

**EVALUATION AND REPORT OF PROGRESS IN ACHIEVING
IDENTIFIED GOALS AND PRIORITIES AND
USE OF TITLE I FUNDS
FOR INNOVATION AND EXPANSION ACTIVITIES**

The Georgia Department of Labor (GDOL)/Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Program assesses the effectiveness of program services based on the annual results achieved in accordance with the federal evaluation standards and primary performance indicators established by the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA). The most recent complete federal fiscal year is FY 2006. Those results are presented below with Georgia VR exceeding five of the seven primary performance indicators.

Federal Program Evaluation Standards and Performance Indicators
--

Evaluation Standard 1: Employment Outcomes: A Designated State Unit (DSU) shall assist any eligible individual, including an individual with a significant disability, to obtain, maintain, or regain high-quality employment.

- **Performance Indicator 1.1:** The number of individuals exiting the VR Program who achieved an employment outcome during the current performance period compared to the number of individuals who exited the VR Program after achieving an employment outcome during the previous performance period.

Required Performance Level: Equal or exceed previous performance period.

Actual Performance: (did not pass with a decrease of 237 individuals served).	
○ # of Employment Outcomes for FY2005	4,828
○ # of Employment Outcomes for FY2006	4,591

Explanation for not meeting RSA Standards:

The VR Program had 237 less successful closures in 2006 than in 2005. The on-going large volume of vacancies in the VR Program, both in the vocational rehabilitation counselor job class as well as in other staff positions, have had an effect on overall case work and case production. A number of issues have led to continued staff vacancies including difficulty in recruiting qualified applicants, lower wages than the market average allowed for similar positions and slow hiring practices.

Additionally, this past year the VR Program focused on quality assurance activities including conducting complete caseload reviews across the state. The time consuming reviews, which were performed by the policy unit, regional management, counselors and other staff, emphasized quality case work and client satisfaction. Both the time involved in these reviews and follow-up case activities and the state's focus on quality over quantity outcomes contributed to the overall reduction in 26 closures.

Plan for Improvement:

VR Program leadership is addressing hiring barriers; filling vacancies and retaining well trained staff are VR Program priorities.

Both new and veteran staff will receive on-going training to enhance their abilities to provide quality services that lead to client employment. New resource books for all field positions have been updated and provided to assist managers in orienting and on-boarding new staff. Additionally, all new staff will attend case management training, and the VR Policy Unit will work closely with regional managers to ensure personnel are properly trained on all aspects of the VR process. Quarterly meetings between management teams and the Policy Unit will continue to occur to address regional and statewide training needs. The Policy Unit will also work with the regions in analyzing caseload data which will assist in identifying areas of concern with overall case management that may be adversely affecting 26 closures.

VR is providing job specific training for Rehabilitation Employment Specialists (RES's) who work directly with employers to develop relationships and place clients in appropriate jobs. This training will improve the skills of the RES's to develop more relationships with employers leading to enhanced employment opportunities and outcomes.

- **Performance Indicator 1.2:** Of all individuals who exit the VR Program after receiving services, the percentage that are determined to have achieved an employment outcome.

Required Performance Level: 55.8%

Actual Performance: 58.08% (exceeded)	
○ # of Successful Employment Outcomes	4,591
○ # of Total Employment Outcomes (statuses 26 + 28)	7,905

Explanation for meeting RSA standard:

During 2006, the VR Program required all new counselors and managers to attend statewide case management training which focused on managing cases from application to successful closure. The VR Policy Unit met quarterly with regional management to discuss case management issues. The Policy Unit also provided extensive training on needs assessment and other aspects of the VR process to assist staff with developing more effective work plans with clients and obtaining better case outcomes. This activity, plus discussing on-going case review findings and routinely staffing cases with issues of concern, assisted managers and teams to assist clients in achieving successful employment.

Georgia VR believes that this standard is the most valid measure of effectiveness. An increase in numbers served is not as meaningful as the percentage of clients who commit to and participate in a work plan and become successfully employed.

- **Performance Indicator 1.3:** Of all individuals determined to have achieved an employment outcome, the percentage who exits the VR program in competitive, self-, or Business Enterprise Program (BEP) employment with earnings equivalent to at least the minimum wage of \$5.15.

Required Performance Level: 72.6%

Actual Performance: 94.14% (exceeded)	
○ # of Employment Outcomes	4,591
○ # of Competitive Employment Outcomes	4,322

Explanation for meeting RSA Standards:

To successfully meet the employment needs of individuals with the most significant disabilities, VR maintains collaborative efforts and working relationships with a network of 36 local Community Rehabilitation Programs and 98 supported employment service providers. Each VR consumer engaged in supported employment programs are paid comparable wages for the same or similar work performed by non-disabled workers.

