advocacy Workshops, Work Readiness Soft Skills Workshops, Exploration of Higher Education through College Tours, and Work Based Learning Experiences.

SCCB Vocational Rehabilitation Comprehensive Transition Services Program: This program serves students from age 15 until exit from high school at which time they are served by the SCCB adult VR program. SCCB has four (4) dedicated Transition Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors statewide building program infrastructure and education relationships to improve services to Transition Students. The Transition Counselors primarily collaborate with education officials such as the South Carolina Department of Education (local school districts), the South Carolina School for the Deaf and Blind (SCSDB) and the South Carolina Department of Disabilities and Special Needs (SCDDSN). Transition Counselors develop the initial Individualized Plan of Employment (IPE) while the consumer is attending high school. The IPE includes services pertaining to the adjustment, prevention or stabilization of vision, and Pre-Employment Transition Services as defined in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act (WIOA). In an effort to avoid the duplication of services, low vision and assistive technology needs will be coordinated with local school districts in accordance with the student's Individualized Education Plan (IEP) and IPE. In such instances, the alternative service providers and funding sources will be identified on the IPE and coordinated accordingly. SCCB will conduct semiannual meetings with the statewide vision teachers in an effort to facilitate the coordination of services to the most significantly disabled students and their need for supported employment services. Discussions will include, but not be limited to, collaboration with SCDDSN, SCDOE and the SCSDB to coordinate transition services. The main source of referrals to the Transition Counselors is the school district. Procedures for outreach to, and identification of blind and visually impaired students include, but are not limited to, the utilization of SCCB program data, statistical data from the Data Analysis System of the US Department of Education (Office of Special Education) and the American Community Survey data. An annual analysis of the data from these sources identifies the location of transition aged unserved and underserved individuals. In an effort to address the assistive technology needs of college bound transition consumers, SCCB sponsors an annual Technology Day. The need for this initiative arose due to an increase in the number of blind and visually impaired students who were failing college courses due to an inability to take notes and complete assignments. During technology day, consumers are assessed and trained on the latest assistive technology software and equipment.

Assistive technology recommendations for each student are contingent upon the level of blindness, skill level and school requirements. Technology Day is conducted by the SCCB Training and Employment Department. SCCB is currently working to become an actively engaged partner in the Transition Alliance of South Carolina (TASC) a multi- agency partnership between the South Carolina Department of Education, South Carolina Vocational Rehabilitation Department, South Carolina Department of Disability and Special Needs, and Local Education Agencies to facilitate the coordination of services to transition students leading to employment and independent adult living. SCCB is currently seeking proposals for a demonstration project called “Career BOOST” (Building Occupational Opportunities for Students in Transition) through which Pre-Employment Transition Services will be provided to students in their communities. These services will include: 1. Self-Advocacy Training 2. Work Readiness Workshops 3. Work Based Learning Experiences 4. College and Higher Education Exploration 5. Career Exploration Experiences SCCB is currently negotiating a formal written Cooperative Agreement with the South Carolina Department of Education that includes provisions for: (A) mutual consultation and technical assistance to assist educational agencies and SCCB in planning for the transition of students with disabilities from school to post-school activities, including VR services; (B) transition planning by personnel of the designated state agency and educational agency that facilitates the development and completion of their individualized education programs; (C) roles and responsibilities, including financial responsibilities, of each agency, including provisions for determining state lead agencies and qualified personnel responsible for transition services; and (D) Procedures for outreach to and identification of students with disabilities who need transition services.

Additionally, SCCB is an active member of the **Transition Alliance of South Carolina (TASC)**. TASC supports local interagency transition teams by providing resources to increase collaboration, partnerships, coordination, and effectiveness in serving students with disabilities transitioning from high school to adult-life. SCCB also participates in the **SC Vision Education Partnership** where public educators for the blind and visually impaired collaborate and coordinate with SCCB Transition VR staff. SCCB is an active member of the **Employment First Initiative** steering committee, an interagency partnership focused on ensuring that competitive integrated employment is the first priority for transition aged students with disabilities. SCCB is also an active member of the **Advisory Council for Educating Students with Disabilities** an advisory council for the Office of Special Education at the South Carolina Department of Education. All of these committees and councils create avenues for coordination and collaboration with state and local education officials.

2. Information on the formal interagency agreement with the State educational agency with respect to:

A. consultation and technical assistance to assist educational agencies in planning for the transition of students with disabilities from school to post-school activities, including VR services;

SCCB finalized a formal written Cooperative Agreement with the South Carolina Department of Education on August 15, 2017 that specifically includes provisions for: (A) mutual consultation

and technical assistance to assist educational agencies and SCCB in planning for the transition of students with disabilities from school to post-school activities, including VR services. The agency has also entered into Memorandum of Understanding with Local Education Agencies (LEA's) that builds our partnerships with public schools. In addition, SCCB is engaged in the **Transition Alliance of South Carolina** where educational partners coordinate, collaborate and provide technical expertise on regionally based transition teams. Finally, SCCB has been an active partner in the **South Carolina Vision Education Partnership** that brings Blind and Visual Impairment Educators and VR Transition Counselors together for collaborative training, team building, and technical assistance.

B. transition planning by personnel of the designated State agency and educational agency that facilitates the development and implementation of their individualized education programs;

SCCB has a current Cooperative Agreement with the South Carolina Department of Education and Local Education Agencies that includes provisions for transition planning by personnel of the designated state agency and educational agency that facilitates the development and completion of their individualized education programs. SCCB provides technical expertise, assistive technology assessments, and Pre-Employment Transition Services to students in cooperation and collaboration with educational entities. The Career BOOST program provides the 5 required Pre-Employment Transition Services in classrooms through a partnership with local public schools and educators.

C. roles and responsibilities, including financial responsibilities, of each agency, including provisions for determining State lead agencies and qualified personnel responsible for transition services;

SCCB has a current formal written Cooperative Agreement with the South Carolina Department of Education and LEA's that includes provisions for clarity of roles and responsibilities, including financial responsibilities, of each agency, including provisions for determining state lead agencies and qualified personnel responsible for transition services.

D. procedures for outreach to and identification of students with disabilities who need transition services.

SCCB has a current formal written Cooperative Agreement with the South Carolina Department of Education and LEA's that includes provisions for procedures for outreach to and identification of students with disabilities who need transition services. SCCB is an active partner in the Transition Alliance of South Carolina (TASC) where VR Transition Counselors partner with local educators who assist in the identification and referral of potentially eligible students who need transition services. SCCB involvement in the South Carolina Vision Education Partnership also creates relationships with educators who refer potentially eligible students to SCCB. SCCB's Career BOOST Program in partnership with LEA's identifies and provides Pre-Employment Transition Services to eligible and potentially eligible students with disabilities and makes referrals to SCCB and SCVRD when comprehensive transition services may be needed. Finally, SCCB staff participate in parent outreach, information, and referral events.

e. Cooperative Agreements with Private Nonprofit Organizations

(Formerly known as Attachment 4.8(b)(3)). Describe the manner in which the designated State agency establishes cooperative agreements with private non-profit VR service providers.

SCCB has actively established Cooperative Agreements and community partnerships with private nonprofit organizations. SCCB is committed to being an active, cooperative and collaborative partner with community entities wherever such reciprocal relationships can benefit consumers and enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of the VR program. SCCB has developed and maintains Cooperative Agreements with the following entities not carrying out activities under the Statewide Workforce Development System:

- The **National Federation of the Blind (NFB) of South Carolina** for the purposes of ensuring statewide availability of adjustment to blindness training, job readiness and computer skills training, independent living skills training.
- The **Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired (ABVI)** for the purposes of ensuring statewide availability of adjustment to blindness training, job readiness and computer skills training, and independent living skills training.
- **South Carolina Association of the Deaf, Inc.**
- **Goodwill Industries** for the purposes of providing statewide access to job readiness and computer skills training.
- The **Helen Keller National Center (HKNC)** for the purpose of expanding training options for consumers who are Deaf/Blind and need training beyond the scope of programs provided at the Ellen Beach Mack Rehabilitation Center for Employment and Independence (EBMRCEI).
- And informal partnerships with community based partners such as faith based organizations, charitable organizations, and non-governmental community based organizations.
- Community Rehabilitation Programs providing Orientation and Mobility, Home Management, and Braille Instruction on a fee-for-service basis.
- **Spirit Enterprise Services** to provide transportation for consumers in order to engage in vocational rehabilitation activities.

f. Arrangements and Cooperative Agreements for the Provision of Supported Employment Services

(Formerly known as Attachment 4.8(b)(4)). Describe the designated State agency's efforts to identify and make arrangements, including entering into cooperative agreements, with other State agencies and other appropriate entities in order to provide supported employment services and extended employment services, as applicable, to individuals with the most significant disabilities, including youth with the most significant disabilities.

SCCB has established an internal Supported Employment program that includes Customized Employment provided by three (3) regionally assigned JOBS Specialists. During program year 2018 SCCB partnered with the Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Technical Assistance

Center and the Youth Technical Assistance Center to provide intensive Customized Employment training to the JOBS Specialists. SCCB has signed a Partnership Plus Agreement with ABLE SC under provisions in the Ticket-to-Work program to provide ongoing supports for ticket holders. SCCB is working to establish other Cooperative Agreements with entities providing ongoing supports to consumers in Supported Employment.

g. Coordination with Employers

(Formerly known as Attachment 4.8(b)(5)). Describe how the designated State unit will work with employers to identify competitive integrated employment and career exploration opportunities in order to facilitate the provision of:

1. VR services; and

SCCB actively engages with the South Carolina business community through services provided by the Training & Employment Division (T&E) Employment Consultants. SCCB T&E Employment Consultants build and maintain partnerships with businesses to:

- Assess and better understand the unique human resource needs of South Carolina businesses;
- To help align SCCB programs to better meet the unique and specific human resource needs of South Carolina businesses;
- To create, establish, and foster relationships with South Carolina businesses that help them meet their unique and specific human resource needs, including talent acquisition and talent retention;
- Develop opportunities for Work Based Experiences, Internships, Job Shadowing, and other work based learning experiences that provide South Carolina Businesses with opportunities to gain experience with a diverse and qualified workforce;
- Create mutually beneficial relationships and facilitate linkages of job openings to a highly skilled and diverse talent pool of candidates. Referrals of consumers who are seeking employment and who have been judged to be Job Ready are received from SCCB Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors. The Employment Consultant's role is job development and placement that meets the needs of the business and the consumer. The Consultant also provides businesses and consumers with access to services that can be provided by SCCB or other governmental agencies. Incentives that may be applicable are also presented. These include:
 - The Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC). This program allows a maximum available credit of \$2,400 per eligible worker.
 - Sensitivity and awareness training for employers and organizations. This training includes American Disability Act (ADA), sighted guide techniques and attitudes regarding blindness. The presentation is designed to remove myths and apprehensions about blindness.
 - Technical assistance for the implementation and support of assistive technology.

SCCB T&E Division also employs Assistive Technology Consultants (AT Consultants) who work directly with businesses and consumers to:

- Provide assessment and technical assistance in the provision of work place modifications and/or assistive technology solutions considered reasonable accommodations that enable a consumer who is blind to become an asset to the business partner;
- Make recommendations for software and/or other equipment which would enable the consumer to successfully engage in employment;
- Creates customized software solutions which may be necessary to allow the consumer to access computer systems effectively;
- Recommends the purchase of required equipment and/or software to the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor; and,
- Oversees the delivery and installation of this equipment on the work site and provides the consumer training on any specialized applications.

2. transition services, including pre-employment transition services, for students and youth with disabilities.

SCCB coordinates the **Summer Internship Program (SIP)** in collaboration with business to match a college aged Junior or Senior with a paid internship over the summer. This highly successful program was expanded in 2016 to include transition students in our new **Summer Internship Program Jr. (SIP Jr.)** where transition students in their Junior and Senior year of High School are matched with internships in local businesses where they gain work experience, conduct career exploration, and establish relationships with employers. SCCB supports the employers by funding the paid internship, providing assistive technology or other workplace accommodations, providing technical assistance and ADA compliance information, and helping workplaces become more diversified and accessible.

SCCB Career BOOST (Building Occupational Opportunities for Students in Transition): Is a contractual pilot program in partnership with South Carolina's Independent Living Centers, the National Federation of the Blind of South Carolina, and LEA's. Pre-Employment Transition Services are provided to eligible and potentially eligible students with disabilities. These services include Self-Advocacy Workshops, Work Readiness Soft Skills Workshops, Exploration of Higher Education through College Tours, and Work Based Learning Experiences in partnership with the business community.

h. Interagency Cooperation

Describe how the designated State unit will collaborate with the State agency responsible for administering each of the following programs to develop opportunities for competitive integrated employment, to the greatest extent practicable:

1. the State Medicaid plan under title XIX of the Social Security Act;

SCCB has a Cooperative Agreement with the South Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), the state agency responsible for administering the state Medicaid plan under Title XIX of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 1396 et seq.). This Cooperative Agreement outlines the roles and responsibilities of all parties regarding the delivery of VR services, including extended services, for individuals with the most significant disabilities who have been determined to be eligible for home and community-based services under a Medicaid waiver, Medicaid state plan amendment, or other authority related to a state Medicaid program as applicable to South Carolina. This Cooperative Agreement will be updated during FPY 2018 to reflect alignment with the Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act.

2. the State agency responsible for providing services for individuals with developmental disabilities; and

SCCB is developing an updated Cooperative Agreement with the South Carolina Department of Disabilities and Special Needs (DDSN) to avoid duplication of services, increase coordination of employment services provided to the shared consumer populations, and to enhance Supported Employment programs. SCCB is an active partner with DDSN and both agencies are represented on the Employment First Initiative Steering Committee and the South Carolina Disability Employment Coalition.

3. the State agency responsible for providing mental health services.

SCCB is developing a new Cooperative Agreement with the South Carolina Department of Mental Health to collaborate, coordinate, avoid duplication of services, and enhance the employment outcomes of shared consumer populations.

i. Comprehensive System of Personnel Development; Data System on Personnel and Personnel Development

(Formerly known as Attachment 4.10). Describe the designated State agency's procedures and activities to establish and maintain a comprehensive system of personnel development designed to ensure an adequate supply of qualified State rehabilitation professional and paraprofessional personnel for the designated State unit, including the following:

1. Data System on Personnel and Personnel Development

A. Qualified Personnel Needs.

Describe the development and maintenance of a system for collecting and analyzing on an annual basis data on qualified personnel needs with respect to:

- i. the number of personnel who are employed by the State agency in the provision of VR services in relation to the number of individuals served, broken down by personnel category;

Staffing patterns are set through a joint effort of the SCCB Commissioner, Director of Consumer Services, Senior Management staff as appropriate, and Regional Directors. In an effort to assess current staffing and hiring needs, SCCB analyzes the following data on an annual basis:

1. Rate of consumer referrals to the VR Program
2. Ratio of VR Counselors to consumers certified eligible for VR services
3. Ratio of VR Counselors to consumers served
4. State Demographic Trends (Incidence of Blindness, Population estimates)
5. Employment/Unemployment data trends
6. Current and projected monetary resources

The SCCB VR program received 714 new referrals during FFY 2017, and served a total of 1,043 eligible consumers. This represented a consumer to VR Counselor ratio of 69.5 to 1. Staffing patterns are continuously evaluated by SCCB administration in an effort to make projections for future capacity to provide quality vocational rehabilitation services.

ii. the number of personnel currently needed by the State agency to provide VR services, broken down by personnel category; and

Row	Job Title	Total positions	Current vacancies
1	VR Counselors	12	2
2	Transition Counselors	3	1
3	VR Counselor Assistants	10	1
4	Rehabilitation Instructors	16	0
5	Assistive Technology Staff	3	0
6	Nurse	1	0
7	Other Staff (Support staff, drivers and BEP)	33	3
8	Business Relations Consultant	3	2
9	Jobs Oriented Blind Service Specialist (Supported Employment)	3	0
VR+10	Quality Assurance Reviewer	1	0
TOTALS		85	

iii. projections of the number of personnel, broken down by personnel category, who will be needed by the State agency to provide VR services in 5 years based on projections of the number of individuals to be served, including individuals with significant disabilities, the number of personnel expected to retire or leave the field, and other relevant factors.

Row	Job Title	Total positions	Current vacancies	Projected vacancies over the next 5 years
1	VR Counselors	12	2	3
2	Transition Counselors	3	1	2
3	VR Counselor Assistants	10	1	3
4	Rehabilitation Instructors	16	0	6
5	Assistive Technology Staff	3	0	1
6	Nurse	1	0	1
7	Other Staff (Support staff, drivers and BEP)	33	3	6
8	Business Relations Consultant	3	2	1
9	Jobs Oriented Blind Service Specialist (Supported Employment)	3	0	1
10	Quality Assurance Reviewer	1	0	0
TOTALS		85	9	

B. Personnel Development

Describe the development and maintenance of a system for collecting and analyzing on an annual basis data on personnel development with respect to:

i. a list of the institutions of higher education in the State that are preparing VR professionals, by type of program;

SCCB maintains relationships with the University of South Carolina and South Carolina State University, both of which produce graduates who have Master of Rehabilitation Counseling degrees. In addition, SCCB has developed an agreement to provide internship opportunities to Alabama State University Master of Rehabilitation Counseling students.

