

(d) Evaluation and Reports of Progress: VR and Supported Employment Goals. For the most recently completed program year, provide an evaluation and report of progress for the goals or priorities, including progress on the strategies under each goal or priority, applicable to that program year. Sections 101(a)(15) and 101(a)(23) of the Rehabilitation Act require VR agencies to describe—

(1) Progress in achieving the goals and priorities identified for the VR and Supported Employment Programs;

Goal 1: Implement strategies to increase awareness and access to services/resources.

Strategy 1.1. Promote an Employment First philosophy that WORK is the first and preferred option for all individuals, including youth.

During Program Year 2024, the section 511 subminimum wage reviews were conducted. This was a decrease from 916 the original number of people who were working subminimum wage in Program Year 2017. The Division also provided training to providers and VR Counselors on Customized Employment for individuals with the most significant disabilities. The Division cooperated with the Developmental Disabilities Division on defining and implementing individual supported employment and reimbursement rates for individual placements.

Strategy 1.2. Expand efforts to ensure the state's workforce represents the most advanced, diverse, skilled, and future ready workers.

During Program Year 2024, The Division funded numerous services for individuals with disabilities to be employed in more advanced skilled employment:

- 294 individuals in post-secondary training programs.
- 8 individuals utilized on-line training programs such as Learn Key or Penn Foster training
- The Division also partners with the South Dakota Apprenticeship Program.

Strategy 1.3. Generate concentrated efforts to increase South Dakotan's knowledge and understanding of VR services and ensure that individuals with disabilities can access services through consumer-friendly processes.

The Division redesigned our website to be more accessible and more user friendly for the public. VR Counselors conduct outreach activities annually to include contacting school special education staff and counselors. The Division also developed new brochures and fliers to be shared with the public and potential VR clients.

Strategy 1.4. Increase dissemination of information with potential clients about how to access or connect with VR services (i.e., website, other VR related information).

The Division has created an on-line referral and on-line application system. Approximately 265 individuals have applied online during Program Year 2024. Approximately 120 individuals were referred online during Program Year 2024.

The Division's website was redesigned with a focus on accessibility and readability. In addition, a provider was obtained to assist with creating new hardcopy outreach materials and social media outreach.

The Division has contracted with The Sampson House to conduct a market campaign. This includes developing/publishing success stories of past Vocational Rehabilitation clients and social media blasts to provide information on Vocational Rehabilitation. During 4th quarter of Program Year 2024, Facebook Ads had 2,678 link clicks, 1,484 Stack Adapt clicks and Google ads had 937 clicks.

Strategy 1.5. Provide VR related materials and/or information in other languages and make it available as needs are identified.

The DRS VR website is fully accessible; in addition, the public can contact DRS staff to obtain materials in any needed format or language. Forms such as applications, Individual Plans for Employment and other documents are printed in alternate language. The Division purchased Instant Language Assistant for 3 offices to provide communication between VR staff and individuals applying/receiving services. The Division also utilizes Language Line service that translate communication and documents.

Strategy 1.6. Explore and partner with organizations/agencies to broaden outreach efforts to reach underserved minority groups, i.e., Oyate' Circle, Multi-Cultural Center.

The Division currently participates in the Connecting Cultures in Yankton. The Division assigns a VR Counselor to each reservation and work directly with the six Tribal Vocational Rehabilitation Programs. The Division has partnered with Disability Rights South Dakota to two informational events on Native American Reservations. (The Division funded and assisted in 5 summer camps on Native American Reservations to promote Pre-ETS.) In previous years, the Division has held a booth and the Lakota National Invitation. The Aberdeen Office participates with the homeless coalition.

Goal 2: Identify and support students and youth with disabilities with making informed choices for successful daily living and participation in education/training leading to career pathways through the provision of individualized services.

Strategy 2.1. Continue to invest resources in developing school to work programs, i.e., Project Skills, Project SEARCH, Pre ETS summer camps; and other trainings (e.g., self-advocacy, self-determination, rights/responsibilities), and promote similar activities i.e., Parent Connection's "Shift Training".

