6. Using funds made available under Title II of WIOA to carry out a program for criminal offenders within a correctional institution, the eligible agency will give priority to serving individuals who are likely to leave the correctional institution within five years of participation in the program.

Attachments:
1. SF424B - Assurances – Non-Construction Programs (http://www2.ed.gov/fund/grant/apply/appforms/appforms.html)
3. SF LLL Form – Disclosure of Lobbying Activities (required, only if applicable) (http://www2.ed.gov/fund/grant/apply/appforms/appforms.html)

Vocational Rehabilitation (VR)

Arkansas Rehabilitation Services

(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 recommendations from the council's annual report, the review and analysis of consumer satisfaction, and other council reports. Be sure to also include:

(2) The Designated State Unit's response to the input and recommendations; and

(3) The designated state unit's explanation for rejecting any of the Council’s input or recommendations.

The State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) met quarterly during the last two fiscal years, and was updated on important events affecting Arkansas Rehabilitation Services (ARS). The SRC reviewed the agency’s service planning and goals. SRC members were informed about the various programs within the agency, and received refresher training on its roles and responsibilities. The SRC also received training on the Arkansas Freedom of Information Act with emphasis on its implications to members, and specifically regarding meetings and required notification of meetings to the public.

The following initiatives were implemented in collaboration with the SRC’s analysis and guidance.

- Arkansas Career Training Institute (ACTI) renovations
- ARS Budget
- ARS Business Leadership Network development plan
- ARS Expos
- Business Relations Representative job placement activities
- Comprehensive System of Personnel Development and CRC training
ARS welcomes and appreciates SRC input and recommendations. For example during the June 2014 quarterly meeting, members of the ACTI Behavior Management Team provided an overview to the SRC on its recently developed Positive Behavior Support Program, which was currently under consideration for implementation. Two SRC members provided expertise in the development and implementation of these types of programs. SRC recommendations were acknowledged with plans to incorporate them into both the program guidelines and rollout strategy for implementation. Program development and implementation updates were provided to the SRC as part of subsequent quarterly meetings. In August 2015, the SRC provided recommendations regarding the new ARS Policy Governing the Rates of Payment for Purchased VR Services.

No input or recommendation from the SRC was rejected by ARS.

(b) Request for Waiver of Statewideness

When requesting a waiver of the statewideness 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;
(2) The designated State unit will approve each proposed service before it is put into effect; and
(3) Requirements of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan will apply to the services approved under the waiver.

Not applicable to ARS.

(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:

- Federal, state, and local agencies and programs;
- State Programs carried out under Section 4 of the Assistive Technology Act of 1998
- Programs carried out by the Under Secretary for Rural Development of the United States Department of Agriculture;
- Non-educational agencies serving out-of-school youth; and
- State use contracting programs.
ARS collaborates and coordinates services with federal, state, and local agencies that contribute to the vocational rehabilitation and independent living of Arkansans with disabilities. ARS cooperates with agencies in carrying out activities including planning and coordinating services to people with disabilities in order to build capacity in communities, improve the quality and quantity of services, and avoid duplication of services. Collaborating agencies include:

- Arkansas Assistive Technology Alternative Financing Program
- Arkansas Department of General Education, Special Education – Transition
- Arkansas Governor’s Employment First Taskforce
- Arkansas Kidney Disease Commission
- Centers for Independent Living
- Community Rehabilitation Programs
- Developmental Disability Providers
- DHS - Division of Aging and Adult Services
- DHS – Division of Services for the Blind
- DHS - Working Disabled Medicaid Program
- DHS - Division of Behavioral Health Services
- DHS - Division of Developmental Disabilities Services
- Supported Employment Vendors
- Social Security Administration Ticket to Work
- Spinal Cord Commission
- Telecommunication Access Program
- PROMISE Grant

ARS is the lead agency for Arkansas’s Assistive Technology Act of 1998 program, Increasing Capabilities Access Network (ICAN). ARS counselors as well as ICAN and Alternative Financing Program (AFP) staff are informed of the various services available through each program.

ARS maintains an active presence on numerous councils and committees, including:

- Arkansas Association on Higher Education and Disability
- Arkansas Interagency Transition Partnership
- Arkansas Workforce Development Board
- Building Better Futures
- Central Arkansas Workforce Development Board Youth Advisory Council
- Governor’s Developmental Disabilities Council
- Interagency Steering Committee on Integrated Employment
- Behavioral Health Planning and Advisory Council
- SoundStARt
- The Arkansas Independent Living Council
- The Governor’s Commission on People with Disabilities
- Arkansas Trauma Rehabilitation Program
- Employment First State Leadership Mentoring Program
- Youth Leadership Forum
- Accessible Parking Taskforce
- The State’s Local Workforce Development Boards
ARS has no cooperative agreements with programs carried out by the Under Secretary for Rural Development of the United States Department of Agriculture, or State use contracting programs.

(d) Coordination with Education Officials. Describe:

(1) 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 an individualized plan for employment for students.

(2) Provide 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;
   (B) Transition planning by personnel of the designated state agency and educational agency that facilitates the development and implementation 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;
   (D) Procedures for outreach to and identification of students with disabilities who need transition services.

ARS assigns VR counselor liaisons to each high school statewide. VR counselors work collaboratively with combined plan partners.

ARS will set aside 15 percent of federal VR program funding to provide pre-employment transition services such as job exploration counseling, and work-based learning experiences including internships in integrated environments. ARS will provide counseling on opportunities for enrollment in comprehensive transition or postsecondary educational programs, will provide workplace readiness training to develop social skills and independent living skills, and will provide instruction in self-advocacy and peer mentoring.

Transition students/youth will be determined eligible for vocational rehabilitation within 60 days after application and the Individual Plan for Employment (IPE) will be completed within 90 days after eligibility.

ARS maintains interagency agreements with the Arkansas Department of Education-Special Education (ADE-SPED) and provides transition services to students in public schools. ARS maintains an interagency agreement with the Arkansas Department of Higher Education (ADHE) with the objective of seamless provision of vocational rehabilitation services and access to higher education. The parties agree to participate in technical assistance and in-service training to assist educational agencies in planning, and to coordinate services to ensure timely and appropriate supports and services are provided to eligible individuals. ARS Transition
policy requires ARS counselors to engage school personnel to generate referrals of students to ARS and to develop an IPE for each student determined eligible. ADE is financially responsible for secondary education and ARS is responsible for taking applications, determining eligibility, and providing VR services to those determined eligible for transition services. ARS participates in the state level Arkansas Interagency Transition Partnership (AITP). AITP is a task-force made up of representatives of state agencies, including ARS, Department of Human Services (DHS)-Division of Services for the Blind (DSB), Arkansas Department of Higher Education, Special Education-Transition, Arkansas Workforce Development Board, DHS-Division of Behavioral Health Services, and parent advocates. ARS will develop a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with CRP Programs, career coaches and WIOA partners to provide pre-employment transition services. ARS will expand and increase utilization of pre-employment transition training services at ACTI.

The Interagency Agreement between the Arkansas Department of Education Special Education Unit - Arkansas Transitions Services, Arkansas Department of Career Education, and ARS is set forth to define each party’s responsibilities with regard to ensuring a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) for eligible students, ages 16-21, and younger when appropriate, which are identified as having a disability in accordance with Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

This agreement between ADE, ACE, and ARS is based on the following principles:

• The parties have a common and concurrent interest in providing a free appropriate public education to eligible individuals with disabilities, ages 16 to 21, and younger when determined appropriate by the IEP team.

• The parties have a common and concurrent interest in working cooperatively to ensure individuals with disabilities have access to the skills, training, and necessary supports to transition successfully from school to work.

• The parties have a common interest in assisting local agencies in developing and initiating vocational programs and services to individuals with disabilities.

• The Special Education/ATS has general supervisory responsibility over the educational program of any public agency providing FAPE to individuals with disabilities ages birth to 21 as defined in state and federal statutes.

• The parties agree to facilitate provision for the development and approval of an individualized plan for employment before each student determined to be eligible for vocational rehabilitation services leaves the school setting.

• The parties agree to promote from their respective agencies the development and implementation of appropriate services for persons with disabilities and to provide outreach to and identification of students with disabilities who need transition services.

ARS agrees to provide eligibility determination according to ARS policy, and 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 when requested and appropriate. ARS counselors will provide information to schools about VR services, meet with special education teachers during the school year, and ensure schools have appropriate forms.
and information for students to apply for services. ARS will work with schools to assist the student in identifying, selecting, and pursuing appropriate career objectives.

Partner high schools agree to work cooperatively with ARS to provide appropriate transition services to students to assure the student’s entry into suitable employment, postsecondary education or training, and independent living. Schools will carry out all required transition planning provisions mandated by IDEA and state regulations, will conduct regular staff development training regarding transition requirements and include ARS counselors in the training when appropriate, will provide referrals to ARS counselors, will provide private meeting space for ARS counselors to meet with students, will include ARS counselors in students IEP meetings with authorization by parents or guardians and student knowledge, will communicate regularly with ARS counselors, and will provide ARS with copies of school records.

ARS will ensure each person enrolled in a vocational education program receives an interest assessment, and identifies capabilities. ARS may provide accommodations as needed to ensure successful completion of the vocational education program. ARS will provide technical assistance to local education agencies to ensure equal educational opportunities including full opportunity to participate in programs, to ensure activities and job opportunities are provided to all youth and students, and to analyze, identify, and change policies and activities that impede the achievement of equal opportunities for all individuals.

ARS has initiated contact with the appropriate parties and progress is underway to re-negotiate its interagency agreements with ADE, ADHE, DHS agencies, and Workforce Services during FY 2016.

(e) Cooperative Agreements with Private Nonprofit Organizations

Describe the manner in which the designated state agency establishes cooperative agreements with private non-profit VR service providers.

ARS has cooperative agreements with Community Rehabilitation Programs (CRPs) throughout the state as part of the Purchased Service Agreements. ARS and representatives from CRPs developed and implemented standard procedures for the referral process and outcome indicators resulting in a fee for service schedule for individuals served by CRPs.

ARS’s standard procedures for external Employment First private non-profit and public VR service providers and CRPs are standards of compliance ensuring VR consumers achieve acceptable outcomes related to employment. The procedures for a CRP to be accredited as a vendor and to maintain accreditation are:

(1) The CRP submits a vendor application documenting required experience in working with consumers with disabilities and employers. (2) ARS reviews the application to assure ARS requirements are met, and submits a certificate and agreement documents to the ARS
Commissioner for signature. (3) The CRP is required to sign certification agreement documents assuring the ARS requirements as a vendor will be met. (4) Once accredited, ARS provides a current vendor packet and provides training to the entity, as needed. ARS informs the ARS district manager and the VR counselors of the vendor. (5) The VR counselor refers the consumer to the CRP and monitors the consumer’s progress. (6) A VR counselor liaison is assigned to each CRP and provides monthly reports to the appropriate ARS personnel. (7) ARS case review personnel from Program Planning, Development and Evaluation perform a standardized audit of CRP consumer files to ensure training criteria is met, the CRP demonstrates acceptable consumer progress/plans, appropriate documents are in the file, and the amount billed meets accepted guidelines of cost to value. CRP personnel files are reviewed to assure performance standards are acceptable and staff training requirements are met.

ARS will initiate new cooperative agreements focused on moving CRPs from fee for service to performance based outcomes.

ARS, in partnership with the Department of Human Services (DHS) Division of Developmental Disabilities Services, will establish pilot projects focused on transitioning from facility based services to community based services.

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

Describe the designated state agency 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.

ARS maintains written cooperative agreements with private non-profit and for profit agencies in the state that provide supported employment (SE) services and extended services to ARS consumers with the most significant disabilities. The service providers commit to funding extended services for as long as the consumers remain employed on the original job.

ARS will continue to work with the Department of Human Services agencies to recruit Developmental Disabilities Centers, Behavioral Health Centers, and other related programs serving individuals with the most significant disabilities to seek certification to provide SE services.

ARS will create new agreements based on technical assistance received through the Department of Labor, Office of Department of Employment Services subject matter experts in Employment First and WIOA.

(g) Coordination with Employers. 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
(2) Transition services, including pre-employment transition services, for students and youth with disabilities.

VR Services

Arkansas has taken many steps to work with businesses to build relationships with employers while improving the employability and opportunities for people with disabilities. ARS identified early on that traditional methods of placing consumers into stereotypical settings resulted in task performance jobs. Without engaging an array of employers representing in-demand jobs, the typical outcome usually occurs in settings that are overly familiar but may not fit the ideal conditions of the worker. To ensure employers and businesses stay engaged, ARS will continue to build on the work that has already been demonstrated as well as expand those efforts in a more strategic manner. The overall goals of the Business Relations section are to:

• Strategically collaborate with ARS district managers and VR counselors in an effort to develop employer relationships that can lead to improved employment outcomes.