SCCB has set a Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD) standard that requires potential VR Counselors to hold a Master’s degree in Rehabilitation Counseling or a related field. The following chart shows statistics for the in-state university vocational rehabilitation counseling degree programs.

ii. the number of students enrolled at each of those institutions, broken down by type of program; and

South Carolina State University Rehabilitation Counseling Program has 49 students enrolled with 25 graduates from the previous year. The University of South Carolina Rehabilitation Counseling Program has 43 students enrolled and 7 graduates from the previous year.

iii. the number of students who graduated during the prior year from each of those institutions with certification or licensure, or with the credentials for certification or licensure, broken down by the personnel category for which they have received, or have the credentials to receive, certification or licensure.

South Carolina State University Rehabilitation Counseling Program had 25 graduates from the previous year. The University of South Carolina Rehabilitation Counseling Program had 7 graduates during the previous year.

2. Plan for Recruitment, Preparation and Retention of Qualified Personnel

Describe the development and implementation of a plan to address the current and projected needs for qualified personnel including, the coordination and facilitation of efforts between the designated State unit and institutions of higher education and professional associations to recruit, prepare, and retain personnel who are qualified, including personnel from minority backgrounds and personnel who are individuals with disabilities.

SCCB has established a plan for the recruitment, preparation, and retention of qualified VR Counselors. This plan consists of the following areas of focus:

Recruitment: SCCB maintains relationships with graduate training programs that are Council on Rehabilitation Education (CORE) accredited located at the University of South Carolina and South Carolina State University. SCCB's recruitment plan ensures recruitment activities are conducted at all South Carolina schools that have graduates in Vocational Rehabilitation Counseling. In addition, SCCB has written agreements with Alabama State University to provide internships to Master's degree students as part of our recruitment efforts. SCCB also utilizes social media and other online job posting sites to advertise vacant positions. The University of South Carolina and South Carolina State University prepare individuals for graduate degrees in VR Counseling. SCCB conducts outreach efforts to these universities and other universities to include: publications and distribution of targeted recruiting material, attendance at career days and job fairs, and recruitment events. In addition, practicum placements and internships are offered to students who are in CSPD qualifying programs. These efforts are designed to recruit qualified personnel, including minority graduates and those with disabilities. SCCB has been especially successful in recruiting personnel from the SC institutions, particularly those from minority backgrounds. Students from these programs and out-of-state programs are encouraged to accept internships and practicum placements with the Commission.

Preparation: Staff preparation begins with SCCB's high standards for professional education and professional certification that occurs primarily prior to employment with the agency. All new staff are required to attend and complete SCCB's New Employee Orientation program that provides basic preparation and onboarding. Further professional training and development

occurs with the direct supervisor, and SCCB actively engages staff in ongoing professional preparation and development. SCCB uses a system for staff evaluation that is available to all state employees. The system focuses on the individual employee's job duties compared to stated goals and objectives. These goals and objectives are identified and discussed with the employee at the beginning of the rating period. Ongoing communication between the employee and supervisor clarifies the employee's understanding of how to meet the performance standards and enhances service delivery to the consumer. At the conclusion of the rating period, an evaluation is performed to rate the employee on each duty in relation to performance objectives. The system provides for employee input into the development of the goals and objectives in order to support successful performance. Another feature of the system allows objectives to be amended throughout the review period. This system provides a mechanism for helping a substandard performer improve and a means of removing an employee from a position should performance not improve to an acceptable level.

Retention: SCCB takes an active role in employee/employer relations. Through strong leadership and the assistance of all staff, the Commission provides a healthy and safe work environment. Employee behavior and performance problems are addressed appropriately and in a timely manner, with an emphasis on assisting the employee to improve. SCCB promotes internal and external customer service and has made teamwork an integral part of day-to-day operations. SCCB provides career advancement and growth opportunities through internal promotions and staff training.

3. Personnel Standards

Describe the State agency's policies and procedures for the establishment and maintenance of personnel standards consistent with section 101(a)(7)(B) and 34 CFR 361.18(c) to ensure that designated State unit professional and paraprofessional personnel are adequately trained and prepared, including:

A. standards that are consistent with any national or State-approved or -recognized certification, licensing, registration, or other comparable requirements that apply to the profession or discipline in which such personnel are providing VR services; and

SCCB utilizes state standards to administer the Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD) as it relates to hiring practices. According to state law, VR Counselors must have a Master's Degree in Rehabilitation Counseling, or a Master's degree in the field of counseling with a graduate course in Theories and Techniques of Counseling, or a Master's degree in any discipline and at least 18 credit hours of coursework at the Master's level or above within thirty months of the date of hire. The 18 credit hours of coursework must include the following: One graduate course with a primary focus on the Theories and Techniques of Counseling three graduate courses, each with a primary focus on one of the following areas: Occupational Information, Job Development and Placement, Medical Aspects of Disabilities, Foundations of Rehabilitation, Psychological Aspects of Disabilities, and Personal and Vocational Adjustment Two graduate courses, each with a primary focus on one of the following areas: Assessment, Research Methodology, Vocational and Career Development,

Community Resources, Case Management, and Delivery of Rehabilitation Services; or a current Certified Rehabilitation Counselor (CRC) certification, regardless of degree.

SCCB currently has 3 vacant VR Counselor positions that are in various stages of the recruitment process. Of the counselors currently employed by SCCB all meet the state minimum standard.

B. the establishment and maintenance of education and experience requirements, in accordance with section 101(a)(7)(B)(ii) of the Rehabilitation Act, to ensure that the personnel have a 21st century understanding of the evolving labor force and the needs of individuals with disabilities.

SCCB utilizes state standards to administer the Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD) as it relates to hiring practices. According to state law, VR Counselors must have a Master's degree in Rehabilitation Counseling, or a Master's degree in the field of counseling with a graduate course in Theories and Techniques of Counseling, or a Master's degree in any discipline and at least 18 credit hours of coursework at the Master's level or above within thirty months of the date of hire. The 18 credit hours of coursework must include the following: One graduate course with a primary focus on the Theories and Techniques of Counseling three graduate courses, each with a primary focus on one of the following areas: Occupational Information, Job Development and Placement, Medical Aspects of Disabilities, Foundations of Rehabilitation, Psychological Aspects of Disabilities, and Personal and Vocational Adjustment Two graduate courses, each with a primary focus on one of the following areas: Assessment, Research Methodology, Vocational and Career Development, Community Resources, Case Management, and Delivery of Rehabilitation Services; or a current Certified Rehabilitation Counselor (CRC) certification, regardless of degree.

SCCB currently has 3 vacant VR Counselor positions that are in various stages of the recruitment process. Of the counselors currently employed by SCCB all meet the state minimum standard.

4. Staff Development.

Describe the State agency's policies, procedures, and activities to ensure that, consistent with section 101(a)(7)(C) of the Rehabilitation Act, all personnel employed by the designated State unit receive appropriate and adequate training in terms of:

A. System of staff development

a system of staff development for professionals and paraprofessionals within the designated State unit, particularly with respect to assessment, vocational counseling, job placement, and rehabilitation technology, including training implemented in coordination with entities carrying out State programs under section 4 of the Assistive Technology Act of 1998; and

SCCB has developed a comprehensive staff development training program designed to expand and strengthen the knowledge and skill level of service delivery staff. During FFY 2018 SCCB has added a new VR Counselor Trainer position with the intent to provide more in-depth focused VR Counselor skill development. The four objectives outlined in the training program are based on the need to increase staff competency so that the quality and quantity of competitive employment placements can be improved. SCCB has partnered with the University of South

Carolina and private and public consultants specializing in the field of vocational rehabilitation and/or blindness in order to provide quality staff development training. The most critical training needs of SCCB staff were determined from the results of a Staff Development Training Needs Assessment, comments from Training Evaluations, and the VR Staff Survey results from Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment. Staff development training needs have been identified in the areas of Leadership Skills, Administrative Skills and Technical Skills.

Four (4) training objectives were identified as follows:

- **Objective 1 (Leadership Training Objective)** Organization assessment, problem solving skills, basic supervisory skills and best personnel practices are the primary focus areas of Objective 1. To accomplish the leadership training objective, SCCB will utilize Certified Public Management (CPM) training, State sponsored supervisory training, National Rehabilitation Leadership Institute (NRLI) and other targeted trainings and conference to keep our business practices up to date with current paradigms. SCCB recognizes that staff development needs may change.
- **Objective 2 (Technical Skills Training)** The development of technical skills to achieve the SCCB mission and vision is the primary focus of Objective 2. Private contractors who specialize in the field of blindness and vocational rehabilitation will also be utilized to accomplish Objective 2. Continued professional development and retention CRC credentials is encouraged and supported by SCCB.
- **Objective 3 (Communication of Policies and Procedures)** Orienting staff to the SCCB organizational structure and service delivery policies and procedures is the primary focus of Objective 3. In order to accomplish this, new staff will participate in an agency wide two-day Employee Orientation provided by HR. They will also receive field specific training in AWARE, VR training modules on policy and procedures, and shadow adjustment and VR staff for a two-week period.
- **Objective 4 (Specialty Training)** For FY 2015, each region is scheduled for quarterly meetings in which case staffing and regional specific trainings will be included. Departmental training schedules are currently being developed with the intention of holding one annual in-service when feasible. Bi-annual surveys of staff are done to stay abreast of trends in staff training needs. In an effort to provide equal access to staff development training for all staff, accessible formats (i.e. Braille, large print, electronic format, etc.) will be provided to those who require alternative formats.

B. Acquisition and dissemination of significant knowledge

procedures for the acquisition and dissemination of significant knowledge from research and other sources to designated State unit professionals and paraprofessionals.

SCCB conducts in-service trainings for professional staff throughout the fiscal year. These trainings are planned based on a yearly assessment of training needs that includes recent and emerging trends in Vocational Rehabilitation Counseling, current research findings, best practices, and quality assurance activities. SCCB works to encourage and support professional staff in developing professional development plans that may include specific professional

conferences, workshops, and on-line training. In FPY 2017 SCCB created and hired a VR Counseling Staff Trainer position dedicated to identifying gaps in counseling staff's knowledge, skills, and abilities and to create and implement a training plan to address these gaps, train to emerging trends and specialized populations, and identify and train to evidence based practices.

5. Personnel to Address Individual Communication Needs

Describe how the designated State unit has personnel or obtains the services of other individuals who are able to communicate in appropriate modes of communication with or in the native language of applicants or eligible individuals who have limited English speaking ability.

SCCB strives to have qualified staff proficient in Braille production, in communication with the Deaf/Blind, and a bilingual counselor to communicate with the rapidly growing Hispanic population. SCCB engages in ongoing efforts to study demographic trends and changes to the population to identify areas of needed expertise. Braille services are provided to SCCB staff and upon request to other public and/or private entities statewide. SCCB has a Deaf/Blind Consultant who is proficient in the use of sign language for the deaf, hard of hearing and dual sensory impaired. SCCB contracts interpreter services as needed in order to serve all other individuals who have limited English speaking ability or limited modes of communication.

6. Coordination of Personnel Development Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

As appropriate, describe the procedures and activities to coordinate the designated State unit's comprehensive system of personnel development with personnel development under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

SCCB is improving collaboration with the South Carolina Department of Education (SCDOE) to coordinate procedures and activities under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The focus of the collaboration has been the development of strategies for improving service delivery systems for blind and visually impaired individuals who are receiving services from the SCCB Children's Services program and VR Transition Counselors. SCCB has become a fully engaged and active partner in the Transition Alliance of South Carolina (TASC) that includes regional coordinating councils where the partner agencies receive training, develop collaborative plans, and develop professional relationships. TASC is a partnership of the Department of Education, Department of Disability and Special Needs, Vocational Rehabilitation Department, and SCCB. SCCB is also represented on the Advisory Council for Educating Students with Disabilities, and advisory council to the South Carolina Department of Education's Office of Special Education.

j. Statewide Assessment

(Formerly known as Attachment 4.11(a)).

1. Provide an assessment of the rehabilitation needs of individuals with disabilities residing within the State, particularly the VR services needs of those:

A. with the most significant disabilities, including their need for supported employment services;

SCCB contracted with the National Center for Innovation, Training and Excellence (NCITE), a part of San Diego State University Research Foundation's Interwork Institute (SDSURF-II) during FFY 2016 to conduct a Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment to determine the vocational rehabilitation needs of South Carolinians who are blind or visually impaired, identify the areas of VR program operations where service gaps exist, and identify areas of program innovation and improvement to become fully compliant with requirements of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act. This assessment was designed to specifically assess the areas noted under section (j) above.

This assessment determined that the following gaps existed in this area:

1. SCCB did not offer supported employment or customized employment services to its consumers with most significant disabilities. This is reflected in the low numbers of employment outcomes for these individuals.
2. SCCB did not offer Work Incentive Benefits Counseling to individuals who were beneficiaries of SSI/SSDI, nor did SCCB collaborate with the South Carolina Work Incentives Program, therefore many beneficiaries expressed anxiety and fear over returning to employment due to a lack of understanding of work incentives.
3. Individuals with disabilities identified the following as barriers to achieving employment outcomes:
 - Attitudes of the public and employers toward individuals who are blind or visually impaired.
 - Lack of reliable and accessible transportation.
 - Independent living skills are a major need of SCCB consumers.
 - The Ellen Beach Mack Rehabilitation Center (EBMRC or the Center) meets this need for a small percentage of SCCB consumers who are available to attend training in Columbia, but many individuals, staff and partners expressed a need for more comprehensive services to be available throughout South Carolina especially in rural areas.

During the period of the last Unified State Plan cycle, SCCB made significant progress in closing these gaps. SCCB hired, trained, and obtained certification for a Work Incentives Counselor, and established referral pathways to the WIPA grantee benefits counseling services. SCCB established JOBS Specialist positions trained to provide Supported Employment including Customized Employment. SCCB signed a Ticket to Work Partnership Plus agreement with an Employment Network to provide on-going supports for supported employment cases. And SCCB has signed a number of fee-for-service agreements throughout the state with qualified service providers in the areas of Orientation and Mobility, Braille Instruction, Independent Living Skills that Support Employment, and adjustment to blindness psychological counseling.

SCCB continues to work to close these gaps, and this modified state plan reflects these goals and priorities.

B. who are minorities;

Gaps included:

- Individuals with blindness and vision impairments who are Hispanic may be underserved by SCCB. South Carolina has experienced one of the largest increases of Hispanics in the country.
- The needs of individuals with blindness and vision impairments from minority ethnic groups are similar to the needs of other ethnic groups with the possible addition of language barriers.

C. who have been unserved or underserved by the VR program;

Gaps included:

- Individuals who have multiple and most significant disabilities have been unserved or underserved due to a lack of Supported Employment program capacity and resources; Individuals who have co-existing psychological disorders may have been traditionally unserved or underserved as SCCB has focused primarily on adjustment to blindness issues. SCCB is actively working to close these gaps and better serve these populations.

D. who have been served through other components of the statewide workforce development system; and

Gaps included:

- America's Job Centers (AJCs) in South Carolina (SC Works) have not effectively served individuals with blindness and vision impairments. There have been no documented instances of SCCB cases that are jointly served by other workforce entities.
- Historically, the relationship between SCCB and the AJCs, although cordial, is primarily one of referral with no evidence of substantial services after referral;
- Although the AJCs are accessible, the technology is frequently out of date and the AJC staff lack the skills to effectively operate/demonstrate the technology; Under WIOA there are legal requirements around the development of partnerships between SCCB and entities in the greater workforce development system.

While these gaps are the focus on continuing efforts both by the AJC's (SC Works) and SCCB, much has been accomplished since the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment. SCCB has improved co-location of SCCB staff in the AJC's for specific periods of time each month where space allows. SCCB has signed MOU's and Infrastructure Cost Sharing Agreements with all SC Works service areas, and has been providing technical assistance to the AJC's in regards to programmatic and physical accessibility.

E. who are youth with disabilities and students with disabilities, including, as appropriate, their need for pre-employment transition services or other transition services.

Gaps included:

- A high percentage of youth with disabilities have multiple disabilities requiring multiple services. Historically, SCCB's VR program has not effectively served individuals with multiple disabilities including youth with the most significant disabilities;
- Transition-age youth appear to have limited exposure to work prior to exiting the school system. School staff indicated that their focus is upon academics and they do not have the resources to provide employment related services;
- Soft skill development, typically delivered in job readiness/preparation programs, is a major need for this group;
- Individuals and education partners expressed a lack of involvement of SCCB staff in the planning and delivery of transition services to youth in school. There appears to be minimal involvement of SCCB in activities beyond IEP meetings and minimal provision of Pre-Employment Training Services;
- Transition-age youth have a great need for mentors who would foster high expectations and build self-advocacy skill;
- Parents and family members of youth with disabilities need more information on the services available through SCCB and how to access them;
- Parents and youth with disabilities need training on self-advocacy. Education partners stated that greater involvement of families leads to accessing more services potentially leading to better outcomes. Families who are poor and live in rural areas are less likely to advocate for services and are most in need of training and support;
- Teachers working with youth who are blind or visually impaired need training and support in working with students using assistive technology. Assistive technology is a strength of SCCB, and the capacity to provide quality assistive technology support could be increased using school resources;
- Education partners and consumers suggested that SCCB take a lead role in bringing stakeholder groups together to foster greater integration of services and increase consumer awareness of services available to them.

