

**STATE OF NEW JERSEY
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES
NEW JERSEY COMMISSION FOR THE BLIND AND VISUALLY
IMPAIRED
REQUEST FOR INFORMATION**

I. Purpose and Intent

The State of New Jersey, Department of Human Services (“DHS”), Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (“CBVI”) is issuing this Request for Information (“RFI”) to gather information from Respondents that will assist CBVI in updating and improving the Supported Employment (“SE”) program. CBVI’s goal is to align SE and related career services policies and provision approaches under Vocational Rehabilitation to current Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (“WIOA”) parameters. CBVI is seeking the most reasonable, innovative, and cost-effective approach for facilitating high quality successful competitive integrated employment outcomes through partnerships with qualified community rehabilitation providers.

CBVI defines “high quality employment outcomes” in the context of employment outcomes as:

- Hourly wages as compared to the median wages for the state
- Full-time employment (35+ hours per week)
- Access to paid benefits and time off
- Opportunities for advancement and career progression

CBVI defines “high quality service provision” as:

- Staff that is experienced and trained in providing employment services to individuals who are blind, visually impaired, and Deaf Blind, including those with additional disabilities.
- Communicative and collaborative working relationship with all relevant parties, including the consumer (and family, if appropriate), CBVI staff, and other providers working in partnership to facilitate successful employment outcomes.
- Continuity of services by the provider, without frequent interruptions impacted by staff turnover or reassignment.

As a preliminary step in this process, this RFI seeks responses from Respondents that provide SE and related career services, as outlined in this RFI. CBVI also welcomes input from other relevant stakeholders regarding how CBVI and its vendors can improve the SE program in this area. Currently, CBVI utilizes a fee-for-service model for: (1) pre-placement activities and job development; (2) placement services; (3) time-limited job coaching and; (4) supported employment job coaching. These have been historically based on the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Service’s (“DVRS”) procedures and payment structure, using vendors approved to provide the services by DVRS and the Division of Developmental Disabilities (“DDD”). The goal of this RFI is to identify alternate ways in which CBVI can better partner with a select group of vendors, facilitate a closer working relationship and customize the process and services to best meet the unique needs of the CBVI’s vocational rehabilitation recipients.

This RFI provides a brief background, a listing of the types of services desired, and presents a series of questions to potential vendors and stakeholders to guide the development of a RFP. While it is CBVI’s goal for responses to this RFI to include consideration of, and an answer to, all issues

presented, a respondent may choose to address those issues within its specialty or expertise. All respondents are encouraged to provide additional, non-requested information they believe would be useful to CBVI and present alternate methods for the targeted service provision.

Current Status:

Under the Vocational Rehabilitation program, CBVI can provide a wide range of supported employment and career services to directly assist an individual to prepare for, obtain, and retain employment. These include discovery and pre-placement activities, work-based learning and evaluation, trial work experiences, job development and placement, short-term job coaching, and supported employment job coaching. Most of these services are provided by vendors authorized by CBVI on an hourly, fee-for-service basis.

Challenges:

The primary challenges faced or observed by CBVI include:

1. The approach and model was designed for the broad disability population, whereas CBVI serves a low-incidence disability population with unique needs.
CBVI's present approach to SE and related career services is based on the model designed for services to the general vocational rehabilitation population, which was designed by DVRS and DDD. Although a wide range of vendors are currently used across the State to administer these services, many of these vendors have no formal or specialized knowledge or skills in the field of services to individuals who are blind, visually-impaired, and Deaf-Blind.
2. CBVI needs to sustain regular training and technical assistance to the full range of potential service providers currently eligible to provide SE and related services but potential vendors often don't have the targeted, culturally appropriate knowledge to meet needs.
Training programs for vendors and individuals providing job development, job coaching, and SE services, as well as other related career services, often do not specifically address the unique blindness needs of the consumers CBVI serves. Though CBVI has provided, and continues to provide, training to vendors and individuals within the field, this training is only provided at the request of the vendor or as a "guest presenter" at a larger, more general training series, such as those provided for Employment Specialist Foundations certification. Therefore, due to the large number of potentially eligible vendors, this model is not sustainable based on CBVI's capacity.
3. CBVI needs aggregate data to evaluate performance with blind, vision impaired and Deaf Blind consumers, but utilizes a wide range of providers making targeted evaluation challenging.
While CBVI receives service and billing reports specific to each consumer service, CBVI does not currently require SE vendors to provide aggregated performance and outcome reports specifically related to services provided to blind, visually impaired, and Deaf-Blind individuals. As a result, CBVI lacks the ability to empirically evaluate performance and outcomes specific to this population. This limits CBVI's ability to make informed decisions on how to improve the delivery of these services or address gaps with performance and outcomes, and restricts program recipients' ability to fully engage in the informed choice process when selecting a provider.