• Increase employer outreach and disability awareness through networking and marketing activities, which include but are not limited to activities such as Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) meetings, professional organization conferences, business coalition seminars, and updating and incorporating a business section on the agency website etc.

• Expand disability awareness and/or sensitivity training that is developed, conducted, and organized to target the disability inclusion managers of corporate customers.

• Increase consumer contact visits to employers who are federal contractors and/or federal subcontractors to identify specific jobs and workforce needs pertaining to federal mandate for above entry level positions.

• Increase consumer contact with companies headquartered in Arkansas, and make the business case for hiring ARS consumers into competitive, integrated employment at the middle and upper management levels.

• Improve the quality of candidate screening activities to provide business customers a higher caliber candidate thus increasing the opportunity for ARS consumers to be given higher consideration for key positions.

• Increase utilization of labor market analysis to gain a comprehensive understanding of target occupational environments by increased analyzing of job trends and factors to promote strategic placement activities for ARS consumers.

• With the passage of WIOA, a greater emphasis is being placed on ARS partnering with businesses, workforce partners, and other stakeholders. To achieve this outcome, ARS created Partners in Progress (PIP) to engage businesses and provide them with qualified
applicants while securing competitive jobs for ARS consumers. The PIP initiative
provides jobseekers and workers access to employment, education, training, and support
services in the labor market. Matching employers with skilled workers creates a mutual
benefit to both stakeholders. Additionally, ARS holds business career symposiums
around the state in local field offices.

- ARS will continue to utilize the Talent Acquisition Portal (TAP) system, which allows
  the agency to update consumer resumes and backgrounds in an electronic system that can
  be utilized by employers nationally. This increases the opportunities for consumers to a
  national level since a company may have a location in Arkansas but the recruiting and
  hiring authority is located in another state. This also may open doors to integrated
  employment and competitive wages and benefits.

- ARS will host a business employment summit to coincide with National Disability
  Employment Awareness month. The conference will bring business and industry leaders
  together with other stakeholders to increase awareness regarding hiring people with
  disabilities, and will provide opportunities to establish relationships with federal
  contractors that may result in hiring ARS consumers.

ARS is working diligently to expand the State’s Business Leadership Network, which is made
up of major employers in the state with a long-standing history of supporting employment of
people with disabilities. This network will help in finalizing MOUs with employers as well as
formalizing the relationship to ensure mutually beneficial business relationships.

The Business Relations Section meets with businesses, chamber of commerce's, and
stakeholders to provide education about the Business Leadership Network (BLN) and the
benefits of hiring individuals with disabilities. To date ARS has signed MOUs with 118
employers and will continue to market and provide education to business and industry to
increase collaborative partnerships.

ARS works directly with employers to develop and modify its services. ARS utilizes a mobile
app to provide information about ARS as well as a follow-up form used by staff to interact with
employment leaders so business relations representatives are able to provide more convenient
follow-up.

ARS will work with Career Workforce Boards and Local Workforce Boards to identify potential
gaps in employment, and then identify the most appropriate education or training needed within
each region to secure employment.

ARS will work with business and industry to establish on-the-job training agreements, job
shadowing opportunities, and paid/unpaid work experiences.

Access and Accommodations provides presentations (Worker’s Comp conference, U of A
Conference, etc.), expertise, and assistance to employers seeking to provide workplace
accommodations to current and potential employees; such programs as AT@Work, Stay at
Work/Return to Work.
Transition Services

Beginning in 2015, ARS has partnered with the National Apprenticeship Training Foundation (NATF) to provide pre-employment training, job development and placement for ARS consumers. In addition, NATF is working with Arkansas Career Training Institute (ACTI) to develop a week-long pre-apprenticeship training program that includes interviewing with employers for both placement and for feedback for those needing additional training or vocational rehabilitation services.

Access and Accommodations provides assistive technology assessments and presentations, expertise and assistance to students, therapists, educators, and employers seeking to provide school and workplace accommodations.

ARS, in collaboration with Increasing Capabilities Access Network (ICAN, State AT Program) and community partners, provides assistive technology training, demonstrations, and loans as it relates to transition to school or work.

ARS will pursue other opportunities currently under development with CRPs around the state to provide pre-employment transition services and other transition services.

ARS will collaborate with employers by fostering integrated systems, coordinating services, and providing career pathways for adults and youth/students with disabilities.

ARS will collaborate with secondary education institutions to coordinate partnerships with employers to provide summer and non-seasonal employment, apprenticeship programs and internships.

ACTI works directly with potential employers to provide internship sites for students nearing the completion of their training programs. To date ten employers provide paid and non-paid internship and work-based learning opportunities. Supervisors from the businesses provide weekly feedback on the interns’ quality of work and the students are graded based on the measures included on the employer feedback form. Additionally, ACTI offers internship opportunities at ACTI to prepare students for employment opportunities available in the Hot Springs area.

Field services and business relations representatives will continue to work with employers to identify competitive integrated employment opportunities for students with disabilities, including internships as part of the Transition Employment Program (TEP).

(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;
(2) The State agency responsible for providing services for individuals with developmental disabilities; and
(3) The State agency responsible for providing mental health services.

ARS serves on the Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy, Arkansas Employment First State Leadership team with the Department of Human Services Divisions of Developmental Disabilities Services (DDS), Behavioral Health Services (DBHS), Services for the Blind (DSB), Medical Services (DMS), Aging and Adult Services (DAAS), Department of Workforce Services (DWS), University of Arkansas PROMISE Grant and the Arkansas Department of Education, Special Education Unit (ADE SEU). The team will be updating the current interagency agreements to fund braided services and apply for combined waiver programs related to opportunities where individuals participated in employment related activities under WIOA.

(i) Comprehensive System of Personnel Development

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;
      (ii) The number of personnel currently needed by the state agency to provide vocational rehabilitation services, broken down by personnel category; and
      (iii) Projections of the number of personnel, broken down by personnel category, who will be needed by the state agency to provide vocational rehabilitation services in the state 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.

A comprehensive and well-managed personnel development program is critical to ARS’s efforts to expand and enhance customer services, and to ensure consumers receive quality rehabilitation services from qualified professional personnel. ARS is strongly committed to providing training programs to all staff, especially those providing direct services to consumers. ARS maintains training records for all staff, updated annually, to reflect training requests and completions specifying the training source, name, credit hours, and attendance date. Professional qualifications for counselors are monitored to ensure current certification and to track educational progress for those achieving certification.
The table below lists personnel, by category, needed to provide VR services over the next five (5) years based on projections of the number of individuals to be served, including individuals with significant disabilities, the number of individuals expected to retire/leave the field, and other relevant factors.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Job Title</th>
<th>Total positions</th>
<th>Current vacancies</th>
<th>Projected vacancies over 5 years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 VR Counselors</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 District Managers</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 ACTI Counselors</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Interpreters</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 ACTI Instructors</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 ACTI Evaluators</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Support Staff</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(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 vocational rehabilitation professionals, by type of program;
(ii) The number of students enrolled at each of those institutions, broken down by type of program; and
(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.

ARS maintains and annually updates a list of higher education institutions in Arkansas that prepare rehabilitation professionals. ARS monitors students enrolled in vocational rehabilitation and related programs at each of the institutions by category, the number of students graduating the previous year, and certification or licensure. ARS works with the institutions to provide internship and practicum opportunities for students and the universities are notified when job openings become available within the agency.
### 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.

The Human Resources (HR) department shapes ARS’s strategies by understanding workforce trends, identifying potential resource opportunities and gaps, and developing effective initiatives. HR takes the initiative and delivers results on strategic business issues, such as, new development, talent management, training, and mobility.

To meet ARS’s goals, HR ensures successful recruitment, preparation, and retention of qualified personnel. HR maintains a working relationship with colleges, universities, and higher education programs within the state, partners in job fairs, maintains a positive relationship with the community and its representatives, and utilizes online recruitment efforts. In addition, ARS is involved with all major social media, newspapers, and industry driven communication.

The Arkansas Legislature authorized special language to ARS for a waiver of the Continuing Professional Education policy prohibiting state agencies from providing college courses to employees. The special language allows ARS to provide college level coursework in degree programs designed to result in a Master’s in Rehabilitation Counseling (MRC) for eligible employees selected by the agency. The special language assists the agency in assuring qualified professional personnel are in place to provide quality rehabilitation services to Arkansans with disabilities.

ARS set an effective date of October 1, 2016, for all rehabilitation counselor positions to meet the standard of having a Master’s degree and to be a Certified Rehabilitation Counselor (CRC).
Those who do not meet the standard have a prescribed time period to achieve the designation per the CRC policy. Rehabilitation counselors who do not meet the standard are cross-graded in position and must be working towards meeting the standard. Counselors working towards meeting the standard will continue to perform counseling functions.

Counselors who do not meet requirements and are not working towards meeting the standard will perform limited case management functions and will not be authorized to perform the following functions: (a) Determination the applicant requires vocational rehabilitation services to prepare for, secure, retain, or regain employment, i.e., eligibility determination and Certification of Eligibility and/or Certificate of Ineligibility; (b) Development and approval of all components of the Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) including annual review; (c) Amendments to IPE; (d) Determination of a satisfactory outcome that the employment outcome is satisfactory and the individual is performing well in the employment, i.e., Closure Amendment.

During the 2009 Arkansas Legislative Session, ARS received permission to institute a graduated pay incentive to counselors who progress toward an MRC/CRC, which aids ARS in recruitment efforts to obtain the best candidates for present and future needs. Additionally ARS continues to utilize the Student Loan Forgiveness Incentive Program, which has resulted in enhanced counselor recruitment. Under this program newly hired VR counselors can be provided up to $2,000 per year repayment to the student loan creditor. Counselors who participate in the Student Loan Forgiveness Program agree to continue working for the agency for two years in return for each year of repayment.

Effective July 1, 2009, all ARS vocational rehabilitation counselors were reclassified as either grade level C117 Rehabilitation Counselor or C119 Certified Rehabilitation Counselor. The C119 Certified Rehabilitation Counselor classification requires CRC certification. According to state Office of Personnel Management (OPM) requirements, ARS now advertises for a C117 position with the preferred qualification being a Master’s degree in Rehabilitation Counseling and CRC certification. ARS was able to establish an internal salary grid with OPM approval. This grid allows the agency to hire VR counselors in the counselor C117 series under different salary ranges based on qualification and certification and allows for cost of living rates for counselors in the C119 classification. State hiring policy authorized by OPM allows ARS to hire graduates with Bachelor’s degrees in Rehabilitation for C117 positions when there is no suitable applicant with a Master’s degree with the condition the person will seek and obtain a Master’s degree in Rehabilitation Counseling within four years of employment and will meet CRC certification or become eligible to sit for CRC certification within one year of receipt of the Master’s degree.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualifications</th>
<th>Classification/Grade</th>
<th>Annual Salary</th>
<th>Hourly Salary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s degree or Non-MRC MASTER’S degree</td>
<td>L051C Rehabilitation Counselor/C117</td>
<td>$32,249</td>
<td>$15.5044</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master’s in Rehabilitation</td>
<td>L051C Rehabilitation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counseling (MRC) /No CRC</td>
<td>Counselor/C117</td>
<td>$34,234</td>
<td>$16.4586</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MRC and CRC with less than five (5) years VR experience</td>
<td>E034C Certified Vocational Rehab Counselor/C119</td>
<td>$35,554</td>
<td>$17.0933</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MRC and CRC with five (5) or more years VR experience</td>
<td>E034C Certified Vocational Rehab Counselor/C119</td>
<td>$37,743</td>
<td>$18.1456</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ARS was approved for a labor market rate increase for district managers with a starting salary of $48,000 per year. The increase helps with recruitment and retention within the field program.

The Staff Development section reviews the current training levels of all personnel, and develops and monitors agency policy and procedure for training and retaining qualified personnel including ACTI staff to meet standards required by the Department of Education and other federal/state requirements. All ARS employees receive an annual personnel performance evaluation from their immediate supervisor, which is reviewed and approved by their respective senior manager. The evaluation considers the training each employee needs to fulfill job duties in providing services to our consumers.

ARS works closely with the universities to provide internship and practicum opportunities for students, and notifies universities when job openings become available. Students are recruited from university and college rehabilitation programs within the state to seek employment with ARS upon graduation. ARS maintains staff liaisons with the university programs including the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville (UAF), the University of Arkansas at Little Rock (UALR), the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff (UAPB), Arkansas State University (ASU), and Arkansas Tech University (ATU). In addition, ARS meets quarterly with the universities to provide updates within the vocational rehabilitation field and ARS, to give practitioner input, and to receive first-hand information regarding graduates from the MRC programs.

The agency actively recruits minorities and students with disabilities. Students, including minorities, are encouraged to join professional rehabilitation organizations such as the National Rehabilitation Association (NRA) and the National Association of Multicultural Rehabilitation Concerns (NAMRC). These rehabilitation professional organizations provide scholarship opportunities to individuals, including minorities, which major in the field of rehabilitation.

