

**STATE'S USE OF TITLE I FUNDS FOR  
INNOVATION AND EXPANSION ACTIVITIES**  
**Assessment Results Addressed**

The Georgia Department of Labor (GDOL)/Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Program continues to look for innovative means of expanding vocational rehabilitation services to better meet the needs of VR customers, particularly customers with the most significant disabilities. VR has solicited feedback from customers, staff and strategic partners, including the State Rehabilitation Council and Statewide Independent Living Council, to identify opportunities for innovation and expansion of services through utilization of Title I funds.

These recommended activities focus directly on the service needs identified in *Attachment 4.12 (a) Comprehensive Statewide Assessment*. They include: outreach to minorities and underserved populations; improving transition services for youths with disabilities; assistive work technology; implementing the Workforce Investment Act; collaborating with community rehabilitation programs.

***Providing Outreach to Minorities and Underserved Populations***

The GDOL/VR Program continues to be committed to serving the needs of individuals with disabilities, including individuals from minority groups.

***Native Americans*** - The VR Program continues its cooperative relationship with the Muskogee Vocational Rehabilitation (MVR) Program and provides disability assessment, evaluation, and referral services to clients of the Lower Muskogee Creek Indian Tribe. During FY 2005, MVR maintained a 90% successful closure rate with 34 American Indian clients assisted in obtaining success through employment. Of those, seven had a vocational outcome of self-employment, and 27 went to work in the integrated labor market.

Strategies: To ensure increased collaboration, VR will continue to include MVR staff in appropriate agency training programs. VR staff will continue to participate in training to learn about the culture and lifestyles of Native Americans. Several VR employees are assigned to provide technical assistance and work with the MVR Program on various projects, including planning, preparation and participation in the Consortia of Native American Rehabilitation (CANAR) conferences.

***Asian and Hispanic Communities*** - Approximately 577,000 Hispanic or Latino and 239,000 Asian immigrants reside in Georgia. VR will continue to develop ways to improve services to this population.

Strategies: Considering the challenges of languages and cultural behaviors of the Asian and Hispanic communities, VR staff will continue to receive training on cross-cultural awareness and sensitivity to ensure that services are effective with various ethnic groups. VR staff attends the annual Latino Summit which addresses labor, legal, and advocacy issues facing members of the Latino community.

***African-Americans***- African Americans (Georgia's largest minority) make up 46% of the total of all individuals who receive vocational rehabilitation services. VR will continue to expand efforts to identify and serve African-Americans with the most significant disabilities.

Strategies: In an effort to create new inroads to the traditionally unserved and underserved populations, VR has launched a campaign to involve more of Georgia's Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) in producing minority Rehabilitation Counselors. To this end, we are working closely with the Whitney M. Young School of Social Work at Clark-Atlanta University (CAU/WMYJSSW) to establish a Memorandum of Understanding between them and the GDOL/Vocational Rehabilitation Program under which several cooperative initiatives will take place within the next two years.

One of the early projects will be sensitization workshops for faculty, staff, and students at CAU regarding the challenges and solutions to those challenges in the lives of individuals with disabilities. Our efforts will continue in identifying funding for a Rehabilitation Counseling curriculum, with special recruitment efforts among minority students, including students with disabilities in the hope that CAU/WMYJSSW will establish such a program in the future.

VR will also maintain relationships with community-based organizations to increase referrals and positive employment outcomes among minorities with significant disabilities.

### ***Improving Transition Services for Youths with Disabilities***

VR will continue to implement major initiatives to improve and expand transition services for youths with disabilities including:

- **Increase the number of public school systems participating in the DOE/VR collaborative arrangements.** Of the 181 public school systems in Georgia, 80 school systems participate in the DOE/VR cooperative arrangement.
- **Begin career exploration as early as age 14.** Georgia VR will continue to develop interagency partnerships and work with local school systems for expansion of transition services to students with disabilities as early as age 14.
- **Expand the High School/ High Tech Program so that eventually there will be at least one site in each Congressional District.** This community-based enrichment program is designed to develop career opportunities and provide activities that will interest students with disabilities to consider careers in science, technology, and computer and pursue higher education.

#### Strategies:

VR will continue collaborating with other agencies and build upon current relationships. The VR Program Statewide Transition Services Coordinator and members of the State Rehabilitation Council partnered with other key education officials to form the State

Interagency Transition Committee. The committee is composed of representatives from the Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities, Department of Education, Department of Labor, Department of Technical and Adult Education, Department of Community Health, Georgia State University, and various disability advocacy groups. The overall purpose of the group is to bring together all interested parties, statewide, to provide input and participate in all possible avenues of effecting the successful transition of youth with disabilities from school to adult activities. The committee has developed an Interagency State Plan for Transition Services for Students with Disabilities.