While these gaps are areas of continued focus for SCCB, much has been accomplished since the Statewide Needs Assessment. SCCB now provides Career BOOST services to students with disabilities who are eligible or potentially eligible for VR services. Career BOOST provides students with instruction in self-advocacy skills, work readiness skills training, work based learning experiences, and exploration of opportunities for career training in post-secondary schools and institutions of higher education. SCCB designed and operates the Student Internship Jr. Program that provides high school transition students with a paid work experience. SCCB Transition VR Counselors have increased their involvement in IEP meetings, and SCCB has formalized memorandum of understandings with LEA's.

2. Identify the need to establish, develop, or improve community rehabilitation programs within the State; and

The majority of intensive VR services are delivered at the Ellen Beach Mack Rehabilitation Center for Employment located in Columbia. Services in outlying areas, especially rural areas, were found to be a significant need during the Statewide Assessment of Rehabilitation Needs. Those who cannot or choose not to attend EBMRC had limited available options. VR 'outreach' services to this population are limited in scope and duration. CRPs are considered one way of addressing the need for geographic access to services. The most common themes that emerged in this area were:

- Historically, SCCB has not relied on CRPs to provide rehabilitation services to applicants and eligible individuals in South Carolina. SCCB has focused its service delivery system on the EBMRC and 'Outreach' services to individuals who cannot or choose not to attend EBMRC. Outreach services are limited in scope and duration.
- SCCB has a limited contractual agreement with Goodwill Industries and the National Federation for the Blind to provide limited independent living skills training and job preparation services.
- Individuals expressed a need for community programs that provide more comprehensive services in the northern and southern parts of South Carolina
- The ABVI center near Charleston (a private non-profit CRP) appears to be under-utilized and reports it has the capacity to partner with SCCB to deliver more comprehensive services to that part of the state.

While these needs are a continued focus of SCCB, much progress has been made to close these identified gaps. SCCB has signed fee-for-service agreements with qualified Community Rehabilitation Programs across the state. These agreements have increased the ability of SCCB to meet the rehabilitation needs of rural consumers.

3. Include an assessment of the needs of individuals with disabilities for transition career services and pre-employment transition services, and the extent to which such services are coordinated with transition services provided under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

Gaps included:

- A high percentage of youth with disabilities have multiple disabilities requiring multiple services. Historically, SCCB's VR program has not effectively served individuals with multiple disabilities including youth with the most significant disabilities;
- Transition-age youth appear to have limited exposure to work prior to exiting the school system. School staff indicated that their focus is upon academics and they do not have the resources to provide employment related services;

- Soft skill development, typically delivered in job readiness/preparation programs, is a major need for this group. This is available to a limited degree through Goodwill;
- Individuals and education partners expressed a lack of involvement of SCCB staff in the planning and delivery of transition services to youth in school. There appears to be minimal involvement of SCCB in activities beyond IEP meetings and minimal provision of Pre-Employment Training Services;
- Transition-age youth have a great need for mentors who would foster high expectations and build self-advocacy skill;
- Parents and family members of youth with disabilities need more information on the services available through SCCB and how to access them;
- Parents and youth with disabilities need training on self-advocacy. Education partners stated that greater involvement of families leads to accessing more services potentially leading to better outcomes. Families who are poor and live in rural areas are less likely to advocate for services and are most in need of training and support;
- Teachers working with youth who are blind or visually impaired need training and support in working with students using assistive technology. Assistive technology is a strength of SCCB, and the capacity to provide quality assistive technology support could be increased using school resources;
- Education partners and consumers suggested that SCCB take a lead role in bringing stakeholder groups together to foster greater integration of services and increase consumer awareness of services available to them.

k. Annual Estimates

Describe:

1. The number of individuals in the State who are eligible for services;

Based on data obtained from the American Community Survey (ACS) and Cornell University's Annual Disability Status Report for South Carolina, SCCB estimates that 2.7% of the South Carolinians experience a visual impairment or blindness. (ACS criteria for visual impairments is broader than VR program eligibility) The most recent American Community Survey data indicates that there are an estimated 6,800 South Carolinians who have some level of visual impairment who are working age (21 to 64) and who are not currently working but are actively seeking employment. In addition to the ACS estimates there are 2,900 youth (age 16-20) who have visual impairments in the state. This is a total estimate of 9,700 individuals who have visual impairments between the ages of 16 and 64.

The visual impairment categorization in the ACS is very broad, all-inclusive, and self-reported. In estimating the number of individuals who would meet the narrower VR program eligibility criteria, SCCB estimates that in any given federal fiscal year there are approximately 3,250 potentially eligible individuals within the state.

Of those SCCB is currently serving 1,043 eligible individuals. SCCB is working on outreach efforts and strategies that strive to increase accessibility and awareness of the VR program so that potentially eligible individuals are aware of, and can access VR services. In addition SCCB is working with WIOA core partners to ensure that blind and visually impaired individuals seeking employment can access services through the one-stop centers as part of the Statewide Workforce Development System.

2. The number of eligible individuals who will receive services under:

A. The VR Program;

SCCB estimates that the VR program will serve 1,150 eligible individuals during FPY 2018, 1,260 during FPY 2019, 1,270 during FFY 2020, and 1,300 during FFY 2021.

B. The Supported Employment Program; and

SCCB built the capacity to provide Supported Employment services in FFY 17. SCCB has established goals to provide Supported Employment services to **6** eligible individual during FFY 2018, **8** individuals during FFY 2019, **10** individuals during FFY 2020, and **10** individuals during FFY 2021.

C. each priority category, if under an order of selection;

SCCB is does not anticipate the need for an order of selection.

3. The number of individuals who are eligible for VR services, but are not receiving such services due to an order of selection; and

SCCB does not anticipate the need for an order of selection.

4. The cost of services for the number of individuals estimated to be eligible for services. If under an order of selection, identify the cost of services for each priority category.

N/A

I. State Goals and Priorities

The designated State unit must:

1. Identify if the goals and priorities were jointly developed

Identify if the goals and priorities were jointly developed and agreed to by the State VR agency and the State Rehabilitation Council, if the State has a Council, and jointly agreed to any revisions.

The findings of the FFY 2016 Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment were used to develop goals, priorities, and strategies reflected in the previous iteration of the South Carolina Unified State Plan. See section (p.) *Evaluation and Reports of Progress* for information related to progress on the previous state plan goals and priorities.

For the current Unified State Plan, SCCB identified gaps from two primary sources. The first being unmet gaps identified in the FFY 2016 Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment. The second source is the South Carolina Workforce Development Board's Economic Analysis and Strategic Plan in order to align SCCB initiatives with the goals of South Carolina's Workforce Development System. The following gaps have been identified:

Gap 1: South Carolina's current labor force, including individuals who are blind or visually impaired, do not have industry recognized credentials, knowledge, skills, or abilities to meet current or emerging demands of the business community.

Gap 2: SCCB needs to improve alignment of policies, resources, and staff expertise to provide job driven, labor market informed, vocational counseling and guidance that aligns with South Carolina's Talent Pipeline Project and Sector Strategies initiatives to assist eligible consumers in accessing career pathways that lead to high and middle skill/income jobs in growth sectors.

Gap 3: SCCB needs to improve partnerships with business in order to more accurately identify current and future workforce needs of business and industry to support career pathways in growth sectors and improve services to business.

Gap 4: SCCB needs to improve marketing, branding, and engagement with business, consumers, and other workforce partners to increase awareness, improve partnerships, and increase effectiveness and efficiency of services leading to competitive integrated employment.

Based on these identified gaps, and in alignment with the South Carolina Workforce Development Board's Strategic Plan, SCCB establishes the following objectives. These objectives have been jointly developed and agreed to by the South Carolina Commission for the Blind Board, and are in alignment with the Workforce Development Board's *Strategies to Build a Competitive Workforce Plan*.

Objective 1: Identify, invest and support blind and visually impaired job seekers in the attainment of industry recognized credentials and vocational training required for current and emerging jobs.

Objective 2: Align resources, policy, and strategies to continuously improve competitive integrated employment outcomes for blind and visually impaired job seekers.

Objective 3: Identify current and future needs of business and industry to support career pathways in growth sectors.

Objective 4: Engage job seekers, business leaders, and other workforce partners through marketing and outreach to articulate a value proposition to each.

See section (o) below for SCCB's goals and strategies to meet these objectives.

2. Identify the goals and priorities in carrying out the VR and Supported Employment programs.

In response to the gaps identified in the 2016 Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment, the economic analysis included as part of this Unified State Plan, and in alignment with the South

Carolina Workforce Development Board's Strategies to Build a Competitive Workforce strategic plan, the SCCB has identified the following four (4) Objectives and eight (8) goals:

Objective 1: Identify, invest and support job seekers who are blind and visually impaired in the attainment of industry recognized credentials and vocational training required for current and emerging jobs.

Goal 1.1: Provide comprehensive vocational rehabilitation services to youth and transition students resulting in the attainment of industry recognized in-demand credentials to obtain competitive integrated employment.

Goal 1.2: Provide comprehensive vocational rehabilitation services to adult job seekers who are blind or visually impaired resulting in the attainment of industry recognized in-demand credentials required for competitive integrated employment.

Objective 2: Align resources, policy, and strategies to continuously improve competitive integrated employment outcomes for blind and visually impaired job seekers.

Goal 2.1: Develop and enhance job seeker work readiness and soft skills.

Goal 2.2: Enhance and improve job placement services and job support services for job seekers who are blind or visually impaired.

Objective 3: Identify current and future needs of business and industry to support career pathways in growth sectors.

Goal 3.1: Provide specialized training through a Pre-Apprenticeship Program to prepare adults not enrolled in college programs, as an alternative career pathway to current and future business and industry needs.

Goal 3.2: Increase and improve talent acquisition and talent retention services to business in support of employees who are blind or visually impaired.

Objective 4: Engage job seekers, business leaders, and other workforce partners through marketing and outreach to articulate a value proposition to each.

Goal 4.1: Improve **visibility and branding of SCCB** with job seekers who are blind or visually impaired, businesses seeking to diversify labor market talent pool, and other workforce partners to increase the awareness and effectiveness of SCCB services.

Goal 4.2: Improve visibility and awareness of SCCB within the Workforce Development System.

3. Ensure that the goals and priorities are based on an analysis of the following areas:

SCCB assures that agency Objectives, Goals, and Strategies are based on the findings of the 2016 Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment and the findings of the Unified State Plan economic analysis. Further, SCCB's Objectives, Goals, and Strategies are in alignment with the South Carolina Workforce Investment Board's Strategic Plan. Finally, SCCB assures that period of public comment has been made available and public comment informed this plan.

A. The most recent comprehensive statewide assessment, including any updates;

SCCB contracted with the National Center for Innovation, Training and Excellence (NCITE), a part of San Diego State University Research Foundation's Interwork Institute (SDSURF-II) during FFY 2016 to conduct a Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment to determine the vocational rehabilitation needs of South Carolinians who are blind or visually impaired, identify the areas of VR program operations where service gaps exist, and identify areas of program innovation and improvement to become fully compliant with requirements of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act. The text of that report follows:

San Diego State University Interwork Institute The South Carolina Commission for the Blind and The State Board of Commissioners Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment Submitted to: The South Carolina Commission for the Blind The South Carolina Board of Commissioners Prepared by: Chip Kenney, M.S. , Project Director Deborah Greene, M.A. Meera Adya, Ph.D., J.D. Chaz Compton, Ed.D., CRC Interwork Institute San Diego State University March 25, 2016 Acknowledgements The comprehensive statewide needs assessment (CSNA) conducted on behalf of the South Carolina Commission for the Blind (SCCB) and the State Board of Commissioners could not have been accomplished without the assistance of a number of individuals who contributed greatly to various phases of the project. The needs assessment team would like to thank these individuals for their contributions to the needs assessment effort. The following individuals were instrumental in helping to ensure that the research activities associated with this needs assessment were completed successfully: Elaine Robertson and Kyle Walker coordinated the CSNA process at SCCB, identifying the key staff persons and their roles and responsibilities. Elaine worked closely with the SCCB Board and staff to identify and recruit a broad spectrum of partners and individuals to provide feedback for the assessment. Shana Robinson compiled data on services to SCCB consumers that were essential in analyzing the agency's performance as it relates to several standards. Ms. Robinson transmitted this information to the project team in a very responsive and timely manner which assisted in the ability to triangulate data from an agency-specific source and allowed the report to include the most recent agency-specific data available. Elaine Robertson, Elizabeth Alexander (Greenville Office) and Marquita Miller (Charleston Office) coordinated the individual and staff interviews at SCCB and scheduled the focus group sessions. They provided assistance with a myriad of organizational processes and activities. Ed Bible identified community partners, businesses and individuals with disabilities to participate in the focus groups and complete the electronic surveys. Finally, the project team would like to express their appreciation to each individual who took the time to share their thoughts and concerns by completing a survey, taking part in an interview, or participating in the focus group research.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: The South Carolina Commission for the Blind, the State Board of Commissioners and the Interwork Institute at San Diego State University jointly conducted an assessment of the vocational rehabilitation (VR) needs of persons with blindness and vision impairments residing in the state of South Carolina. The purpose of the assessment was to provide planners with VR information pertinent to the allocation of resources, to provide a rationale for the development of SCCB's State Plan, and to comply with the needs assessment mandate in the Rehabilitation Act.

The process that was developed for conducting the needs assessment involved four primary data-gathering approaches: Electronic surveys conducted with four stakeholder groups and hard copy surveys of a random sample of former and current SCCB consumers, other individuals with blindness and vision impairments, and businesses in South Carolina; Focus groups conducted with three stakeholder groups (individuals with blindness and vision impairments, representatives of organizations that provide services to persons with blindness and vision impairments, and businesses); Key informant interviews conducted with SCCB staff; individuals identified as knowledgeable about the needs of individuals with blindness and vision impairments in South Carolina, businesses; and Analysis of a variety of existing demographic and case service data relevant to individuals with disabilities.

Through the data collection efforts, researchers solicited information from four primary stakeholder groups: (a) former, current or potential consumers of SCCB located throughout South Carolina; (b) community partners (e.g., the Commission, educational institutions, municipalities) and representatives of organizations that provide services to individuals who are potential or actual consumers of SCCB; (c) SCCB staff; and (d) representatives of businesses operating in South Carolina or surrounding areas. The approach was designed to capture input from a variety of perspectives in order to acquire a sense of the multi-faceted needs of persons with blindness and vision impairments in South Carolina.

Efforts were made to gather information pertinent to the following eight main categories: 1. General agency performance; 2. Needs of individuals with the most significant disabilities, including their need for supported employment; 3. Needs of individuals with blindness and vision impairments from different ethnic groups, including needs of individuals who have been unserved or underserved by the VR program; 4. Needs of individuals with blindness and vision impairments served through other components of the statewide workforce investment system; 5. Needs of individuals with blindness and vision impairments in transition; 6. Need for community rehabilitation programs (CRPs) that serve individuals with blindness and vision impairments in South Carolina; 7. Business relations and services, including SCCB's ability to meet the needs of businesses in South Carolina regarding recruiting, hiring, accommodating and retaining employees with blindness or vision impairments; and 8. Alignment of other SCCB programs and services, including the Ellen Beach Mack Rehabilitation Center and the Training and Employment Division (EBMRC), with the VR program in meeting the needs of individuals with blindness and vision impairments in South Carolina.

As part of this CSNA, at the agency's request, an interim report was issued in January to address specific issues related to SCCB's work under the Workforce Investment Opportunity Act (WIOA). Some of the same findings are included in this final report. SCCB has already proposed actions to address gaps identified in both reports. The full Interim Report is included in Appendix A.

Over 300 key informants provided input for the CSNA research through surveys, interviews and focus groups. It is important to put the following in perspective when reading these reports and the supporting data: 1. In the context of this report "SCCB" refers exclusively to the VR program of the Commission and not to any of the other state or federal programs administered by the agency. 2. This CSNA covers a period of time when SCCB operated under the Workforce Investment Act (WIA), the authorizing legislation for VR programs across the country. WIOA,

the new authorizing legislation, was passed into law in July of 2014. It places new requirements upon SCCB with varying dates of implementation. SCCB is working diligently to build the capacity of the agency to comply with the new requirements of WIOA. 3. SCCB has experienced significant staff turnover during the time period of this CSNA. This turnover undoubtedly affected the performance of SCCB. The turnover situation has stabilized and SCCB has filled many positions that provide critical direct services to individuals who are blind or visually impaired in South Carolina. 4. Though findings are reported from all groups, the limited participation rates from community partners and businesses decrease the generalizability of findings pertaining to them and suggest a need for increased partnerships in those sectors.

The following summary highlights the results of the most commonly cited needs and themes derived from the surveys, focus groups, and key informant interviews in the eight main areas of investigation.