(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) 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, in the absence of these requirements, other comparable requirements that apply to the
profession or discipline in which such personnel are providing vocational rehabilitation services; and

(B) The establishment and maintenance of education and experience requirements, to ensure that the personnel have a 21st century understanding of the evolving labor force and the needs of individuals with disabilities.

ARS reviews policies and procedures in all areas of personnel standards to ensure all personnel, including professionals, instructors, and paraprofessionals, receive appropriate and adequate training for their recognized certifications, licensures, and job requirements set out by their performance evaluations. Because there is no standard established by the State of Arkansas, ARS bases its personnel standards for VR counselors on the degree needed to meet the national CRC requirements through the Commission on Rehabilitation Counseling Certification (CRCC). ARS requires a Master’s degree in rehabilitation counseling or a closely related field, as defined by the CRCC eligibility criteria, and to be CRC certified. The Staff Development Section reviews the current training levels of all personnel, and will continue to ensure training is not only updated but elevates experience levels for VR counselors, and required standards, evaluation of training needs, and timelines are established. Human Resources is responsible for ensuring all VR counselors and support staff receive training on the DSU’s policies and procedures and consequently meet the required standards set out therein. To ensure ARS employees have a 21st century understanding of the evolving labor force and the needs of individuals with disabilities, the Deputy Chief of Field Services will continue to periodically meet with Rehabilitation Counseling higher education programs, to review curriculum (i.e., case management) and provide input on current educational needs for incoming ARS counselors.

ARS utilizes as a resource for addressing the evolving labor force, the Career Education and Workforce Development Board which is composed of 13 members appointed by the Governor in conjunction with Act 892, to provide a wealth of resources and leadership to the agency. Board members are leaders in business, industry, education, economic development, and rehabilitation services across the state, and are charged with creating a comprehensive statewide program of career education and workforce development focused on educational opportunities retention with the goal of economic development.

ARS will utilize the Career Development Enhancement Program to establish and maintain education and experience requirements to ensure staff have an understanding of the labor force and the needs of individuals with disabilities. A chief component of this program is the National Career Development Association (NCDA) Career Development Facilitator (CDF) Training program. Internationally recognized, the NCDA Career Development Facilitator Training provides individuals with relevant skills and knowledge to assist others in planning careers and obtaining meaningful work. The 120-hour program enhances the knowledge and skills of individuals working in a variety of career development settings. The Career Development Facilitator may serve as a career group facilitator, job search trainer, career resource center coordinator, career coach, career development case manager, intake interviewer, occupational
and labor market information resource person, human resource career development coordinator, employment/placement specialist, or workforce development staff person.

As of 2015, 148 ARS employees have completed the CDF training, and each year will increase the number of staff selected for the program by 25 percent.

Annually, a refresher course will be presented to update staff on the latest information on labor force and employment for persons with disabilities. Additionally, HR will focus on training all staff to improve conflict management skills, constructive communication skills, time management, and diversity. HR will conduct intense training for supervisors and managers.

(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) 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
(b) Procedures for the acquisition and dissemination of significant knowledge from research and other sources to designated State unit professionals and paraprofessionals.

Staff Development monitors the current training levels of all personnel for required standards and training needs. Staff Development will implement the ARS Career Development Enhancement Program (CDE), a competency-based program. Employees will successfully complete job related requirements such as, but not limited to, meeting experience requirements, completing mandated job-related training, demonstrating satisfactory job performance, and exhibiting appropriate conduct.

The Program will include all ARS staff, and will be conducted in six phases with the first three phases targeting all staff; phases four and five focusing on subject matter specific training in the area of expertise such as counselors, administrative staff, instructors, etc.; and phase six targeting managers and supervisors.

Other opportunities for training are provided to all staff via the Arkansas Rehabilitation Association Training Conference, Special Topics Training, Administrative Assistants Training Conference, online training, and webinars. Training is also available through the State Interagency Training Agency, CRC training, CEU training for purposes of certification or licensure in the professions, and training provided internally by the agency in case management and compliance with policy and procedures. Internal policy and procedures are developed and monitored for the agency in terms of hiring, training, or retraining personnel to meet agency standards. The universities are utilized to provide training opportunities.
ARS ensures all personnel receive appropriate and adequate continuing education. The agency enables employees to attend classes, seminars, and conferences, and disseminates information through newsletters, in-service training, workshops, and training conferences. The field program conducts district meetings in their respective districts where the latest techniques for providing services to consumers are discussed. The Deputy Chief of Field Services provides best practice training on various VR and ARS procedures throughout the state. The Deputy Chief of Field Services also provides a seminar for CRC candidates and best practice training in periodic Special Topics Training. The Chief of Field Services meets monthly with district managers to provide updates and training regarding policy and procedures with client services and day-to-day operations.

Access and Accommodations sections will work with counselors in collaboration with Increasing Capabilities Access Network and community partners to provide quarterly trainings in the area of assistive technology as it relates to home, work or school.

To ensure training provided at ACTI remains relevant to current business and industry standards, the Vocational Training Staff attend quarterly instructor workshops.

(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.

ARS provides access and continues to employ personnel who communicate in the native languages of applicants and consumers with limited English speaking ability. ARS also provides special communication modes such as interpreters, captioned videos, specialized telecommunications services, and materials for individuals who are deaf and deaf-blind, as well as other specialized media systems for individuals with disabilities. Interpreters are provided for the deaf or hearing impaired. Sign language skills are included as a minimum qualification for positions providing services to persons who are deaf or hearing impaired.

Arkansas continues to experience a large influx of Spanish speaking citizens requesting VR services, and promotes hiring employees with Spanish language skills. ARS requested and the Arkansas General Assembly granted permission to the agency to compensate employees who demonstrate relevant foreign language skills at enhanced levels when using their skill set for the benefit of VR consumers. The agency provides assistance to our employees in order to help them accommodate consumer needs.

(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 Improvement Act.

ARS staff participates in state, regional, and national transition meetings and conferences. ARS Field Program staff serves on the Arkansas Interagency Transition Partnership (AITP) Team and attends the annual National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center (NSTTAC) Conference. In addition, they help plan, coordinate, and facilitate the bi-annual State Transition Summit, and help lead the planning and coordination of local transition fairs and parent’s nights with assistance from district managers and local VR counselors. AITP promotes personnel development through online-based educational vignettes for teachers, students, and families, and through an annual Summer Agency Connection, which includes ARS district managers, Arkansas Career Training Institute (ACTI), Access and Accommodations in collaboration with Increasing Capabilities Access Network (ICAN) personnel, and representatives from high schools. AITP also developed a directory of services that includes ARS and other stakeholders, and a parental guide for transition from pre-school to post-secondary education and training.

For FY 2016 the Staff Development and Training Unit will coordinate and meet with focus groups representing counselors, managers, transition counselors, administrative support staff, and other work groups to determine their training needs. The Staff Development and Training Unit will evaluate the information gathered and make required adjustments to the Career Development Enhancement Program. Training modules may be delivered via online, webinar, or classroom.

(j) Statewide Assessment

(1) Provide an assessment of the rehabilitation needs of individuals with disabilities residing within the state, particularly the vocational rehabilitation services needs of those:
   (A) Who are minorities;
   (B) Who have been unserved or underserved by the vocational rehabilitation program;
   (C) Who have been served through other components of the statewide workforce development system;
   (D) Who are youth with disabilities and students with disabilities, including, as appropriate, their need for pre-employment transition services or other transition services;
(2) Identify the need to establish, develop, or improve community rehabilitation programs within the state.
(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.

The most recent Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA) for Arkansas was completed in December 2015. ARS contracted with Dan Hopkins & Associates, Inc. who
worked collaboratively with the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC), key stakeholders and ARS to complete a CSNA of rehabilitation needs of individuals with disabilities in Arkansas. Multiple strategies to gather data and information were used including: (a) A focus group discussion with participants from ARS, SRC, key stakeholders and vendors; (b) A structured survey of all ARS counselors; (c) A structured survey of a random sample of ARS consumers throughout Arkansas; (d) Focus groups of consumers; (e) An ACTI focus group of administrators and staff; (f) Interviews and surveys of the agency leadership; (g) Questionnaire and an abbreviated focus group with district managers; (h) Review of 2014 RSA 911 data; and (i) Review of data from the American Community Survey and 2014 Current Population Survey.

(1) Rehabilitation Needs

Implications

1. As the number of minority individuals and emerging disability populations continues to increase, a broad range of topics and issues for agency consideration are presented, these include: outreach and marketing strategies; diversity of language and culture; availability of appropriate services; and the availability of trained personnel to address these issues and meet the needs of individuals with disabilities.

2. The high number of consumers exiting the system without an employment outcome has significant implications for the agency and the issue suggests the need to assess the effectiveness of services provided during the service delivery process, for example, assessment/evaluation planning; counseling and support; the nature and scope of services provided, and job development and placement strategies. Large caseloads and a perceived limit on time the counselor spends in direct contact with consumers, coupled with the delays in services, contribute to the number of consumers exiting without a positive employment outcome.

3. The agency should examine the high degree of emphasis on numbers and services as opposed to a focus on quality employment outcomes when analyzing consumers who leave the program with an employment outcome.

4. As indicated the growing number of individuals with a mental disability being referred by multiple sources suggests the need for examination of referral sources, availability of effective services, and trained personnel to serve this consumer population.

5. The large number of consumers being referred/coded as having a mental disability has at least three major implications for consideration: (1) The accuracy of coding of the disability; (2) The nature and scope of services required to adequately serve this population; and (3) The availability of trained personnel to adequately meet their needs.

6. Counselor time devoted to case recording, documentation, and data entry, along with the consumer’s need for employment-related assistance, suggests these factors may impede the agency’s ability to adequately serve its consumers and retain qualified counselors.
Recommendations

1. The agency should consider developing strategies for effective outreach and marketing in order to reach the unserved and underserved populations around the state.

2. The agency should explore the feasibility of increasing the role and function of the district managers in the areas of outreach, marketing, and stimulating local community resource involvement.

3. The agency should enhance its comprehensive training and continuing education program for district managers, counselors, and other appropriate personnel to effectively and efficiently serve consumers from diverse and emerging populations.

4. Current and potential referral sources and strategies should be examined to ensure the referral of all individuals with disabilities be expedited.

5. The effectiveness of the services provided during the service delivery process be studied (including assessment, planning, counseling, job development/employment services), with the goal of achieving quality employment outcomes.

6. Consideration should be given to strategies that enable counselors to devote additional time to direct consumer contact and provision of services. These include a reduction of caseload sizes, training in caseload management, and improved utilization of support personnel and technology.

7. The agency should consider developing strategies for personnel training that lead to increasing the number of consumers exiting the system with quality employment outcomes.

8. The agency should make every attempt to recruit qualified professionals who are culturally competent serving multi-cultural and Spanish speaking consumers along with other emerging disability populations.

Supported Employment (SE)

Implications

1. The WIOA and Rehabilitation Act requirements for SE services for individuals with the most significant disabilities not only includes a significant expansion of SE services, but also includes an increase in the number of consumers, including students and youth, who are eligible for SE services. The mandate for expansion of SE services and consumers served requires a significant increase in the resources necessary to meet those requirements in terms of manpower and service providers.
2. The Arkansas Department of Education data indicates there is a large potentially eligible population along with a high demand for SE services within the State.

3. There are many geographical areas within the state where there are no SE services or a lack of SE services.

4. According to the survey, ARS district managers state many CRPs indicate they do not have the financial resources to provide supported employment services.

Recommendations

1. The agency should determine the geographical areas and communities within its districts where there are no SE services.

2. The agency’s leadership should consider its overall priorities, including the availability of resources, and an increase in the number of counselors that provide SE services in order to build capacity to provide SE services by utilizing the available resources of WIOA partners, CRPs, agency field services counselors, support staff, management, business relations representatives, ICAN, ACTI and others for the benefit of SE consumers.

3. The agency leadership should explore the possibility of providing start-up funds for the development and implementation of innovative approaches to expand the provision of SE services to individuals with the most significant disabilities. CRPs should collaborate and form cooperative partnerships in those areas where services are lacking.

4. The agency leadership should explore the feasibility of ACTI providing SE services directly to consumers with the most significant disabilities. Potential SE services might include assessment, planning, job development, job placement, job coaching, and other services necessary in a multidisciplinary approach to meet the needs of individuals with the most significant disabilities. Close collaboration with ARS Field Services counselors is necessary to provide SE services at ACTI especially when consumers contemplate returning to their local communities.

Workforce Development

Implications

1. The low percentage of ARS consumers exiting the Program with an employment outcome suggests a need for the increased utilization of Workforce Center services in preparing consumers for employment and to assist in job placement.

2. The lack of a well-developed working relationship with Workforce Centers in some Districts indicates programs and services available with the Workforce System are not
being fully utilized by ARS to assist individuals with disabilities to achieve employment outcomes.

3. The current working relationship between ARS and Workforce Centers limits ARS’s knowledge of local labor market trends, job requirements, and employment opportunities within the State.