In Program Year 2024, the Division funded 426 students in Project Skills, 5 Project SEARCH sites, and 17 Pre ETS summer camps. In addition, VR Counselors would host a variety of Pre ETS employability classes in high schools. Division staff participated in other trainings such as Parent Connection's "Parent University".

Strategy 2.2. Collaborate with employers, CILs, and workforce development system partners to increase opportunities for youth with disabilities to participate in paid work-based learning

experiences, explore career options, and develop the soft skills/professional skills necessary for lifelong employment success.

During Program Year 2024, there were five-hundred-eighty-six (586) employers that provided work placements for Project Skills experiences. DRS sponsored six (6) 'Let's Talk Work' events across the state. These events help students with disabilities build the skills needed for successful employment, while also giving them the opportunity to hear directly from employers about the skills they value in the workplace.

Strategy 2.3. Coordinate vocational rehabilitation services for students and youth with disabilities who are attending post-secondary programs.

DRS sponsors an annual meeting/training for the South Dakota post-secondary disability coordinators. This training promotes the coordination of services for individuals with disabilities. On May 8-9, 2024, twenty people attended and nine of which were from vocational institutes and college universities. The annual event was held in-person in Chamberlain, SD and had a virtual option as well. The meeting featured an online presenter, Jane Jarrow, to speak about the new protocols on the required documentation for Emotion Support Animals (ESA) on campuses since the number of these requests have increased significantly over the recent years. The format of the meeting also allows Disability Coordinators to discuss situations and brainstorm potential solutions amongst their peers. DRS and SBVI staff also had the opportunity to discuss making referrals to VR services, explained the VR eligibility process, and potential services available to post-secondary students with disabilities pending their individual needs and employment goals.

During the 2023–2024 school year, DRS partnered with post-secondary institutions across the state to host four Catch the Wave events. These one-day workshops are designed for high school students planning to pursue post-secondary education. Attendance numbers included a total of one-hundred-sixty-two (462) individuals: Mitchell Technical College forty-nine (49), Southeastern Technical College two-hundred-twenty-three (223), Northern State University eighty-eight (88), and Black Hills State University one-hundred-two (102).

DRS collaborated with post-secondary institutes in the state to host six “Catch the Wave” events. These are one-day workshops intended for high school students planning to attend post-secondary educational opportunities. Attendance numbers included a total of 532 individuals: Mitchell Technical College – eighty-two (82), South Dakota School of Mines & Technology - one hundred and one (101), University of South Dakota – one hundred thirty-five (135), Lake Area Technical College – sixty-eight (68), Todd County High School – eighty-nine (89), and Northern State University – fifty-seven (57).

DRS works closely with the Dakota Wesleyan University/Lifequest program in Mitchell. This program provides students with disabilities employment skills classes while also providing a post-secondary opportunity. There were six (6) students who were supported by VR during the school year 2023-2024.

During the 2023–2024 school year, DRS supported eleven (11) clients participating in Augie Access at Augustana University. Augie Access is a comprehensive transition and postsecondary program for

young adults and students with intellectual and developmental disabilities, designed to enhance career employment, social, academic, and independent living outcomes.

DRS also supported ten (10) students in the STRIVE program during the 2023–2024 school year. STRIVE, offered through Teachwell Solutions in coordination with Southeastern Technical College, allows students to take dual-credit courses that count toward both their high school diploma and an associate degree once they officially enroll in college.

Strategy 2.4. Increase and strengthen transition services for eligible students and other youth with disabilities who are exploring their employment future; with an emphasis on those from underserved minorities i.e., Native American, Black/African American, Latino/Hispanic, Asian.

The Division annually sponsors the Youth Leadership Forum (YLF), a five-day event held June 2–6, 2024, on a college campus. YLF provides a unique learning opportunity for forty-two (42) high school students with disabilities, including those from ethnic and racial minority groups. The program helps students explore personal leadership, plan for future careers, develop self-advocacy skills, and expand their knowledge of the services and supports available during the transition from high school to adulthood.