Section One: General Agency Performance. The most common themes that emerged in this area were:

- Although SCCB has consistently met most Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) standards and indicators over the past five years there has been a significant drop off in the past three years in the number of cases closed with an employment outcome. Possible explanations for the decline in performance include reductions in force, office closures, staff turnover, and ending the practice of taking “Homemaker” and “Unpaid Family Worker” closures.
- There was a high frequency of comments by key informants (individuals and agency partners) about the speed of services, lack of consistent communication and unclear rationales for many agency decisions including eligibility, discontinuation of services at EBMRC and case closure.
- There was a high frequency of comments from staff concerning low morale across the agency. Staff concerns were centered around high turnover, low pay, high workloads and lack of recognition. Staff did recognize that SCCB’s VR program is turning in a positive direction and are generally hopeful their concerns will be appropriately addressed.
- There has been a marked decrease over a three-year period in the numbers of SSI/SSDI recipients served and the number achieving an employment outcome.
- SCCB serves a very low rate and has a low rehabilitation rate for individuals with multiple disabling conditions. This includes a low rehabilitation rate for those attending EBMRC. The number of individuals served who are coded as having most significant disabilities is very small.
- SCCB has minimal disputes with applicants or eligible individuals that result in mediations, impartial hearings or civil legal action. However, it should be noted that interviews with individuals a majority expressed lack of awareness of the Client Assistance Program
- SCCB ranks high nationally among agencies serving the blind in average case expenditures and time in service. Historically, the most prevalent services provided have been Assessment and Diagnostic/Treatment.

- SCCB ranks high nationally among agencies serving the blind in the number of hours worked at closure.
- SCCB ranks low nationally among agencies serving the blind for indicators of the quality of employment outcomes (wages and medical benefits).
- Average time in service for individuals is almost one year longer for individuals whose cases are closed without an employment outcome. This, coupled with expenditure data, indicate that significant agency resources are utilized in cases that do not lead to an employment outcome. On average \$250,000 per year is expended on cases closed unsuccessfully after acceptance.
- Nearly 20 percent of the cases closed without an employment outcome are the result of individuals 'no longer interested in services' or 'refused services' or 'unable to locate'.
- Of those individuals attending EBMRC over the past five years, 43 percent were closed unsuccessfully or as homemakers.
- SCCB does not have a supported employment program indicating that individuals with the most significant disability are underserved.
- According to the agency's data, the rehabilitation rate for individuals who are transition age is 0%. This is significant considering the federal requirements under WIOA around employment for youth with disabilities.
- The rehabilitation rate for individuals between the ages of 55- 64 served by SCCB over the past three fiscal years is 58 percent (below national averages). This is significant considering the trend of older workers, including those with disabilities wanting or needing to remain in the workforce.
- RSA data and comments from key informants (staff and individuals) indicate that few individuals served by SCCB are also served by other partners in the workforce development system. SCCB consumer awareness of workforce system services that may benefit them is minimal.
- The data reviewed indicates the following segments of the population of South Carolina who may be underserved are:
 - o Youth between the ages of 13-24
 - o Adults between the ages of 55-64
 - o Adults over the age of 65 who wish or need to continue working
 - o Individuals who are Hispanic, Native American or Asian
 - o Individuals with the most significant disabilities
 - o Individuals with multiple disabilities including cognitive, mental health, deaf/blindness, and physical disabilities
 - o Individuals with disabilities who live in rural areas of South Carolina and cannot or choose not to access services at EBMRC
 - o Individuals with disabilities who live at or below the poverty level

The most common themes that emerged in this area were:

- SCCB does not offer supported employment or customized employment services to its consumers with significant and most significant disabilities. This is reflected in the low numbers of employment outcomes for these individuals.

- Individuals with disabilities identified the following as barriers to achieving employment outcomes:
 - o Attitudes of the public and employers toward individuals who are blind or visually impaired.
 - o Lack of reliable and accessible transportation.
- A significant number of SCCB consumers receive SSA benefits and fear the loss of benefits if they seek employment. Access to benefits counseling provided by either SCCB or outside agencies appears to be minimal.
- Independent living skills are a major need of SCCB consumers. The Rehabilitation Center (EBMRC or the Center) meets this need for a small percentage of SCCB consumers, but many individuals, staff and partners expressed a need for more comprehensive services to be available throughout South Carolina especially in rural areas. Section Three: Needs of individuals with blindness and vision impairments from different ethnic groups, including needs of individuals who have been unserved or underserved by the VR program.

The most common themes that emerged in this area were:

- Individuals with blindness and vision impairments who are Hispanic may be underserved by SCCB. South Carolina has experienced one of the largest increases of Hispanics in the country.
- The needs of individuals with blindness and vision impairments from minority ethnic groups are similar to the needs of other ethnic group with the possible addition of language barriers. Section Four: Needs of individuals with blindness and vision impairments served through other components of the statewide workforce investment system. The most common themes that emerged in this area were:
 - America's Job Centers (AJCs) in South Carolina (SC Works) have not effectively served individuals with blindness and vision impairments. There have been no documented instances of SCCB cases that are jointly served by other workforce entities.
 - Historically, the relationship between SCCB and the AJCs, although cordial, is primarily one of referral with no evidence of substantial services after referral;
 - Although the AJCs are accessible, the technology is frequently out of date and the AJC staff lack the skills to effectively operate/demonstrate the technology;
 - Under WIOA there are legal requirements around the development of partnerships between SCCB and entities in the greater workforce development system. Section Five: Needs of individuals with blindness and vision impairments in transition.

The most common themes that emerged in this area were:

- A high percentage of youth with disabilities have multiple disabilities requiring multiple services. Historically, SCCB's VR program has not effectively served individuals with multiple disabilities including youth with the most significant disabilities;
- Transition-age youth appear to have limited exposure to work prior to exiting the school system. School staff indicated that their focus is upon academics and they do not have the resources to provide employment related services;

- Soft skill development, typically delivered in job readiness/preparation programs, is a major need for this group. This is available to a limited degree through Goodwill;
- Individuals and education partners expressed a lack of involvement of SCCB staff in the planning and delivery of transition services to youth in school. There appears to be minimal involvement of SCCB in activities beyond Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings and minimal provision of Pre-Employment Training Services (Pre-ETS);
- Transition-age youth have a great need for mentors who would foster high expectations and build self-advocacy skill;
- Parents and family members of youth with disabilities need more information on the services available through SCCB and how to access them;
- Parents and youth with disabilities need training on self-advocacy. Education partners stated that greater involvement of families leads to accessing more services potentially leading to better outcomes. Families who are poor and live in rural areas are less likely to advocate for services and are most in need of training and support;
- Teachers working with youth who are blind or visually impaired need training and support in working with students using assistive technology. Assistive technology is a strength of SCCB, and the capacity to provide quality assistive technology support could be increased using school resources;
- Education partners and consumers suggested that SCCB take a lead role in bringing stakeholder groups together to foster greater integration of services and increase consumer awareness of services available to them. Section Six: Need for Community Rehabilitation Providers (CRPs) in South Carolina The majority of intensive VR services are delivered at the EBMRC located in Columbia. Services in outlying areas, especially rural areas, are not considered adequate to meet the needs of consumers living in these areas who cannot or choose not to attend EBMRC. VR 'outreach' services to this population are limited in scope and duration. CRPs are considered one way of addressing the need for geographic access to services.

The most common themes that emerged in this area were:

- Historically, SCCB has not relied on CRPs to provide rehabilitation services to applicants and eligible individuals in South Carolina. SCCB has focused its service delivery system on the EBMRC and 'Outreach' services to individuals who cannot or choose not to attend EBMRC. Outreach services are limited in scope and duration.
- SCCB has a limited contractual agreement with Goodwill Industries and the National Federation for the Blind to provide limited independent living skills training and job preparation services.
- Individuals expressed a need for community programs that provide more comprehensive services in the northern and southern parts of South Carolina

- The Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired (ABVI) center near Charleston (a private non-profit CRP) appears to be under-utilized and reports it has the capacity to partner with SCCB to deliver more comprehensive services to that part of the state. Section Seven: Business Relations and Services The information gathered from businesses in South Carolina was very limited as a result of a low return rate on the survey and the small size of the three small focus groups.

Common themes included:

- Low survey response rates and low representation for the focus groups could be an indication that VR's partnerships with the business community are limited in quantity and/or quality. Two of the businesses represented in the focus groups had hired individuals who had approached them directly for employment. SCCB was then brought in to provide necessary supports which secured the employment. The project team did not interview any employer in which SCCB initiated the placement.

- Businesses expressed a need for assistance with training on understanding disability and disability sensitivity in recruiting and hiring qualified employees with disabilities. Respondents encouraged SCCB to take a leadership role with businesses in South Carolina as a disability expert and to develop long-term and trusting relationships with businesses.

- ABVI in Charleston indicated that Boeing is building a large plant near Charleston. This presents an opportunity for SCCB to develop a partnership that could lead to significant employment opportunities especially in high-wage, high-demand jobs. ABVI also indicated that the Lighthouse of Seattle was opening a community rehabilitation program and working directly with Boeing.

- Over the past few years and under WIA, SCCB (and most VR agencies nationally) has not maintained an effective working relationship with other workforce entities. Therefore, SCCB has not been in a position to use these relationships to leverage opportunities to develop relationships with businesses. Also, other workforce agencies have not had full access to the expertise that SCCB would bring to the table around blindness, low vision and assistive technology that would provide a useful job retention resource to the workforce system.

Concluding Remarks: This CSNA identified gaps in performance, needs of individuals who are blind and visually impaired and the needs of community partners and educators in South Carolina. It also identifies population segments that appear to be underserved and provides recommendations for SCCB to consider in addressing their needs.

This CSNA is intended to serve as a starting point and resource for SCCB and the Board to develop goals, objectives and strategic plans to address these needs. It is important to look at needs as a gap between desired and achieved results.

SCCB is to be highly commended for already taking steps to address these needs as part of the requirements under WIOA. The South Carolina Commission for the Blind Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment Impetus for Needs Assessment Title IV of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) contains the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 as amended and requires all state vocational rehabilitation (VR) agencies to assess the rehabilitation needs

of individuals within the respective state and relate the planning of programs and services and the establishment of goals and priorities to those needs.

According to Section 101 of the Rehabilitation Act, each participating state shall submit a Unified State Plan every year for vocational rehabilitation services that includes the results of a comprehensive, statewide assessment, jointly conducted by the designated State unit and the State Rehabilitation Council every three years describing the rehabilitation needs of individuals with disabilities residing within the State, particularly the vocational rehabilitation service needs of (I) individuals with the most significant disabilities, including their need for supported employment; (II) individuals with disabilities who are minorities and individuals with disabilities who have been unserved or underserved by the vocational rehabilitation program; (III) individuals with disabilities served through other components of the statewide workforce development system; and (IV) youth with disabilities and students with disabilities including their need for pre-employment transition services or other transition services.

In addition, Section 101 of the Rehabilitation Act indicates that the comprehensive statewide needs assessment must include an assessment of the need to establish, develop or improve community rehabilitation programs within the State. In response to this mandate and to ensure that adequate efforts are being made to serve the diverse needs of persons with disabilities in South Carolina, the South Carolina Commission for the Blind (SCCB), in partnership with the State Board of Commissioners, entered into a contract with the Interwork Institute at San Diego State University for the purpose of jointly developing and implementing a comprehensive statewide assessment of the vocational rehabilitation needs of individuals with blindness and vision impairments residing in South Carolina.

Purpose of Needs Assessment and Utilization of Results

The purpose of the comprehensive statewide needs assessment (CSNA) is to identify and describe the vocational rehabilitation needs of individuals with blindness and vision impairments residing within South Carolina. In particular, the CSNA seeks to provide information on: The overall performance of SCCB as it relates to meeting the rehabilitation needs of individuals with blindness and vision impairments in South Carolina; The rehabilitation needs of individuals with the most significant disabilities, including their need for supported employment services; The rehabilitation needs of individuals with blindness and vision impairments who are minorities, or who have been unserved or underserved by the vocational rehabilitation program; The rehabilitation needs of individuals with blindness and vision impairments in transition; The rehabilitation needs of individuals with blindness and vision impairments served through other components of the statewide workforce development system; The need for community rehabilitation programs serving individuals with blindness and vision impairments within South Carolina; The effectiveness of SCCB's business relations and services and the needs of businesses as it relates to recruiting, hiring, accommodating and retaining individuals with blindness and vision impairments; and The alignment of other SCCB programs and services (including the Ellen Beach Mack Rehabilitation Center and the Training and Employment Division) with the VR program in meeting the needs of individuals with blindness and vision impairments in South Carolina.

Data collection efforts solicited input from a broad spectrum of VR stakeholders, including persons with blindness and vision impairments, service providers, SCCB staff and businesses. It is expected that data from the needs assessment effort will provide SCCB and the Board of Directors with direction when creating the VR portion of the Unified State Plan and when planning for future program development, outreach and resource allocation.

Description of Needs Assessment Process

The needs assessment approach was designed to elicit quantitative and qualitative data about the needs of persons with blindness and vision impairments. Focus group and key informant interview activities yielded qualitative data that may be used to complement and lend depth to the findings of the survey efforts and the analysis of extant data. The use of multiple data collection strategies, both quantitative and qualitative, facilitates data collection that captures both the breadth and the depth of concerns relevant to individuals with blindness and vision impairments in South Carolina. The process that was developed for conducting the needs assessment involved four primary data-gathering approaches: Electronic surveys conducted with four stakeholder groups (individuals with blindness and vision impairments, representatives of organizations that provide services to persons with blindness and vision impairments, SCCB staff, and businesses in South Carolina). Hard copy surveys were sent to a random sample of 400 individuals with blindness and vision impairments who are either former, current or potential consumers of SCCB, in addition to the electronic survey for this group; Focus groups conducted with staff and three stakeholder groups (individuals with blindness and vision impairments, community partners - representatives of organizations that provide services to persons with blindness and vision impairments, and businesses); Key informant interviews conducted with individuals with blindness and vision impairments, SCCB staff, organizations that provide services to individuals with blindness and vision impairments in South Carolina, businesses; and Analysis of a variety of existing demographic and case service data and reports relevant to individuals with blindness and vision impairments.

Through the data collection efforts, researchers solicited information from four primary stakeholder groups: (a) former, current or potential consumers of SCCB located throughout South Carolina; (b) representatives of organizations that provide services to, advocate for, or represent the interests of individuals who are potential or actual consumers of SCCB; (c) SCCB staff; and (d) representatives of businesses operating in South Carolina. In addition, the approach was designed to capture input from a variety of perspectives in order to acquire a sense of the multi-faceted needs of persons with blindness and vision impairments in South Carolina. Responses to the individual survey reflect the opinions of current, former and potential clients of SCCB.

Efforts were made to gather information pertinent to the investigated categories through inquiries with individuals who serve a broad range of persons with blindness and vision impairments in South Carolina (whether they are affiliated with SCCB or not). Inherent in any type of research effort are limitations that may constrain the utility of the data that is generated. Therefore, it is important to highlight some of the most significant issues that limit the ability to generalize the needs assessment findings to larger populations. One potential source of bias is the participant sample. The findings that are reported reflect only the

responses of those who could be reached and who were willing to participate. Individuals who were disenfranchised, dissatisfied, or who did not wish to be involved with SCCB may have declined to participate. A second significant concern is that the information gathered from respondents may not accurately represent the broader concerns of all potential constituents and stakeholders. Data gathered from service providers, for example, may reflect only the needs of individuals who are already recipients of services, to the exclusion of those who are not presently served. Although efforts were made to gather information from a variety of stakeholders in the vocational rehabilitation process, it would be presumptuous to conclude with certainty that those who contributed to the focus groups, the key informant interviews, and the survey research efforts constitute a fully representative sample of all of the potential stakeholders in the vocational rehabilitation process in South Carolina.

The time period covered by this comprehensive statewide needs assessment includes the three fiscal years from October 1, 2011 to September 30, 2014 as well as any available information for FY 2015 that was supplied by SCCB. The time frame was determined by the Federal Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) requirement that VR programs perform a CSNA every three years at a minimum.

The specific methods for gathering the quantitative and qualitative data used in this assessment are detailed below.

Analysis of Existing Data Sources

The project team at San Diego State University (SDSU) reviewed a variety of existing data sources for the purposes of identifying and describing demographic data within South Carolina including the total possible target population and subpopulations potentially served by SCCB. Data relevant to the population of South Carolina, the population of persons with disabilities (and where possible data specific to blindness) in South Carolina, as well as the number of Veterans, income level, educational levels and other relevant population characteristics were utilized in this analysis. Sources analyzed include the following: Federal Rehabilitation Services Administration's RSA 911, RSA 2, RSA 113, RSA 107 monitoring data for SCCB, and Agency Report Cards (a national ranking of agencies across several performance measures). 2013 American Community Survey 2013 US Census Bureau Statistics 2014 Social Security Administration SSI/DI Data Cornell University's Disabilitystatistics.org (2013 Data) UNH Disability Compendium 2015 <http://www.disabilitycompendium.org/> (2014 Data) South Carolina's Census Bureau SCCB case service data compiled at the request of the project team 2010 RSA 107 Monitoring Report Key Informant Interviews Instrument.

The instrument used for the key informant interviews was developed by the researchers at SDSU and reviewed and revised by SCCB. Key informant population. The key informant population consisted of SCCB staff, community partners, individuals with blindness and vision impairments and business partners. A total of 210 individuals responded to surveys. This included 48 SCCB staff members, 4 partner agencies, 156 consumers and two business persons. Qualitative data collection.

