

(i) Comprehensive System of Personnel Development. In accordance with the requirements in section 101(a)(7) of the Rehabilitation Act, the VR agency must develop and maintain annually a description (consistent with the purposes of the Rehabilitation Act) of the VR agency's comprehensive system of personnel development, which shall include a description of the procedures and activities the VR agency will undertake to ensure it has an adequate supply of qualified State rehabilitation professionals and paraprofessionals that provides the following:

(1) Analysis of current personnel and projected personnel needs including—

- (A) The number and type of personnel that are employed by the VR agency in the provision of vocational rehabilitation services, including ratios of qualified vocational rehabilitation counselors to clients;
- (B) The number of personnel currently needed by the VR agency to provide VR services, broken down by personnel category; and
- (C) Projections of the number of personnel, broken down by personnel category, who will be needed by the VR agency to provide VR services in 5 years based on projections of the number of individuals to be served, including individuals with significant disabilities, the number of personnel expected to retire or leave the field, and other relevant factors.

Personnel Category	No. of Personnel Employed	No. of Personnel Currently Needed	Projected No. of Personnel Needed in 5 Years
Secretaries	9	9	7
Counselor Aides	9	9	9
VR Counselors	38	38	40
District Supervisors	5	5	5
Management	8	8	8
Interpreters	1	1	1

- (D) Ratio of qualified VR counselors to clients: In Program Year 2024, there were 4,776 total individuals served. This was a ratio of 1 to 121 individuals served by a VR Counselor. The average open cases for a VR Counselor is 80 individuals per VR Counselor.
- (E) Projected number of individuals to be served in 5 years: It is estimated that in 5 years, 5,000 individuals will receive VR services annually.

(2) Data and information on personnel preparation and development, recruitment and retention, and staff development, including the following:

- (A) A list of the institutions of higher education in the State that are preparing VR professionals, by type of program; the number of students enrolled at each of those institutions, broken down by type of program; and the number of students who graduated during the prior year from each of those institutions with certification or licensure, or

with the credentials for certification or licensure, broken down by the personnel category for which they have received, or have the credentials to receive, certification or licensure.

Institute of Higher Education	Type of Program	No. of Students Enrolled	No. of Prior Year Graduates
SDSU	Masters in VR	14	5

- (B) The VR agency’s plan for recruitment, preparation and retention of qualified personnel, which addresses the current and projected needs for qualified personnel; and the coordination and facilitation of efforts between the VR agency and institutions of higher education and professional associations to recruit, prepare, and retain personnel who are qualified, including personnel from minority backgrounds and personnel who are individuals with disabilities.

Recruitment of qualified staff including individuals with minority backgrounds and individuals with disabilities is accomplished through promoting vacancies at universities in Region VIII with master level programs. The University of Colorado, Montana State University, South Dakota State University and Utah State University are also sources for recruitment of graduates with master’s level degrees in vocational rehabilitation counseling. In addition, South Dakota has three State public universities with programs offering master’s degrees in counseling. These three State Universities have expanded their class locations to other universities and distance learning options. Graduates of the following programs are recruited for vocational rehabilitation counselor openings: Doctorate of Education program options, Counselor of Education and Counseling Practice; School Psychology and Educational Psychology, Mental Health Counseling, or Master of Arts in Counseling or Educational Psychology. Graduates are hired and trained to prepare for the Certification for Rehabilitation Counselors (CRC) to meet the highest qualifications in the state for rehabilitation counselors.

The announcements for all state positions including the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor positions are posted on the State web page. The Division also utilizes Facebook, Linkin, Indeed and Google Ads.

Retention and advancement are accomplished through the opportunity for all entry—level vocational rehabilitation counselors to participate in master’s level vocational rehabilitation education programs and, once meeting the requirements for “Senior Counselor”, receive promotion to this level. Leadership and management training and assignments with senior level management teams assist counselors to prepare for supervisory and administrative positions. Senior rehabilitation counselors are

encouraged to apply for management and administrative positions when vacancies occur. Opportunities for promotion are available through announcements of supervisory and management positions provided those candidates meet the requirements for the position.

To address the priority of recruiting individuals with disabilities, Bureau of Human Resources and Administration has in SD Administrative Rule the requirement that individuals with disabilities are automatically certified applicants to be interviewed. In addition, any eligible applicant for employment who has been certified severely disabled by a rehabilitation counselor will be certified (eligible to interview) regardless of the ranking the applicant receives compared to other applicants. This ensures individuals who have disabilities will be interviewed and compete for openings in the designated state unit.

