



ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF LABOR
& WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Division of Vocational Rehabilitation

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Division of Vocational Rehabilitation

***Strategic Plan
FFY 2024 – 2027***

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Alaska Division of Vocational Rehabilitation

Strategic Plan for FFY 2024 – 2027

The Alaska Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR), along with the State Vocational Rehabilitation Committee (SVRC), continually assesses the vocational rehabilitation needs of Alaskans with disabilities and the success of DVR in meeting those needs. DVR's strategic plan is a major component in continuous program evaluation and planning for the division in adherence to 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's systems and the delivery of services to those individuals receiving vocational rehabilitation services. DVR utilizes the strategic planning process to develop a plan of action for continuous improvement. DVR has an on-going three-year strategic planning process coinciding with the federally required triennial Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA). Based on the information collected and analyzed from the CSNA, analysis of current Workforce Innovation and Opportunity

Act (WIOA) regulations, Common Performance Measures, and input from DVR staff, the strategic planning team identifies improvements in service delivery, staff development, organizational efficiencies, and DVR's role in serving employers as the basis for the new strategic plan. A working version of this plan will be updated biannually by the individuals responsible for specific activities. This information will be utilized by the Leadership Team to determine if the agency is meeting its goals and priorities and if revisions are needed.

The strategic planning team is composed of the DVR management and leadership teams, the SVRC Executive Committee, including the representative from the Client Assistance Program (CAP) and the Tribal Vocational Rehabilitation (TVR) 121 programs.

A summary of the goals and priorities:

- Delivery of high quality vocational rehabilitation services to all individuals with disabilities with priorities established for:
 - Transition age/at-risk youth involved in the Juvenile Justice System
 - Individuals with disabilities residing in rural Alaska
 - Individuals who require Supported Employment
 - Alaska Native/American Indian individuals with disabilities
 - Reduction of system barriers
 - Individuals who experience blindness or who have a visual impairment
 - Individuals who experience deafness or are hard of hearing
- Staff development includes efforts in:
 - Training opportunities to maintain professional certifications and for staff development
 - Leadership development
 - Succession planning
- Organizational efficiencies and responsibilities:
 - Meet all Federal regulations
 - Report and meet negotiated Common Performance Measures
 - Utilize technology for system improvements

- Ensure case management software is up-to-date and will generate federal reporting that meets the requirements of the RSA-911 data report
- DVR will prioritize the needs of Alaskan businesses:
 - Work with employers to expand employment opportunities
 - Collaborate with other core WIOA agencies to improve employment services to individuals with disabilities
 - Advocates for individuals with disabilities are represented on appropriate boards and committees

Goals, Priorities, Strategies, and Performance Indicators

Goal 1 – Service Delivery:

DVR will deliver high quality vocational rehabilitation services to individuals with disabilities to assist them in obtaining employment consistent with their employment goals.

This goal reflects DVR’s focus on continuous improvement of the VR service delivery system based upon the needs of Alaskans with disabilities as identified by the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA).

Priority 1.1 Improve employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities including services needed to achieve meaningful employment.

Strategies:

- Conduct and Review Labor Market Research protocol to ensure validity and that it is occurring in cases at IPE development, as appropriate.
- Continue to support consumer training, as appropriate, and utilize all training opportunities and systems (i.e., AVTEC, UAA, UAF, and UAS, apprenticeships, Job Corps, Military Youth Academy, etc.).
- Identify consumer’s knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) to match with employer’s needs and willingness to build upon those KSAs.
- Ensure vocational evaluation is used as a strategy for rapid engagement as well as career exploration to obtain meaningful employment.
- Ensure consideration of personal experience with disability and support skills in self-advocacy, especially for youth, including person centered planning.
- Provide pre-employment services, job supports, and other employment specific services and financial life skills.

