

Oregon Vocational Rehabilitation State Plan 2024 – 2028 Executive Summary

July 1, 2024

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act requires VR to submit a state plan every four years. The plan serves as a grant application to our federal funder, the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) and is a collaboration between the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) and VR. It serves as a roadmap for how we will assist people with disabilities to achieve, maintain and advance in employment and independence.

The full plan has 13 required sections, including:

- Our goals and priorities, and strategies to reach those goals.
- Findings from San Diego State University’s Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment of Oregon VR, conducted in the fall of 2023 through surveys and focus groups with staff, customers, partners and businesses.
- Evaluation of our progress in reaching goals outlined in the previous state plan.
- Review of staff needs to effectively provide services.
- Overview of our partnerships and how we operate.

This document provides the Goals, Priorities, and Strategies section of the plan. VR completed this section with feedback gathered from more than 300 partners, customers and VR staff members in December 2023.

It outlines steps VR will take to meet goals in four areas:

- Do a great job assisting customers;

- Make and improve partnerships;
- Hire and keep diverse, well-trained staff; and
- Ensure VR processes works well and the program can effectively help customers.

Accessibility

You can get this executive summary, as well as the full plan, in other languages, large print, braille or a format you prefer free of charge. Email vr.info@odhsoha.oregon.gov or call 503-945-5880 or 877-277-0513. We accept all relay calls.

Goals, Priorities, and Strategies

Goal 1: Do a great job assisting customers.

VR will reach this goal through the following strategies:

1. Create processes to hear directly from customers about how VR could improve.
 - a. Support the SRC in completing the Consumer Satisfaction Survey and use the data to develop new strategies to reach diverse groups.
 - b. Develop a process for customers to give immediate feedback on VR services, including youth services.
2. Do a better job explaining VR services and processes to current and new customers.
 - a. Create an updated video that explains VR services for people who don't know about VR.
 - b. Create materials to help explain VR process and activities.
 - c. Work with partners that have trusted relationships with the disability community, including youth, to share information about VR services.
 - d. Train VR staff to use assistive technology and devices to communicate with customers.
3. Communicate with customers in their preferred language, format and style.
 - a. Make sure all written communication materials for customers are in plain language.
 - b. Create outreach materials and methods in a format that works best for the audience.
 - c. Translate client documents into their language.

- d. Make standard VR forms available in different languages and formats.
- 4. Make outreach materials available in different languages and formats.
 - a. Speed up the process of getting services.
 - b. Once a person applies, speed up the time it takes for them to become eligible.
 - c. Once someone is eligible, speed up the time it takes to start meeting with their VR Counselor to create an Individualized Plan for Employment.
 - d. Give decision-making power to the right people so decisions can be made faster. Review and update policies to re-assign decision authority where needed.
- 5. Help customers explore education and training programs.
 - a. Review and update policies to remove barriers.
 - b. Look to the Inclusive Career Advancement Program (ICAP) team for ways the program could further support customers in accessing training for high-demand fields.
 - c. Increase the number of students getting Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) throughout the state.

Goal 2: Make and improve partnerships

VR will reach this goal through the following strategies:

- 1. Strengthen partnerships with Workforce Partners to serve more people.
 - a. Look for opportunities for Workforce Partners to provide employment services to customers.

- b. Share data with Workforce Partners to track outcomes and avoid duplicating efforts.
 - c. Collaborate with Workforce Partners on opportunities to share information about VR in community settings.
- 2. Identify organizations that have relationships in rural areas and with underserved communities — Black communities, people of color, Indigenous communities and other culturally specific communities.
 - a. Partner with ODHS Communications and the Office of Equity and Multicultural Services to identify new organizations, create communication materials and identify outreach opportunities to share information about VR.
- 3. Develop a process for customers to share feedback about their experience working with VR's contracted service providers.
- 4. Make sure customers and partners are included in creating policies that help VR to be effective.
 - a. Conduct regular reviews of the VR Policy Manual and Oregon Administrative Rules (OAR) with program partners and contractors to make sure policies are current and that they eliminate barriers to effective service delivery.
 - b. Ask for input on policy changes from the SRC, which represents the needs and concerns of VR customers. This review will take place every two weeks when the SRC Policy Committee meets.
 - c. Ask for input on rule changes from the Rules Advisory Committee, which advises VR on how its rules affect people with disabilities.