Through community work adjustment training with local businesses, VR consumers are given the opportunity to participate in paid work experiences that simulate competitive expectations. They learn vocational skills, positive work behaviors, and job seeking skills that are necessary to compete for integrated, competitive employment. Many of these consumers are paid at least minimum wage, and are ultimately hired by the sponsored business at competitive employment wages.

- **Performance Indicator 1.4:** Of all individuals who exit the VR program in competitive, self-, or BEP employment with earnings equivalent to at least the minimum wage, 62.4% are individuals with significant disabilities.

Required Performance: 62.4%

Actual Performance: 83.04% (exceeded)	
○ # with Competitive Employment Outcomes	4,322
○ # of Competitive Employment Outcomes for All Individuals with Significant Disabilities	3,589

Explanation for meeting RSA standards:

The VR Program operates under an Order of Selection system that ensures that individuals with the most significant disabilities are selected first for the provision of vocational rehabilitation services. The system is based on significance of disability. Individuals with significant disabilities are secondary priority, and all other eligible individuals in descending order of the severity of their disability are third priority.

- **Performance Indicator 1.5:** The average hourly earnings of all individuals who exit the VR program in competitive, self-, or BEP employment with earning levels

equivalent to at least the minimum wage as a ratio to the State's average hourly earnings for all individuals in the State who are employed (as derived from the Bureau of Labor Statistics report "State Average Annual Pay" for the most recent available year).

Required Performance: 0.52

Actual Performance: 0.464 (did not pass)
○ Average Hourly Wage for Individuals with Competitive Employment Outcomes- \$8.49
○ Average Hourly Wage for State- \$17.96

Explanation for not meeting RSA standard:

Many factors impede the potential for more success in the number of successful employment outcomes that consist of increased earning potential, health benefits, and career advancement. The presence of a significant disability can be a challenge when seeking competitive employment at or above state and national wage levels for VR consumers. The Longitudinal Study on Vocational Rehabilitation Services Programs showed that Georgia consumers are younger; lack a high school education, and have little or no work experience. Additionally, about a third of the VR caseloads are transition cases.

Because of the current economy, workers with more education and experience are accepting low-paying positions, which limit the job market options for workers with less education and less work experience. Georgia is a state with a lower minimum wage than many states, while it also has a larger number of jobs, particularly in the Atlanta area, that pay much higher wages. This adversely impacts the ability for the Georgia VR Program to meet the performance standard ratio. It is commendable that the average hourly wage of \$8.49 for VR clients with competitive employment outcomes is significantly higher than the minimum wage of \$5.15 per hour.

Plan for Improvement:

VR will continue to promote supported employment services and other supports to assist individuals with the most significant disabilities. VR will maintain collaborative relationships with corporations and government agencies in Georgia that promote equal employment opportunities for people with disabilities. Further, VR will implement Quality Assurance strategies to ensure proper coding of consumers employment wages.

- **Performance Indicator 1.6:** Of all individuals who exit the VR program in competitive, self-, or BEP employment with earnings equivalent to at least the minimum wage, the difference between the percentage who reported their own income as the largest single source of economic support at exit and the percentage who reported their own income as the largest single source of support at application.

Required Performance: 53.0

Actual Performance: 71.68 (exceeded)	
○ Primary Support is Own Income at Application	573
○ Primary Support is Own Income at Closure	3671

Explanation for meeting RSA Standards:

The BEP assists Georgians who are blind or visually impaired to become profitable independent business operators, specifically vending facilities, snack bars, and food service establishments. Referrals are accepted from the VR Program and individuals are trained to become licensed vendors and are subsequently placed into a business enterprise. The average gross salary per vendor is \$42,000 per year with average annual sales of approximately \$123,000.

Evaluation Standard 2: Equal Access to Services: This Standard measures whether individuals from minority backgrounds have been provided equal access to VR services at the same rate as non-minority individuals.

- **Performance Indicator 2.1:** 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.

Required Performance: .80

Actual Performance: 1.013 (exceeded)	
○ Non-Minorities Exiting the VR Program	5,842
○ Non-Minorities Who Received Services	3,763
○ Minorities Exiting the VR Program	6,346
○ Minorities Who Received Services	4,142

Explanation for meeting RSA Standards:

The VR Program continues to average statewide equal number of referrals on minorities and non-minorities. VR maintains and develops good relationships with referral sources and community partners to ensure that services are offered to all eligible individuals, both minorities and non-minorities, who qualify for services in an open priority category.