Performance Indicators:

- Case reviews indicate IPEs and documentation of case progress align with informed choice, knowledge, skills, and abilities, and support Labor Market Research.
- Increased percentage of individuals maintaining employment in same field 2 quarters after exit and 4 quarters after exit.
- Continuous increase in hourly wages.
- Increases in credential attainment and measurable skill gains.
- Individuals receive career exploration services and secure meaningful employment.
- Plan development shows standards for best practices and self-advocacy.

Priority 1.2 Improve Supported Employment services to individuals with the Most Significant Disabilities, including youth with the Most Significant Disabilities.

Strategies:

- Determine ways DVR can improve services to individuals who require Supported Employment (SE).
- Increase understanding and knowledge regarding early engagement and available VR Services.
- Increase services to SE Youth, ensuring 50% of SE funds are expended on Youth.
- Work with CRPs to increase staff available to provide SE Job Supports.
- Assure that staff are informed of available transportation options or potential complications that may exist.

Performance Indicators:

- DVR will provide training to SDS and long-term support providers.
- SDS will provide training to DVR staff.
- DVR and SDS will continue to meet quarterly to ensure quality services to this population.

- Technology will be explored and implemented as a way to provide distance delivery in circumstances where it may be appropriate.
- Ensure SE individuals have training on use of local transportation when appropriate.

Priority 1.3 Continue to provide quality services to rural locations.

Strategies:

- Continue to support VRC travel to rural locations.
- Develop rural travel expectations to ensure staff time is effectively utilized.
- Expand services to underserved hubs, including increasing coordination with partners.
- Attend events such as Alaska Federation of Natives, Native Youth Olympics, Southcentral Foundation Health Fairs, ASSEC, etc., to market DVR services.
- Invite TVR representation to attend rural services meeting.
- Expand DVR's use of technology in rural areas.
- Develop strategies for taking advantage of tele-work opportunities where transportation and lack of local employment opportunities are barriers as access to high-speed internet improves throughout the state.
- Utilize subsistence IPEs as appropriate.

Performance Indicators:

- Travel approved for a minimum of two trips a year to rural areas and travel with partners when possible.
- Travel Expectations document is used and adhered to.
- More utilization of rural hubs for reaching rural clients.
- TVR representation at Rural Services meeting.
- Technology is implemented and utilized.

Priority 1.4 Continue to deliver Pre-Employment Transition Services with an increased focus on At-Risk youth exiting the DJJ system.

Strategies:

- Increase work experience activities and sites.
- Work closely with CRPs and Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) vendors to align work experiences with high demand jobs.
- Ensure that expected number of students participating in Pre-ETS matches CSNA goal.
- Continue to recruit CRPs to provide Pre-ETS services.
- Continue to ensure At-Risk-Youth, including those involved with the Juvenile Justice System, are included in Pre-ETS activities and expand Pre-ETS within detention facilities.
- Continue to coordinate services to At-Risk youth with disabilities in shelters or transitioning from treatment facilities.
- Continue to support travel for Transition Coordinator to travel to rural areas to evaluate Pre-ETS programs and build/maintain programs.

Performance Indicators:

- Additional work experiences are available.
- Work experiences more closely mirror high demand job industries.
- Meet or exceed expected number of Pre-ETS students provided services.
- Additional CRPs are available to provide Pre-ETS services.
- Programs within Juvenile Justice Detention facilities will continue to increase.
- Transition Coordinator travel occurs.

Priority 1.5 Enhance Collaboration with Tribal VR Partners.

Strategies:

- Continue to participate in face-to-face meetings when invited.
- Invite TVR Directors to quarterly Rural Services Meetings on a rotating basis.

- Invite TVR to DVR training opportunities.
- Create collaboration plan to increase referrals and shared cases.
- Identify contact in each region to share and communicate information.
- Identify clear chain of command for reporting issues.
- Review MOU and Contingency Plan and draft changes as agreed upon.

Performance Indicators:

- Annual meeting occurs.
- Creation of a collaboration plan.
- MOU revised as necessary.

