

Attachment K
RFP 26-85961 Vocational Rehabilitation Business Network
Scope of Work

The Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS) seeks one, or more, state or local public entities to enter into an Interagency Cash Transfer Agreement(s) (Agreement) to develop Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Business Networks in local counties. Activities will support BRS in conducting technical assistance to businesses, a key strategy toward achieving VR's goal of increasing competitive, integrated employment outcomes for VR participants, including those with the most significant disabilities, and pre-employment transition services participants. The below information outlines specific scope of work and partner matching requirements.

Purpose

The awarded entity(ies) will conduct technical assistances to businesses, specifically recruitment of businesses and training to businesses in specified geographic region(s) to **expand the network of business partners with VR**, through Services to Groups: technical assistance to businesses that are seeking to employ individuals with disabilities (34 C.F.R. § 361.49(a)(4)). Non-federal funds received through this interagency cash transfer agreement will be used to satisfy VR program matching requirements (34 C.F.R. § 361.60(b); 2 C.F.R. § 200.306(b)) and will support the cost of VR services. BRS is seeking one, or more, state or local public entities to enter into a contract agreement for purposes of enhancing and improving the provision of VR services to eligible individuals and job seekers with disabilities. The scope of work below details the specific activities to be carried out through contracts awarded through this Request for Proposal (RFP) process.

Background Information

Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) is a federal and state funded program designed to assist individuals (adults and youth) with disabilities in preparing for, obtaining, maintaining, or advancing in employment. VR services are tailored to support individuals with disabilities that present barriers to achieve meaningful employment, with the ultimate goal of achieving competitive integrated employment - jobs that are performed in typical work settings, alongside individuals without disabilities, and that pay at least minimum wage or the customary rate for the position. VR provides a wide range of individualized services based on each participant's strengths, interests, and employment goals, and identified as necessary to achieve the specific employment goal. The vocational goal and required services are documented in the participant's Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE), as agreed to between the assigned VR Counselor and the VR participant.

VR serves eligible individuals who experience mental health conditions, intellectual/developmental disabilities, physical disabilities, and sensory disabilities. Job seekers in the VR program establish individualized employment goals that range from part-time to full-time work, and for positions that range from entry-level to careers requiring certifications or licensure.

This pilot project is designed to enhance employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities by leveraging VR services and expanding employer engagement. The project will promote

competitive integrated employment and facilitate career pathway exploration through coordinated efforts in partnership with VR, registered VR providers, and business partners working efficiently and effectively to increase employment outcomes for qualified job seekers with disabilities.

Funding

The awarded contractor(s) must commit to providing the required non-federal match so that federal funds can be accessed for this pilot project. Non-federal match provided by awarded contractor(s) results in a positive return in funding to carry out project activities as aligned with this scope of work. For example, contractor match contribution of \$25,000 enables BRS to access over \$92,000 in federal funds to award to contractor(s).

BRS anticipates that annual budgets will range from \$100,000 to \$500,000 depending on geographic size and as aligned with project scope. The required match from awarded contractor would then range from \$27,065 to \$135,324. Please see enclosed match calculator for more information.

Expenditures for VR services are under the direct control and at the discretion of BRS. State or local public funds provided by awarded contractor(s) will be submitted to BRS annually within 60 days of contract execution. Please reference the match calculator to identify required match for respondents' specific proposed budget amount. The cost proposal must include only the federal portion of funds, which is the share of funding available to the awarded contractor(s). Do not include the contractors non-federal share in the cost proposal. The contractors non-federal share, or match, will be identified in the response to the Technical proposal.

The awarded contractor(s) may not submit claims for reimbursement for contract activities until non-federal contribution is deposited into the VR account. BRS will reimburse contractor for contract expenditures as outlined in the awarded contract, to carry out technical assistance to businesses through recruiting, onboarding and engagement of employers in the specified geographic region(s) through leveraging business networks and providing information, resources, and training as a business peer.

Contract Activities

The project will enhance opportunities for eligible participants to experience positive employment options, and promote competitive integrated employment for individuals with disabilities, through expanded employer engagement efforts to meet both job seeker and business hiring needs. To achieve this, awarded contractor(s) will recruit VR business partners from the respondent's existing network, with a focus on targeted industries identified in partnership between BRS and contractor, based on VR participant vocational goals and local labor market needs. Awarded contractor(s) will provide technical assistance to these businesses to support successful career exploration and hiring experiences for both the job seeker and the business. Additionally, the contractor(s) will develop career pathway tools to guide participants in selecting high-demand vocational paths and help VR, its partners and participants, better understand and navigate these pathways effectively.