4. ARS has limited familiarity with WIOA implementation requirements and the requirements and methods for collaboration and cooperation with Workforce partners.

Recommendations

1. Training is recommended to familiarize ARS leadership and counselors with the state Workforce System, the Workforce Centers, and the resources available in the ARS Districts.

2. ARS should conduct follow-up meetings with Workforce Centers to increase and improve working relationships and collaborative efforts.

3. ARS should consider surveying the availability of services within the ARS Districts with the goal of utilizing the Workforce Centers as a resource to prepare consumers for employment and to assist in job placement, especially in those areas lacking services.

4. ARS should provide training in WIOA requirements and appropriate policy and procedure to implement the Act.

(2) Community Rehabilitation Programs (CRPs)

Implications

1. As indicated by study results, the lack of a sufficient number of CRPs together with the need for some CRPs to expand and improve services, have significant negative consequences for individuals with disabilities in their achievement of timely and relevant services and positive rehabilitation outcomes.

2. The lack of consistency in provision of services among CRPs around the state limits the counselors and agency’s ability to provide equal access to services for consumers.

3. The continued emphasis of CRPs on providing workshop type services limits ARS’s ability to utilize them for achieving acceptable outcomes according to RSA regulations.

4. Vocational rehabilitation services are not available in certain areas of the state, particularly in rural areas, thus consumers do not have access to many services needed for successful completion of their vocational goals.
Recommendations

1. District managers and agency Leadership should assume a more active role with the CRPs for purposes of (a) Conducting a survey of the CRPs and other service providers to assess and evaluate the availability of critical rehabilitation services; (b) Services needed, but not provided; and (c) to develop a more positive working relationship with CRPs and local service providers.

2. ARS should consider promoting the expansion of needed services in all areas of the State, especially the expansion and establishment of CRPs in those geographical areas identified.

3. ARS should seek out innovative ways to encourage CRPs to provide the essential services needed by consumers. This might be accomplished by providing innovative approaches to funding such as providing seed funds to CRPs to partner together to provide Supported Services in a combined geographical service area.

4. ARS should enhance communications with CRPs to explore the possibility of developing a more open and coordinated effort to expand the availability of services in all areas of the State.

Arkansas Career Training Institute (ACTI)

Implications

1. Study results indicate the need to more closely align the mission of ACTI and the Field Program with the new WIOA requirements. With additional emphasis on integrated competitive employment, as well as Pre-employment Transition, Supported Employment, and expansion of services to students and youth with disabilities, there is a need for enhanced communication, training, and provision of services at ACTI and close collaboration with Field Services.

2. ACTI is being underutilized because counselors do not feel appropriate services are available for many of their consumers. This is especially true for the lower functioning and special disability groups, such as those with mental health issues. In addition, the Field Program states the referral and admission process takes too long, requires unneeded action by the counselors, and rejects the acceptance of many consumers who need services.

Recommendations

1. ARS and ACTI administrators and leadership should review the current and future role and function of ACTI in the provision of services designed to assist in meeting the needs
of individuals with disabilities. Special consideration should be given to: (1) The emerging trends in disability populations; (2) The unserved and underserved disability groups; (3) The lack of service resources available throughout the state, especially in rural areas; (4) The absence of local services and programs; (5) The large number of geographical areas without CRPs; (6) The limited services and trained personnel in CRPs; (7) The emerging ethnic minority populations; (8) The nature and scope of services mandated for Transition, and the processes used for referral and admission from the Field to the Institute.

2. ARS should design and implement strategies to improve the working relationship between ACTI and the Field Program.

3. ACTI and the Field Program should streamline the referral and admission process.

4. ACTI should improve marketing activities to prospective consumers, schools, employers, and other partners.

5. ARS and ACTI leadership should explore the feasibility and opportunities for ACTI to provide agency training/continuing education and other organizational development needs by providing the facilities and accommodations for these and related activities which may contribute to the development of needed resources related to Supported Employment and Transition personnel and other needs related to WIOA implementation.

(3) Transition Career Services and Pre-employment Transition Services

Implications

• Study results indicate the WIOA and Rehabilitation Act requirements for pre-employment and other Transition services for students and youth are at a much higher level and require a significant increase in resources in terms of manpower and services in order to meet those mandates.

• ARS has two approaches to Transition services with different outcome goals. One is the Arkansas Transition Program (ATP), formerly the Pilot Transition Project, which operates in six school districts in Crittenden, Jefferson, Pulaski, and Washington counties. The second is a more general/traditional approach of the Field Program provided by the caseload counselors throughout the state.

• One of the limitations of the ATP is it only works with a small number of schools and the outcomes vary from school to school; in addition, there are a limited number of referrals to the Field Program.

• Study findings indicate there is a varying level of appreciation of the ATP by ARS managers and counselors throughout the state. The level of acceptance by VR counselors and managers is dependent upon the effectiveness of the ATP transition counselor and
the number of referrals to ARS counselors.

- Another critical issue affecting both programs is the varying responses encountered in the different school districts. Many school districts or schools within a district do not want the ATP transition or VR counselors to provide services.

Recommendations

- ARS leadership should convene a transition task force to consider the overall priorities of the agency, including the available resources; an increase in the number of counselors and positions to provide Transition services as mandated; to build capacity to provide Transition services by utilizing the available resources of WIOA partners and CRPs; and to utilize all components of the agency including not only Field Services counselors, but support staff, management, business relations representatives, ICAN, ACTI, and others to provide direct services to Transition consumers.

- The transition task force should review the activities and outcomes of the Arkansas Transition Program and the VR Field Services Transition program in order to identify best practices that can be implemented throughout the state.

- ARS should explore combining the efforts of the two programs to seek economies of scale and efficiency in providing Transition services to consumers.

- ARS district managers and management should collaborate with the state’s school districts in order to facilitate the working relationship between the school districts, the agency, and local VR counselors.

- ARS leadership and management should work with the State Department of Education to insure rehabilitation counselors have ready access to all students with disabilities.

- ARS should develop a protocol wherein students reporting a disability, and any student with an IPE, be contacted by a transition or rehabilitation counselor prior to or during middle school/junior high.

- ARS should develop a protocol wherein all students with an IPE have a Plan or be determined ineligible for rehabilitation services by the time they reach the age of 16.

- ARS Field Services should form a Transition Committee to survey and assess the schools and resources in the community and within the DSU, including providers and funding, in order to set goals, objectives, and activities for the assessment and the provision of Transition services in the ARS Districts.

(k) Annual Estimates. Describe:

(1) The number of individuals in the state who are eligible for services.
(2) The number of eligible individuals who will receive services provided with funds under:
   (A) The VR Program;
   (B) The Supported Employment Program; and
(C) Each priority category, if under 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

(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.

Arkansas Rehabilitation Services is not under an Order of Selection for FY 2016. In Arkansas, out of a total of 1,762,235 non-institutionalized population aged 18 to 64, there are 264,645 individuals with disabilities. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2014 American Community Survey.

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(1) State Goals and Priorities. The designated State unit must:

(1) 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.

(2) Identify the goals and priorities in carrying out the VR and supported employment programs.

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

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

   (B) The State’s performance under the performance accountability measures of section 116 of WIOA; and

   (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.

ARS and the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) developed and agreed upon goals and priorities based on the most recent Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment completed December 2015, and RSA recommendations from the most recent 107 Monitoring Review.

The goals and priorities for Arkansas Rehabilitation Services are as follows:

Goal 1: Establish baselines and meet benchmarks for performance accountability measures of section 116 of WIOA.
Goal 2: Increase the availability of Supported Employment (SE) services to youth and adults with significant disabilities by providing technical assistance to ARS Employment First vendors (CRPs, SE providers, and other external employment vendors) and increasing the number of referrals for SE services.

Goal 3: Improve public relations, marketing, information, outreach, and referrals.

Goal 4: Increase collaboration with business that leads to increased employment outcomes.

Goal 5: Expand and improve the transition services program.

Goal 6: Develop and improve Community Rehabilitation Programs including the ARS Arkansas Career Training Institute (ACTI).

Goal 7: Improve training, resources, and continuing education.

Goal 8: Improve ARS’s ability to act as a resource when assisting individuals with disabilities and employers in addressing accommodation needs.

Goal 9: Improve service delivery to achieve better outcomes that are efficient and effective for agency customers.

(m) Order of Selection. Describe:

1. The order to be followed in selecting eligible individuals to be provided vocational rehabilitation services.
2. The justification for the order.
3. The service and outcome goals.
4. The time within which these goals may be achieved for individuals in each priority category within the order.
5. How individuals with the most significant disabilities are selected for services before all other individuals with disabilities.
6. 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.

This agency is not operating under an Order of Selection.

(n) Goals and Plans for Distribution of Title VI, Part B Funds

1. Specify the state's goals and priorities with respect to the distribution of funds received under section 603 of the Rehabilitation Act for the provision of supported employment services.

Expanding and enriching the availability of Supported Employment (SE) Services to consumers through technical assistance, specifically intense training to vendors and increase the number of
referrals for SE services is the DSU’s targeted result via the distribution of section 603 SE funds. The strategy employs technical assistance and key incentives to SE providers, including CRPs, designed to increase the availability of SE services to consumers. At the same time, the agency will place greater emphasis on proven and innovative supported employment outcomes and community integrated services, which result in performance based outcomes. The strategy involves an increased focus on SE outcomes resulting in a competitive wage in integrated employment culminating in a career outcome in contrast to the traditional sheltered employment.

Based on WIOA, ARS will update interagency agreements with the state agencies serving individuals with the most significant disabilities including Division of Developmental Disabilities Services, Special Education, Behavioral Health Services and the Division of Services for the Blind. These agreements place an emphasis on competitive employment as a desirable outcome for individuals with the most significant disabilities including those with developmental disabilities, and the partnership, roles, and responsibilities between the agencies. ARS is developing marketing strategies to increase additional certification for rural SE service providers.

ARS will maximize the ability of individuals with most significant disabilities to achieve competitive employment through customized employment, supported employment, and other individualized services.

ARS will collaborate with WIOA partners, private funding, and other state agencies to help individuals with most significant disabilities to receive extended services to increase employability in an integrated environment.

(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
   (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.

Based on the success rate for competitive employment outcomes in the inaugural Project SEARCH initiative, ARS in collaboration with ACCESS Group, Inc., other community partners, and Project SEARCH International will expand the Arkansas Project SEARCH.

ARS will set aside 50 percent of supportive employment funds specifically for youth programs that support competitive integrated employment.

ARS will determine methods for funding extended services for youth with disabilities not to exceed four years through the Employment First Vendors (CRPs, SE providers, and other external employment).

ARS will develop new services components or agreements with partners of state agencies for braided funding of extended services to assure youth with disabilities have successful employment opportunities.
ARS will provide education and instruction of WIOA expectations to providers, and will establish Memorandums of Understanding or contract services to providers to initiate services to potentially eligible consumers.

(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 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 agency will host or participate in business conferences including Chamber of Commerce events, Society of Human Resource Managers annual statewide meetings, and Industry Liaison Group business symposiums to promote the hiring of people with disabilities. These conferences will provide information and education on the value added services offered through the Talent Acquisition Portal (TAP), and will provide opportunities to establish relationships that result in hiring of consumers.

- ARS will enhance relationships with businesses whose corporate offices are headquartered in Arkansas, and will build partnerships with senior corporate officers and managers to gain support for hiring consumers and purchasing TAP credits for advertising job openings.

- ARS will develop performance-based contracts with supported employment providers across the state to increase the percentage of sustainable employment outcomes.

- ARS will implement a marketing plan to increase awareness of ARS VR services to private citizens, service providers, and business and industry, and that will more clearly identify underserved communities, and transition and pre-employment transition consumers as recommended in the Statewide Comprehensive Needs Assessment.

- ARS will work with other interested parties and organizations to educate employers and businesses regarding disability issues and to provide outreach to increase opportunities for consumers to attain competitive employment. As part of this effort, Access and Accommodations will target business related conferences including Arkansas Workers’ Compensation Educational Conference, Arkansas Self-insurers Association Conference, etc., to provide information and training as it relates to accommodating employees with disabilities in the workplace.
• ACTI will begin, expand, and offer training and evaluation services in local communities beyond Hot Springs. This will include Rehab Initial Diagnosis and Assessment for Clients (RIDAC) and Learning and Evaluation Center (LEC) evaluations.

• ACTI will work with statewide partners to facilitate pre-apprenticeship training for registered apprenticeships.

• ARS will focus additional efforts toward placement of ACTI graduates. This includes working with employers in automobile collision repair, automobile service repair, cosmetology, and construction technology. In addition, ACTI will continue to offer short-term programs including: Transition Employment Program, Career Readiness Certificate training, OSHA certification, Professional Career Performance Program (Positive Behavior Support), forklift operation certification, logistics training block (Basic Logistics, Certified Logistics Technician, and Certified Production Technician), and call center training to address skills gaps identified by employers from across the state.