5. Continue to invest in training for contracted providers in order to provide professional, consistent services throughout the state. Topics will include:
 - a. Contract trainings specific to job placement services providers.
 - b. Building new skills to help customers.
 - c. Meeting national standards and following best practices.
 - d. Psychosocial communication accommodations — communication techniques assist in engaging with people with mental health conditions. Example techniques include motivational interviewing, trauma-informed care, nonviolent communication, de-escalation techniques, collaborative problem solving, and addressing microaggressions.
6. Build and maintain relationships with businesses.
 - a. Provide training and consultation to business on hiring, supporting, retaining and promoting people with disabilities.
 - b. Participate in business events to raise awareness about VR services to businesses.
 - c. Inform businesses about incentives for hiring people with disabilities.
 - d. Share resources to support businesses in employing, supporting, retaining and promoting people with disabilities.
7. Work with the National Employment Team to have a unified approach to working with business customers.
8. Coordinate with the Oregon Employment Department's Business Services Team to share information about VR with businesses.

9. Partner with the local workforce development boards to coordinate services and share resources.
10. Bring on more contractors to provide services to youth with disabilities.
 - a. Create a fee-for-service contract for Pre-Employment Transition Services for youth and phase out current contract.
 - b. Bring on more contractors who can fill gaps in services. This includes contractors who can serve rural areas, who can work outside of school hours, and who have the language and cultural skills to work with diverse populations.
 - c. Bring on more contractors who can provide opportunities for students to get work experience year-round.
11. Build relationships with schools, families and programs to serve more youth with disabilities.
 - a. Connect with families and students with disabilities about VR youth services to increase awareness.
 - b. Work with partners that have trusted relationships with families to share information about VR services.
 - c. Develop policy that specifically addresses youth-related topics and requirements.
 - d. Develop and implement training for staff and partners.

Goal 3: Hire and keep diverse, well-trained staff.

VR will reach this goal through the following strategies:

1. Make VR offices across the state more welcoming to employees of diverse backgrounds.

- a. Partner with the ODHS Office of Multicultural Services and the VR Service Equity Committee to put into action the ODHS Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging Plan.
 - b. Share information with new staff about how they can get involved with ODHS affinity groups, called Employee Resources Groups.
2. Continue to recruit racially diverse and bilingual staff who reflect the demographics of Oregon to be effective in serving customers with various languages and cultures.
 - a. Conduct targeted outreach to colleges with diverse student bodies to encourage students to either apply for an internship or employment with Oregon VR.
 - b. Expand and refine recruitment and hiring practices to reach more applicants. Use ODHS resources that support and invest in a diverse workforce.
3. Train VR staff to provide services in a way that is respectful of different cultures and disabilities.
 - a. Expand staff training in cultural brokering, a practice that helps people from different cultures understand each other.
 - b. Provide trainings for VR staff in psychosocial communication accommodations — communication techniques assist in engaging with people with mental health conditions. Example techniques include motivational interviewing, trauma-informed care, nonviolent communication, de-escalation techniques, collaborative problem solving, and addressing microaggressions.
 - c. Identify areas where further training is needed.

4. Provide training and professional development opportunities for staff in all positions to provide professional and consistent practices across the state.
 - a. Train all staff on new and updated policies.
 - b. Train new staff, including new managers, on all policies and procedures.
 - c. Use data and case file reviews to develop training plans.
 - d. Train staff on expectations for how and how often they communicate with customers.
 - e. Train staff on how to move customers quickly through the VR eligibility process.
 - f. Create training on how to use the program's case management system that keeps track of all VR customers and their progress.
 - g. Create training on fiscal management to help staff quickly authorize contracted services and approve invoices, and to make sure they are including the right supporting documents.
5. Continue to develop and support Vocational Rehabilitation Specialists, who are experts in specific disabilities or program areas.
 - a. Create a supportive system for interns by expanding support for supervisory staff.
 - b. Start a formal mentoring program for direct service, program and non-management staff.
6. Start a mentoring program for new staff to help them understand their role. Ideally this will improve performance and their job satisfaction.