DRS staff present at school transition classes, high school classes, summer Pre-ETS camps, and Independent Living training sessions. These presentations covered information about VR services, employment skills, post-secondary opportunities, and job search supports.

VR Counselors regularly attend Individual Education Plan (IEP) meetings and meet with students at the school and/or in their office to discuss post-secondary goals and training needs. Services are set up on an individualized basis for transition students that we are working with. Approximately 33% of individuals applying for VR services are students with disabilities who are on an IEP. Another 2% are students with disabilities not on an IEP .

VR Counselors utilize the Pathful Explore online platform along with other interest inventories to help students with disabilities identify their interests, values, and aptitudes for certain employment considerations. VR Counselors can purchase eTrac accounts for students with disabilities. eTrac is an online curriculum that is designed to teach job search skills to people struggling to overcome barriers to employment. DRS has purchased a comprehensive curriculum for district offices to use with students in completing the five required Pre-ETS. VR Counselors use these workbooks when delivering lessons to students in high school classrooms.

DRS provides a work experience program, Project Skills, for students with disabilities to try various employment options. A student can receive up to 250 hours of paid work experience during a school year and participate in multiple experiences while receiving IEP services through their school district. During Federal Fiscal Year 2024, 426 students with disabilities participated in the Project Skills program. DRS has written agreements with one-hundred-fifty (150) school districts and educational cooperatives to provide Project Skills. These paid work experiences not only teach students with disabilities the skills needed to be successful employees but also allow them to try a variety of employment experiences to determine what type of career they want to pursue.

DRS sponsors 5 Project Search sites in South Dakota where 26 students participate during Program Year 2024. The fifth site started August 2024 in Yankton, SD.

During the 2024 summer, DRS offered funding for the Pre-ETS Initiative offering training opportunities for high school students with disabilities focusing on training in workplace readiness training to develop social skills and independent living, instruction in self-advocacy, and information about VR services and other programs available to assist individuals with disabilities. A total of nine (9) entities were involved in this. Altogether, a total of one-hundred-twenty-five (125) participants or students were involved in the trainings, eighty-seven (87) are currently receiving VR services, and thirty-eight (38) are potentially eligible for VR services.

Strategy 2.5. Conduct outreach activities to better identify and serve underserved youth with disabilities, i.e., youth home schooled, in foster care, served through alternative educational

VR counselors partner with Juvenile Detention Centers throughout South Dakota to provide Pre-Employment Transition Services to youth as they transition back to their home school districts. In Program Year 2024, five percent (5%) of the youth served were referred by at-risk agencies.

Strategy 2.6. Conduct outreach activities for teachers, students with disabilities, and their family members to provide information on VR services and how to access the VR program.

VR Counselors attend Parent-Teacher conferences and other open house events at schools to meet with students and parents regarding available VR services. VR also attends the annual Project SEARCH Open House to provide information on VR Services for students participating in the program. DRS presented at the Lighting the Way Conference at Augustana University in Sioux Falls to discuss VR services for youth on the Autism Spectrum. DRS presented at the Special Education Conference, TSLP Summer Institute, and the Adult Education Conferences annually. VR counselors regularly attend the monthly TSLP Transition Round-Up Zoom meeting where a variety of topics are discussed. Also attending are Special Education teachers and directors, as well as staff from adult service agencies.

DRS sponsors at least twenty-eight (28) transition events (Catch the Wave, Let's Talk Work, Regional Forums) annually through the Transition Services Liaison Project. During these events, DRS provides teachers, students, and family members with information on VR services. DRS staff have been creating monthly transition newsletters to mail to students and their families to increase outreach. Every month is a different topic that shares resources and supports available to South Dakota students with disabilities. Topics include job interview tips, ways to build your resume, disability disclosure, independent living, self-advocacy, and more. These newsletters are also available on the DRS transition resource website and highlight the benefits of working with a VR counselor.

DRS staff implemented an outreach initiative to connect with Special Education Teachers, Directors, and 504 Coordinators within school districts. At the beginning of each school year, DRS staff meet with these educators to provide information about Vocational Rehabilitation Services.

