Division of Vocational Rehabilitation

Strategic Plan
FFY2013 – 2015
The Alaska Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) along with the State Vocational Rehabilitation Council (SVRC) continually assesses the vocational rehabilitation needs of Alaskans with disabilities and the success of DVR in meeting these needs. DVR's strategic plan is a major component in the on-going program evaluation and planning for the division in the implementation of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended and the associated regulations, 34 CFR Part 361.

**Mission**

The mission of the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation is to assist individuals with disabilities to obtain and maintain employment.

**Principles**

DVR believes in:

- The empowering value of employment in an individual's life.
- Honoring and respecting each individual’s strengths, skills, choices, abilities and cultural identity.
- Developing strong partnerships with Tribal Vocational Rehabilitation programs, schools, job-centers and centers for independent living.
- Delivering high quality vocational rehabilitation services.
- Employing and developing highly qualified and skilled rehabilitation staff.
- The principles of stewardship in the use of public resources.

**Background**

DVR is committed to the challenge of continuously improving both the organization systems and the delivery of services to those individuals receiving vocational rehabilitation services. DVR utilizes the strategic planning process and the resulting plan to put into action this concept of continuous improvement. DVR has an on-going three-year strategic planning process coinciding with the federally required triennial Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA). A new strategic plan is written every three years and is informed by the CSNA. In years two and three of the strategic planning cycle, the planning team convenes to review progress, amend the priorities and strategies as required and develop a detailed work plan for the upcoming year.

The strategic planning team is composed of the DVR management team and members of the SVRC including the chair and representatives from the Client Assistance Program; the American Indian Vocational Rehabilitation Services or as they are known in Alaska, Tribal Vocational Rehabilitation (TVR) programs; and the State Independent Living Council (SILC).

Based on the information collected from the CSNA, analysis of current Federal Standards and Indicators, and input from staff, the team identified service delivery, staff development, organizational efficiencies, and DVR as part of the statewide workforce and service delivery systems.
A summary of the goals and priorities:

- Delivery of high quality vocational rehabilitation services to all individuals with disabilities to include:
  - Transition age youth;
  - Individuals residing in rural Alaska;
  - Individuals who experience blindness or who have a visual impairment; and
  - Individuals from minority backgrounds.

- Staff development includes efforts in:
  - Succession planning;
  - Leadership development; and
  - Training opportunities to maintain professional certifications and for staff development.

- Organizational efficiencies and responsibilities:
  - Implement advancements in technology as resources allow;
  - Analysis of current business practices to improve service delivery system; and
  - Critical applications/systems are current.

- DVR is part of the statewide workforce and service delivery systems:
  - DVR collaborates with other agencies to improve the delivery of VR services; and
  - Represents the needs of people with disabilities.
**Goals, Priorities, Strategies and Performance Indicators**

**Goal 1 - Service Delivery:** DVR will deliver high quality vocational rehabilitation services to people with disabilities to assist them in obtaining employment consistent with their career goals.

This goal reflects DVR’s continued focus on improving the VR service delivery system with the priorities and strategies identified by the CSNA.

**Priority 1.1: Improve VR services to transition age youth**

**Strategies:**
- Explore the use of social media to connect youth to VR services
- Design web page with youth focus
- Analyze why and when youth are dropping out of the VR program
- Participate in Project Search, Tapestry and Integrated Employment Initiative (IEI) grants
- Through participation in the IEI grant, increase the employment hour of youth with Intellectual or Developmental Disabilities (IDD)
- Connect with the DOLWD Youth First grantees
- Research the use of Work Keys in school systems and use by employers
- Outreach to alternative schools and youth correctional facilities such as the McLaughlin Youth Center
- Expand the DVR transition work group to include Section 504 students
- Expand the DVR transition work group to include youth from the Juvenile Justice System
- Annually identify 504 coordinators and special education staff for each school
- Include guidance counselors and school nursing staff in DVR outreach activities
- Explore developing a transition planning guide for 504 students
- Maintain DVR presence at Special Education conferences and continue outreach to special education teachers
- Convene focus group made up of youth with an emphasis on communication and engagement strategies
- Develop a strategic plan for transition services
- Research RSA’s emerging practices for youth services
- Partner with the Division of Senior and Disability Services to improve the employment opportunities for youth with IDD or with a traumatic brain injury
- VR counselors attend rural transition camps as available
Performance Indicators:
- Number of youth applying for VR services increases 5% from the previous year
- Rehabilitation rate for youth meets or exceeds Federal Standard
- Fewer youth are exiting VR in eligible status

Priority 1.2: Improve VR services in rural Alaska.