Developing and building a VR business network is intended to support improved efficiency in connecting VR job seekers with businesses to assist with career exploration and employment

opportunities, including: hosting individuals for activities such as job shadows and business site tours; sharing industry expertise by providing informational interviews or resume review; providing work based learning opportunities such as pre-apprenticeships, apprenticeships, internships, or other work experiences; connecting job seekers to hiring opportunities; or other activities such as mock interviews, reverse job fairs, or other strategies to connect VR job seekers with business hiring needs.

The VR business network is also intended to expand opportunities for individuals, which may help fill current gaps or mitigate barriers to employment. Some examples of barriers experienced by job seekers with disabilities are outlined below:

- The job seeker has some interest in working in a healthcare setting but is unsure about which specific path best aligns with their interests. They would benefit from a site visit or job shadow, and possibly informational interview at their local hospital or other medical setting to gain a deeper understanding of the various employment opportunities and pathways.
- The job seeker meets the qualifications for a particular job opening, but has difficulty expressing their abilities in a traditional interview setting due to communication barriers. Participating in a mock interview to gain interview skills, or offering a modified interview process with a partner business may better position the individual to sufficiently demonstrate their competency.
- The job seeker is seeking employment in an industry that does not require a certification or degree, but does require work experience. Participating in a meaningful work experience in the industry area may help fill the work history gap for the job seeker.
- The job seeker desires to update their credentials but is unsure which credentials to attain to best position themselves for employment with local businesses. An informational interview with an industry professional would provide needed clarification to help ensure the individual pursues the most effective training pathway to their desired employment outcome.
- The individual is an upcoming or college graduate and struggling to find employment in their industry. They would benefit from a meaningful internship or work experience that could lead to eventual employment with a partner business.
- The individual is seeking employment in an area where VR and its provider partners have exhausted their leads or have no leads on a potential job opportunity. Getting connected with one, or more members of the VR business network may provide efficient access to appropriate job opportunities.
- Many job seekers work closely with VR funded job coaches; however these coaches often carry high caseloads, making it difficult to develop and sustain new business relationships. Many job coaches have a small network of businesses but lack capacity or expertise to grow these networks. Gaining access to a broader network of businesses through the VR business network would support faster placement and enable these important job coaches to focus their time on providing needed individualized supports to promote a successful and sustained employment outcome.

While we seek contractors with capacity to build a VR business network to meet the full range of examples, the pilot program will initially place a strong emphasis on supporting VR participants who are currently enrolled in postsecondary education or actively completing postsecondary

training programs, and expand to other targeted populations as the project progresses. By integrating postsecondary advancement with targeted employer engagement, the program aims to create a more responsive, effective, and efficient employment pipeline for job seekers with disabilities.

Expectations of awarded contractor(s):

Provide technical assistance to businesses through the following activities:

1. Develop a network of local, state and regional businesses from a variety of industries to support efforts in expanding employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities. Ideally, this VR businesses network is developed through an already established network of business partners.
2. Increase the number of business partners engaged with the VR program through activities such as hosting job shadows or site tours, providing informational or mock interviews and resume review, pre-apprenticeships and apprenticeships or other work based learning opportunities, and hiring opportunities.
3. Ongoing Promotion of best practices with businesses, and sharing of resources to support businesses in recruitment of interns and job candidates with disabilities.
4. Provide training and technical assistance to business partners to increase effectiveness of employer-led onboarding and training to eligible individuals with disabilities engaged in internships, work experiences, and employment.

Additionally, awarded contractor(s) will develop materials that outline career or industry pathways relevant to local area, to include specific training requirements, options for training completion, and local businesses seeking those qualifications. Materials must be easy to navigate and promote jobs and careers in in-demand local industries.

The awarded contractor(s) will assign a staff person in a liaison capacity who will serve as point of contact for BRS. Additionally, the awarded contractor(s) will provide quarterly written progress reports to BRS, which will include data necessary to evaluate achievement of the expectations outlined in the deliverables and evaluation section of this scope of work. This will include, but is not limited to, total number of businesses onboarded and name and type of business and type of employment activities they will provide, number of requests from VR and portion of requests fulfilled, and progress toward meeting project objectives and outcomes. The awarded contractor(s) will participate in quarterly meetings with BRS to share program highlights and challenges, best practices, and recommendations, and to address any concerns. Quarterly reports are due 30 days after quarter end.