DRS staff have been creating monthly transition newsletters to mail to students and their families to increase outreach. Every month is a different topic that shares resources and supports available to South Dakota students with disabilities. Topics include job interview tips, ways to build your resume,

disability disclosure, independent living, self-advocacy, and more. These newsletters are also available on the TSLP website and highlight the benefits of working with a VR counselor.

DRS staff created a Transition Timeline which provides suggested transition activities and resources based on grade/age level. The Transition Timeline has been distributed by VR counselors and TSLP staff to Special Education teachers/directors and other transition professionals to share with students with disabilities and their families to help them prepare for a successful transition from high school to adulthood. A flyer was also created to distribute to students once they turn 18. This flyer provides information on registering to vote, the importance of obtaining an official state identification card, selective service registration, and supported decision-making resources.

Goal 3: Provide services and supports to assist individuals with disabilities with making informed choices regarding employment, money management, and personal and work relationships, to live as independently as possible.

Strategy 3.1. Provide training on strategies and tools for VR Counselors to assist clients in reaching their employment goal.

The Division has provided each VR Counselor a cell phone with texting ability and a Zoom account as tools to reach and engage individuals applying or are current VR clients. During Program Year 2024, 17,091 texts were sent to applicants/clients

The Division is using Semi-Autonomous Rehabilitation Assistant (SARA). Sara is a client communication software that helps counselors and clients stay in contact. SARA will allow counselors to communicate with clients via email and text messaging- simply respond to whichever is most convenient. SARA will also simplify the process of submitting documentation and scheduling appointments and will send personalized reminders to keep clients progressing toward their goals! During Program Year 2024, 30,832 SARA notes were sent to applicants/clients.

DRS encourages the professional development of its VR Counselors through the participation of a variety of training and conferences. Participating in trainings that cover a wide range of topics such as transition services, counseling skills and techniques, specific disabilities, and ethics benefits DRS clients by having a VR Counselor with a diverse foundation of knowledge. From July 2022 – June 2023, DRS staff collectively participated in over 900 trainings.

Strategy 3.2. Promote the utilization of counseling strategies and tools to access the client's critical strengths and barriers in order to enhance their personal life status and employment skills.

DRS has provided extensive Motivational Interviewing (MI) training for VR Counselors to provide them with the skills to assess their clients. MI is discussed during regular staff meetings to ensure that VR Counselors are utilizing the tools and assessing motivation during all phases of the VR process. Dr. Trevor manthy will be providing MI training at the 2025 Fall Conference.

The Division contracted with World of Work, Inc. to provide VR Counselors training on the World of Work Inventory (WOWI). WOWI is a scientifically developed, objective assessment that incorporates three dimension to uncover the optimal career matches. In Program Year 2025, DRS offered a beginners training opportunity for newer VR Counselor, which 14 attended. There will be a

more advanced level training offered to seasoned VR Counselors in Program Year 2026, which 11 will be attending.

Strategy 3.3. Explore and utilize different strategies and/or technology in order to increase the amount of time VR counselors engage with clients, especially those with significant disabilities, to improve outcomes impacted by guidance and counseling.

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Strategy 3.4. Identify and assist individuals with disabilities looking for advancement, career change, enhanced earnings to increase client choice and success rate of obtaining a better employment pathway.

The Division assisted 4764 individuals with disabilities during Program Year 2024 in receiving VR services. 629 of these individuals were successfully employed. During Program Year 2025, individuals applying for services had an average annual earnings of \$7,250 and when their VR case was closed they had an annual earnings of \$21,537. The Division developed new fliers to promote career advancement and career change as an employment outcome.

Strategy 3.5. Provide training to staff to improve communication and provide services in a culturally responsive manner.

For Program Year 2024, DRS provided trainings to Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) staff on topics such as best practices for working with school districts and SARA (client communication software designed to improve communication between VR counselors and clients). VR staff can participate in communication focused trainings that's available on YesLMS (in-house learning management system). Also, there is a SARA workgroup, comprised of a VR program specialist and counselors that's focused on enhancing the use of SARA within DRS.