Key informant interviews and focus groups were conducted from September 21, 2015 to October 23, 2015. Forty-seven face-to-face sessions were held. The general format was

consistent among consumers, with introductory questions followed by open-ended questions about their experiences and their needs and services, as well as their perceptions of the needs of others, the services they receive and suggested changes in SCCB service delivery. Similarly, the format was consistent among SCCB staff and representatives of agencies/ organizations that provide services to, advocate for, or represent the interests of individuals with blindness and vision impairments. First, participants were asked questions to ascertain their personal and professional expertise and their experience with SCCB. Participants were then asked open-ended questions about their perceptions of the needs of individuals with blindness and vision impairments in South Carolina. Finally, participants were asked to share their perceptions of how SCCB could improve their ability to help meet those needs, especially as it relates to helping consumers obtain and retain employment. Efforts to ensure respondent confidentiality. Names and other identifying characteristics were not recorded by the interviewers. Participants were informed that their responses would be treated as confidential information, would not be reported with information that could be used to identify them, and would be consolidated with information from other respondents before results were reported.

Data analysis: The interviewers took notes on the discussions as they occurred. The notes were transcribed and analyzed by the researchers at SDSU. Themes or concerns that surfaced with consistency across interviews were identified and are reported as common themes in the report narrative. Surveys Survey of Individuals with Disabilities Instrument. The instrument used for the electronic survey of individuals with blindness and vision impairments was developed by the project team and reviewed and revised by SCCB.

Survey population: Participants in this portion of the survey effort can be described as individuals with blindness and vision impairments who are potential, former or current clients of SCCB. The agency broadly dispersed the electronic survey via USPS and e-mail invitations. Hard copy surveys were mailed to SCCB consumers using a random sample of 400 former or current consumers.

Data collection: Data was gathered from this population through the use of an accessible, Internet-based survey that was also made available in printed form. Once the survey was active, SCCB distributed it to 1,628 individuals via electronic links (mailed and emailed) and print copies (with self-addressed, postage-paid return envelopes). Approximately 100 were returned marked undeliverable, for a total distribution to 1,528 individuals. SCCB also posted the link on its website and Newslink. One week after the initial distribution, another electronic notice was sent as both a "thank you" to those who had completed the survey and a reminder to those who had not. A third and final reminder was sent 5 weeks after the second invitation. Surveys were then placed into "inactive" status and the data analyzed. Printed surveys returned by mail were collected and entered into the system by the project team at SDSU for further analysis.

Efforts to ensure respondent confidentiality: Respondents to the individual survey were not asked to identify themselves when completing the survey. In addition, responses to the electronic and printed surveys were aggregated by the project team at SDSU prior to reporting results, which served to further obscure the identities of individual survey respondents.

Accessibility: The electronic survey was designed using an accessible, internet-based survey application. On the printed and electronic versions of the individual survey, respondents were provided with the name and contact information of the Research Director at SDSU in order to place requests for other alternative survey formats.

Data analysis: Data analysis consisted of computing frequencies and descriptive statistics for the survey items with fixed response options. Open-ended survey questions, which yielded narrative responses from individuals, were analyzed by the researchers for themes or concepts that were expressed consistently by respondents.

Number of completed surveys: A total of 132 electronic surveys were received from individuals with blindness and vision impairments. Only 104 of the surveys were completely filled out. While this suggests a return rate of approximately 9% of the 1,146 who received the electronic link, it is difficult to gauge the true return rate as some responses may have come as a result of forwarded invitations or from postings on SCCB's website and Newlink. Of the four hundred surveys sent in hard copy by mail to a random sample of former or current consumers of SCCB, 18 were returned marked as undeliverable due to having the wrong address on file. Fifty-two completed surveys were received. When the undeliverable surveys are removed from the equation, the return rate for the hard copy surveys is 14%. Survey of Partners Instrument. The instrument used for the electronic survey of community partners was developed by the project team and reviewed and revised by SCCB.

Survey population: Individuals identified for participation in this survey effort can be described as representatives of organizations that provide services, coordinate services, or serve an advocacy role for persons with blindness and vision impairments in South Carolina. Invitations were issued to 33 partners.

Data collection: Data was gathered from this population through the use of an Internet-based survey. SCCB identified 33 partners for participation in the survey effort. Once the survey was active, SCCB sent an invitation and link to the survey by e-mail. Approximately one week after the distribution of the initial invitation, another electronic notice was sent as both a "thank you" to those who had completed the survey and a reminder to those who had not. A third and final invitation was sent 5 weeks after the second invitation. Surveys were then placed into "inactive" status and the data analyzed. Efforts to ensure respondent confidentiality. Respondents to the partner survey were not asked to identify themselves or their organizations when completing the survey. In addition, responses to the electronic surveys were aggregated by the project team at SDSU prior to reporting results, which served to further obscure the identities of individual survey respondents.

Accessibility: The survey was designed using an accessible, internet-based survey application. Respondents were also provided with the name and contact information for the Research Director at SDSU in order to place requests for other alternative survey formats.

Data analysis: Data analysis consisted of computing frequencies and descriptive statistics for the survey items with fixed response options. Open-ended survey questions, which yielded narrative responses from individuals, were analyzed by the researchers for themes or concepts that were expressed consistently by respondents.

Number of completed surveys: A total of 8 electronic surveys were started with only 4 entirely completed by representatives of partner organizations, which yields a 1% return on the 33 invitations. It may be that the low response rate corresponds to SCCB's limited track record of collaboration, partnering with business or contracting for services. Survey of SCCB Staff Instrument. The instrument used for the electronic survey of SCCB staff was developed by the project team at SDSU and reviewed and revised by SCCB.

Survey population: Individuals identified for participation in this survey effort can be described as all staff working for SCCB between September and December 2015. Data collection. Data was gathered from SCCB staff through the use of an Internet-based survey. All 125 staff were sent an electronic invitation and link to the survey. Approximately one week after the initial distribution, a subsequent notice was sent as both a "thank you" to those who had completed the survey and a reminder to those who had not. A third and final invitation was sent out 5 weeks after the second invitation. Surveys were then placed into "inactive" status and the data analyzed. Efforts to ensure respondent confidentiality. Respondents to the staff survey were not asked to identify themselves by name when completing the survey. Responses to the electronic surveys were aggregated by the project team at SDSU prior to reporting results. This served to further protect the identities of individual survey respondents. Accessibility. The survey was designed using an accessible, internet-based survey application. Respondents were also provided with the name and contact information for the Research Director at SDSU in order to place requests for other alternative survey formats.

Data analysis: Data analysis consisted of computing frequencies and descriptive statistics for the survey items with fixed response options. Open-ended survey questions, which yielded narrative responses from individuals, were analyzed by the researchers for themes or concepts that were expressed consistently by respondents.

Number of completed surveys: Out of a total of 125 SCCB staff invited to participate, 77 electronic surveys were started, with only 48 being entirely completed, for a 38% response rate. Survey of Businesses Instrument. The instrument used for the electronic survey of businesses in South Carolina was developed by the project team at SDSU and reviewed and revised by SCCB.

Survey population: Individuals identified for participation in this survey effort can be described as representatives of South Carolina businesses in operation between September and December 2015.

Data collection: Data was gathered from businesses through the use of an Internet-based survey. Twenty business representatives were sent an electronic invitation and link to the survey. Approximately one week after the initial distribution, a subsequent notice was sent as both a "thank you" to those who had completed the survey and a reminder to those who had not. A third and final invitation was sent out 5 weeks after the second invitation. Surveys were then placed into "inactive" status and the data analyzed. Efforts to ensure respondent confidentiality. Respondents to the business survey were not asked to identify themselves by name when completing the survey. Responses were aggregated by the project team at SDSU

prior to reporting results. This served to further protect the identities of individual survey respondents.

Accessibility: The survey was designed using an accessible, internet-based survey application. Respondents were also provided with the name and contact information for the Research Director at SDSU in order to place requests for other alternative survey formats.

Data analysis: Data analysis consisted of computing frequencies and descriptive statistics for the survey items with fixed response options. Open-ended survey questions, which yielded narrative responses from individuals, were analyzed by the researchers for themes or concepts that were expressed consistently by respondents.

Number of completed surveys: Of the 20 businesses invited to participate, only 2 surveys were returned for a response rate of 10%. Although the numbers are so small they cannot be generalized to all South Carolina businesses, they are presented here for illustrative purposes. The low response rate suggests that the agency should strengthen its relationships with employers. The project team has included recommendations to more effectively engage businesses in the Business Relations section of the report.

Focus Groups Instrument: The focus groups were conducted based on a protocol developed by the researchers at SDSU. The protocol was reviewed and revised by SCCB. The central question raised in each of the focus group meetings was, "What are the most important employment-related needs encountered by people with blindness and vision impairments?" When appropriate the moderator introduced additional questions prompting respondents to discuss needs associated with preparing for, obtaining and retaining employment, and increasing the employment of persons with blindness and vision impairments.

Participants in the staff and partner agency groups were also asked to discuss the needs of individuals with most significant disabilities; those from cultural, racial, or ethnic minority groups; and students with blindness and vision impairments transitioning from high school. They were also asked about the need to establish, develop or improve CRPs.

Population: Thirteen focus groups were conducted for the assessment, with a total of 64 participants. They consisted of three consumer groups, five partner groups (including the Board of Commissioners), three business groups and two staff groups.

Data collection: The 13 focus groups were held in Greenville, Columbia and Charleston from September 21 through October 23, 2015, involving 64 individuals, 22 of whom were consumers, with the remainder representing the agency, partner agencies and businesses. The format of the focus groups was consistent for all groups. A few minutes were devoted to introductions, personal background, and rapport building in order to establish a productive focus group environment. The focus group moderator explained the purpose of the focus group and provided a brief description of the larger needs assessment effort. The moderator explained the role of San Diego State University in the needs assessment effort and assured participants of the confidentiality of their statements. A note-taker recorded the discussion as it occurred. Efforts to ensure respondent confidentiality. Names and other identifying characteristics were not recorded by the note-taker. Focus group participants were informed that their responses

would be treated as confidential information, would not be reported with information that could be used to identify them, and that information from multiple focus groups would be consolidated before results were reported. In addition, SCCB staff did not attend the focus groups consisting of individuals with disabilities and partner agencies in order to ensure an open dialogue amongst participants.

Accessibility: SCCB included a request for reasonable accommodation in their electronic invitations to all of the research groups. One individual requested an interpreter.

Data analysis: Notes were transcribed and analyzed by the researchers at SDSU. Results were organized according to the eight categories under investigation in the assessment. Themes or concerns that surfaced with consistency across groups were identified and reported as consensus themes in the report narrative.

Analysis and Triangulation of Data: The data gathered from the national and agency-specific data sets, key informant interviews, surveys and focus groups were analyzed by the researchers on the project team. The common themes that emerged regarding needs of persons with disabilities from each data source were identified and compared to each other to validate the existence of needs, especially as they pertained to the target populations of this assessment. These common themes are identified and discussed in the Findings section.

Dissemination Plans: The CSNA report is delivered to SCCB and the Board of Commissioners. The project team received several requests by consumers and partner agencies to share the results of the CSNA. We recommend that SCCB publish the report on their website for public access and that they notify the public of the availability of the report by e-mail.

SOUTH CAROLINA'S DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE & SERVICE DELIVERY CONTEXT

In 2014, there were 4,832,482 people with disabilities living in South Carolina, with approximately 77,406 of them (1.6%) being individuals with a visual disability, of working age, living in the community. 75.4% of working age civilians without disabilities living in the community were employed, as opposed to 34.4% of those with disabilities and 32% of those with visual disabilities. Economically, the pattern of lower employment continues with lower earnings and higher poverty rates. To wit, the median earnings for South Carolinians without disabilities 16 years or older in inflation adjusted dollars for 2014 was \$27,296 whereas for those with disabilities it was \$20,157. With respect to poverty, the rate for working age civilians without disabilities living in the community is half that (15%) for those with disabilities (30%).

SCCB VR programs consist of approximately 16 counselors located in 9 District offices throughout South Carolina. The administrative and service delivery hubs for SCCB are located in Columbia. The most intense independent living and job training services are provided at the residential EBMRC in Columbia. To access the services at EBMRC, individuals are transported from their residence to EBMRC on Monday and return on Friday. Individuals living locally in the Columbia area may also access EBMRC programs and services. SCCB also provides 'Outreach' services, delivered by staff in the 9 district offices. The Outreach services do not provide the same intensity and duration as those provided by EBMRC. EBMRC also houses training programs in assistive technology (JAWS, Zoomtext etc.) as well as summer Transition programs

for high school students. SCCB provides job development and placement services via a cadre of Employment counselors who serve the state. Transition services are provided by a cadre of Transition counselors who also serve the entire state. SCCB does limited outsourcing of services through community rehabilitation programs.

CSNA FINDINGS

The CSNA findings are reported below in sections that correspond with the requested areas of inquiry. They are presented in narrative form. Each section starts with a summary across all data collection methods, followed by a breakdown according to data collection method. Data tables that were too large to be included in the body of the report are presented in the Appendices.

SECTION 1 OVERALL AGENCY PERFORMANCE: The data on agency performance included below comes from the case management system used by SCCB and is compared to the available data submitted by SCCB to the Federal Rehabilitation Services Administration. Recurring Themes Across all Data Collection Methods The following recurring themes emerged in the area of Overall Agency Performance: Indicators as summarized above, demographic data for South Carolina indicates that 1.6% of people with disabilities of working age who are living in the community are individuals with a visual disability. Surveyed consumers, staff and partners agreed that the top barriers to achieving employment goals relate to geographic access to services and jobs, followed by lack of individuals' education and job skills, and employer perceptions about their ability to work. Agency performance SCCB estimates that the VR program will serve 1,173 eligible individuals during FY 2016, 1,257 during FY 2017, 1,350 during FY 2018, and 1,400 during FY 2019. SCCB serves males and females equally, and ethnic/racial minorities in equal or greater proportion to their representation in the general population. Recent data regarding SCCB's active cases indicates that 56% are Black or African American and 41% are White.

SCCB serves youth and individuals with most significant disabilities at very low rates. There was a consistent decrease in both the number and percentage of cases closed with an employment outcome over the 2009-2014 period. SCCB ranks high for per case expenditures and low for quality of employment outcomes nationally among agencies for the blind. SCCB staff have a strong knowledge of assistive technology relating to blindness and visual impairment. The agency makes this technology readily available to students and adults. SCCB provides strong transition programs at the EBMRC, but these programs are limited to a small number of youth who are blind or visually impaired.

Historically, SCCB VR has not viewed itself or been viewed by other agencies as an integral partner at the statewide workforce level due to (1) SCCB's paradigm under WIA of being a sole one-stop shop, attempting to meet all the needs of its consumers independently, and (2) external silos and territorialism that has existed among state agencies. However, the agency has expressed the intention of working more closely with partners going forward. Historically, the most prevalent services provided by SCCB are Assessment and Diagnosis and Treatment of Impairments.

The VR program's service delivery system is centered in Columbia, resting primarily with the EBMRC. The majority of consumers participating in the adjustment to blindness program were closed as "N/A" (41.3%), "homemaker" (22.3%), or "unsuccessful" (20.1%). The breakdown of "closure reason" indicates that 36.9% were "successful closures." SCCB's service delivery was rated by surveyed consumers to be strongest in relation to vision restoration, low vision aids and assistive technology.

The biggest barriers to SCCB services identified by all survey respondents were slow service delivery, inadequate information about SCCB services and lack of geographic access. Key informants in all categories had the perception that SCCB returns unmatched federal dollars every year, at the expense of delivering needed services. The research team determined that SCCB has not in fact returned federal dollars in the past several years.

Gaps Currently, SCCB's memoranda of agreement with other state agencies, including the general VR agency, the Mental Health agency, and the Developmental Disability agency, must be updated to meet the requirements of WIOA. The vast majority of substantive independent living (IL) training received by SCCB consumers is conducted at the Center in Columbia. This is a residential center, therefore to access the training, an individual must either be a resident at the center or live in close proximity where commuting to and from the center on a daily basis is feasible. Key informants suggest that this, coupled with significant transportation barriers statewide, presents a major challenge in accessing SCCB services. In 2014, only 3% of Center participants came from the 10 lowest median income counties in South Carolina indicating that individuals who live below the poverty line and in rural areas may be underserved.

SCCB has limited contracts or other arrangements with external service providers especially community rehabilitation programs. There are limited VR 'outreach' services throughout the state. Outreach services consist of independent living services (orientation/mobility and home/personal management) and are not as comprehensive as services offered at the EBMRC.

Lack of affordable, accessible transportation is an historic, significant and pervasive barrier to independent living, employment and services for individuals with disabilities everywhere, and despite its wide acceptance as a critical need, little progress is made in addressing it systematically. South Carolina is no exception, with key informants and survey participants representing all stakeholder groups identifying this as an issue.

All individuals surveyed for this study were in agreement that the highest priorities should be to improve geographic access (outreach, transportation, community-based services) and to address staffing issues (vacancies, skill levels, morale).

These were followed by somewhat divergent suggestions depending on the respondent group: Staff and partners focused on internal improvements (collaboration, assessment, individualized services), whereas consumers focused on stronger job training, placement and support.

Results by Data Collection Method Services Provided to Individuals by SCCB: Quantitative Data SCCB estimates that the VR program will serve 1,173 eligible individuals during FFY 2016, 1,257 during FFY 2017, 1,350 during FFY 2018, and 1,400 during FFY 2019. The following tables and discussions present statistical data on SCCB VR's performance in providing services to

individuals with blindness and vision impairments from 2012 through 2014. 2014 SCCB Data on EBMRC Services 50% of EBMRC attendees were from Richland or the immediately adjacent counties. 3% of EBMRC attendees were from the state's ten poorest counties as measured by median income. 82% EBMRC closed cases did not have an employment outcome: 41% "N/A," 20% "homemaker," 20% "unsuccessful" and 0.6% "failure to cooperate."