• ARS will complete necessary improvements to the Army Reserve Building adjacent to ACTI in order to improve VR services offered at ACTI and to increase employment outcomes.

• ARS/ACTI will coordinate with local and statewide higher education institutions, independently and respectively, to provide continuing education and training for VR consumers wishing to pursue higher accreditation in skilled trades and to enhance employment outcomes.

• ACTI will realign vocational evaluation services to better serve ARS consumers. These services will focus on identifying accommodations, evaluating skills and abilities needed for in-demand careers in Arkansas, and providing comprehensive feedback to vocational counselors to facilitate more effective individual plans for employment.

• ACTI will increase use of the electronic case management system to streamline the referral process and provision of feedback to vocational counselors and managers in the field.

• ACTI staff will provide face to face meetings with field staff to supplement electronic notifications of programming changes.

(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.

• Field Services will offer the Access and Accommodations’ Return to Work/Stay at Work and Assistive Technology at Work (AT@Work) services through all field offices for
assessment and consultation as it relates to the adequacy of assistive technology equipment. Field Services will also collaborate with Increasing Capabilities Access Network (ICAN, the State AT Program) to promote the demonstration, loan, and reuse of assistive technology equipment and related devices including assisting in the opening of a satellite office located in Fayetteville to promote statewideness.

- Field Services will collaborate with the Arkansas Alternative Financing Program (AFP), and the Telecommunications Access Program regarding assistive technology services and supports available to all Arkansans with disabilities.

- ARS will continue to collaborate with Career Technical Education and Adult Education to provide basic and advanced skill based services and resources to individuals with disabilities.

(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.

- ARS will continue to provide outreach activities to individuals from minority backgrounds, individuals with the most significant disabilities, and others who are unserved or underserved.

- ARS will provide training to improve outreach activities to unserved and underserved minority populations in order to improve performance on the performance accountability indicators.

ARS will utilize its network of Community Rehabilitation Programs to identify individuals with disabilities who are minorities and/or have the most significant disability. These individuals, who because of rural living, a lack of transportation or limited English, can be referred to ARS and other support service networks needed to reach employment.

(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).

- ARS will meet with school designee at the beginning of the school year to review referral procedures and to identify transitioning students who may benefit from VR services.

- ARS will provide a liaison to the schools to provide education about VR services and to meet with school staff and students.
• ARS will assist students with disabilities in transitioning from school into employment, postsecondary education, and training.

• ARS will provide awareness of pre-employment transition through job exploration counseling, work based learning experiences in integrated work settings and will provide workplace readiness training through internships.

(5) **If applicable, plans for establishing, developing, or improving community rehabilitation programs within the state.**

• ARS is working with a design professional to develop a long-term critical maintenance plan for the ACTI campus.

(6) **Strategies to improve the performance of the state with respect to the performance accountability measures under section 116 of WIOA.**

• ARS has developed a data sharing agreement and is working with the Arkansas Research Center to develop baselines for the performance accountability measures using historical data from the DSU’s case management system along with corresponding employment data.

• ARS will work with the other core programs to facilitate a common intake process, and electronic protocols that will allow for near real-time evaluation of performance accountability measures.

• ARS will provide training and establish performance goals for VR counselors and business relations representatives to improve outreach activities to unserved and underserved minority populations.

• To improve outreach to unserved and underserved minority populations, ARS will continue to participate in Community Connection and Partners in Progress events targeted in regions with a distressed economy and poor performing school systems. Representatives from every service component including Field Services, ACTI, Special Programs, and Business Relations participate in these events. Employers are encouraged to participate in mini-job fair activities.

• Access and Accommodations in collaboration with Increasing Capabilities Access Program (ICAN), State AT Program, will provide and disseminate brochures printed in Spanish to reach more Arkansas residents and inform them of the benefits of assistive technology.

• District managers and business relations consultants will continue to promote VR services on morning radio and TV talk shows to increase consumer awareness of services and to educate businesses about the availability of the qualified and dependable
workforce represented by ARS consumers.

- ARS will recruit qualified rehabilitation counselors, including bi-lingual English Sign Language VR counselors, to fill vacancies to meet or exceed past performance in employment outcomes.

- ARS will increase performance in Supported Employment for adults and youth with disabilities with emphasis on serving an increased number of individuals with developmental/intellectual, behavioral health concerns, and cognitive disabilities.

- ARS will use the comprehensive monitoring instrument for CRPs including ACTI, developed in response to RSA 107 Monitoring. The monitoring instrument establishes performance indicators including increases in employment outcomes, and evaluates if Field Services’ needs are met for service provision to ARS consumers.

- Access and Accommodations in collaboration with Increasing Capabilities Access Network will work with Division of Services for the Blind to develop a certification review team for compliance of the one stop delivery system with section 188 of WIOA and applicable provisions of ADA 1990.

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

- ARS will integrate the use of CSAVR’s Talent Acquisition Portal (TAP) to connect VR consumers with business partners, and will continue to recruit businesses to list employment opportunities in the TAP.

- ARS will collaborate with the Workforce Center staff to increase the ability of ARS staff to conduct intake interviews and take applications in a confidential manner while located at a Workforce Center site.

- ARS district managers will conduct presentations to Workforce employees to increase and improve working relationships and collaborative efforts.

- ARS will collaborate with Workforce Centers to identify potential employers to provide employment opportunities, apprenticeships and on the job training for transition students.

- Access and Accommodations, AT@Work will provide an AT professional housed in the Fayetteville office to assist ARS counselors, consumers, and employers, to increase access to stay at work and return to work programs. In addition, Access and Accommodation in collaboration with Increasing Capabilities Access Network (ICAN), State AT Program, will open a satellite office in Northwest Arkansas to support state wideness and access to assistive technology.

(8) How the agency's strategies will be used to:
(A) Achieve goals and priorities by the State, consistent with the comprehensive needs assessment:
(B) Support innovation and expansion activities; and
(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.

Strategies to Achieve Goals and Priorities

Goal 1: To establish baselines and meet benchmarks for state with respect to the performance accountability measures under section 116 of WIOA.

Strategy

• ARS will increase referrals, enhance job development and placement services, and recruit qualified rehabilitation counselors to fill vacancies to meet or exceed past performance in employment outcomes.

• ARS will increase performance in Supported Employment for youth and adults with disabilities with emphasis on serving an increased number of individuals with the most significant disabilities, including developmental/intellectual, behavioral health concerns and cognitive disabilities.

• ARS will develop performance-based contracts with supported employment providers to increase the percentage of supported employment closures.

• ARS will provide training to improve outreach activities to unserved and underserved minority populations in order to improve performance.

Goal 2: Increase the availability of Supported Employment (SE) Services to consumers by providing technical assistance to vendors and increasing the number of referrals for SE services.

ARS, in partnership with the AR Employment First State Leadership Mentoring Program team, is receiving technical assistance from the Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy subject matter experts on methods to use Medicaid Waivers and other partners’ funds in restructuring to expand and improve SE services. The team includes: The Department of Human Services Divisions of Developmental Disabilities Services (DDS), Behavioral Health Services (DBHS), Services for the Blind (DSB), Medical Services (DMS), Aging and Adult Services (DAAS), Department of Workforce Services (DWS), and the Arkansas Department of Education, Special Education Unit (ADE SEU).

ARS, in partnership with the AR Employment First State Leadership Mentoring Program, will initiate revised MOUs based on the WIOA, including new rates and reimbursement
methodology for braiding services.

- ARS, in partnership with the AR Employment First State Leadership Mentoring Program, will provide technical assistance to the pilot projects focused on transitioning from facility based services to community based services.

**Goal 3: Improve public relations, marketing, information, outreach, and referrals.**

- ARS will continue the marketing plan to increase awareness of VR services to citizens, service providers, and business and industry, and to increase employment outcomes to improve performance accountability measures.

- Access and Accommodations in collaboration with Increasing Capabilities Access Network (ICAN, State AT Program) will provide a new informational website to provide resources for accommodation and assistive technology as it relates to home, education, and employment.

- ARS will develop outreach strategies designed to improve access to VR services for the state’s Hispanic residents with disabilities. Field personnel will distribute materials and information in a variety of formats designed to reach and serve the growing diverse population in Arkansas.

- ARS will develop educational and informational materials designed to inform potential referral sources about the referral process and the scope of ARS.

- ARS will utilize its network of Community Rehabilitation Programs to identify individuals with disabilities who are minorities and/or have the most significant disability. These individuals, who because of rural living, a lack of transportation or English as a second language, can be referred to ARS and other support service networks needed to reach employment.

- ARS Communications will work with ACTI to increase education and outreach about programs and services provided at ACTI. This includes strategies for internal and external stakeholders.

**Goal 4: Increase collaboration with business that leads to increased employment outcomes.**

- ACTI will work to expand the success of registered apprenticeships, internships, and part-time employment opportunities for ARS clients.

- ARS has developed the statewide business and industry advisory board and implemented the Talent Acquisition Portal (TAP). ARS will expand and grow TAP, to increase job
potential for agency customers.

- ARS will increase the number of business relations representatives to provide job placement services in all Field Services offices and ACTI.

- A statewide advisory group will be established and composed of individuals from business and industry, counselors, job placement specialists, and other appropriate professionals to explore participating in the National Employment Team.

- ARS will actively support the development of the Arkansas Business Leadership Network. ARS will continue to meet with companies from across the state throughout the year to garner support and identify an anchor employer(s) to facilitate the application process.

- The local business advisory group at ACTI will be integrated into the statewide ARS business advisory group with the goal of expanding job placement and employment outcomes.

- ARS will enhance relationships with businesses whose corporate offices are headquartered in Arkansas and partner with senior corporate officers and managers. Through a dedicated full time corporate business relations consultant, ARS will be positioned to build relationships with key decision makers as well as connect with the State Chamber of commerce to solidify its status as an economic contributor and not just a social service provider.

- ARS will actively market the utilization of ARS Business Relations to companies seeking qualified applicants with disabilities.

- ARS will develop and initiate activities and events to recognize individuals who have overcome their disabilities, and give recognition to employers and businesses, who have demonstrated “best practices,” hired people with disabilities, and made unique and cost-effective reasonable accommodations.

- ARS will develop a presentation to advocate the benefits of hiring and retaining individuals with disabilities.

- ARS will update promotional/educational videos, brochures, mailers, etc., and target businesses.

- Area managers will partner with business relations representatives to effectively market ARS services to business and industry, performing an intentional and active role on the business relations team.
• ARS will evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of current marketing strategies and how ARS is currently engaging employers.

• Through the Return to Work/Stay at Work program, the Access and Accommodations team will continue to be a resource for employers and employees for expertise in seeking information on providing accommodation and comprehensive assistive technology evaluations.

Goal 5: Expand and improve transition services program.

• ARS has actively engaged in the development of legislation to implement comprehensive transition and postsecondary education programs in two-year institutions of higher education, and will continue to act as a resource for higher education institutions in the development of postsecondary education programs. ARS will also provide information to consumers about these programs.

• ARS will conduct an assessment of transitional services statewide and implement policy and procedures consistent with WIOA.

• ARS will explore combining both transition programs and establish one vision for transition services.

• ARS will develop a transition committee to initiate a statewide plan to provide innovative transition services to students.

• ARS will provide pre-employment transition services such as job exploration counseling, work-based learning experiences including internships that provide integrated environments.

• ARS will provide counseling on opportunities for enrollment in comprehensive transition or postsecondary educational programs.

• ARS will provide workplace readiness training to develop social skills and independent living.

• ARS will provide instruction in self-advocacy and peer mentoring.

• ARS rehab area managers will work with WIOA partners, school districts, and educational co-ops to enhance working relations to effectively provide transitional services.
• ARS will explore hiring a Transitional Coordinator who will implement strategies of enhancing transitional services and providing statewide training to counselors.

• ARS will work with business and industry to establish on-the-job training, apprenticeships, and paid work experiences to prepare students for the workforce.

• ARS will collaborate with WIOA partners and other state agencies to utilize braided funding for services.

• ARS leadership will work with the State Department of Education to strengthen relationships between schools and rehabilitation district managers and counselors.

• ARS leadership will work with school districts throughout the state to facilitate and enhance the working relationships between the local high schools and local rehabilitation district managers and counselors.

• ARS will host Transition Expos across the state to market ARS transition services. ARS will continue to partner with Arkansas Transition Services (ATS) to provide technical assistance with transition planning, and will support the bi-annual state Transition Summit for local transition teams to identify local resources and continue to increase awareness of ARS services. ARS will refer consumers to College Bound Arkansas to prepare transition students with disabilities for college, will continue to sponsor the Annual Youth Leadership Forum (YLF), and will support the annual Disability Awareness activities.

• ARS counselors will contact all special education teachers of students with an IEP prior to or during the junior year, and when there is staff turnover will notify schools as soon as a new counselor is assigned.