In the FY 07 Annual State Plan Updates submission, Attachment 4.11(c)(1) was labeled 4.12(c)(1) for the State Goals and Priorities, and Supported Employment goals and objectives were described in Attachment 4.12(c)(3). While FY 07 is not yet complete, the results to date are described below using FY 06 information where appropriate:

Defining Goal: Of the people with disabilities who are eligible for services and who commit to a work plan and participate in the VR program, a minimum of 55.8% will obtain and retain employment for at least 90 days.

Result: There were 4,591 VR clients closed as employed for at least 90 days during FY 06 for a success rate of 58.08%.

Goal #1: Provide quality services that assist people with significant disabilities to go to work while meeting or exceeding the Federal Program Evaluation Standards and Performance Indicators, with emphasis on the primary performance indicators.

Result: FY 06 results are discussed above in the Federal Program Evaluation Standards and Performance Indicators with Georgia exceeding five of seven primary performance indicators.

Goal #2: Improve services to more underserved clients in specific categories.

Result: The VR Program continued to enhance its partnership with Muskogee Vocational Rehabilitation by supporting a large contingency of managers and counselors at the CANAR conference held in Savannah. VR improved transition services by establishing a statewide agreement between VR and the Georgia Department of Education (GDOE) and increasing the number of transition counselors providing earlier VR intervention and collaboration. Self-employment and supported employment policies were totally revised. VR provided training to staff on all aspects of services, including working with individuals interested in pursuing their own businesses and serving those individuals who require extended support services to maintain employment.

Goal #3: Enhance relationships with potential employers and create relationships with at least 20 new employers each year.

Result: The VR regional staff developed relationships with over 300 new employers to date during FY 07.

Goal #4: Obtain customer feedback to improve services and customer satisfaction.

Result: The State Rehabilitation Council conducted an independent survey on client satisfaction with positive results concerning clients' interaction with VR. As a follow-up to this survey, each of the thirteen regions developed initiatives to further address customer satisfaction. One region contacted every consumer whose case was closed successfully to determine the level of support received from VR. Another initiative based on client requests, was to arrange employment tours so staff and consumers could learn more about local businesses. Customer feedback on policy has been welcomed. The Policy Unit ensures that policy is available for comment on-line and made policy revisions based on client input in FY 06. VR plans to include customer satisfaction as a part of its new quality assurance system and the VR Program will continue to review

other means to effectively gather information from clients and improve services.

Evaluation of Supported Employment Goals and Objectives:

Expand supported employment services and programs.

The program was expanded to include two new providers of supported employment services in rural areas of the state. There are, however, many barriers to expanding supported employment services. Among these are a lack of available funds to attract providers and the lack of qualified providers in predominantly rural areas. The VR program will continue to evaluate and review the supported employment program to expand the program especially in rural areas.

Identify and clearly define the supported employment services needed by the VR Program.

The VR Program conducted a year long review of the Supported Employment Program, which included, but was not limited to, survey data collection from VR staff, supported employment providers, and input from other state rehabilitation programs and agencies. As a result of this initiative, the supported employment program and policy were updated. The resulting new policies and procedures clearly reflect the emphasis on providing needed services in a timely and consistent manner

Revise the VR Program's supported employment agreements based on continuing clarifications of service delivery expectations.

VR edited the Collaborative Agreement for Supported Employment Providers to reflect the changes in policy and procedure. VR gave the Providers a description of terms and copies of new simplified forms for required monthly reporting and invoicing for services and provided training on the new forms and clarification of payment benchmarks.

Update supported employment materials for use by VR staff.

VR updated policies and procedures for Supported Employment based on the results of the in-depth review of the program and consolidated them for VR staff in a comprehensive training manual.

Train VR Program staff and supported employment providers on revised supported employment services process.

VR Unit Managers attended a half-day train the trainer event to prepare them to pass the training on to VR program staff including Counselors, Rehabilitation Assistants, Employment Specialist and Job Readiness Specialists. The training included a review of the revised policy requirements and the description of the benchmarks of the program. All new forms and the revised collaborative agreement were reviewed along with reporting requirements, invoicing and payment procedures. Each manager received a training manual of all the training materials to use in training their unit staff. Additional training was provided to newly hired staff in some regions.

Also, VR held three meetings with Community Rehabilitation Providers to review changes in the Supported Employment Program, clarify payment benchmarks, answer questions and provide training on use of the revised forms.

Innovation and Expansion Activities:

The VR Program supported the State Rehabilitation Council and its innovation and expansion activities with total FY 06 expenditures of \$116,141.