Observations: Based on the SCCB Data Performance in key areas has declined from 2012 through 2014. Applications, eligibility decisions, individualized plan for employment (IPE) development and employment outcomes decreased significantly. The cost of serving individuals whose cases are closed successfully or unsuccessfully has risen dramatically. This data may suggest case management issues resulting in higher case service expenditures and lower employment outcomes.

The percentage of cases coded Most Significantly Disabled (MSD) is low and may reflect an unclear interpretation of agency policies and/or coding errors. It may also reflect eligibility decisions that screen out individuals with most significant disabilities.

Services to youth under 18 appear to be very low and will need to be addressed in light of WIOA requirements.

RSA Data Highlights: The following data highlights are drawn from various RSA reports, including Standards and Indicators, RSA-911, RSA-722, RSA State Report Card [See Appendix H for RSA reports relating to SCCB] Indicator 1.1, "Number of closures with employment outcome," has consistently decreased from 2006 (546) to 2015 (137). Source: Standards and Indicators. There has been a downward trend in Indicator 1.2, "Percentage of closed cases with an employment outcome," from 2006-2015.

Source: Standards and Indicators: SCCB consistently exceeds the other federal performance standards relating to closed cases.

Both males and females are equally served by SCCB. SCCB consistently significantly exceeds standard 2.1, "Ratio of minority services to non-minority services."

SCCB outcomes for Hispanics are somewhat low in comparison with the representation of Hispanics in the general population. The state's Hispanic population is rapidly increasing and South Carolina is among the states with the highest percentage increases in the country.

Other minorities such as Native Americans and Asians represent very small percentages of the population served, corresponding to very small percentages in South Carolina's general population.

SCCB has minimal (a total of 2 in FY 2014) disputes with applicants or eligible individuals resulting in mediation, impartial hearings or civil actions. Source: RSA-722. Average time to closure is 12 months longer for individuals closed with no employment compared with individuals closed with employment. Source: RSA-911.

Historically for SCCB, the percentage of competitive employment outcomes is highest for the age range 25-35. Source: RSA-911. Historically for SCCB, the percentage of employment outcomes is lowest for age range 14-24. Source: RSA-911.

SCCB ranks high (nationally among agencies for the blind) for expenditures, months of service and hours worked per week at closure. Source: RSA State Report Card.

SCCB ranks low (nationally among agencies for the blind) in quality of employment outcomes including wages and medical benefits. Source: RSA State Report Card.

SCCB appears to underserve individuals with multiple disabilities especially individuals with cognitive and mental disabilities. Source: RSA-911.

Historically, the most prevalent services provided by SCCB are Assessment and Diagnosis and Treatment of Impairments.

Almost 19% of unsuccessful closures for SCCB were for the following reasons: No longer interested in services; refused services; unable to locate. Source: Agency Data. Of those attending EBMRC, 43% of cases were closed either unsuccessfully or as homemakers. 38% were closed successfully.

2010 RSA Monitoring Report Findings and Recommendations: RSA conducted a 107 monitoring review in 2010 and issued findings and recommendations for SCCB to address. Those findings and recommendations that coincide with this report's findings on overall agency performance include: SCCB serves individuals not requiring extensive funding.

Stakeholders reported that SCCB focuses on serving those who are already employed at application.

SCCB does not integrate internal functions (including fiscal, programmatic and program evaluation).

It does not appear that the agency was successful in fulfilling the 2010 report's recommendations relating to: shifting resources from low- to high-impact services to address service gaps decentralizing service delivery adding staff with capacity and skill sets needed to offer programs, reduce waiting lists, etc. partnering with other agencies implementing a dual service system with South Carolina Vocational Rehabilitation Department (SCVRD) including marketing and training.

Observations Based on RSA Data: In general, performance in key service delivery fell over a 3-year period, possibly due to staff turnover. Key issues documented in the RSA Monitoring report have not been resolved and may continue to impact agency performance.

Individuals with multiple disabilities that included blindness are significantly underserved.

Lack of partnerships with other agencies including SCVRD appear to be contributing factors.

Case management issues appear to contribute to higher cost, lower successful outcomes and less efficient service delivery. The root causes of the case management issues require further investigation.

Services Provided to Individuals by SCCB: Qualitative Data on Barriers and Improvements Focus Groups and Key Informant Interviews Some consumers reported positive experiences with SCCB. "Staff and fellow consumers who are visually impaired definitely inspired me." One

individual new to South Carolina said the agency “opened doors to blindness resources” and “I look forward in the future to give back to SCCB to help other consumers not as fortunate as myself.” Consumers’ employment barriers (lack of education or job skills, employer perceptions, etc.) are compounded by challenges they encounter in accessing the services needed to overcome those barriers.

B. the State's performance under the performance accountability measures of section 116 of WIOA; and

SCCB is using performance data required under section 116 of WIOA for program year 2016 and 2017 to establish baselines for performance measurement, continuous improvement and goal setting.

C. other available information on the operation and effectiveness of the VR program, including any reports received from the State Rehabilitation Council and findings and recommendations from monitoring activities conducted under section 107.

SCCB has also analyzed previous Rehabilitation Services Administration Monitoring reports, recent State Audit Reports, and historical performance data to inform the Objectives, Goals, and Strategies of this program specific portion of the Unified State Plan.

m. Order of Selection

Describe:

1. Whether the designated State unit will implement and order of selection. If so, describe:

A. The order to be followed in selecting eligible individuals to be provided VR services.

SCCB tracks resources on a continual ongoing basis and has determined that the agency currently has the staff and financial resources to provide required and effective VR services to all eligible individuals in the state and does not anticipate implementing an Order of Selection.

B. The justification for the order.

N/A

C. The service and outcome goals.

N/A

D. The time within which these goals may be achieved for individuals in each priority category within the order.

N/A

E. How individuals with the most significant disabilities are selected for services before all other individuals with disabilities; and

N/A

2. If the designated State unit has elected to serve eligible individuals, regardless of any established order of selection, who require specific services or equipment to maintain employment.

N/A

n. Goals and Plans for Distribution of title VI Funds.

1. Specify the State's goals and priorities for funds received under section 603 of the Rehabilitation Act for the provision of supported employment services.

The South Carolina Commission for the Blind has established the capacities to provide Supported Employment to youth and adults with Most Significant Disabilities in response to the findings of the FFY 2016 CSNA. Funds received under section 603 of the Rehabilitation Act for Supported Employment are utilized to fund the costs of individualized discovery assessment, job development, job placement, and on-the-job supports for Supported Employment and Customized Employment delivered internally by JOBS Specialists. SCCB provides extended services for a period not to exceed 4 years. SCCB has signed a Partnership Plus Agreement under the Ticket to Work program to provide long term on going supports through an Employment Network (Able SC). SCCB utilizes 50% of Supported Employment funds to provide Supported Employment and Customized Employment for eligible youth. SCCB has established goals to provide Supported Employment services to **6** eligible individuals during FFY 2018, **8** individuals during FFY 2019, **10** individuals during FFY 2020, and **10** individuals during FFY 2021.

2. Describe the activities to be conducted, with funds reserved pursuant to section 603(d), for youth with the most significant disabilities, including:

A. the provision of extended services for a period not to exceed 4 years; and

SCCB has established the capacity and resources to provide Supported Employment to youth with most significant disabilities. SCCB hired and trained three in-house Supported Employment JOBS Specialists to provide job placement and on-the-job supported employment services to consumers who have most significant disabilities. Further, SCCB is engaging in the redevelopment of a cooperative agreement with the state Medicaid and Developmental Disability agencies to facilitate transition to on-going supports where available. SCCB signed a Partnership Plus Agreement with Able SC and Employment Network under the Ticket to Work Program to provide on-going supports.

B. how the State will leverage other public and private funds to increase resources for extended services and expanded supported employment opportunities for youth with the most significant disabilities.

As required by WIOA 50% of Supported Employment funds will be used to provide Supported Employment Services to youth with most significant disabilities. SCCB built in-house capacities and resources to meet this goal since FPY 2016. SCCB has signed a Partnership Plus Agreement under the Ticket to Work program to provide long term on going supports through an Employment Network (Able SC). SCCB will look for opportunities to engage with private and

public partners to fund extended and ongoing supported employment services for this population.

o. State's Strategies

Describe the required strategies and how the agency will use these strategies to achieve its goals and priorities, support innovation and expansion activities, and overcome any barriers to accessing the VR and the Supported Employment programs (See sections 101(a)(15)(D) and (18)(B) of the Rehabilitation Act and section 427 of the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA)):

1. The methods to be used to expand and improve services to individuals with disabilities.

The findings of the FFY 2016 Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment were used to develop Objectives, Goals, and Strategies reflected in the previous iteration of the South Carolina Unified State Plan. See section (p.) *Evaluation and Reports of Progress* for information related to progress on the previous state plan goals and priorities.

For the current Unified State Plan, SCCB identified gaps from two primary sources. The first being unmet gaps identified in the FFY 2016 Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment. The second source is the South Carolina Workforce Development Board's Economic Analysis and Strategic Plan.

The following gaps have been identified:

Gap 1: South Carolina's current labor force, including individuals who are blind or visually impaired, do not have industry recognized credentials, knowledge, skills, or abilities to meet current or emerging demands of the business community.

Gap 2: SCCB needs to improve alignment of policies, resources, and staff expertise to provide job driven, labor market informed, vocational counseling and guidance that aligns with South Carolina's Talent Pipeline Project and Sector Strategies initiatives to assist eligible consumers in accessing career pathways that lead to high and middle skill/income jobs in growth sectors.

Gap 3: SCCB needs to improve partnerships with business in order to more accurately identify current and future workforce needs of business and industry to support career pathways in growth sectors and improve services to business.

Gap 4: SCCB needs to improve marketing, branding, and engagement with business, consumers, and other workforce partners to increase awareness, improve partnerships, and increase effectiveness and efficiency of services leading to competitive integrated employment.

Based on these identified gaps, and in alignment with the South Carolina Workforce Development Board's Strategic Plan, SCCB establishes the following objectives. These objectives have been jointly developed and agreed to by the South Carolina Commission for the Blind Board, and are in alignment with the Workforce Development Board's *Strategies to Build a Competitive Workforce Plan*. Each strategy includes a "Key Indicator" that will be used to quantify SCCB's progress.

Objective 1: Identify, invest and support job seekers who are blind and visually impaired in the attainment of industry recognized credentials and vocational training required for current and emerging jobs.

Goal 1.1: Provide comprehensive vocational rehabilitation services to youth and transition students resulting in the attainment of industry recognized in-demand credentials required for competitive integrated employment.

Strategy 1.1.1: Provide Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) through the Career BOOST and Summer Teens Programs. In cooperation and collaboration with public schools these services include career exploration and counseling, self-advocacy skills training, work readiness training, work-based learning experiences, and exploration of post-secondary education and training.

Key Performance Indicator 1.1.1: Number of Students Completed

Strategy 1.1.2: Support the attainment of a High School Diploma, GED and/or SC Employability Credential through vocational counseling and guidance, assistive technology, coordination and collaboration with public schools.

Key Performance Indicator 1.1.2: Number of Students Completed

Strategy 1.1.3: Invest in, facilitate and support completion of Post-Secondary college and/or university vocational training.

Key Performance Indicator 1.1.3: Number of Students Completed

Goal 1.2: Provide comprehensive vocational rehabilitation services to adult job seekers who are blind or visually impaired resulting in the attainment of industry recognized in-demand credentials required for competitive integrated employment.

Strategy 1.2.1: Provide quality Adjustment to Blindness and Pre-Vocational Training at the *Ellen Beach Mack Rehabilitation Center for Employment & Independence*. Adjustment to Blindness Training includes: Orientation & Mobility (Independent Travel), Independent Living Skills, Braille Literacy, Employability Soft Skills, Basic Financial Literacy, and Psychosocial Adjustment to Blindness Counseling. Pre-Vocational Training includes: Basic Keyboarding, Basic Microsoft Office Suite Training, and Assistive Technology Training such as Computer Screen Readers, Text Magnifiers, Low Vision Aids, Etc.

Key Performance Indicator 1.2.1: Number of Consumers Completed

Strategy 1.2.2: Support the attainment of a High School Diploma, GED, and SC Employability Credential through vocational counseling and guidance, assistive technology, collaboration and technical assistance to adult education programs.

Key Performance Indicator 1.2.2: Number of Consumers Completed

Strategy 1.2.3: Invest in, and support the completion of Post-Secondary vocational training through career exploration, vocational counseling and guidance, assistive technology, tuition assistance, collaboration and technical assistance to colleges and universities.

Key Performance Indicator 1.2.3: Number of Consumers Completed

Objective 2: Align resources, policy, and strategies to continuously improve competitive integrated employment outcomes for blind and visually impaired job seekers.

Goal 2.1: Develop and enhance job seeker work readiness and soft skills.

Strategy 2.1.1: Provide Adjustment to Blindness and Pre-Vocational Training at the *Ellen Beach Mack Rehabilitation Center for Employment & Independence*. Adjustment to Blindness Training includes: Orientation & Mobility (Independent Travel), Independent Living Skills, Braille Literacy, Employability Soft Skills, Basic Financial Literacy, and Psychosocial Adjustment to Blindness Counseling. Pre-Vocational Training includes: Basic Keyboarding, Basic Microsoft Suite Training, and Assistive Technology Training such as Computer Screen Readers, Text Magnifiers, Etc.

Key Performance Indicator 2.1.1: Number of Consumers Completed

Strategy 2.1.2: Facilitate The BRIDGE Program Job Club (Building Readiness for Individualized Development of Gainful Employment) provides consumers who have completed the Adjustment to Blindness and Pre-Vocational Training at the *Ellen Beach Mack Rehabilitation Center for Employment and Independence* a paid work based learning experience (internship) and job club activities to enhance employability and jump start job placement in their local community.

Key Performance Indicator 2.1.2: Number of Consumers Completed

Strategy 2.1.3: Summer Internship Program (SIP) provides college and university students with a paid summer internship in their field of study during their Sophomore, Junior and Senior year.

Key Performance Indicator 2.1.3: Number of Consumers Completed

Goal 2.2: Enhance and improve job placement services and job support services for job seekers who are blind or visually impaired.

Strategy 2.2.1: Increase job placement by SCCB Employment Consultants through talent acquisition services to business partners matching qualified job seekers who are blind or visually impaired with current job openings.

Key Performance Indicator 2.2.1: Number of Consumers Employed

Strategy 2.2.2: Provide Supported Employment (SE) utilizing the initial placement and job coaching provided on a short term basis by an SCCB JOBS Specialist (Job Oriented Blind Service) with long term extended supports provided by another agency such as an employment network, state agency, or natural supports.

Key Performance Indicator 2.2.2: Number of Consumers Employed

Strategy 2.2.3: Provide Customized Employment that includes intensive discovery of individualized skills, abilities, potential; and intensive customization of an existing job opening, creation of a job that fills an unmet need, and other customized options. SCCB provides

Customized Employment through a qualified and trained JOBS Specialist (Job Oriented Blind Service).

Key Performance Indicator 2.2.3: Number of Consumers Employed

Objective 3: Identify current and future needs of business and industry to support career pathways in growth sectors.

Goal 3.1: Provide specialized training through a Pre-Apprenticeship Program to prepare adults not enrolled in college programs, as an alternative career pathway to current and future business and industry needs.

Strategy 3.1.1: Utilize the principles STEM education to develop a Pre-Apprenticeship training program for job seekers who are blind and visually impaired that will satisfy the entry level skills needed for acceptance into registered apprenticeship programs. Incorporate the use of the most current Assistive Technology that will make graduates competitive when applying to fill open apprenticeship positions.

Key Performance Indicator 3.1.1: Number of Consumers Completed

Strategy 3.1.2: Collaborate with the South Carolina US Department of Labor Apprenticeship Office to discover the industry needs for apprentices in South Carolina. Meet with employers to promote program and consumers before, during, and after program participation to facilitate job development opportunities.

Key Performance Indicator 3.1.2: Number of Apprenticeships Entered by Consumers

Strategy 3.1.3: Engage and collaborate with WIOA core partner's business service coordination council to collaborate and coordinate business service efforts to include the blind and visually impaired in the labor market.

Key Performance Indicator 3.1.3: Number of Business Services Delivered

Goal 3.2: Increase and improve talent acquisition and talent retention services to business in support of employees who are blind or visually impaired.

Strategy 3.2.1: Provide Workplace Sensitivity Training Workshops and Accessibility Technical Assistance (TA) to business partners in order to facilitate the employment of people who are blind or visually impaired.

Key Performance Indicator 3.2.1: Number Workshops/TA Delivered

Strategy 3.2.2: Provide Talent Acquisition Services to business partners by matching current open positions with qualified applicants who are blind or visually impaired, providing technical assistance in regards to assistive technology and reasonable accommodations.

Key Performance Indicator 3.2.2: Number of Job Placements

Strategy 3.2.3: Provide Talent Retention Services to business partners by providing technical assistance, support, and training necessary for the business to retain an employee who is blind or visually impaired.

Key Performance Indicator 3.2.3: Number of Job Retentions

Objective 4: Engage job seekers, business leaders, and other workforce partners through marketing and outreach to articulate a value proposition to each.