Strategy 3.6. Continue efforts to increase and expand provider supports for employment and life skills development.

DRS has contracted with Griffin and Hammis Associates to provide a variety of training for providers including Customized Employment Training, preparation for the CESP Certification exam, training for agency leadership, and monthly trainings and community of practice meetings geared toward employment service providers to help them enhance their knowledge and skills.

Strategy 3.7. Increase awareness, supports, and the utilization of self-employment as an outcome for VR clients.

DRS has developed a policy on self-employment and has provided training for VR Counselors to promote the utilization of self-employment. This training promoted ways to best assist VR clients who have a goal of operating a business. This has been promoted further in rural areas and discussions on identifying various generational things (including on the reservations) that may be happening where the next generation could take over and continue to provide a meaningful service to the community. DRS has been successful in working with the Oglala Sioux Tribal VR Program in jointly funding several self-employment cases on the Pine Ridge Reservation

A workgroup was created to update the program's policy and procedures regarding self-employment. The goals of the changes were to increase the support VR could provide, clarify the process for staff and clients, and encourage a process that included presumed competence and minimized the use of screening out clients from self-employment services.

Goal 4: Facilitate the delivery of VR services to enhance earnings, employee benefits, retention, and career advancement for clients.

Strategy 4.1. Improve client engagement i.e., rapid engagement, timeliness of eligibility decisions, IPE development, need for other services.

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All VR Counselors have an assigned work cell phone to utilize texting options to applicants/clients. During Program Year 2024, 17,091 text messages were sent to applicants/clients.

The Rehabilitation Services Administrations compiles a quarterly report on timeliness of eligibility and Individual Plans for Employment (IPE). During Program Year 2024 DRS was 98.9% in meeting the eligibility timeline requirement. During Program Year 2024 DRS was 98.7% in meeting the IPE timeline requirement.

Strategy 4.2. Reduce the administrative burden to allow meaningful guidance and counseling to engage clients to improve quality of employment outcomes, retention, and advancement.

The Division changed its policy on not needing financial needs for job search support services where were typically minimal cost but extensive staff time. The Division utilizes South Dakota and all other state wage data incorporated into the VR FACES case management system. This process saves staff time in obtaining this data in other more time consuming methods.

Strategy 4.3. Increase knowledge base and understanding of VR, Mental Health, CRP's, Native American VR Programs to enhance service delivery for mutually served individuals.

VR Counselors actively work with Tribal VR programs in their area and have regular schedules at the Tribal VR offices. Through these connections, VR Counselors maintain active and positive relationships within those communities. DRS continues to meet at least annually with all five Tribal VR Programs. DRS VR Counselors and State Office staff participate in meetings on the Native American Reservations with individual Tribal VR Programs and events such as Catch the Wave, regional forums, or public listening sessions. Each Tribal VR program has a VR Counselor assigned to their program.

DRS staff participated in the First Responders Disability Awareness Training for Tribal Nations Niagara University and Oyate Circle (the training was the first of its kind in the nation) in Rapid City. DRS staff participated in Adventure for Leadership and Fulfilment with Access (ALFA) Camp at Lakota Tech High School on Pine Ridge.

DRS contracted with the Oyate Circle at the Center for Disabilities to provide disability awareness training on the Reservations. All the Division staff attended this training. DRS assisted the Independent Living system in receiving funding for independent living services on the 9 reservations.

VR Counselors have presented at Oglala Lakota College and at Little Wound High School Transition Forum. The Division has funded Oyate Circle's summer Pre-ETS called ALFA Camp where students with disabilities participated in Pre-Employment Training Services.

The Division has been having booths and presenting at conferences involving the Mental Health system, Community Rehabilitation Programs and Native American Programs. This the October 2025 annual Fall Conference will include a presentation on the public Mental Health System.

Strategy 4.4. Provide cultural humility/intelligence training for VR staff and partners to improve provision of culturally responsive services.