Strategies:
- Continue DVR rural work group to identify realistic goals for rural services; develop strategies for meeting these goals; and convey this information to VR field staff
- Maintain strong relationships with TVR and Job Center partners
- Train Job Center staff in rural areas on disability related issues
- Work with partners to ensure rural Job Centers have AT resources
- Develop partnerships with other state agencies providing rural services in Alaska
- Identify locations and establish a travel schedule for rural areas other than the hub communities
- Develop CRPs in rural Alaska
- Establish qualifications for CRPs serving rural locations
- Review MOA with TVR Consortium annually
- Maximize the use of technology for the service delivery
- SVRC travels to a rural location once a year
- Ensure funds are available for VR counselors to travel to rural areas
- Make use of video conferencing available through the state library system (OWL)
- Continue to research uses of technology for long distance service delivery

Performance Indicators:
- The number of individuals served in rural locations
- CRPs are available in the five hub communities
- Counselors serving rural Alaska meet DVR’s standard for number of trips per year
- Rural consumers and Job Center staff remain satisfied with DVR services as demonstrated through surveys
Priority 1.3: Ensure on-going support for services to individuals who experience blindness or a visual impairment

Strategies:

- Continue to support the Alaska Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired (the Center) and other efforts within DVR to ensure our obligation as a combined agency are met
- Continue Division support for the Blind Services Team
- Maintain membership in Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the blind and Visually Impaired
- Remain active in the National Council of State Agencies for Blind

Performance Indicators:

- Number VR clients who experience blindness or a visual impairment remains constant
- Quality services remain available through the Center

Priority 1.4: Ensure in-house VR provided services are effective.

Strategies:

- Contract with the TACE to provide an overall analysis of statewide VR in-house services including the level of provision including statewide access, the overall effectiveness of the services and their place in the statewide WIA system
- Review current statewide standards and modify/develop as needed: standards for workshops, definitions of services and level of services including use compared to capacity
- Analyze the relationship of in-house VR services to case movement
- Develop mechanisms for matching evaluation to outcomes
- Ensure all staff have required knowledge for use of in-house services

Performance Indicators:

- Performance criteria established for staff conducting specialized services
- Consistent definitions used for in-house services are disseminated to staff through the Technical Manual and other means

Priority 1.5: DVR will meet or exceed state and federal performance standards

Strategies:

- Research practices of other public VR programs in timely IPE development
- Increase outreach to individuals with minority backgrounds
- Outreach to the Asian community through the Anchorage Asian Alaskan Cultural Center
• Chief of Field Services is liaison to the Alaska Vocational Rehabilitation Tribal Consortium

Performance Indicators:
• Increased orientations and information to Asian Alaskans about services for those with a disability
• Meet Federal Standards
• Meet State M&Ms

Priority 1.6: DVR will purchase effective services from qualified CRPs
Strategies:
• Develop a mechanism for matching CRP services to outcomes
• Share information with VR staff and CRPs for continued input and improvement
• Ensure an adequate number of CRPs and/or DVR staff who are trained to provide benefit analysis (BA) in order for SSA beneficiaries to understand the impact of work on their benefits
• Market CRP as a career to current Direct Service Professionals through presentations at Full Lives Conferences and collaboration with the Alaska Alliance for Direct Service Careers
• Provide staff training on CRP identified needs
• Work with rural VR counselors to identify potential rural CRPs
• DVR continues to evaluate CRPs for quality services and areas to improve services to DVR participants
• CRP Facilities Specialist facilitates discussion between CRPs on promising practices, issues, etc.

Performance Indicators:
• Results analyzed and use in a ‘report card’ type format for evaluating CRPs

Goal 2 – Staff Development: DVR will recruit, employ, retain and train the most qualified and highly skilled rehabilitation staff.
This goal reflects the value DVR places on well trained staff and the serious need for succession planning with the anticipated loss of key staff in the near future.