BRS will coordinate with the awarded contractor(s) in carrying out technical assistance to businesses, including collaboration with BRS' Business and Community Engagement Lead. BRS will serve as a subject matter expert in best practices pertaining to recruitment and hiring of qualified job seekers with disabilities and will provide necessary training and share resources to support this effort. Additionally, VR can provide consultation to business partners in navigating appropriate interview and workplace accommodations, though it should be noted that many individuals with disabilities do not require accommodations or modifications, or require only minor reasonable accommodations. Furthermore, VR can provide access to job coaching and

other support services that may be necessary to ensure a successful work experience, job placement, or other employment activity. VR partners with approximately 90 employment service providers statewide to provide individualized support to VR job seekers as a supplement to the businesses onboarding and new hire training processes.

Outcomes and Reporting

Specific deliverables will be finalized through negotiation of awarded contract(s) and will include expectations similar to the following:

1. Onboarding a minimum number of businesses during the project period, to serve as a member of the VR business network. An onboarded business is a business that has committed to providing opportunities for individuals with disabilities, including hosting individuals for career exploration through the various activities described in this scope of work (e.g., site tours, informational interviews, etc.), providing opportunities for work experiences or internships, or providing job opportunities.
2. Providing training to a minimum number of VR business network employers to support successful VR participant access to the described employment related activities.
3. Facilitating access to a minimum number of completed employment related activities, including number of work experiences and number of individuals hired through a VR business network employer.
4. Developing and submitting career path tools designed to assist VR staff, participants, and providers in helping point VR job seekers to relevant local in-demand industries and career paths.

Deliverables and Evaluation

While specific targets may be adjusted through contract negotiation processes, based on factors such as geographic size, respondents should assume the following for purposes of responding to its capacity to meet the outlined scope of work and expectations:

Outcome 1: Expansion of the VR Business Network

By the end of Year 1, the contractor will establish a baseline of **15-20 formally engaged VR business network partners**, and will indicate the type of employment activities each is committed to engage in with participants. In Year 2, the initiative will demonstrate sustained growth by increasing the number of active partners by a minimum of 20% each quarter. This outcome reflects enhanced employer engagement, broader service collaboration, and increased opportunities for competitive integrated employment.

Outcome 2: Increased Fulfillment of Service Requests

In Year 1, the program will **fulfill 10-15 VR requests in connecting VR participants to career exploration and employment activities** outlined in this scope of work. In Year 2, the number of fulfilled requests will increase by at least 20% quarter-over-quarter, with a minimum of **20-30** requests fulfilled annually. This outcome demonstrates improved responsiveness, service delivery capacity, and alignment with participant employment goals.

Outcome 3: Improved Service Efficiency and Partner Engagement

The program will monitor and report on the following indicators to assess operational effectiveness:

Fulfillment Rate: Percentage of total requests successfully completed (requests will come from VR team members)

Partner Engagement Rate: Proportion of VR network partners actively contributing to service delivery

Average Time to Fulfill Requests: Average time from request (from VR) to completion.

These outcomes will be reviewed quarterly and compiled into an annual performance report to assess project success and areas of improvement, evaluate cost effectiveness, inform stakeholders, support continuous improvement, and guide future strategies. BRS will review quarterly and annual reports to evaluate progress toward meeting program outcomes outlined above, including achievement of quarterly targets outlined above.

Independent Verification and Validation (IV&V) Services

If the State decides to add Independent Verification & Validation services as part of this engagement, the contractor will copy the Indiana Department of Administration (IDOA) – Independent Verification & Validation (IV&V) team member(s) on all project related communications (emails, meeting invites, collaboration tools, etc.) and will grant access to all documents and deliverables throughout the term of the contract.

DEFINITIONS

Apprenticeships

A formal, structured training program that combines paid on-the-job learning with classroom instruction. Apprenticeships lead to industry-recognized credentials and are typically longer-term, with a focus on mastering a skilled trade or occupation.

Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS)

- The Bureau of Rehabilitation Services is a program under the State of Indiana Family and Social Services Administration, Division of Disability and Rehabilitative Services. BRS administers Indiana's state Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program, along with Blind and Visually Impaired Services and Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services programs. BRS is also the Designated State Entity (DSE) For the Indiana Independent Living Program. BRS is responsible for administering the VR program, including, at minimum, the following non-delegable functions:
 - (i) All decisions affecting eligibility for vocational rehabilitation services, the nature and scope of available services, and the provision of these services.
 - (ii) The determination to close the record of services of an individual who has achieved an employment outcome in accordance with [§ 361.56](#).
 - (iii) Policy formulation and implementation.