• ARS leadership will promote all students with an IEP be provided eligibility determination for VR services before they graduate high school.

• The ARS Field Program and the Arkansas Career Training Institute (ACTI) will continue to expand opportunities for young people with disabilities to participate in the five-week jointly developed Transition Employment Program (TEP) in which students receive a comprehensive assessment/evaluation, OSHA certification training, job readiness, soft-skills development, and three internship rotations at ACTI.

• ARS will continue to partner with the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences (UAMS), and ACCESS Group, Inc. to increase the number of young adults served in the UAMS Project SEARCH site. In addition, ARS plans to increase the number of Project SEARCH sites to other regions of the state, and will partner with four high schools and
St. Vincent’s Hospital in Hot Springs, Arkansas.

- ARS will continue to support the youth model site in Fayetteville in partnership with Lifestyles, Inc., Fayetteville Public Schools, and Washington Regional Medical Center.

- Access and Accommodations will work with counselors, educators and employers to assist students with disabilities who utilize assistive technology by providing assessments, consultation, and acquisition as part of the transition process from secondary education to postsecondary education and work.

- Access and Accommodations (AT@Work) in collaboration with Increasing Capabilities Access Program (ICAN, State AT Program) and community partners will provide training to appropriate staff as it relates to the legal provisions of assistive technology as an accommodation in education and employment settings.

**Goal 6: Develop and improve Community Rehabilitation Programs.**

- ARS will continue assigning a rehabilitation counselor as a liaison to each CRP in each District.

- ARS district managers will assume a more active role with CRPs to develop more positive working relationships.

- ARS will train CRPs on the WIOA requirements for services to youth and students with disabilities as it relates to Section 511 Limitations on Sub-Minimum Wage.

- ARS will initiate purchased service agreements focused on moving CRPs from fee for service to performance based outcomes payments.

- ARS, in partnership with the Arkansas Employment First State Leadership Mentoring Program, will establish technical assistance guidelines focused on CRPs transitioning from facility based services to community-based services.

- ARS and ACTI administrators will review the current and future role and function of ACTI in the provision of services designed to assist in meeting the needs of individuals with disabilities.

- ARS will develop short-term and long-range maintenance plans for ACTI.

- ACTI will continue to utilize the Professional Career Performance Program designed to reinforce positive behaviors essential to attaining and maintaining employment.
• ARS will expand the OSHA ten-hour training as a weeklong stand-alone program.

• A Call Center Training program will be designed and implemented to help students gain the foundational skills needed for immediate placement with call centers. ACTI is working with several call centers who have recruited students completing the customer service training. This program will address the challenges some students are experiencing when navigating entrance competency examinations and evaluations.

• A Heavy Equipment Operation program will include a collaborative training agreement with a local two-year college to provide CDL training and licensing as well as a six-week hands-on training on hydraulic excavator simulator.

• ACTI will conduct an annual assessment in conjunction with the triennial needs assessment to determine the optimum adequacy of its programs and infrastructure as a state operated CRP. This includes necessary and critical upgrades to infrastructure and accessibility.

Goal 7: Improve training, resources, and continuing education.

• Significant training and continuing education is recommended by the Comprehensive Needs Assessment for most, if not all, agency personnel in a broad range of areas. ARS will review the needs identified in the Training Needs Assessment conducted by ARS Staff Development and Training.

• Staff Development and Training will coordinate and conduct task force meetings representing a cross section of agency personnel to analyze the identified needs submitted. If appropriate, the trainings will be incorporated into the draft Career Development Enhancement Program as part of the employees’ training and education plans.

• Staff Development and Training will use the information from the task force proposed above to make adjustments in the Career Development Enhancement Program for subsequent years.

• Staff Development and Training and ARS Senior Management will ensure the Career Development Enhancement Program is initiated and enforced in subsequent years. Training delivery method will vary depending on the subject matter – all resources available will be considered.

• ARS will train staff on the new services and standards for Community Rehabilitation Programs beginning July 1, 2016.
• ARS will train staff to increase awareness related to Employment First (E1st) Provider Transformation and Integrated Community Based Services as it relates to Community Rehabilitation Programs, Supported Employment Programs, and External Job Placement vendors.

• ARS/ACTI will undertake a feasibility study and memoranda of agreement with Higher Education providers to further the agency’s desire to provide continuing education and training for VR consumers wishing to pursue higher accreditation in skilled trades and to enhance employment outcomes.

• Access and Accommodations (AT@Work) in collaboration with Increasing Capabilities Access Program (ICAN, State AT Program) and community partners will provide training to appropriate staff as it relates to the legal provisions of assistive technology in education and employment settings.

**Goal 8: Improve ARS’s ability to act as a resource when assisting individuals with disabilities and employers in addressing accommodation needs.**

• ARS will reorganize/realign its Special Programs section to better communicate the availability of resources to assist in the accommodation process. As part of this change Special Programs will be renamed Access and Accommodations.

• ARS will rename it Retaining a Valued Employee (RaVE) program to Return to Work/Stay at Work (RTW/SAW). This language is consistent with programs/practices in private/public sector employment and communicates functional intent.

• As part of the Governor’s Employment First Task Force, ARS will assume a lead role in the implementation of a RTW/SAW program within Arkansas state government.

• ARS will sufficiently staff its Assistive Technology at Work (AT@Work) program to meet referral demands from the ARS Field Program and RTW/SAW initiative. Staff will have expertise to address accommodation needs in training and employment settings.

**Goal 9: Improve service delivery to achieve better outcomes that are efficient and effective for agency customers.**

• ARS will ensure the development and implementation of comprehensive training for district managers and counselors to effectively serve consumers.

• ARS will adequately staff the field program to reduce caseloads and allow counselors to devote additional time to direct consumer contact and provision of services.

• ARS will examine the agency referral sources and ensure counselors are trained to provide effective services to consumers with mental health concerns and intellectual/developmental disabilities.
• ARS will increase the role of the rehab area manager in the areas of outreach and marketing at local levels statewide to cultivate positive working relationships with employers, partners, and stakeholders.

• ARS will implement training that will focus on increasing the number of individuals exiting the system with quality employment outcomes.

• ARS will evaluate the Supported Employment services provided statewide and focus on expansion in rural areas.

• ARS will strengthen the relationships with WIOA partners such as Workforce Services, Services for the Blind, Adult Education, and Department of Human Services to better serve agency customers with resources.

• ARS will implement and develop policies for WIOA and provide statewide training for the field program.

• ACTI will evaluate programs on effectiveness and implement new short term programs that give student’s competitive training for the 2020 workforce.

• ACTI will implement efficient communication processes with the field program to ensure counselors are aware of ACTI programs.

• ACTI will improve marketing and outreach to employers, schools, and prospective consumers.

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

The goals and strategies for FY 2014 and FY 2015 are:

Goal 1: To meet or exceed the benchmarks for the state performance accountability indicators under section 116 of WIOA.

Strategy

• ARS successfully employed 3,077 consumers to competitive integrated employment.

• ARS hosted Community Connection Events at each local office, which provided an overview of VR services to business and industry. ARS partnered with local businesses and industry to answer consumer’s questions and provide an overview of the labor
needs.

- ARS promoted services through radio, newspaper, and other activities to reach potential consumers, which increased the number of referrals.

ARS Performance Standards and Indicators for FY 2014 and FY 2015

Performance Indicator 1.1
The data indicates the number of individuals in Arkansas who achieved an employment outcome increased from 2,917 in FY 2013 to 3,044 in FY 2014 and to 3,077 in FY 2015. This met the federal benchmark of equaling or exceeding performance in the last two fiscal years.

Performance Indicator 1.2
In FY 2014 the data indicates 65.8 percent of the individuals in Arkansas who exited the VR program after receiving services achieved an employment outcome. In FY 2015 the data indicates 72.4 percent of the individuals in Arkansas who exited the VR program after receiving services achieved an employment outcome. This exceeded the federal benchmark of 55.8 percent in both years.

Performance Indicator 1.3
The data indicates the percentage of individuals determined to have achieved an employment outcome, which exited the VR program in competitive, self-employment, or Business Enterprise Program (BEP) employment with earnings equivalent to at least the minimum wage in Arkansas is 98.6 percent for FY 2014 and 99.5 percent for FY 2015, which exceeded the federal benchmark of 72.6 percent.

Performance Indicator 1.4
The data indicates of all individuals who exited the VR program in competitive, self-employment, or Business Enterprise Program (BEP) employment, with earnings equivalent to at least the minimum wage, the percentage who are individuals with significant disabilities in Arkansas is 97.9 percent in FY 2014 and 98 percent in FY 2015, which exceeded the federal benchmark of 62.4 percent.

Performance Indicator 1.5
The data indicates the result for Performance Indicator 1.5 in Arkansas is the ratio of 0.66 in FY 2014 and .64 in FY 2015, which exceeded the federal benchmark of 0.52.

Performance Indicator 1.6
The data indicates the mathematical difference between the percentage reporting their own income as the largest single source of economic support at exit and the percentage reporting
their own income as the largest single source of economic support at application in Arkansas is 53.4 for FY 2014 and 56.7 in FY 2015, which met and exceeded the federal benchmark of 53.0.

**Standard 2: Equal Access to Services**

**Performance Indicator 2.1**

The data indicates the service rate for all individuals with disabilities from minority backgrounds, as a ratio to the service rate for all non-minority individuals with disabilities in Arkansas is 0.88 for FY 2014 and 0.91 for FY 2015, which exceeded the federal benchmark of 0.80.

**ARS Evaluation and Progress on Goal 1**

ARS met or exceeded the minimum performance required on all performance standards and indicators during FY 2014 and FY 2015. Performance on standard 1.1 employment outcomes went from 2,917 to 3,044, a 4.2 percent increase for FY 2014 and from 3,044 to 3,077, a 2 percent increase for FY 2015. Performance on standard 2.1 Minority Background Service Rate went from 0.84 to 0.88 in FY 2014 and from 0.88 to 0.91 in FY 2015, which exceeded the minimum standard.

**Section 116 WIOA Performance Accountability Measures**

ARS is working with the Arkansas Research Center to perform an analysis of historical data to develop baselines for the performance accountability measures, which should be completed in January 2016. These baselines will be used to negotiate benchmarks for the performance accountability measures as listed under section 116 of WIOA, which include:

1. The percentage of program participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the second quarter after exit from the program;

2. The percentage of program participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the fourth quarter after exit from the program;

3. The median earnings of program participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the second quarter after exit from the program;

4. 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;

5. 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

6. The indicators of effectiveness in serving employers established pursuant to clause (iv).
7. A State may identify in the State plan additional performance accountability indicators.

Youth

1. The percentage of program participants who are in education or training activities, or in unsubsidized employment, during the second quarter after exit from the program;

2. The percentage of program participants who are in education or training activities, or in unsubsidized employment, during the fourth quarter after exit from the program; and

3. The primary indicators of performance described in subclauses (III) through (VI) of subparagraph (A)(i)(iii) Indicator Relating to Credential. For purposes of clause (i)(IV), or clause (ii)(III) with respect to clause (i)(IV), program participants who obtain a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent shall be included in the percentage counted as meeting the criterion under such clause only if such participants, in addition to obtaining such diploma or its recognized equivalent, have obtained or retained employment or are in an education or training program leading to a recognized postsecondary credential within 1 year after exit from the program.

Goal 2: ARS will use a portion of the funds in compliance with Section 101(a)(18) for the development and implementation of innovative approaches to expand and improve vocational rehabilitation services to individuals with disabilities.

Strategy

• ARS will use a portion of the funds under Section 101(a)(18) for the support of the SRC and/or the SILC.

• ARS will continue Expos across the state to provide marketing of ARS services and outreach to local communities targeting individuals with minority backgrounds and individuals with disabilities who have been unserved or underserved.

ARS Evaluation and Progress on Goal 2

ARS hosted open houses statewide to provide awareness and education of agency services to potential consumers with disabilities, vendors, stakeholders, and business and industry.

ARS hosted Partners in Progress events statewide, which focused on business and industry’s needs for personnel. ARS invited employers into local offices to answer questions about potential jobs and openings for ARS consumers who were trained and ready for work.

ARS established On-the-Job Training (OJT) cooperative agreements with business and industry to provide career readiness and real life work experiences for consumers.
ARS’s marketing strategy significantly improved the VR program’s name recognition and resulted in improved referrals and markedly increased employment outcomes over past years.

**Goal 3: Increase the availability of Supported Employment (SE) Services to consumers by providing technical assistance to vendors and increasing the number of referrals for SE services.**

**Strategy**

- ARS will continue to collaborate with the Developmental Disabilities Services and Behavioral Health Services agencies to explore methods to use Medicaid Waiver and Medicaid restructuring to expand and improve SE services.
- ARS will continue to provide technical assistance and access to certification for SE providers and standards for job coaches to expand and improve SE services.