DRS contracts with YesLMS to offer live and on-demand training opportunities for VR staff. YesLMS is a cloud-based learning management system. VR staff can complete trainings on YesLMS on various cultural competency topics such as Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility; Intersectionality and Disability: A Culturally Responsive Approach; Disability Etiquette and Language; and Intersecting Identities, Power, Privilege, and Implications for VR.

Strategy 4.5. Increase awareness and referrals to Benefits Specialists and services for VR clients.

The SD Benefits Specialist Network (funded by DRS) provides counseling and advisement services to beneficiaries of SSI and SSDI who are currently working or seeking employment. Benefits Specialists answer questions about how work will impact SSI, SSDI, Medicaid, Medicare, and other public benefits. Benefits Specialists also provide information about how work incentives can help beneficiaries increase their earnings. During Program Year 2024, 615 VR current and past clients received services from a Benefits Specialist. The Benefits Specialist Network also provided a series of training sessions in seven different communities. This training is for VR Counselors, Community Support Provider staff, Mental Health Center staff, and state agency staff. Training objectives include understanding the Social Security Administration's eligibility process; understanding how income from employment impacts eligibility for benefits; identifying and directing individuals to programs providing support; recognizing key SSA work incentives; and dispelling myths and encouraging people with disabilities to work. There were 102 individuals who attended these training sessions.

Strategy 4.6. Increase work experience opportunities for adults with disabilities with a focus on individuals with mental illness and other underserved populations, including those living in very rural areas.

During Program Year 2024, the Division paid \$122,146.52 (7516.71 hours at \$16.25/ hour for wages, benefits, and admin costs for paid work experiences for adults with disabilities. This program is very beneficial for individuals with mental illness and other underserved populations

Strategy 4.7. Continue with the development and utilization of vocational skills training for individuals with disabilities.

The Division continues to purchase On the Job Training to Employers for individuals to develop specific employment job skills. The Division also purchases skill training from Goodwill Industries, Rehabilitation Center, Technical Schools and other skills training program such as Great Plains Welding and AE Tech. In Program Year 2024, the Division paid \$18,502 for On the Job Training and \$135,721 for Occupational/Vocational Skills training.

Goal 5: Facilitate the development of a strong statewide community partnering with workforce systems, businesses, State Government, tribal systems, schools, service providers and service organizations to enhance services to individuals with disabilities eligible for services.

Strategy 5.1. Continue work to improve the structure, accessibility, and administration of workforce delivery systems across the state to align programs and services in an accessible, seamless, and integrated manner.

In 2014, DRS, established a single point-of-contact (business specialist) at the state level to establish and maintain partnerships with businesses by offering customized assistance or support for recruiting, hiring, and retaining people with disabilities. This single point of contact continues for DRS.

DRS contracts with nonprofit organizations in the state to provide local assistance, support, and training to businesses (a form of a business-led model) in their local communities, and each of them employs a full-time executive director. The entities are Employment Disability Resources (formerly known as Sioux Falls Business Resource Network and the Workplace Disability Network of the Black Hills (formerly known as the Workforce Diversity Network of the Black Hills)).

DRS has office memberships for personnel to participate in local Human Resources groups and the Chamber of Commerce as another strategy for outreach and partnership opportunities with businesses. Since January 2017, the DRS business specialist has been the Workforce Readiness Director (a volunteer role) on South Dakota's State SHRM Council which she will term off in December 2023. The Aberdeen district supervisor is the diversity chair for the local Society of Human Resource Managers chapter in Aberdeen. The Yankton district supervisor is the diversity chair for the local Society of Human Resource Managers chapter in Yankton.

DRS and the Board of Vocational Rehabilitation sponsor at least 12 training annual events for National Disability Employment Awareness Month. The events are promoted to individual businesses and business organizations, which also promote the hiring and retention of people with disabilities.

DRS also conducts outreach to businesses by attending business-related events held throughout the state. For example, had a booth during the State Society of Human Resource Management Annual Conference that was held May 3-5, 2023.