- (iv) The allocation and expenditure of vocational rehabilitation funds.
- (v) Participation as a partner in the one-stop service delivery system established under title I of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, in accordance with [20 CFR part 678](#).

Competitive, Integrated Employment

- ***Competitive integrated employment*** means work that—
 - (i) Is performed on a full-time or part-time basis (including self-employment) and for which an individual is compensated at a rate that—
 - (A) Is not less than the higher of the rate specified in section 6(a)(1) of the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 ([29 U.S.C. 206\(a\)\(1\)](#)) or the rate required under the applicable State or local minimum wage law for the place of employment;
 - (B) Is not less than the customary rate paid by the employer for the same or similar work performed by other employees who are not individuals with disabilities and who are similarly situated in similar occupations by the same employer and who have similar training, experience, and skills; and
 - (C) In the case of an individual who is self-employed, yields an income that is comparable to the income received by other individuals who are not individuals with disabilities and who are self-employed in similar occupations or on similar tasks and who have similar training, experience, and skills; and
 - (D) Is eligible for the level of benefits provided to other employees; and
 - (ii) Is at a location—
 - (A) Typically found in the community; and
 - (B) Where the employee with a disability interacts for the purpose of performing the duties of the position with other employees within the particular work unit and the entire work site, and, as appropriate to the work performed, other persons (*e.g.*, customers and vendors), who are not individuals with disabilities (not including supervisory personnel or individuals who are providing services to such employee) to the same extent that employees who are not individuals with disabilities and who are in comparable positions interact with these persons; and
 - (iii) Presents, as appropriate, opportunities for advancement that are similar to those for other employees who are not individuals with disabilities and who have similar positions.

Employer Tour

An organized visit to a business or worksite where participants learn about job roles, workplace culture, and employment opportunities. Tours may include presentations, demonstrations, and Q&A sessions with staff.

Informational Interviews

A guided conversation between a participant and a professional in a field of interest, designed to explore career paths, workplace culture, and required skills. These interviews help participants build networks and clarify vocational goals.

Internships

A time-limited, supervised work experience that allows participants to perform job duties in a real-world setting. Internships may be paid or unpaid and are designed to build skills, enhance employability, and support career exploration.

Job Shadows

A structured, short-term experience in which a participant observes a professional in a real work setting to gain insight into job tasks, workplace expectations, and industry norms. Job shadows are typically unpaid and do not involve hands-on work.

Mock Interviews

A simulated job interview experience that allows participants to practice responding to common interview questions, receive feedback, and build confidence. Mock interviews may be conducted by VR staff, employers, or trained volunteers.

Pre-apprenticeship

A program that prepares individuals for entry into a registered apprenticeship through basic training and career exposure. For individuals with disabilities, it offers a supported pathway to build foundational skills, explore industry options, and increase readiness for inclusive employment.

Resume review

A personalized evaluation of a participant's resume to ensure clarity, relevance, and alignment with job goals. Reviews may include formatting suggestions, content edits, and tailoring strategies for specific industries or roles.

Vocational Rehabilitation

- Under the State Vocational Rehabilitation Services Program, the U.S. Department of Education provides grants to assist States in operating statewide comprehensive, coordinated, effective, efficient, and accountable vocational rehabilitation programs, each of which is: (a) An integral part of a statewide workforce development system; and (b) Designed to assess, plan, develop, and provide vocational rehabilitation services for individuals with disabilities, consistent with their unique strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities, interests, and informed choice so that they may prepare for and engage in competitive integrated employment and achieve economic self-sufficiency. The Indiana state VR program is administered by the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services.

Vocational Rehabilitation Eligibility

- **Basic requirements.** BRS' determination of an applicant's eligibility for vocational rehabilitation services must be based only on the following requirements:
 - (i) A determination by qualified personnel that the applicant has a physical or mental impairment;
 - (ii) A determination by qualified personnel that the applicant's physical or mental impairment constitutes or results in a substantial impediment to employment for the applicant; and
 - (iii) A determination by a qualified vocational rehabilitation counselor employed by the designated State unit that the applicant requires vocational rehabilitation

services to prepare for, secure, retain, advance in, or regain employment that is consistent with the individual's unique strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities, interest, and informed choice. For purposes of an assessment for determining eligibility and vocational rehabilitation needs under this part, an individual is presumed to have a goal of an employment outcome.