Priority 1.6 Improve usage and quality assurance of CRP services in all regions.

Strategies:

- Work with CRP Coordinator to develop a comprehensive CRP monitoring plan.
- Ensure Managers are involved in vetting new CRP applicants and in creating corrective action plans.
- Increase the number of CRPs who can provide distance delivery by leveraging technology where available.
- Increase training available to new and existing CRPs.
- Provide templates and other supporting materials.
- Facilitate CRP Community of Practice.
- Improve consistency of expectations/communication between VRCs and CRPs and understanding of each's role in VR process from referral through period of service.
- Explore technological avenues and assess the use of software in improving service delivery and reporting.

Performance Indicators:

- Adherence to timelines.

- Process developed and followed for new CRPs and determining corrective action plans.
- Increase number of CRPs who are able to provide virtual services.
- Quality of services provided is improved.

Priority 1.7 Ensure consumers are aware of how to access available community resources.

Strategies:

- Develop new avenues for providing Assistive Technology and other Technology Training
- Cultivate relationships with specialist providers such as neuropsychologists.
- Assist individuals in seeking resources for Behavioral Health Services, including the most up-to-date services available, including those services offered that are beyond traditional sources including 1115 Waiver Services.
- Referral to Protection & Advocacy (P&A) agency known as the Disability Law Center of Alaska.
- Refer individuals to appropriate Independent Living Services.
- Assist individuals in securing transportation, including accessible transportation.
- Resources for unhoused and increased access to VR Services.
- Advocacy on appropriate transportation boards.

Performance Indicators:

- Assistive Technology training provided.
- Increased specialists as vendors
- Develop and maintain VR presence on boards/other guiding entities such as the Statewide Independent Living Council and the Governor's Council on Disabilities and Special Education Employment and Transportation Committee to advocate and educate on the employment needs of individuals with disabilities,

- VR staff increase knowledge of how to effectively work with the unhoused population and are able to refer individuals to necessary local resources.
- Participant income is greater at exit than at application, where measurable.

Priority 1.8 Reduce system barriers for individuals seeking VR services.

Strategies:

- Establish internal committee to conduct an in-depth review of VR processes to identify areas that could be streamlined or made more efficient.
- Improve on-line referral process to expand access.
- Inform participants and stakeholders of reasons for breadth of information gathering and assure that process and timelines are understood.

Performance Indicators:

- Participants and stakeholders understand that VR processes take time.
- Increase in on-line referrals.
- Streamlining is implemented where feasible.

Priority 1.9 Evaluate and improve services to individuals who are blind or visually impaired.

Strategies:

- Evaluate program to determine gaps and improvements that can be made to better serve this population including increasing successful closure rate.
- Improve consistency of identification of needs related visual impairments in terms of VR, and development and delivery of services.
- Support Blind Services Team program development and training, including travel for in-person meetings.

- Develop tools for assessing pathways to success, including regular case reviews.
- Blind Services Coordinator hosts bi-annual training for Division Statewide Assessment Team to increase effectiveness of evaluation services.
- Inform all regional offices about the BEP and opportunities for referrals.
- Update administrative codes to ensure BEP meets all regulatory requirements.
- Modernize existing sites' Micro-Markets.
- BEP evaluates site equipment as needed.

Performance Indicators:

- VR Blind Services Program evaluation is completed with recommendations for improvement.
- Blind Services Team meets regularly and travels for annual in-person meeting.
- VR staff are trained in recognition of Vision-related VR needs, available resources, and case process development.
- BEP site equipment is updated and modernized.

Priority 1.10 Continue to support the employment needs of individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Strategies:

- Continue to evaluate current program to determine gaps and improvements that can be made to better serve this population.
- Ensure the Model State Plan (MSP) for the Deaf remains up-to-date (links and content).
- Maintain a presence on the Deaf Professionals Network.
- Increase utilizing staff interpreting for rural participants, including providing travel budget for DVR staff interpreter.
- Deaf Navigator performs bi-annual training for Division Statewide Assessment Team to increase effectiveness of evaluation services.