DRS conducts trainings for businesses to provide them with information and resources to promote employment opportunities for people with disabilities. DRS provides training on topics such as disability etiquette/awareness, WINDMILLS training, basics of mental health disabilities, and other customized training topics. Trainings are provided at no cost to businesses. DRS is also tracking the number of services and supports being provided to employers. During Program Year 2022, DRS provided services and support to 483 South Dakota employers.

Strategy 5.2. Ensure employers/businesses have access to workers and the technical assistance needed to employ individuals with disabilities; and to increase their understanding of how to attract and retain qualified individuals with disabilities as part of their workforce.

DRS has a designated Business Specialist that serves as a state-wide point-of-contact for employers to contact to help as they're recruiting, hiring, or retaining individuals with disabilities. DRS has developed various resources to provide employers such as an overview of VR services available for them, explanation of the Employment Skills Program (work experience), explanation of Job Coaching services and how it works, etc. the DRS Business Specialist also works with VR Counselors to be of support to them connecting with employers in their local communities.

Strategy 5.3. Expand services to rural and remote areas to provide employment related services, i.e., job development, job coaching, follow along services.

DRS has developed contacts in rural communities where some have evolved into regular interagency meetings in rural communities.

DRS staff work closely with the Oyate Circle at the Center for Disabilities in providing disability awareness training on the reservations. DRS staff also participate in the Department of Labor Youth Council which establishes relationships in rural areas to promote education and employment.

DRS has contracted with a provider four full time employment specialist coordinators officed in DRS locations. These employment specialist coordinators travel to rural areas to provide job placement, job coaching and follow along services especially where other providers are not located or available. As of the end of Program Year 2024, they have worked with a total of 293 VR clients.

Strategy 5.4. Identify and work with partners to develop and expand the use of work experience, internships, apprenticeships, and other job entry possibilities at various levels, i.e., local business, county, state, and federal positions.

DRS utilizes a work experience program titled “Employment Skills” where adults or students who are not on an Individual Education Plan can receive up to 250 hours of paid work experience. In Program Year 2024, 147 individuals participated in this program.

DRS also coordinates with DLR work experience programs to provide job coaching and other support services to individuals in need of additional services for successful employment beyond those that can be provided through the DLR program. This partnership gives consumers the “best of both worlds” from each program expanding their success in these kinds of experiences.

51% of the participants are age 17-25

19% of the participants are age 26-35

17% of the participants are age 36-45

10% of the participants are age 46-55

7% of the participants are age 55-65

1% of the participants are over the age of 65

Strategy 5.5. Maintain and expand the utilization of extended services for assuring successful employment for supported employment clients.

DRS local offices work closely with Community Support Providers to strengthen employment outcomes to include job coaching and related services. This partnership also includes the development of plans for sustaining employment for individuals who are Social Security recipients.

DRS participates in the State Employment Leadership Network (SELN) with the Division of Developmental Disabilities. This initiative includes redefining policies and services to support extended employment services for people with significant disabilities.

DRS has funded establishment grants to expand the service capacity of service providers with 18 agencies to add 21 Employment Specialists/Job Coaches available to provide services for individuals with the most significant disabilities.

DRS has funded grants to Community Support Providers to develop their expertise in Customized Employment. DRS has completed contracts with about half of CSP’s in South Dakota to cover training

expenses for providers interested in learning about and providing Customized Employment Services in South Dakota. This will allow providers to provide a more individualized service appropriate for individuals with more significant needs that have not been well-served by traditional services.

DRS created the Transition to Extended Service incentive a one-time incentive to long-term service providers to help ensure that individual client supports are discussed and added to the person's support plan as they transition from VR supports to extended services through their provider.

Strategy 5.6. Continue funding and support for the State Rehabilitation Council and the Statewide Independent Living Council. The innovation and expansion activities from these council's fund support staff for the councils, National Disability Employment Awareness Month, Governor's awards, and other activities related to the goals/strategies.