Priority 2.1: Recruit and retain qualified staff.
Strategies:
• Develop consistent statewide tools for evaluating employee performance, annual review, training needs and for promotional purposes
• Maximize training funds to support VR Counselors in graduate level rehabilitation programs
• Provide relevant training opportunities to staff such as Motivational Interviewing
• Internships
• Provide CRC credit for training
• Develop tools and strategies to consistently deliver “Customer Service Excellence” at all levels to both internal and external customers

Performance Indicators:
• Number of nationally certified counseling staff
• Performance evaluation tools developed
• Promotional criteria refined

Priority 2.2: Leadership development and succession planning

Strategies:
• Support staff participation in leadership training programs such as Emerging Leaders, the National Rehabilitation Leadership Institute, etc.
• Develop a succession plan
• Make staff aware of educational and long range employment opportunities within DVR

Performance Indicators:
• Number of DVR staff attending training

Goal 3 – DVR will maintain/improve the efficiency and effectiveness of organizational systems

This goal reflects DVR’s commitment to continual improvement and efficiency.

Priority 3.1: Revise the Case Review process

Strategies:
• Review purpose of the process
• Examine components (fiscal, CRP and case files) and specific needs
• Revise current process and tools, as appropriate
• Establish standards

Performance Indicators:
• Process refined and schedule for case review is on schedule
• Case review information is useful for program evaluation
Priority 3.2: Implement federally required RSA-911 changes to the AWARE case management system

Strategies:
- Staff actively participate in all AWARE user groups
- Thorough analysis of impact to field and accounting staff
- Thorough analysis of data changes as related to current data usage
- Training of field and other staff in timely manner

Performance Indicators:
- Required data is collected accurately
- Federal reports produced on time and accurately
- DVR services are not negatively impacted

Priority 3.3: Implement the new state accounting system (IRIS)

Strategies:
- Coordinate with Alliance Enterprises and Alaska Department of Administration to adapt current accounting interface
- Explore opportunities for collaboration between state agencies

Performance Indicators:
- Essential federal reporting is available and accurate
- Payments to vendors are timely
- AWARE interface works

Priority 3.4: DVR will use technology to deliver high quality services to all customers including VR program participants and vendors

Strategies:
- DVR staff will be trained on the technological tools available such as features of VOIP, video/captioning phone systems, AWARE, Visual Interpretation System (VIS) and report formats, DVR intranet, DVR webpage, State of Alaska website employee resources, Microsoft Lync, iPad applications, and training platforms
- Continually evaluate emerging technologies

Performance Indicators:
- Training identified or developed for the technology appropriate to the user
- Training delivered to all appropriate staff
Goal 4 – DVR will provide leadership in the workforce system
This goal is intended to strengthen our connection to other programs that serve individuals with disabilities.

Priority 4.1: DVR will maintain a leadership role in expanding vocational opportunities for Alaskans with disabilities

Strategies:

- Establish criteria for support and participation in new initiatives
- Develop procedures for referring individuals exiting DVR employed who are SSA Ticket to Work (TTW) holders to Employment Networks (EN) using the Partnership Plus model. (Job Center ENs and others as they become available)
- Ensure Job Center staff are regularly trained or made aware of DVR and VR services.
- DVR leadership team and managers continue to identify functional Job Center issues that require on-going work at all levels of the division including the Job Center Integration Committee (JCIC) and the local Job Center management teams.
- Work with Job Centers to obtain information on individuals who self-identify as having a disability
- Support the National Governor’s Association Chair initiative; “A Better Bottom Line: Employing People with Disabilities”
- Partner with other service providers to maximize resources and coordinate services for individuals who are in need of long term supported employment services
- Support the Employment First Initiative
- Support efforts to establish vocational services from community behavioral health providers
- Continue Chief of Rehabilitation Services participation in the Vets Success meetings
- Continue support for DVR business point of contact to the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR) National Employment Team (the Net)
- Examine the role of DVR staff on boards, councils, and advisory groups
- Seek membership or stronger representation on the Alaska Workforce Investment board
- Support the State as a Model Employer (SAME) initiative and serve on the steering committee
- Support the Integrated Employment Initiative and serve on the advisory board
- Support current Project Search sites and serve on the steering committee
- Support the Tapestry project and serve on the advisory board
- Serve on the Governor’s Council on Disabilities and Special Education
- Serve on the Alaska Mental Health board
- Serve on the Statewide Independent Living Council
- Serve on the Community and Public Transportation Advisory board
- Serve on the Alaska Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired board

Performance Indicators
- Documentation of information provided by DVR staff
- DVR is appropriately represented on the Alaska Workforce Investment Board (AWIB) in alignment with federal statutes
- Statewide and local Job Center MOUs are in place in accordance with federal statutes
- Criteria process for DVR involvement in outside initiatives is established
- Number of TTW holders obtaining job retention services from ENs
- Training of Job Center staff on DVR and VR services