Goal 4.1: Improve **visibility and branding of SCCB** with job seekers who are blind or visually impaired, businesses seeking to diversify their labor market talent pool, and other workforce partners to increase the awareness and effectiveness of SCCB services.

Strategy 4.1.1: Complete Rebranding & Promotional Materials.

Key Performance Indicator 4.1.1: Rebranding Completed and Implemented

Strategy 4.1.2: Attend and distribute branding materials at Community Health Fairs, Career and Job Fairs, and other Community Resource Education Events.

Key Performance Indicator 4.1.2: Number Attended

Goal 4.2: Improve visibility and awareness of SCCB within the Workforce Development System.

Strategy 4.2.1: Enhance programmatic presence in SC Works American Job Centers through assigned liaison relationships with field staff, standardized colocation hours, infrastructure cost sharing, accessibility assessment technical assistance and implementation, and availability of program educational information and rebranded materials.

Key Performance Indicator 4.2.1: N/A

Strategy 4.2.2: Enhance programmatic presence at South Carolina Workforce Development Board meetings to ensure that the needs of job seekers who are blind or visually impaired are represented.

Key Performance Indicator 4.2.2: Number of Board Meetings Attended by SCCB

2. How a broad range of assistive technology services and devices will be provided to individuals with disabilities at each stage of the rehabilitation process and on a statewide basis.

SCCB's Employment and Training Division provides SCCB consumers with assistive technology assessments when necessary at each stage of the vocational rehabilitation process to ensure that eligible individuals have the tools and AT resources necessary to succeed in their Individualized Plan for Employment activities and services. VR Counselors make referrals to the T & E Division staff for assessments when the need is identified.

In addition, SCCB has a cooperative agreement with the South Carolina Assistive Technology Program at the University of South Carolina School of Medicine to access comparable benefits, eliminate duplication of services, and increase coordination of employment services provided to the shared consumer populations. SCCB will work to enhance and improve this partnership.

3. The outreach procedures that will be used to identify and serve individuals with disabilities who are minorities, including those with the most significant

disabilities, as well as those who have been unserved or underserved by the VR program.

In order to identify and make VR services available to minorities, individuals with most significant disabilities, and those traditionally unserved or underserved by the VR program, SCCB has conducted outreach and information to South Carolina's Native American tribes, to community service organizations that serve the Hispanic community, and has established and enhanced our services to Deaf-Blind consumers. In addition, SCCB has engaged in staff training on how to effectively serve individuals with multiple significant disabilities. SCCB is working to improve the program's visibility, branding, and presence in the SC Works American Job Centers. During FPY 2018 SCCB is engaging in an E3 Targeted Communities Technical Assistance Grant focused on improving the capacity to serve individuals in rural-high poverty areas.

4. The methods to be used to improve and expand VR services for students with disabilities, including the coordination of services designed to facilitate the transition of such students from school to postsecondary life (including the receipt of VR services, postsecondary education, employment, and pre-employment transition services).

Career BOOST Pre-Employment Transition Services: SCCB has piloted a demonstration project called Career BOOST (Building Occupational Opportunities for Students in Transition). This program augments SCCB's comprehensive transition services program by providing the five (5) required Pre Employment Transition Services (PETS) to eligible or potentially eligible students statewide in collaboration and coordination with public schools. These Pre-ETS services include: 1. Self-Advocacy Training 2. Work Readiness Workshops 3. Work-based Learning Experiences 4. Post-Secondary Education Enrollment and Careers Exploration 5. Information & Referral to SCCB's Transition VR Program

Student Internship Program Jr.: SCCB has expanded our highly successful Student Internship Program (SIP) that provides paid summer internships for college seniors and juniors, by developing the SIP Jr. Program that provides paid summer internship opportunities in a variety of career fields to transition students in their senior and junior year of High School.

Career Exploration Lab: SCCB used funds to establish the "Career Exploration Lab" where transition students are exposed to career exploration in functional 3-D fabrication, manufacturing using 3-D printer technology, product development, business development, microenterprise development, entrepreneurship, marketing and other science, technology, engineering, and math careers. During the Summer of 2017 and again in 2018 SCCB partnered with a team of scientists who use tactile 3-D prints of the universe to explore STEM careers with blind or visually impaired students.

Summer Teens Program: SCCB will continue the very successful Summer Teens Program that brings students from across the state to the Ellen Beach Mack Rehabilitation Center for Employment to engage in 5 weeks of career exploration, blindness skills that support employment training, self-advocacy training, paid work based learning experiences, and soft-skills work readiness training.

Transition Alliance of South Carolina: SCCB is an active partner on TASC where we collaborate and coordinate with other partner programs that serve transition aged students with disabilities.

Advisory Council for Educating Students with Disabilities: SCCB serves on the ACESD to partner with the South Carolina Office of Special Education, public schools, parents, students, and other organizations with the goal to improve post-school outcomes and employment.

5. If applicable, plans for establishing, developing, or improving community rehabilitation programs within the State.

SCCB will continue to seek opportunities and partnerships to aid in the development and establishment of Community Rehabilitation Programs (CRP) to provide community based adjustment to blindness services, supported employment (SE) services, customized employment (CE) services and life skills training.

6. Strategies to improve the performance of the State with respect to the performance accountability measures under section 116 of WIOA.

It is the position of SCCB that the Goals, Priorities, and Strategies listed in this state plan will lead to improvements on performance accountability measures after the initial "baseline" establishing year of FFY 2016.

7. Strategies for assisting other components of the statewide workforce development system in assisting individuals with disabilities.

SCCB has been an active partner in the WIOA Unified State Plan Implementation Team. South Carolina's plans are to continue convening this group of core WIOA partners to continue to develop meaningful and effective partnerships, share expertise and knowledge, skills, and abilities, and to expand the ability of the system to serve all individuals including those with disabilities. In addition, SCCB is working to ensure that there is agency presence in the local one stop American Job Centers on a consistent basis to provide support and expertise to consumers who are blind or visually impaired. SCCB entered into MOU's and Infrastructure Cost Agreements with all SC Works service deliver areas. SCCB is currently working with SC Works to provide assessment and technical assistance to ensure programmatic and physical accessibility.

8. How the agency's strategies will be used to:

A. achieve goals and priorities by the State, consistent with the comprehensive needs assessment;

The Goals, Priorities, and Strategies detailed in the SCCB VR program portion of the Unified State Plan were designed to directly address the gaps in service needs identified in the 2016 Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment and align with the state Workforce Investment Board's Strategic Plan. These Goals, Priorities, and Strategies form the basis of our 4-year Strategic Plan for the VR program at SCCB. The Senior Management Team meets on a monthly basis to review progress toward Strategic Plan goals.

B. support innovation and expansion activities; and

The following strategies are newly developed, expanding, and/or innovative initiatives included in this state plan:

Soft Skills Training to Support Employment Curriculum: In partnership with the core WIOA partners SCCB will participate in the review, selection, purchase and implementation of a state wide standardized curriculum on the “soft skills” that South Carolina Businesses have been requesting from the statewide Workforce Investment Board.

CRP Establishment & Development: SCCB will continue to seek opportunities and partnerships to aid in the development and establishment of Community Rehabilitation Programs (CRP) to provide community based adjustment to blindness services, supported employment (SE) services, customized employment (CE) services, Braille training, vocational evaluation, and life skills training.

Career BOOST Pre-Employment Transition Services: SCCB has piloted a demonstration project called Career BOOST (Building Occupational Opportunities for Students in Transition). This program augments SCCB’s transition services program by providing the five (5) required Pre Employment Transition Services (PETS) to eligible or potentially eligible students statewide. These PETS services will include: 1. Self-Advocacy Training 2. Work Readiness Workshops 3. Work-based Learning Experiences 4. Post-Secondary Education Enrollment and Careers Exploration 5. Information & Referral to SCCB’s Transition VR Program

Career Exploration Lab: SCCB established the "Career Exploration Lab" where transition students are exposed to career exploration in functional 3-D fabrication, manufacturing using 3-D printer technology, product development, business development, microenterprise development, entrepreneurship, marketing and other science, technology, engineering, and math careers.

C. overcome identified barriers relating to equitable access to and participation of individuals with disabilities in the State VR Services Program and the State Supported Employment Services Program.

SCCB is committed to ensuring that services are provided in an equitable manner and are fully accessible. SCCB reviews, assesses and monitors agency programs to conduct continuous improvement activities. The greatest gap identified in the 2016 Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment pertained to the lack of a Supported Employment program at SCCB. In response SCCB established the JOBS Specialists (Job Oriented Blind Services) positions trained to provide Supported Employment (SE), Customized Employment (CE), and Individual Placement and Support (IPS) models to consumers who have Most Significant Disabilities. These positions function in a one-on-one consumer centered approach as Job Placement Specialists, On-The-Job Coaches, and in other employment related supportive roles allowed under Title VI.

p. Evaluation and Reports of Progress: VR and Supported Employment Goals

Describe:

1. An evaluation of the extent to which the VR program goals described in the approved VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan for the most recently completed program year were achieved. The evaluation must:

A. Identify the strategies that contributed to the achievement of the goals.

The following is an evaluation and report of progress on SCCB's goals from the most recently completed program year. The goals and priorities from the last Unified State Plan were:

Goal 1: Increase Program Capacity Leveraging Partnerships & Community Engagement

Priority 1.1: Improve WIOA Partnerships & One-Stop System Engagement

Priority 1.2: Improve Partnerships & Strategic Alliances to Increase Program Capacity

Priority 1.3: Increase Public Awareness & Community Engagement

Priority 1.4: Align Ellen Beach Mack Rehabilitation Center (EBMRC) Programing

Report of Progress Goal 1: SCCB achieved substantial progress on goal 1. SCCB improved WIOA partnerships and One-Stop System Engagement through the strategies of formalizing American Job Center partnerships with Memorandum's of Understanding which include infrastructure cost agreements, specified co-located staff office times and space, center accessibility assessment and technical assistance, and staff cross training. SCCB has active MOU's with all SC Works Centers. SCCB worked with core WIOA partner programs to create agency cross training modules for partnership workforce staff, and explored data sharing and common intake opportunities. SCCB finalized a Cooperative Agreement with SC Department of Education and is currently negotiating an update to the SC Vocational Rehabilitation Department Cooperative Agreement. SCCB negotiated and entered into a number of Cooperative Agreements with community based qualified fee-for-service vendors and other partners to expand capacity and available resources statewide. This has expanded program capacity to provide independent travel training (8 new vendors), home management training (2 new vendors), and Braille Literacy (2 new vendors) in community settings. SCCB also provides ZoomText, Jaws, and other assistive technology training through a fee-for-service contract with the National Federation of the Blind of South Carolina. SCCB established contractual programs for Pre-Employment Transition Services with South Carolina's Independent Living Centers and the National Federation of the Blind. Since inception Career BOOST has provided 761 students with Self-Advocacy Workshops, 494 Work Readiness Workshops, and 160 Work Based Learning Experience such as paid internships and work site tours and job shadowing. Under Career Boost 62 eligible and potentially eligible high school students have participated in college and university tours, exploration of post-secondary educational options, and counseling on financial aid opportunities. SCCB conducted public awareness outreach and implemented a social media presence to enhance agency visibility. In 2017 SCCB rewrote the curriculum and courses offered at the Ellen Beach Mack Rehabilitation Center for Employment and Independence. This new curriculum includes pre-test and post-test assessments to measure skill gains and provide for continuous improvement. Several new center programs have been implemented including a partnership with Adult Education that brings GED preparation instruction and testing to the

center. SCCB added a Basic Financial Literacy course using curriculum designed by the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau. SCCB has also added Soft-Skills training based on the “Skills to Pay the Bills” curriculum.

Goal 2: Increase Quantity & Quality of Employment Outcomes

Priority 2.1: Align VR Counseling with South Carolina’s Talent Pipeline Project, Emphasizing Career Pathways, Attainment of Industry Recognized Credentials, Job Driven/Sector Strategies & Labor Market Information

Priority 2.2: Increase Employment for those with **Most Significant Disabilities**

Priority 2.3: Increase Vocational Exploration & Opportunities for **Transition Students**

Priority 2.4: Increase Employment for **all eligible consumers**

Report of Progress Goal 2: Under the previous state plan, SCCB focused efforts on building program capacity, resources and expertise needed in order to meet goal 2. This required resource location, resource reallocation, and program building. As these programs have been built, SCCB has not experienced an increase in the number of successful employment outcomes. Under the provisions of the previous Unified State Plan, SCCB has aligned VR Counseling, career exploration, vocational goal selection, and Individualized Plan for Employment development with labor market information and sector strategies. SCCB has instituted the use of The Career Index Plus for analyzing labor market information and helping consumers make informed job driven decisions. SCCB implemented significant staff training in the area of using labor market information and understanding South Carolina’s regional economic conditions. SCCB leveraged partnerships with the Department of Employment and Workforce, and the Job Driven Technical Assistance Center to provide staff with training on sector strategies, the talent pipeline efforts, and the use of labor market information. SCCB has established program capacity and resources to better serve individuals who have Most Significant Disabilities. SCCB has established JOBS Specialists who are providing Supported Employment and Customized Employment, evidence based practices that have not been offered by SCCB in the past. In addition, SCCB has hired and trained a Certified Work Incentive Counselor to help beneficiaries understand the implications of gainful employment on their Social Security benefits. SCCB established Career BOOST, a contractual program in partnership, collaboration, and coordination with Independent Living Centers, the National Federation of the Blind, and South Carolina’s Local Education Authorities. This program provides the required Pre-Employment Transition Services to eligible and potentially eligible students with disabilities. SCCB hosted the first Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math Career (STEM) Exploration Week for transition students during the summer of 2017. During the STEM Career Exploration week, 9 high school students who are blind or visually impaired were provided instruction by a team of scientists from San Jose State University, Edinboro University of Pennsylvania, NASA’s Goddard Space Flight Center, the Space Telescope Science Institute, and the International Astronomical Union. The students explored STEM careers using 3D printed tactile models of galaxies, planets, and other astronomical phenomena. Additionally, students were exposed to “sonification” techniques used by blind and visually impaired Astronomers to study the universe. SCCB is repeating the program in the summer of 2018.

Goal 3: Increase & Improve Innovative Coordinated Services to Business.

Priority 3.1: Engage with Business Community & Business Organizations

Priority 3.3: Increase Coordination with WIOA Partner's Business Services

Priority 3.4: Seek Opportunities for Customized Training Partnerships

Report of Progress: SCCB has made less progress on goal 3. During the last program year SCCB has experienced turnover and long term vacancies in 2 of the 3 statewide Business Services Employment Consultant positions. These positions have primary responsibilities for the strategies under goal 3. In addition, SCCB experienced the retirement and long term vacancy of the Director of the Division of Training & Employment, the position that supervises and directs the business services unit and coordinates with WIOA partner business services staff. SCCB is in the process of recruiting, selecting, and hiring the business services unit and will refocus efforts to meet goal 3.

B. Describe the factors that impeded the achievement of the goals and priorities.

While SCCB met a considerable number of the goals from the 2016 Unified State Plan, the following goals were not met:

Strategy 2.3.2 Student Business Enterprise Program Career Exploration: This goal was not achieved. SCCB has experienced significant staff change in the BEP leadership and has not had the human resources to pursue this strategy.

Strategy 3.1.1 Business Services Engagement: SCCB experienced significant turnover and long term vacancies within our Business Engagement Services Unit during 2016 and 2017. Efforts are currently underway to rebuild this unit.

Strategy 3.1.2 Establish Business Advisory Council: SCCB explored the creation of an SCCB Business Advisory Council, but learned that existing WIOA Business Advisory Councils may better serve our needs, avoid duplication of effort, and align SCCB with other WIOA partners. SCCB experience significant turnover and long term vacancies within our Business Engagement Services Unit during 2016 and 2017 that prevented SCCB from fully engaging in existing business advisory council meetings.

2. An evaluation of the extent to which the Supported Employment program goals described in the Supported Employment Supplement for the most recent program year were achieved. The evaluation must:

A. Identify the strategies that contributed to the achievement of the goals.

SCCB expended Supported Employment revenue during FFY 2017 for the first time as JOBS Specialists were on boarded and began providing Supported Employment services. Consumers being served by SE funds are currently in the placement and support phase, therefore no consumers served by Supported Employment funds have been transitioned to extended services at this time. SCCB signed a Partnership Plus Agreement with Able SC to provide on-going supports at the time when a consumer transitions from VR support. Building a quality

Supported Employment program is a continued goal of SCCB for FFY 2018. Currently SCCB is undergoing extensive Customized Employment training and technical assistance to build capacity and program effectiveness. SCCB also added the capacity to provide benefit and work incentive counseling.

B. Describe the factors that impeded the achievement of the goals and priorities.

SCCB made substantial progress on creating a Supported Employment program through the establishment of the JOBS Specialists, providing both Supported Employment and Customized Employment training to these staff, and building the capacity to provide benefits and work incentive counseling services. The greatest impediment was that these resources had to be created where they did not exist prior.