- Increase Pre-ETS opportunities for students who are Deaf.

Performance Indicators:

- Work with contractor to keep MSP links and content up-to-date.
- Program evaluation is completed with recommendations for improvement.
- Maintain relationships with community partners.
- Comprehensive services are included on IPEs.
- Pre-ETS are delivered to students who are Deaf.

Priority 1.11 Promote Employment for Senior Alaskans, 55 and older.

Strategies:

- Reestablish standing committee between Division of Employment and Training Services and DVR to determine activities to improve senior employment rates.
- Promote consistent partnership with MASST statewide.
- Develop scorecard for measuring performance.
- Increase employer and partner awareness of the value of seniors with disabilities within employment.
- Explore relationships with other partner agencies.

Performance Indicators:

- DVR/DETS committee meets regularly.
- Scorecard for performance is developed and evaluation is ongoing.
- DVR partners with other agencies to promote Senior Employment.
- DVR participates with the Alaska Commission on Aging.

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 need for succession planning with the anticipated loss of key staff in the future.

Priority 2.1 Ensure resources are available for hiring and retaining qualified staff.

Strategies:

- Schedule annual all-staff training sessions for professional staff.
- Utilize internship programs.
- Expand recruitment strategies to fill both VRC and VRA vacancies.
- Ensure all staff are aware of continuing education and advancement opportunities.
- Develop educational development plans for non-CRC VRCs.
- Stay abreast of changes to CRC requirements.
- Ensure all VRAs receive VRA Online Training.
- Support VRA higher education opportunities where feasible.

Performance Indicators:

- All-staff training occurs.
- Internship positions are utilized.
- Communication to staff occurs.
- All non-CRC VRCs have an Educational Development Plan.
- Training checklists are completed for all staff.

Priority 2.2 Ensure ongoing staff development and training.

Strategies:

- Stay informed on requirements for maintaining/obtaining CRC and make sure that candidates are informed of current requirements as part of hiring process.
- Provide specialized training: Field Administrative Support Team (FAST), Business Engagement Services Team (BEST), Blind Services, Deaf/Hard of Hearing, Division Statewide Assessment Team (DSAT), etc.
- Provide ongoing training opportunities for VRAs.
- Keep modules for VRC training up-to-date.
- Develop ongoing education for eligibilities, severity of disability, plans, closures, etc.
- Regional Managers provide training on software and reporting.
- Ensure staff have access to the most current job forecasts by developing a distribution plan for “Trends” economic forecast magazine, economic development corporation info, etc.
- Specialized Training:
 - Career pathways and expectations for employment and training outcomes.
 - Conduct and understand Labor Market Research.
 - Self-Advocacy including how to seek and benefit from training.
 - CRP and VRC relations understanding and consistency and documentation.
 - Behavioral Health best practices and where to find available resources.
 - Training for working with clients who are unhoused or in poverty including available resources for those individuals.

Performance Indicators:

- Links are posted on SharePoint.
- Specialized training is developed and delivered.
- Opportunities are communicated to VRAs.

- VR Modules are updated and delivered.
- Quarterly training opportunities for staff is scheduled and available.

Priority 2.3 Continue mentoring and succession planning.

Strategies:

- Senior VRCs (CRCs) are given opportunities to be in Regional Manager acting status.
- Develop specialized desk manuals for unique job duties.

Performance Indicators:

- Regional Manager Acting Status is delegated equally to senior VRCs.
- Desk manuals for unique positions are created and easily accessible for successors.
- Continued development of Management Manual

Goal 3 – Quality Assurance

DVR will continuously evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of organizational systems and identify opportunities to develop innovative solutions for necessary changes.