**ARS Evaluation and Progress on Goal 3**

Over a two year period, ARS has increased the number of certified SE vendors by 52 percent from 35 to 67. In addition, some vendors have satellite SE offices (29) around the state. ARS has assisted 241 individuals in successful competitive integrated employment, which is an increase in successful closures by 78 percent.

ARS trained 343 participants for job coach certification statewide. The training venue options were in-person or through the new free online job coach training. Some individuals certified were employed by Workforce Development entities. The online training is hosted on the Arkansas Waiver Association website, and includes testing with results forwarded to ARS to certify job coaches and track job coaches by certified vendors.

ARS, in partnership with Vision Quest and the AR Employment First State Leadership Mentoring Program team, developed standard definitions for supported employment services, plus rates and reimbursement methodology through technical assistance received from the Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy subject matter experts on methods to use Medicaid Waivers and other partners’ funds in restructuring for expansion and improvement of SE services. The team includes: The Department of Human Services Divisions of Developmental Disabilities Services (DDS), Behavioral Health Services (DBHS), Services for the Blind (DSB), Medical Services (DMS), Aging and Adult Services (DAAS), Department of Workforce Services (DWS), and the Arkansas Department of Education, Special Education Unit (ADE SEU).

ARS collaborated with a group of stakeholders (20) to develop and update the job coach training certificate program. The stakeholders group included new and long standing SE leadership who represented large, small, and rural providers, potential SE providers of developmental
disabilities, the Developmental Disabilities Providers Association, the Arkansas Waiver Association, and the Arkansas APSE Association. ARS developed a training program and updated the testing requirements for job coaches. The job coach training website went live in FY 2015.

ARS provided training on updates to SE policy requirements in the agency manual updated 1-2014, Basic SE, and 21st Century Supported Employment to 380 participants.

Goal 4: Improve public relations, marketing, information, outreach, and referrals.

Strategy

- ARS will implement a marketing plan to increase awareness of ARS VR services to both private citizens, service providers, and business and industry as recommended in the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment. The goal of the marketing program is to increase employment outcomes to improve performance on the Standards and Indicators.

- ARS will develop outreach strategies designed to improve access to VR services for the state’s Hispanic residents living with a disability. Materials and information will be provided in a variety of formats for field personnel to distribute at the local community level. The materials will provide special attention to strategies designed to reach and serve a growing diverse population in the state.

- ARS Expos will provide marketing of ARS services and outreach to local communities targeting individuals with minority backgrounds and individuals with disabilities who have been unserved or underserved.

- ARS will develop educational and informational materials designed to inform potential referral sources about the referral process and the scope of ARS services as recommended in the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment.

ARS Evaluation and Progress on Goal 4

ARS’s marketing strategy significantly improved ARS’s name recognition and resulted in improved referrals and markedly increased employment outcomes over past years. The ARS Expos, a community centered manifestation of the marketing approach, contributed significantly to the increase in employment outcomes, including the minority communities. ARS will utilize Partners in Progress and Community Connections for outreach in the future.

Goal 5: Improve and expand job development, placement, and employment.

Strategy

- ARS will increase the number of business relations representatives placement specialists employed within the state from 14 to 20 in order to have them available at all Field Services offices and ACTI.
• A statewide advisory group will be established composed of individuals from business and industry, counselors, job placement specialists, and other appropriate professionals to explore participating in the National Employment Team.

• The local business advisory group at ACTI will collaborate with the statewide ARS business advisory group with the goal of expanding job placement and employment outcomes.

ARS Evaluation and Progress on Goal 5

Over FY 2014 and FY 2015, ARS deployed 14 business relations representatives.

The local ACTI business advisory group has successfully assisted with job placement at ACTI. Beginning in July 2013, several members of the advisory group began facilitating internships for ACTI students. Success at these first internship locations has allowed for expansion to other employers in the area. To date over 150 students have been placed in local internships; the program has clearly demonstrated to local employers the viability of consumers served at ACTI to fill competitive employment vacancies; and has resulted in additional closures.

Over the past two years, ARS certified 61 external job placement vendors to assist in the expansion of employment opportunities around the state, which is a 75 percent increase.

ARS’s Project SEARCH employment success rate is 91.7 percent with the participants receiving employer benefits.

Goal 6: Expand and improve transition services program.

Strategy

• ARS leadership will work with the State Department of Education to insure rehabilitation counselors have ready access to all students with disabilities as recommended by the Comprehensive Needs Assessment.

• ARS leadership will work with school districts throughout the state to facilitate and enhance the working relationship between the school district personnel and local rehabilitation district managers and counselors.

• ARS will recommend all students reported to have a disability and an IEP be contacted by a transition or rehabilitation counselor prior to or during their junior year of school.

• ARS will provide eligibility determination for VR services for all students with an IEP before they graduate high school.

• ARS policy indicates an IPE will be developed for all eligible students before they exit the school setting.
ARS Evaluation and Progress on Goal 6

- ARS worked in collaboration with Arkansas Transition Services to host Reality Fairs statewide that focused on post-secondary education, budgeting, and dressing for success.

- ARS field counselors were assigned as liaisons for each high school statewide. Each counselor visited the assigned high school twice during the year and provided information on vocational rehabilitation services.

- Eligible transition students had an individualized plan for employment completed by their graduation date.

- ARS participated in Transition Fairs, local Summits, and Centered Planning Meetings to help educate teachers, administrators, and parents regarding ARS transitional services.

- In the inaugural class of the ATP/ACTI Transition Employment Program – 100 percent of the 15 TEP participants completed the five-week program, and successfully completed the OSHA Certification Training to become General Industry OSHA certified. The success of the inaugural class is evidenced by the increase of applicants for summer 2015 TEP from 16 applicants for the pilot class to 42. Through the efforts of ATP and ATS, there is an increase from one to eight in the number of student applicants not served by an ATP counselor.

- The success of the UAMS Project SEARCH adult model is evidenced by the quality of job placements of the inaugural class. The closure rate is 91.7 percent for first year completers. All are working full-time and the top wage is $11.86.

- The UAMS Project SEARCH success has contributed to the growth of the Business Advisory Council (BAC), which consists of 18 major employers (Dillard’s, Baptist Health Hospital, Embassy Suites, City of Little Rock Parks & Recreation, Maverick Transportation, St. Vincent Health System, UAMS and others).

- ARS leadership approved the request to include the expansion of Project SEARCH in its Legislative Budget request (submitted June 2015). Funding will allow ARS to expand the UAMS Project SEARCH site, continue funding the Fayetteville youth model, and add additional sites in the state over the next five years. ACTI is supporting the UAMS Project SEARCH by providing room, board, recreational activities, and transportation to and from UAMS, which enables more general VR counselors from outside Central Arkansas to refer their consumers to this evidence-based project. This accommodation has assisted ARS in recruiting applicants from across the state.

- Through the PROMISE grant, competitively awarded to only six sites, ARS has had the opportunity to provide meaningful and comprehensive transition services to an additional 1,000 youth selected to participate in AR PROMISE. ARS transition specialists are responsible for serving youth on SSI beginning at age 14, and for providing career readiness training, soft-skill development, career exploration activities, work-readiness training, and administering and/or utilizing skills and needs self-inventories, career interest assessments, and pre-employment training to ensure the two paid work experiences they receive through the Department of Workforce Services are
appropriate job matches.

- Through the joint efforts of ATP and ATS, significant progress has been made in piloting the CIRCLES program in fall 2015. All ATP counselors, general VR counselors, and the ATS consultants have been trained.

- By spring 2014, ARS had entered into Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) with 120 individual high schools; however, these MOUs will be re-negotiated based upon WIOA regulations.

Goal 7: Develop and improve Community Rehabilitation Programs. (CRP)

Strategy

- ARS will continue assignment of a rehabilitation counselor as a liaison to each CRP in each District.

- ARS district managers will assume a more active role with CRPs for purposes of developing a more positive working relationship as recommended by the Comprehensive Needs Assessment.

- ARS will identify the specific services needed, but not currently provided by CRPs in their area including services for emerging populations and low-functioning consumers as recommended by the Comprehensive Needs Assessment.

- ARS will complete an instrument used to monitor CRPs and the ARS Arkansas Career Training Institute to ensure agency performance standards are met in compliance with the FY 2011 RSA On-Site Monitoring.

- ARS and ACTI administrators and leadership will review the current and future role and function of ACTI in the provision of services designed to assist in meeting the needs of individuals with disabilities.

- A task force representative of a cross section of ARS personnel will convene to analyze current and future needs and to provide input regarding the role and function of ACTI and the nature and scope of services provided.

- ARS will develop short-term and long-range maintenance plans for ACTI.

- ACTI will retain the services of an architectural consultant to improve the efficiency and ability to expedite the process of addressing infrastructural concerns.

- The FY 2013 Comprehensive Needs Assessment recommends ARS continues to work with the RSA to address the identified infrastructure issues and needs to ensure the safety of students and staff and to acquire the federal property and facilities available for the expansion and improvement of services and increase the number of individuals with
disabilities served at ACTI.

- ARS will implement replacement of the ACTI water system; acquisition and renovations of the former Army Reserve Building at 200 Reserve St., Hot Springs, Arkansas; and complete removal and build-back process for the concrete wall roof panel on Buildings 53, 54, and 55 at the ARS Arkansas Career Training Institute (ACTI) facility.

ARS Evaluation and Progress on Goal 7

ARS currently has a short-term facility maintenance plan that includes significant maintenance to Building one, Ross Hall, and the former Army Reserve Building. ARS has retained the services of architectural consultants and the scope of work for the long-range facility plan has been developed. However, further development of this plan has been delayed until FY 2016 to allow for completion of projects identified in the short-term plan. To date milestones of the short-term plan include completion of build-back of the fascia panels on buildings 53, 54, and 55; completion of all the training areas in the former Army Reserve Building; and completion of infrastructure components of the ACTI campus water system. The remaining construction is limited to the fire suppression components of the water system in buildings 1 and Ross hall. This will be completed in February 2016.

ARS trained 129 individuals on revamping of Community Rehabilitation Program services, which covered information about transitioning from fee for service to performance based outcomes, new draft CRP services, and other states’ mandated Employment First Executive Orders. The participants included: ARS field staff, ARS CRPs, ARS SE providers, Developmental Disabilities providers, the Developmental Disabilities Provider Association, the Arkansas Waiver Association, ARS employment vendors and the Department of Education – Arkansas PROMISE grant staff. ARS presented to 113 individuals with disabilities participating in a facility based program about the Americans with Disabilities Act and employment.

During CRP site monitoring visits, ARS outlined the changes in the draft WIOA regarding community-based services versus segregated settings, including the use of programs holding subminimum wage certificates.

Goal 8: Enhance collaboration and partnerships with the Workforce Development System.

Strategy

- ARS will collaborate with the Workforce Center staff to increase the ability of ARS staff to conduct intake interviews and take applications in a confidential manner while located at a Workforce Center site.

- ARS district managers will conduct follow-up contacts with Workforce managers to increase and improve working relationships and collaborative efforts.
• ACTI has received approval to provide testing for the Arkansas Department of Workforce Services CRC candidates who are individuals with disabilities. The individuals must be VR consumers. The CRC is the National Career Readiness Certificate developed by ACT. CRC is a national industry-recognized, portable, evidence-based credential that certifies essential skills needed for workplace success.

ARS Evaluation and Progress on Goal 8

As of September 30, 2015, 391 ARS consumers have attained a career readiness certificate as a result of the collaboration between the Arkansas Department of Workforce Services (ADWS) and ACTI.

ARS counselors attended Arkansas Workforce Centers (AWC) biweekly to increase referrals and ARS’s presence. AWC provided counselors office space and telephone and internet connections to help ensure service delivery.

ARS district managers provided PowerPoint presentations about services to employees at the Workforce Centers. AWC managers provided presentations to ARS employees’ statewide regarding workforce services.

ARS district managers are committee members on local workforce committees statewide and provide input regarding ARS services. ARS partnered with ADWS to host job fairs, job summits, and mock interviews to prepare consumers for employment outcomes.

Goal 9: Enhance training and continuing education.

Strategy

• Significant training and continuing education is recommended by the Comprehensive Needs Assessment for most if not all agency personnel in a broad range of areas. ARS will review the needs identified in the Training Needs Assessment conducted by ARS Staff Development and Training.

• ARS will convene a task force as recommended in the Comprehensive Needs Assessment representing a cross section of Agency personnel to analyze the identified needs and to assist in the design of the Training and Education Plan. ARS will consider personnel from the Regional TACE program.

• Staff Development and Training will use the information from the task force proposed above to develop its in-service training proposal for subsequent years.

• ARS will develop and implement a Training and Continuing Education Plan designed to meet these needs.

ARS Evaluation and Progress on Goal 9
The Training Needs Assessment in general indicated soft skills training in a number of areas such as: Dealing with Difficult People, Nonviolent Crisis Intervention (CPI), Team Building, and Conflict Resolution were needed. In addition there was a great need for increased information with job placement. Since 2010 for job placement, ARS has offered Career Development Facilitator (CDF) training, which covers resume writing, career selection, and mock interviews to name a few of the topics.