3. The VR program's performance on the performance accountability indicators under section 116 of WIOA.

During the first program year under WIOA, SCCB has been working to build the information technology infrastructure to track and report the following performance accountability indicators under section 116 of WIOA:

(I) the percentage of program participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the second quarter after exit from the program; (II) the percentage of program participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the fourth quarter after exit from the program; (III) the median earnings of program participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the second quarter after exit from the program; (IV) the percentage of program participants who obtain a recognized postsecondary credential, or a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent (subject to clause (iii)), during participation in or within 1 year after exit from the program; (V) the percentage of program participants who, during a program year, are in an education or training program that leads to a recognized postsecondary credential or employment and who are achieving measurable skill gains toward such a credential or employment; and (VI) the indicators of effectiveness in serving employers established pursuant to clause (iv).

Because the agency has not been required to track or report this data prior to WIOA, SCCB has nothing to report for these data elements for FFY 2015. SCCB has elected to use the FFY 2016 program year to baseline these measures.

4. How the funds reserved for innovation and expansion (I&E) activities were utilized.

SCCB used the authority under innovation and expansion (I&E) for the establishment of the following programs:

Career BOOST Pre-Employment Transition Services: SCCB piloted a demonstration project called Career BOOST (Building Occupational Opportunities for Students in Transition). This program augments SCCB's transition services program by providing the five (5) required Pre Employment Transition Services (PETS) to eligible or potentially eligible students statewide. These PETS services will include: 1. Self-Advocacy Training 2. Work Readiness Workshops 3.

Work-based Learning Experiences 4. Post-Secondary Education Enrollment and Careers Exploration 5. Information & Referral to SCCB's Transition VR Program

Career Exploration Lab: SCCB established the "Career Exploration Lab" where transition students are exposed to career exploration in functional 3-D fabrication, manufacturing using 3-D printer technology, product development, business development, microenterprise development, entrepreneurship, marketing and other science, technology, engineering, and math careers.

q. Quality, Scope, and Extent of Supported Employment Services.

Include the following:

1. The quality, scope, and extent of supported employment services to be provided to individuals with the most significant disabilities, including youth with the most significant disabilities.

SCCB expended Supported Employment revenue during FFY 2017 for the first time as JOBS Specialists were on boarded and began providing Supported Employment services. Consumers being served by SE funds are currently in the placement and support phase, therefore no consumers served by Supported Employment funds have been transitioned to extended services at this time. SCCB signed a Partnership Plus Agreement with Able SC to provide on-going supports at the time when a consumer transitions from VR support. Building a quality Supported Employment program is a continued goal of SCCB for FFY 2018. Currently SCCB is undergoing extensive Customized Employment training and technical assistance to build capacity and program effectiveness.

2. The timing of transition to extended services.

In compliance with 34 CFR 363.6 SCCB policy requires that an individual must transition to extended services within 24 months of starting to receive supported employment services unless a longer time period is agreed to in the individualized plan for employment. SCCB policy requires supported employment outcomes to be in competitive integrated employment.

Certifications

Name of designated State agency or designated State unit, as appropriate **South Carolina Commission for the Blind**

Name of designated State agency **South Carolina Commission for the Blind**

Full Name of Authorized Representative: **James Kirby**

Title of Authorized Representative: **Commissioner**

States must provide written and signed certifications that:

1. The **designated State agency or designated State unit (as appropriate) listed above** is authorized to submit the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan under title I of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Rehabilitation Act), as amended by WIOA*, and its supplement under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act.** Yes
2. As a condition for the receipt of Federal funds under title I of the Rehabilitation Act for the provision of VR services, the **designated State agency listed above** agrees to operate and administer the State VR Services Program in accordance with the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan, the Rehabilitation Act, and all applicable regulations, policies, and procedures established by the Secretary of Education. Funds made available under section 111 of the Rehabilitation Act are used solely for the provision of VR services and the administration of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan; Yes
3. As a condition for the receipt of Federal funds under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act for supported employment services, the designated State agency agrees to operate and administer the State Supported Employment Services Program in accordance with the supplement to the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan*, the Rehabilitation Act, and all applicable regulations, policies, and procedures established by the Secretary of Education. Funds made available under title VI are used solely for the provision of supported employment services and the administration of the supplement to the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan;** Yes
4. The designated State agency and/or the designated State unit has the authority under State law to perform the functions of the State regarding the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement; Yes
5. The State legally may carry out each provision of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement. Yes
6. All provisions of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement are consistent with State law. Yes
7. The **Authorized Representative listed above** has the authority under State law to receive, hold, and disburse Federal funds made available under the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement; Yes

8. The **Authorized Representative listed above** has the authority to submit the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and the supplement for Supported Employment services; Yes

9. The agency that submits the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement has adopted or otherwise formally approved the plan and its supplement. Yes

Footnotes

Certification 1 Footnotes

* Public Law 113-128.

** Unless otherwise stated, "Rehabilitation Act" means the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended by WIOA, signed into law on July 22, 2014.

Certification 2 Footnotes

* All references in this plan to "designated State agency" or to "the State agency" relate to the agency identified in this paragraph.

** No funds under title 1 of the Rehabilitation Act may be awarded without an approved VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan in accordance with section 101(a) of the Rehabilitation Act.

*** Applicable regulations, in part, include the Education Department General Administrative Regulations (EDGAR) in 34 CFR parts 76,77,79,81, and 82; 2 CFR part 200 as adopted by 2 CFR part 3485; and the State VR Services Program regulations.

Certification 3 Footnotes

* No funds under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act may be awarded without an approved supplement to the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan in accordance with section 606(a) of the Rehabilitation Act.

** Applicable regulations, in part, include the citations in *** under Certification 2 footnotes

Additional Comments on the Certifications from the State

Certification Regarding Lobbying — Vocational Rehabilitation

Certification for Contracts, Grants, Loans, and Cooperative Agreements The undersigned certifies, to the best of his or her knowledge and belief, that:

(1) No Federal appropriated funds have been paid or will be paid, by or on behalf of the undersigned, to any person for influencing or attempting to influence an officer or employee of an agency, a Member of Congress, an officer or employee of Congress, or an employee of a Member of Congress in connection with the awarding of any Federal contract, the making of any Federal grant, the making of any Federal loan, the entering into of any cooperative agreement, and the extension, continuation, renewal, amendment, or modification of any Federal contract, grant, loan, or cooperative agreement.

(2) If any funds other than Federal appropriated funds have been paid or will be paid to any person for influencing or attempting to influence an officer or employee of any agency, a Member of Congress, an officer or employee of Congress, or an employee of a Member of Congress in connection with this Federal contract, grant, loan, or cooperative agreement, the undersigned shall complete and submit Standard Form-LLL, "Disclosure of Lobbying Activities," in accordance with its instructions.

(3) The undersigned shall require that the language of this certification be included in the award documents for all subawards at all tiers (including subcontracts, subgrants, and contracts under grants, loans, and cooperative agreements) and that all subrecipients shall certify and disclose accordingly. This certification is a material representation of fact upon which reliance was placed when this transaction was made or entered into. Submission of this certification is a prerequisite for making or entering into this transaction imposed by section 1352, title 31, U.S. Code. Any person who fails to file the required certification shall be subject to a civil penalty of not less than \$10,000 and not more than \$100,000 for each such failure.

Statement for Loan Guarantees and Loan Insurance

The undersigned states, to the best of his or her knowledge and belief, that:

If any funds have been paid or will be paid to any person for influencing or attempting to influence an officer or employee of any agency, a Member of Congress, an officer or employee of Congress, or an employee of a Member of Congress in connection with this commitment providing for the United States to insure or guarantee a loan, the undersigned shall complete and submit Standard Form-LLL, "Disclosure of Lobbying Activities," in accordance with its instructions. Submission of this statement is a prerequisite for making or entering into this transaction imposed by section 1352, title 31, U.S. Code. Any person who fails to file the required statement shall be subject to a civil penalty of not less than \$10,000 and not more than \$100,000 for each such failure.

Applicant's Organization **South Carolina Commission for the Blind**

Full Name of Authorized Representative: **James Kirby**

Title of Authorized Representative: **Commissioner**

SF LLL Form – Disclosure of Lobbying Activities (only if applicable)

(<http://www2.ed.gov/fund/grant/apply/appforms/appforms.html>). If applicable, please print, sign, and email to MAT_OCTAE@ed.gov

Certification Regarding Lobbying — Supported Employment

Certification for Contracts, Grants, Loans, and Cooperative Agreements The undersigned certifies, to the best of his or her knowledge and belief, that:

(1) No Federal appropriated funds have been paid or will be paid, by or on behalf of the undersigned, to any person for influencing or attempting to influence an officer or employee of an agency, a Member of Congress, an officer or employee of Congress, or an employee of a Member of Congress in connection with the awarding of any Federal contract, the making of any Federal grant, the making of any Federal loan, the entering into of any cooperative agreement, and the extension, continuation, renewal, amendment, or modification of any Federal contract, grant, loan, or cooperative agreement.

(2) If any funds other than Federal appropriated funds have been paid or will be paid to any person for influencing or attempting to influence an officer or employee of any agency, a Member of Congress, an officer or employee of Congress, or an employee of a Member of Congress in connection with this Federal contract, grant, loan, or cooperative agreement, the undersigned shall complete and submit Standard Form-LLL, "Disclosure of Lobbying Activities," in accordance with its instructions.

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The undersigned states, to the best of his or her knowledge and belief, that:

If any funds have been paid or will be paid to any person for influencing or attempting to influence an officer or employee of any agency, a Member of Congress, an officer or employee of Congress, or an employee of a Member of Congress in connection with this commitment providing for the United States to insure or guarantee a loan, the undersigned shall complete and submit Standard Form-LLL, "Disclosure of Lobbying Activities," in accordance with its instructions. Submission of this statement is a prerequisite for making or entering into this transaction imposed by section 1352, title 31, U.S. Code. Any person who fails to file the required statement shall be subject to a civil penalty of not less than \$10,000 and not more than \$100,000 for each such failure.

Applicant's Organization **South Carolina Commission for the Blind**

Full Name of Authorized Representative: **James Kirby**

Title of Authorized Representative: **Commissioner**

SF LLL Form – Disclosure of Lobbying Activities (only if applicable)
(<http://www2.ed.gov/fund/grant/apply/appforms/appforms.html>).

Assurances

The designated State agency or designated State unit, as appropriate and identified in the State certifications included with this VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement, through signature of the authorized individual, assures the Commissioner of the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA), that it will comply with all of the requirements of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement, as set forth in sections 101(a) and 606 of the Rehabilitation Act. The individual authorized to submit the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement makes the following assurances:**The State Plan must provide assurances that:**

1. Public Comment on Policies and Procedures:

The designated State agency assures it will comply with all statutory and regulatory requirements for public participation in the VR Services Portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan, as required by section 101(a)(16)(A) of the Rehabilitation Act.

2. Submission of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and Its Supplement:

The designated State unit assures it will comply with all requirements pertaining to the submission and revisions of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement for the State Supported Employment Services program, as required by sections 101(a)(1), (22), (23), and 606(a) of the Rehabilitation Act; section 102 of WIOA in the case of the submission of a unified plan; section 103 of WIOA in the case of a submission of a Combined State Plan; 34 CFR 76.140.

3. Administration of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan:

The designated State agency or designated State unit, as appropriate, assures it will comply with the requirements related to:

a. the establishment of the designated State agency and designated State unit, as required by section 101(a)(2) of the Rehabilitation Act.

b. the establishment of either a State independent commission or State Rehabilitation Council, as required by section 101(a)(21) of the Rehabilitation Act.

The designated State agency or designated State unit, as applicable **(A) is an independent State commission**

c. consultations regarding the administration of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan, in accordance with section 101(a)(16)(B) of the Rehabilitation Act.

d. the financial participation by the State, or if the State so elects, by the State and local agencies, to provide the amount of the non-Federal share of the cost of carrying out the VR program in accordance with section 101(a)(3).

e. the local administration of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan, in accordance with section 101(a)(2)(A) of the Rehabilitation Act.

The designated State agency allows for the local administration of VR funds **No**

f. the shared funding and administration of joint programs, in accordance with section 101(a)(2)(A)(ii) of the Rehabilitation Act.

The designated State agency allows for the shared funding and administration of joint programs: **No**

g. statewideness and waivers of statewideness requirements, as set forth in section 101(a)(4) of the Rehabilitation Act.

Is the designated State agency requesting or maintaining a waiver of statewideness for one or more services provided under the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan? See Section 2 of this VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan. **No**

h. the descriptions for cooperation, collaboration, and coordination, as required by sections 101(a)(11) and (24)(B); and 606(b) of the Rehabilitation Act.

i. all required methods of administration, as required by section 101(a)(6) of the Rehabilitation Act .

j. the requirements for the comprehensive system of personnel development, as set forth in section 101(a)(7) of the Rehabilitation Act.

k. the compilation and submission to the Commissioner of statewide assessments, estimates, State goals and priorities, strategies, and progress reports, as appropriate, and as required by sections 101(a)(15), 105(c)(2), and 606(b)(8) of the Rehabilitation Act.

l. the reservation and use of a portion of the funds allotted to the State under section 110 of the Rehabilitation Act for the development and implementation of innovative approaches to expand and improve the provision of VR services to individuals with disabilities, particularly individuals with the most significant disabilities.

m. the submission of reports as required by section 101(a)(10) of the Rehabilitation Act.

4. Administration of the Provision of VR Services:

The designated State agency, or designated State unit, as appropriate, assures that it will:

a. comply with all requirements regarding information and referral services in accordance with sections 101(a)(5)(D) and (20) of the Rehabilitation Act.

b. impose no duration of residence requirement as part of determining an individual's eligibility for VR services or that excludes from services under the plan any individual who is present in the State in accordance with section 101(a)(12) of the Rehabilitation Act .

c. provide the full range of services listed in section 103(a) of the Rehabilitation Act as appropriate, to all eligible individuals with disabilities in the State who apply for services in accordance with section 101(a)(5) of the Rehabilitation Act?

Agency will provide the full range of services described above **Yes**

d. determine whether comparable services and benefits are available to the individual in accordance with section 101(a)(8) of the Rehabilitation Act.

e. comply with the requirements for the development of an individualized plan for employment in accordance with section 102(b) of the Rehabilitation Act.

f. comply with requirements regarding the provisions of informed choice for all applicants and eligible individuals in accordance with section 102(d) of the Rehabilitation Act.

g. provide vocational rehabilitation services to American Indians who are individuals with disabilities residing in the State, in accordance with section 101(a)(13) of the Rehabilitation Act.

h. comply with the requirements for the conduct of semiannual or annual reviews, as appropriate, for individuals employed either in an extended employment setting in a community rehabilitation program or any other employment under section 14(c) of the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, as required by section 101(a)(14) of the Rehabilitation Act.

i. meet the requirements in sections 101(a)(17) and 103(b)(2) of the Rehabilitation Act if the State elects to construct, under special circumstances, facilities for community rehabilitation programs

j. with respect to students with disabilities, the State,

i. has developed and will implement,

A. strategies to address the needs identified in the assessments; and

B. strategies to achieve the goals and priorities identified by the State, to improve and expand vocational rehabilitation services for students with disabilities on a statewide basis; and

ii. has developed and will implement strategies to provide pre-employment transition services (sections 101(a)(15) and 101(a)(25)).

5. Program Administration for the Supported Employment Title VI Supplement:

a. The designated State unit assures that it will include in the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan all information required by section 606 of the Rehabilitation Act.

b. The designated State agency assures that it will submit reports in such form and in accordance with such procedures as the Commissioner may require and collects the information required by section 101(a)(10) of the Rehabilitation Act separately for individuals receiving supported employment services under title I and individuals receiving supported employment services under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act.

c. The designated state unit will coordinate activities with any other State agency that is functioning as an employment network under the Ticket to Work and Self-Sufficiency program under Section 1148 of the Social Security Act.

6. Financial Administration of the Supported Employment Program:

a. The designated State agency assures that it will expend no more than 2.5 percent of the State's allotment under title VI for administrative costs of carrying out this program; and, the designated State agency or agencies will provide, directly or indirectly through public or private entities, non-Federal contributions in an amount that is not less than 10 percent of the costs of carrying out supported employment services provided to youth with the most significant disabilities with the funds reserved for such purpose under section 603(d) of the Rehabilitation Act, in accordance with section 606(b)(7)(G) and (H) of the Rehabilitation Act.

b. The designated State agency assures that it will use funds made available under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act only to provide supported employment services to individuals with the most significant disabilities, including extended services to youth with the most significant disabilities, who are eligible to receive such services; and, that such funds are used only to supplement and not supplant the funds provided under Title I of the Rehabilitation Act, when providing supported employment services specified in the individualized plan for employment, in accordance with section 606(b)(7)(A) and (D), of the Rehabilitation Act.

7. Provision of Supported Employment Services:

a. The designated State agency assures that it will provide supported employment services as defined in section 7(39) of the Rehabilitation Act.

b. The designated State agency assures that:

- i. the comprehensive assessment of individuals with significant disabilities conducted under section 102(b)(1) of the Rehabilitation Act and funded under title I of the Rehabilitation Act includes consideration of supported employment as an appropriate employment outcome, in accordance with the requirements of section 606(b)(7)(B) of the Rehabilitation Act
- ii. an individualized plan for employment that meets the requirements of section 102(b) of the Rehabilitation Act, which is developed and updated with title I funds, in accordance with sections 102(b)(3)(F) and 606(b)(6)(C) and (E) of the Rehabilitation Act.

Additional Comments on the Assurances from the State