The VR Statewide Transition Services Coordinator will continue to share information gained through the Committee with VR Field Services, particularly VR Counselors for Transition and other counselors working with students.

The High School/High Tech program currently serves 503 students in 49 high schools. The VR High School/High Tech State Coordinator will continue to collaborate with the Statewide High School/High Tech Steering Committee, schools, community and business partners, and other interested parties to develop enrichment activities for students and design and implement plans for expansion.

### ***Increasing Funding Options for Assistive Technology***

The VR program received a grant of \$1,563,307 to establish Credit-Able, Georgia's Assistive Technology (AT) Alternative Loan Program. Credit-Able is a service that helps Georgians with disabilities gain access to affordable financing for assistive technology, home modifications and adapted vehicles. Credit-Able can even help employers with affordable loans to finance job accommodations for employees with disabilities, a benefit in particular to small business owners. Credit-Able brings together financial, assistive technology and disability expertise through the participation of credit unions and community-based organizations. The lead agency office for this program is the AT Unit, Tools for Life program.

The AT unit generated nearly \$1.7 million in private, state and federal funds for loan guarantees, and negotiated contracts with Tech-Able and the Getting Ahead Association to administer Credit-Able.

#### **Strategies:**

AT Unit staff will continue to identify potential grant opportunities and collaborate with department and community partners to apply for appropriate grants that will provide additional funding for assistive technology. AT unit staff will work with businesses to generate funding and donations of equipment as appropriate.

### ***Collaborating with Community Rehabilitation Programs (CRPs)***

The GDOL/VR Program considers job coaching, adjustment training and on-the-job training as important keys to the best opportunities for individuals with the most significant disabilities to secure and maintain gainful employment in integrated work settings within their community. These services are provided to enable individuals - particularly those with most significant disabilities - to learn job skills, obtain career outcomes, and maximize their hour and wage employment opportunities in the competitive labor force. VR will continue to provide these services as needed for all eligible individuals, through supported employment provisions of their individualized plans for employment. VR believes that the need for these types of training services cannot be met by VR alone, but requires collaborative efforts of a variety of community service providers.

VR attributes its success in part to long-standing relationships with a network of 22 private and nonprofit community rehabilitation facilities located throughout Georgia. These facilities provide a wide variety of supported employment and work readiness services to VR consumers and include vocational evaluation, vocational training, work adjustment training, and specialized services for persons who have visual or hearing impairments. These valued partnerships have helped make vocational rehabilitation a dynamic force in Georgia, capable of meeting the needs of its consumers.

Through the VR/CRP partnerships, VR has developed 306 service agreements and contracts to meet the needs of consumers in urban and rural counties. These include 251 agreements with non-CRPs and 55 agreements and contracts with CRPs. Of these agreements and contracts, 86 are for supported employment alone, 182 are service agreements, and 38 are contracts for VR related services.

Strategies:

VR will continue to collaborate with the CRP's and other community partners through annual meetings with the VR Leadership Team to plan and coordinate improved services. Also, the VR Regional Directors and Contract Specialists, and VR State Staff will meet periodically with individual community providers to develop common initiatives, strategies and solutions to mutual concerns that result in more people with significant disabilities going to work.

***Implementing the Workforce Investment Act***

VR will continue to build relationships with federal, state, and local government agencies by participating as a partner and a leader in the implementation of the Workforce Investment Act. Memoranda of Understanding have been developed with thirty-one One-Stop Service Centers to provide universal access to workforce development programs.

Strategies:

The VR Assistive Work Technology (AWT) staff will continue to work closely with One-Stops to provide a menu of assistive technology educational programs to help assure citizens with

disabilities are receiving appropriate accommodations at these facilities. AWT staff assisted all 53 GDOL Career Centers with installing and utilizing assistive technology devices to enhance services for Georgians with disabilities who may use their facilities. AWT staff will continue to be available to provide technical assistance and update these devices as needed.

VR staff will continue to serve on local Workforce Investment Boards, state Youth Councils and other committees to ensure adequate representation of the needs of individuals with disabilities. VR staff will continue to build collaborative partnerships to promote effective quality services for customers with disabilities.

### ***Funding Support of State Councils***

VR continues funding support for the State Rehabilitation Council. Expenditures include travel, advertising, supplies, printing, meeting room rental, per diem, interpreters, and facilitator services.

During FY 2005, VR provided funding support for the Statewide Independent Living Council. Allowable expenditures included travel, meeting room expenses, and interpreter fees.

#### **Strategies:**

VR staff will assist the State Councils in identifying and obtaining grants, such as the recent Microsoft grant, to meet the needs of unserved and underserved people with significant disabilities.