- a. Develop a mentoring program for staff with several years of experience to develop new skills or explore different areas of the program.

Goal 4: Make sure our processes work well and we can effectively assist customers.

VR will reach this goal through the following strategies:

1. Create and put into action a thorough system of good internal controls, policies and procedures to make sure we follow federal rules and document requirements correctly.
 - a. Review and update required forms to make them easier and less time consuming for staff.
 - b. Conduct a review of existing policies and procedures to revise decision-making authorities where necessary in order to provide authority to appropriate levels and expedite service delivery.
 - c. Update the intake and application process to make accessing services simpler for customers.
2. Move towards rapid engagement to reduce the number of customers who drop out prior to plan development.
 - a. Reduce the overall count of days from application to eligibility and eligibility to plan development.
3. Provide ways for staff to provide input on the vision, goals and future direction of the program.
 - a. Establish advisory groups that will have rotating membership to give opportunity for more participation. Examples include groups to advise on policy, Youth Services, and the case management system.

4. Set up strong internal control for the federal grant award to make sure the program is managing the grant money properly, following all federal laws and meeting the terms of the grant.
 - a. Review internal controls annually. When authority updates occur, identify if we need to update, develop or discontinue any controls.
 - b. Develop appropriate training for new and updated internal controls.
 - c. Implement new internal controls and related procedures.
5. Draft and implement a monitoring plan with a risk management component that evaluates financial, legal, security and brand risk in accordance with federal and state requirements. The plan will monitor expenses and case files to make sure we are following federal and state requirements.
 - a. Make sure there are appropriate internal controls to support this monitoring plan.
 - b. Communicate with staff on all aspects of the monitoring process and how it will be implemented.
6. Draft policies, procedures and internal controls over contract monitoring that include monitoring policies and procedures; a monitoring schedule; and a risk management component that is compliant with the federal and state requirements.
 - a. Write applicable policies and internal controls.
 - b. Develop training for staff and contractors.
 - c. Update contracts as needed.
7. Develop policies and procedures for how we collect and verify our data.

- a. Regularly update VR's case management system to keep it secure from bad actors and incorporate the latest features and improvements.
 - b. Streamline data gathering procedures to improve staff efficiency and reduce administrative burden.
 - c. Develop policies and procedures for how VR tracks customers who earn a credential for completing a training or education program.
8. Conduct regular reviews of the VR Policy Manual to make sure policies are current and streamlined to eliminate barriers to effective service.
- a. The Policy Advisory Committee will meet quarterly to review current policy and ensure artificial barriers to service are eliminated.
 - b. The Policy and Compliance team manager will host an "open office hour" monthly for staff to interact, ask questions or provide feedback and suggestions.
9. Improve consistency of case practices by implementing a case review process to reduce findings and improve customer satisfaction.
- a. Conduct quarterly, annual, and as-needed quality assurance case reviews to evaluate the quality of services provided.
 - b. A model for multi-office case service record reviews will be developed and implemented by the QA team to ensure accuracy of local level review data and to inform policy clarifications and training needs of the program.
 - c. Branch managers will conduct local level case reviews to assist with case-specific decision making, ensure compliance, and determine if adequate progress is being made for the customer.

- d. Conduct an annual statewide survey with VR customers to determine levels of satisfaction with services provided.
10. Provide customers with more support in becoming self-employed.
- a. Work with the policy team to simplify and clarify policy and processes for customers interested in pursuing self-employment, including supported self-employment.
 - b. Provide ongoing training to VR staff on self-employment policy and processes.
11. Create process for VR Workforce and Businesses team to better collaborate with VR counselors in matching customers to jobs that fit their goals and meet the needs of businesses.
- a. Create a process for VR staff to request case consultation or direct support from the team.
 - b. Share information with VR counselors and contracted providers about opportunities for career seekers.
 - c. Provide VR staff, customers and partners with training and support on employment readiness skills that are industry-specific.
 - d. Connect contracted employment service providers with businesses when an employment opportunity aligns with the customer's employment goal.

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