This goal reflects DVR's commitment to continuous programmatic improvement and organizational efficiency.

Priority 3.1 Provide on-going Quality Assurance (QA) and program evaluation activities to ensure integrity of VR Services.

Strategies:

- Program evaluation results are reviewed by administrative and management staff.
- Consumer satisfaction responses are analyzed and disseminated to SVRC on a quarterly basis and sent to Managers monthly.
- Internal case review process and tool is developed and implemented.
- Case reviews are both qualitative and quantitative in nature.
- Develop internal controls that ensure fidelity and accuracy of data submitted to RSA.
- Create reports in Tableau for Managers to review cases frequently.
- Help Desk staff will provide on-going support and training by participating in staff meetings and flying to Fairbanks and Juneau semi-annually to meet with staff.

Performance Indicators:

- Internal documentation revised as necessary based on QA results.
- Staff training developed as deemed necessary based upon case review results.
- Results are shared with appropriate staff.
- Case reviews are completed and scheduled on a regular basis and incorporate internal controls.
- All staff are trained on new procedures.

- Regional Managers will have access and be able to run reports when needed.
- Staff meetings are scheduled with Help Desk Staff on an on-going basis.

Priority 3.2 DVR will meet or exceed state and federal Common Performance Measures (CPMs).

Strategies:

- Establish baseline data for all WIOA required data elements and negotiate with RSA on required CPMs.
- Monitor data collection processes to ensure program fidelity.
- Work with National Clearinghouse to obtain additional education information.
- Work with Leadership to determine appropriate State Goals known as Missions & Measures.

Performance Indicators:

- Negotiation with RSA completed.
- All required federal reporting submitted on time and is accurate.
- Schedule established for sending/receiving data from the National Clearinghouse.
- Meet or exceed State Missions and Measures.

Priority 3.3 Continue to update the AWARE case management system to provide quality data while reducing system barriers.

Strategies:

- Help Desk team actively participates in all AWARE user groups and Community of Practice group to ensure DVR's workflows are considered when Alliance is creating enhancements to the software.
- Help Desk team meet and thoroughly analyze impact to field and accounting staff with each iteration of RSA-911 data manual,

upgrades to the AWARE system, or clarification of current regulations by RSA.

- Help Desk team works with the management team to ensure on-going, accurate data collection by field staff.
- Help Desk team coordinates all training of field and other staff and provides training in timely manner.
- Help Desk team routinely runs QA on AWARE data to ensure accuracy and consistency.
- Policy, Planning and Program Evaluation team (PP&P) to evaluate processes for moving to a paperless system. This includes hardware and software purchases that may be necessary and staff training.
- Incorporate SharePoint in all policy and procedure development.

Performance Indicators:

- All AWARE updates are reviewed and installed as required.
- Federal reports are produced on-time and accurately. Staff are notified and trained on any changes to AWARE.
- Required data is collected accurately.
- DVR services are not negatively impacted.
- RSA-911 edit issues are resolved.
- Plan for transitioning to paperless record keeping is established with timelines and costs.
- Policies and Procedures are available on SharePoint.

Priority 3.4 Continue to support SARA communication system.

Strategies:

- Help Desk staff will continue support and provide training for SARA.
- Finalize improved AWARE to SARA integration.
- Continue training on new features and technology as it becomes available.
- Electronic signatures

- Concurrent case-noting and calendaring
- Single-Sign-On
- Outlook calendar and SARA calendar integration
- Train BEP staff and BEP Vendors on use of SARA
- Begin soft onboarding and training with CRPs into SARA.

Performance Indicators:

- New SARA interface and new system functionality is in place.
- Follow-up training at VR statewide training performed annually.
- Survey BEP vendors semi-annually and then annually determine if SARA communication is useful or needs further refinements.
- Collaborate with CRP Coordinator and survey staff and CRP vendors regarding effectiveness of SARA use with CRPs.