The ARS task force met on an as needed basis and consisted of district managers and various staff members with collaboration from the regional TACE program.

Staff Development and Training continues to monitor the needs of the agency and will modify the training and education plan as needed.

ARS has a Training and Education Plan utilized by the field staff, and is currently working on a more detailed plan for the clerical support staff. Other professions in the agency have their specific plans and continuing education for their disciplines.

**Goal 10 Develop and improve agency Information Technology (IT) to enhance services to individuals with disabilities.**

**Strategy**

- Standardization of equipment and software towards mobile and/or web based options.
- Standardization of IT policy.
- Continuous Training for staff in IT.
- Continue to pursue hiring IT staff to meet agency needs.
- ARS will integrate its core service management system with special programs and ACTI instructional programs client service tracking mechanisms for the purpose of enhanced and comprehensive wrap around services for the state’s VR clients.

**ARS Evaluation and Progress on Goal 10**

IT understands the most commonly used device by Arkansans (when accessing state agency information) is the mobile phone. As a result, the Arkansas Department of Career Education, ARS’s parent agency, continues to pursue web-based and mobile ready tools. The Communications Department is developing a new web portal built on responsive design that will adjust to the form factor of the device accessing the agency’s information. IT utilized secured, encrypted SaaS (Software as a Service) for the web-based client case management system for Rehabilitation Services.
IT is improving Cybersecurity efforts. All IT Policy is documented as part of the Human Resources personnel documentation and is required to be reviewed, acknowledged, and signed by all employees and their managers. IT plans to utilize, with Dell SecureWorks’ staff, Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPPA), and Data Privacy Security Awareness training in the coming months. Once in place, each staff person will be required to complete the training modules each calendar year.

IT continues to seek out the necessary training to stay at the forefront of Cybersecurity and overall professional development. IT has established an ongoing self-paced training process where staff utilize PluralSight (a computer based training application) to keep up with the latest changes in Active Directory, Server Management, Web, and other job related functions like project management, MS SharePoint, and database management. IT has deployed the Microsoft IT Academy training for Developers and IT Staff has been trained on Office 365 Administration.

The IT Department continues to need stability. With 85 percent of its Helpdesk and Network Administration Support outsourced, IT recognizes the need to reinstitute a fully in-house IT Administrative Support Department. Outsourcing the Administrative Support Team has helped to bring in staff with more current skills and training, but the turnover rate of contracted staff remains a challenge.

IT conducted a needs assessment for a new student information and client services system to be built by ARS Field Services’ Case Management System provider, Libera. However, Libera recently informed ARS it will no longer provide software development for VR. ARS must develop a new plan to integrate core service management. ACTI has hired a new Assistant Administrator, who will develop a plan for better tracking of students by increasing its access to employment data services available from the Department of Workforce Services.

**Outreach**

**Strategy**

The agency implemented the ARS Expo program. The Expos are marketing and outreach programs that inform Arkansas citizens about the availability of ARS services. The Expos provide outreach activities to individuals from minority backgrounds, individuals with the most significant disabilities, and others who are unserved or underserved. The Expos take place in communities across the state and continue from last year to cover the entire state. The Expos include representatives from Field Services, ACTI, Special Programs, and all services components of ARS. Employers are present for job fair activities. Media is used to inform the community about Expo activities. Activities extended beyond the regular work-day hours in order to serve individuals after work hours.

The lessons learned from the ACE/ARS Expo program will be incorporated into all outreach activities. This includes education and outreach to internal and external stakeholders.
ARS will implement a marketing plan to increase awareness of ARS VR services to both private citizens, service providers and business and industry as recommended in the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment. The marketing plan will utilize an approach of direct mail, public service announcements, video and printed materials including a format having continuity of style and color for the various components of the agency. Activities in the marketing plan include outreach to unserved and underserved populations to increase employment outcomes for those populations. The goal of the marketing program is to increase employment outcomes to improve performance on the Standards and Indicators.

**ARS Evaluation and Progress**

In July of 2012, ARS awarded a contract to a marketing firm to increase awareness of ARS VR services to private citizens, service providers, and business and industry as recommended in the Statewide Comprehensive Needs Assessment. The goal of the marketing program is to increase employment outcomes to improve performance on the standards and indicators.

ARS is developing a multi-pronged program for serving the state’s Hispanic community. Counselor training sessions have been implemented wherein counselors and professional assessment staff learn the cultural values of the state’s Hispanic community and ways to break down cultural and language barriers to accessing VR services. Additionally, transition counselors are working with the state’s Hispanic transition consumers encouraging them to consider VR counseling as a career. ARS is developing a statewide strategy with the state’s graduate VR programs in higher education to recruit more Hispanic/Spanish speaking students who would subsequently be recruited by ARS.

ARS has fully developed marketing and branding of VR services delivered by the agency. Agency expos grew in attendance and co-sponsored collaboration. The agency now has a robust website offering interactive video vignettes enabling the public to learn about every program and service offered by the agency.

**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.

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

The goals from 4.11(e)(4 1) for FY 2014 and FY 2015 were to increase the availability of Supported Employment (SE) Services to consumers by providing technical assistance to vendors and to increase the number of referrals for SE services. The strategy employs technical assistance and key incentives to SE providers, including CRPs that are designed to increase the availability of SE services to consumers. At the same time, the agency will place greater emphasis on proven and innovative supported employment outcomes and integrated community performance-based outcomes.
The strategy involves an increased focus on SE outcomes resulting in a competitive wage integrated employment that culminates in a career outcome in contrast to the traditional sheltered employment. Based on WIOA, ARS will update the interagency agreements with the state agencies serving individuals with the most significant disabilities including: The Department of Human Services Divisions of Developmental Disabilities Services (DDS), Behavioral Health Services (DBHS), Services for the Blind (DSB), Medical Services (DMS), Aging and Adult Services (DAAS), Department of Workforce Services (DWS), and the Arkansas Department of Education, Special Education Unit (ADE SEU) The agreement places an emphasis on competitive employment as a desirable outcome for individuals with the most significant disabilities including those with developmental disabilities and mental health diagnoses.

ARS is developing additional certification criteria for SE service providers. The criteria include updated requirements for certification and training for job coaches. ARS increased fee schedules and negotiated contracts for services with providers in an attempt to increase service providers, and incentives to service providers, to increase employment outcomes for individuals with the most significant disabilities.

ARS Evaluation and Progress

- Over the last two years, ARS increased SE referral authorizations by 69 percent (370) with 241 individuals employed as successful 26 closures, which is an increase in successful closures by 78 percent.

- ARS collaborated with a group of stakeholders (20) to develop and update the job coach training certificate program. The stakeholders group included new and long standing SE leadership who represented large, small and rural providers, potential SE providers of developmental disabilities, the Developmental Disabilities Providers Association, the Arkansas Waiver Association, and the Arkansas APSE Association.

  Based on the collaboration, ARS developed a training program and updated the testing requirements for job coaches. The job coach training website went live in FY 2015. ARS hosted job coach certification training at four regional venues and initiated free online training, hosted on the Arkansas Waiver Association website, with a total of 343 participants. The web-based training includes testing with results forwarded to ARS to certify job coaches and track job coaches by certified vendors.

- ARS provided training to 380 participants on updates to SE policy requirements in the agency manual updated 1-2014, Basic SE, and 21st Century Supported Employment.

- ARS, in partnership with Vision Quest and the AR Employment First State Leadership Mentoring Program team, developed standard definitions for supported employment services. In addition established rates and reimbursement methodology through technical assistance received from the Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy subject matter experts on methods to use Medicaid Waivers and other partners’ funds in restructuring for expansion and improvement SE services. The team includes: The Department of Human Services Divisions of Developmental Disabilities Services (DDS), Behavioral Health Services (DBHS), Services for the Blind (DSB), Medical Services (DMS), Aging and Adult Services (DAAS), Department of Workforce Services (DWS), and the Arkansas Department of Education, Special Education Unit (ADE SEU).
Disabilities Services (DDS), Behavioral Health Services (DBHS), Services for the Blind (DSB), Medical Services (DMS), Aging and Adult Services (DAAS), Department of Workforce Services (DWS), and the Arkansas Department of Education, Special Education Unit (ADE SEU).

Over a two year period, active SE cases went from 278 in FY 2013 to 603 in FY 2015, a 46 percent increase in individuals served.

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

ARS is working with the Arkansas Research Center to perform an analysis of historical data to develop baselines for the performance accountability measures, which should be completed in January 2016. These baselines will be used to negotiate benchmarks for the performance accountability measures as listed under section 116 of WIOA.

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

Title I funds for I&E are reserved and used to support the SRC in the annual resource plan. Title I funds are also used, along with funds from the Division of Services for the Blind, to support the SILC annual budget. Innovation and Expansion funds supported ARS community forums, called ACE/ARS Expos, in FY 2014 and FY 2015 in several communities. The Expos are marketing and outreach efforts to reach individuals with disabilities, parents, community leaders, educators, and employers in the community. The Expos are a combination outreach and job fair with booth displays of ARS field services, transition services, assistive technology, Arkansas Career Training Institute, Adult Basic Education, and employers.

(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.

(2) The timing of the transition to extended services

ARS continues initiatives to expand and improve Supported Employment (SE) Services for individuals with the most significant disabilities throughout the state. ARS, in partnership with WIOA partners and other state agencies, are reviewing Employment First status for the state of AR. ARS will be updating Interagency Agreements with the state agencies serving individuals with the most significant disabilities or providing employment related services available to individuals with disabilities.

The partners collaborating with ARS include: The Department of Human Services Divisions of Developmental Disabilities Services (DDS), Behavioral Health Services (DBHS), Services for the Blind (DSB), Medical Services (DMS), Aging and Adult Services (DAAS), Department of Workforce Services (DWS), and the Arkansas Department of Education, Special Education Unit (ADE SEU). These agreements emphasize competitive integrated employment as a desirable
outcome for individuals with the most significant disabilities and the partnership, roles and responsibilities between the agencies.

Another purchased service agreement is in place with SE service vendors to implement strategies to expand the SE system including job placement services and extended services. Strategies include increasing the number of vendors offering SE and job placement statewide through enhanced incentives; utilizing a performance based approach with CRPs and SE providers; revised CRP fee schedules; and commitment from partnering state agencies to emphasize employment as a high priority outcome as a result of the Governor’s Executive Order Employment First Initiative for People with Disabilities.

- ARS collaborated with a group of stakeholders (20) to develop and update the job coach training certificate program. The stakeholders group included new and long standing SE leadership who represented large, small, and rural providers, potential SE providers of developmental disabilities, the Developmental Disabilities Providers Association, the Arkansas Waiver Association, and the Arkansas APSE Association. ARS developed a training program and updated the testing requirements for job coaches. The job coach training website went live in FY 2015.

- ARS hosted job coach certification training at four regional venues and initiated the free online training with a total of 343 participants. Also, free web-based job coach certification training, hosted on the Arkansas Waiver Association website, was initiated. The web-based training includes testing with results forwarded to ARS to certify job coaches and track job coaches by certified vendors.

- ARS provided training on updates to SE policy requirements in the agency manual updated 1-2014, Basic SE, and 21st Century Supported Employment to 380 participants.

- ARS, in partnership with the DHS Division of Developmental Disabilities Services and other state partners, has extensively reviewed the current MOU’s and will initiate revised MOU’s based on the WIOA, and new rates and reimbursement methodology created through the Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment “Vision Quest” initiative for Infusing Integrated Employment in Medicaid Waiver and State Plan Options.

Over a two year period, active SE cases went from 278 in FY 2013 to 603 in FY 2015, a 46 percent increase in individuals served.

ARS provides Supported Employment (SE) Services in compliance with the Definitions in the Act based on a determination of the needs of an eligible individual, as specified in an individualized plan for employment. When job training is provided, it is provided on-site.

SE services include placement in a competitive integrated setting for the maximum number of hours possible based on the unique strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities, interests, and informed choice of individuals with the most significant disabilities. SE providers are utilized statewide. All providers of SE services to consumers of ARS agree in writing to provide extended services for the consumer as long as the consumer has the current job. The timing of the transition from employment to extended services is immediate. Extended
services begin immediately after the case is closed status 26 when the employment outcome is achieved.

**Department of Human Services – Division of Services to the Blind**

**VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION**

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:

(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;

   (2) the Designated State unit's response to the Council’s input and recommendations; and

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

   **DSB Response:** This agency is an independent commission.

(b) **Request for Waiver of Statewideness.** When requesting a waiver of the statewideness 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;

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

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

   **DSB Response:** This agency has not requested a waiver of statewideness.

(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;

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

   (3) Programs carried out by the Under Secretary for Rural Development of the Department of Agriculture;

   (4) Noneducational agencies serving out-of-school youth; and

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1 Sec. 102(b)(2)(D)(iii) of WIOA