(2) Performance on the performance accountability indicators under section 116 of WIOA for the most recently completed program year, reflecting actual and negotiated levels of performance. Explain any discrepancies in the actual and negotiated levels; and

There are six primary indicators of performance under section 116 of WIOA:

1. **Employment Rate – 2nd Quarter After Exit:** The percentage of participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the second quarter after exit from the program (for title I Youth, the indicator is the percentage of participants in education or training activities, or in unsubsidized employment during the second quarter after exit);
 - a. 60.9% of participants were in unsubsidized employment during the second quarter after exit from the program.
2. **Employment Rate – 4th Quarter After Exit:** The percentage of participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the fourth quarter after exit from the program (for title I Youth, the indicator is the percentage of participants in education or training activities, or in unsubsidized employment during the fourth quarter after exit);
 - a. 54.5% of participants were in unsubsidized employment during the fourth quarter after exit from the program.
3. **Median Earnings – 2nd Quarter After Exit:** The median earnings of participants who were in unsubsidized employment during the second quarter after exit from the program;
 - a. For program year 24, the median earnings of participants in unsubsidized employment during the second quarter after exit was \$3,579.
4. **Credential Attainment:** The percentage of those participants enrolled in an education or training program (excluding those in on-the-job training (OJT) and customized training) who attain a recognized postsecondary credential or a secondary school diploma, or its recognized equivalent, during participation in or within one year after exit from the program. A participant who has attained a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent is included in the percentage of participants who have attained a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent only if the participant also is employed or is enrolled in an education or training

program leading to a recognized postsecondary credential within one year after exit from the program;

- a. In program year 2024, the Division recorded 43.6% of participants attained postsecondary credentials or a secondary school diploma (or its recognized equivalent) during participation in or within one year after exit from the program. The Division is making ongoing efforts to train staff for a better understanding of credential attainment and obtaining documentation of participant progress.
5. **Measurable Skill Gains:** 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, defined as documented academic, technical, occupational, or other forms of progress, towards such a credential or employment.
- a. The Division recorded that 70.3% of participants obtained measurable skill gains leading to a recognized postsecondary credential or employment. This percentage is expected to increase in conjunction with staff training.
6. **Effectiveness in Serving Employers:** addresses the program's efforts to provide quality engagement and services to employers and sectors and establish productive relationships with employers and sectors over extended periods of time.
- a. This is an 87% retention rate with wages showing from the same employer second and 4th quarter after exit during calendar year 2023.

	Retention Yes	Retention No	Total
DRS	882	129	1,011
SBVI	71	8	79
Total	953	137	1,090
	0.87		
	87%		

- (3) The use of funds reserved for innovation and expansion activities (sections 101(a)(18) and 101(a)(23) of the Rehabilitation Act) (e.g., SRC, SILC).

Prior to the 1998 Amendments of the Rehabilitation Act, the Division of Rehabilitation Services was required to utilize 1.5% of the Federal 110 funds for Innovation and Expansion (I&E) activities. The Division continues to use these funds at an increased percentage. During the Program Year 2024, \$116,677 was spent for I&E activities through a contract with Black Hills Special Services Cooperative to provide staff support for the State Rehabilitation Council (Board of Vocational Rehabilitation) and the State Independent Living Council. The contract provides for the following:

- Support staff for the Board of Vocational Rehabilitation and the Statewide Independent Living Council contracted through the Black Hills Special Services Cooperative. This includes wages and benefits for 1 FTE Board support staff.
- Operational costs, equipment, and travel for support staff and office supplies are paid through the Black Hills Special Services Cooperative.
- Costs involved in having members of the Board of Vocational Rehabilitation or the Statewide Independent Living Council attend meetings/training.
- Strategic Planning Initiatives approved by the Board of VR to expand and improve the provision of vocational rehabilitation services to individuals with disabilities, particularly individuals with the most significant disabilities, consistent with the findings of the statewide assessment and goals and priorities of the State.

The Division of Rehabilitation Services budgets approximately \$224,853 annually for support services and strategic planning activities for both the Board of Vocational Rehabilitation and the Statewide Independent Living Council.