- (C) Description of staff development policies, procedures, and activities that ensure all personnel employed by the VR agency receive appropriate and adequate training and continuing education for professionals and paraprofessionals:
- i. Particularly with respect to assessment, vocational counseling, job placement, and rehabilitation technology, including training implemented in coordination with entities carrying out State programs under section 4 of the Assistive Technology Act of 1998; and
 - ii. Procedures for the acquisition and dissemination of significant knowledge from research and other sources to VR agency professionals and paraprofessionals and for providing training regarding the amendments to the Rehabilitation Act made by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act.

The Division has established liaison relationships and cooperative agreements with the other partner agencies that are included in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act and the Combined State Plan. The Division's Business Specialists is a member of the state's Workforce Investment Council which deals with training issues system wide.

Training needs of the state's Native American Indian Vocational Rehabilitation Services Programs, Centers for Independent Living, the Client Assistance Program and Community Based Rehabilitation Programs are considered in planning annual training activities. Training needs are addressed through a variety of resources including workshops, conferences and seminars hosted by other organizations such as Special Education, DLR, Parent Connection, BHR training, professional organizations, client organizations (SD Association of the Blind, National Federation of the Blind of SD, Community Support Providers of South Dakota, SD National Alliance of Mental Illness and the SD Association of the Deaf), and distance learning are examples of sponsors of training activities in which staff participate. Independent study and mentoring by supervisors and senior rehabilitation counselors are other means for meeting individual staff development needs.

The Division of Rehabilitation Services purchased a learning management system, YesLMS, through the VR Development Group. YesLMS allows the Division to host live, virtual trainings through the platform as well as develop on-demand, self-paced courses. In addition to in-house trainings, YesLMS also offers a library of courses from the VR Development Group, a company that specializes in vocational rehabilitation training, and their partner agencies to provide a large library of additional trainings that are pre-approved for continuing education credits through the Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certifications. The LMS currently has nearly 200 courses professional development training opportunities.

All DRS employees have individual development plans to address individual training needs and continuing education. Training is tracked on the case management system. DRS works in cooperation with the Blind VR program to plan joint training initiatives in the areas of comprehensive assessment, counseling techniques, job placement services and information and referral of comparable benefits and services. Monthly training sessions address policies and procedures, best practices and other topics related to vocational rehabilitation counseling. DRS works closely with DakotaLink, the state's Assistive Technology Act program, for training and referring individuals for assessment and training in the most updated assistive technology devices for individuals with a disability.

The Division distributes research and information to address the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act and the Rehabilitation Act and requires participation in training and distributes articles and resources to address topics for staff development. Experts from the technical assistance centers are brought in for training seminars and conferences as well as targeted online training for professionals and paraprofessionals. The following are resources (not all inclusive) for training and information that is disseminated to staff:

- American Indian Vocational Rehabilitation Training and Technical Assistance Center (AIVRTTAC)
- National Technical Assistance Center on Transition for Students with Disabilities: The Collaborative (NTACT:C)
- Older Individuals who are Blind Training and Technical Assistance Center (OIB-TAC)
- Vocational Rehabilitation Technical Assistance Center for Quality Management (VRTAC-QM)
- Vocational Rehabilitation Technical Assistance Center for Quality Employment (VRTAC-QE)
- National Clearing House of Rehabilitation Training Materials (NCTRM)

(3) Description of VR agency policies and procedures for the establishment and maintenance of personnel standards consistent with section 101(a)(7)(B) to ensure that VR agency professional and paraprofessional personnel are adequately trained and prepared, including—

- (A) Standards that are consistent with any national or State-approved or -recognized certification, licensing, registration, or other comparable requirements that apply to the profession or discipline in which such personnel are providing VR services; and
- (B) The establishment and maintenance of education and experience requirements, in accordance with section 101(a)(7)(B)(ii) of the Rehabilitation Act, to ensure that the personnel have a 21st century understanding of the evolving labor force and the needs of individuals with disabilities.

Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor:

South Dakota does not have a state-approved or recognized certification, licensing, or registration requirements for any of the personnel classifications used by SDVR, and specifically vocational rehabilitation counselors. Individuals hired as a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor must meet the requirements of 34 CFR §361.18 (c)(ii)

- (A)(1) Attainment of a baccalaureate degree in a field of study reasonably related to vocational rehabilitation, to indicate a level of competency and skill demonstrating basic preparation in a field of study such as vocational rehabilitation counseling, social work, psychology, disability studies, business administration, human resources, special education, supported employment, customized employment, economics, or another field that reasonably prepares individuals to work with consumers and employers; and
- (2) Demonstrated paid or unpaid experience, for not less than one year, consisting of—
 - (i) Direct work with individuals with disabilities in a setting such as an independent living center;
 - (ii) Direct service or advocacy activities that provide such individual with experience and skills in working with individuals with disabilities; or
 - (iii) Direct experience in competitive integrated employment environments as an employer, as a small business owner or operator, or in self-employment, or other experience in human resources or recruitment, or experience in supervising employees, training, or other activities; or
- (B) Attainment of a master's or doctoral degree in a field of study such as vocational rehabilitation counseling, law, social work, psychology, disability studies, business administration, human resources, special education, management, public administration, or another field that reasonably provides competence in the employment sector, in a disability field, or in both business-related and rehabilitation-related fields; and

Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors are approved to sign all case work documents. Individual Plans for Employment will require a Sr. Vocational Counselor Signature.

Senior Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor:

A Senior Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor is a higher classification and pay grade. A Senior Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor will meet the requirements of a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor but also have obtained/maintained certification of a Certified

Rehabilitation Counselor from the Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification (CRCC). A Senior VR Counselor has all the job functions of a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor and can independently sign off on Individual Plans for Employment. As of 7/1/2025, 17 employees meet the requirements of Senior VR Counselors and have their CRC.

District Supervisor:

The SD Vocational Rehabilitation Program has five districts, each with a District Supervisor. Each District Supervisor will provide direct supervision of 9 to 15 staff, all personnel matters, conduct all office operations, and have the signature authority of all client case work.

The approved plan must be signed by the Supervisor. The plan will include at a minimum one course each semester unless the individual can present extenuating circumstances that are approved by the State Office.

Personnel Development

The Division is committed to assisting vocational rehabilitation counselors to obtain the necessary academic training and professional experience to meet the standards of a Senior Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor. Program Year 2024, 8 Division employees were pursuing their Vocational Rehabilitation master's degree program through South Dakota State University. Two individuals graduated during the past year with a master's degree in vocational rehabilitation and are preparing to take the CRC exam. Another important strategy is coordination of resources to access the most comprehensive training opportunities.

The Division of Rehabilitation Services approaches personnel development through several avenues. Each employee's current level of education and training, as well as short-term and long-term training needs are tracked by supervisors who evaluate methods for addressing these needs annually through the Continuous Performance Communication (CPC) review system. CPC is the State's performance review process intended to increase communications between employees and supervisors. CPC is a series of check-ins and a year-end appraisal. Check-ins occur throughout the year between the supervisor and employee to discuss areas related to performance and growth. At the end of the year, the check-ins are used to determine the employee's year-end appraisal.

The CPC system allows for ongoing feedback between employees and supervisors by incorporating a self-audit while addressing professionalism, work quality and areas for development as well as areas of strength. Training needs are addressed utilizing a form that not only identifies needed training but also includes fields for the date the training is scheduled and the date it is attended. BHR workshops are identified under the following headings: supervisory, job enrichment and technology with "other training" and "job-specific skills" included in the document used to track need and attendance. The training officer works with agency supervisors to identify resources for obtaining training in areas related to vocational rehabilitation (including the Rehabilitation Act Amendments, Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act and RSA regulations), including serving individuals with the most significant

disabilities and those of minority backgrounds. Training needs are also identified through input from clients responding to satisfaction surveys and input from the State Rehabilitation Council.

- (4) Method(s) the VR agency uses to ensure that personnel are able to communicate in appropriate modes of communication with or in the native language of applicants or eligible individuals who have limited English speaking ability.

The Division employs an interpreter who is available for all training sessions to clients who are deaf or deaf/blind. If additional interpreters are needed, the Division contracts for these services. Braille, materials on disk and enlarged print are provided to all staff or clients who request alternative formats. The Division has developed fee schedules and vendors to pay for interpreters of foreign languages and Native American interpreters. The Division also purchases foreign language interpreting services such as Linguistica and Interpretalk service for interpreting services through phone services.

- (5) As appropriate, describe the procedures and activities to coordinate the designated State unit's comprehensive system of personnel development with personnel development under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

Training on IDEA and transition services for students with disabilities is coordinated with the DOE Special Education Program and the State Transition Project. The annual Youth Leadership Forum is planned in collaboration with the Special Education Program, Division of Rehabilitation Services, Service to the Blind and Visually Impaired, Statewide Independent Living Council, and the Transition Services Liaison Project. The annual Fall Conferences were a combined effort with the Special Education Program and DLR, which offered a series of transition presentations.