Priority 3.5 Explore and improve technology usage.

Strategies:

- Explore an internal or State of Alaska “accessibility” position.
- Explore additional social media opportunities to increase awareness and information about DVR and its services statewide.
- Assist staff and managers with the hybrid teleworking staffing environment, which continues to improve distance delivery of services, increases communication between VR Staff and clients/case services partners, and gives VR clients the option to choose their preferred meeting and communication methods.
- Continue to coordinate support with Information Technology regarding AT Equipment and other technology available for use by participants in field offices.
- Implement a paperless/electronic case file which includes attaching documents from sources other than the AWARE case management system.

Performance Indicators:

- Accessibility hardware and software is supported and upgraded when applicable.

- Social media influence to show increased number of individuals served annually.
- VR offices transitioned to paperless/electronic case files by FY26.

Priority 3.6 Review existing Policies and Procedures.

Strategies:

- Revise existing policies.
- Obtain SVRC approval on policies related to service delivery.
- Revise client services procedures.

Performance Indicators:

- New policies written and all staff is trained.
- Policies are posted publicly.
- New procedures are written and all staff is trained on the procedures.

Priority 3.7 Review DVR case processes for efficiency and ease of navigation.

Strategies:

- Evaluate processes at each case status.
- Simplify documentation and promote a statewide path of workflow which all offices follow when possible
- Improve guidance materials and implement staff training.
- Develop committee to evaluate and suggest improvements (see Priority 1.8).

Performance Indicators:

- Clients are able to quickly and easily access DVR services.
- Redundancy is reduced.
- Consistency among offices achieved.

Goal 4 – Prioritize Alaska Business Needs

DVR will prioritize the needs of Alaskan businesses while leveraging other workforce partners.

This goal represents DVR’s responsibility to the dual customer model as well as ensuring employment services are provided through other components of the Workforce development system.

Priority 4.1 Work with employers to ensure vast opportunities exist in meaningful employment.

Strategies:

- Work with employers to ensure opportunities for DVR clients to succeed in high-demand jobs.
- Provide training to in-house job developers.
- Develop YouTube channel
- Develop standardized outreach materials for employers.
- Develop standardized and publicly available FAQs.
- The Business Engagement Services Team (BEST) will develop one-year plan for employer engagement and determine how to measure success.
- The BEST will develop an internal Strategic Plan to determine specific action steps required to achieve the goals of this section.

Performance Indicators:

- Employers in high demand industries will hire DVR clients.
- Training program implemented for job developers.
- BEST will develop a one-year plan with SMART goals and measures of success.

Priority 4.2 Work with WIOA Partners to strengthen services to individuals with disabilities.

Strategies:

- Develop a structured communication plan with Division of Employment and Training Services (DETS).
- Develop a structured communication plan within the Department of Labor and Workforce Development (DOLWD).
- Advocate for VR representation on the Alaska Workforce Investment Board.
- Continue to co-enroll participants.

Performance Indicators

- Improved and increased communication, referrals, and cross agency collaboration.
- Improved and increased interdepartmental communication.
- SARA Communication System indicates co-enrolled participants.

Priority 4.3 Utilize “Employment First” initiative to promote hiring of individuals with disabilities across Alaska.

Strategies:

- Explore “rebranding” to increase the understanding of DVR and services provided.
- Increase Supported Employment opportunities.
- Increase the use of Provisional Hire within the State.
- Include training at the hiring manager level.
- Meet with other Division Directors to train on the Provisional Hire process.
- Create links to include Provisional Hire opportunities when new positions post.
- Use AWARE’s Job Ready page consistently in all regions and provide training, as needed.
- Create an employment related task-force.

Performance Indicators:

- DVR's services are more easily recognizable.
- DVR Staff is successful in making connections to enhance employment opportunities for Alaskans with disabilities.
- Increased successful Supported Employment cases.
- Increased Provisional Hire requests and placements.