The payment structure currently utilized is based on an hourly fee-for-service model, where all services are billed based on service hours provided. CBVI is interested in exploring other payment models based on performance, where payment is provided at various points and milestones in the

process for outcomes/deliverables achieved, or a hybrid of the two, where it might lead to higher quality services and outcomes. Some other models used nationally in the vocational rehabilitation system also utilize tiered payments for high quality outcomes.

II. Contents of RFI Submissions

CBVI is seeking information related to the provision of SE and other related career services, to individuals who are blind, visually impaired, and Deaf Blind, or with multiple disabilities. Responses should include recommendations that can help CBVI identify other options for providing services to this population.

Services include:

- Trial Work experience
- Community based work evaluation
- Work-based learning experiences for students with disabilities, age 14-21
- Pre-placement and/or discovery activities, which include person-centered exploration activities, that informs job development and facilitates the successful acquisition of employment
- Job development, customized employment, and other job placement services
- Short-term job coaching, as well as intensive supported employment job coaching
- SE for youth with the multiple disabilities, age 14-24

A. Response Contents

Respondents to this RFI must address the following questions:

1. What are the challenges faced by providers in implementing the above-listed services leading to high quality outcomes?
2. What supports can CBVI provide to the vendor to best facilitate high quality service provision and outcomes?
3. What are your agency's current challenges to demand and capacity in serving individuals with vision impairments, and what might CBVI do to assist the agency in overcoming these challenges?
4. How can CBVI support staff retention and continuity and consistency of services for consumers?
5. What factors should CBVI consider in developing a payment and/or service structure that is cost-effective, outcome-driven, and provides an agency the necessary resources to provide high-quality outcomes?

Respondents to this RFI should explain their approaches to addressing the objectives described above and include:

B. Respondent Information

List the Respondent's name, contact information, location, and experience in the subject area. Provide information that is relevant to the service program, including affiliated organization information.

C. Delivery of Services Information

Respondents should address their agency's ideas in providing the above-listed services, as well as highlighting experiences, challenges, and successes in providing these services to CBVI consumers.

Non-provider Respondents should address suggestions for the above-listed services provision globally, and should not address individual consumers' confidential case service information. Individual consumer concerns can be addressed outside the scope of this RFI by contacting the consumer's primary case worker, supervisor, service center manager, or Coordinator of VR and Transition Services directly.

Information provided in response to this RFI can be released to the public under the New Jersey Open Public Records Act, N.J.S.A. §§47:1A-1 et seq., ("OPRA") or the common law right to know. All information submitted in response to this RFI is considered public information, notwithstanding any disclaimers to the contrary submitted by a Respondent, except as may be exempted from public disclosure by OPRA and the common law.

Any proprietary and/or confidential information which you provide will be redacted by DHS. A Respondent to this RFI may designate specific information as not subject to disclosure pursuant to the exceptions to OPRA found at N.J.S.A. §47:1A-1.1, when such Respondent has a good faith legal and/or factual basis for such assertion. DHS reserves the right to make the determination as to what is proprietary or confidential and will advise the responding vendor accordingly. The location in the response to this RFI of any such designation should be clearly stated in a cover letter. DHS will not honor any attempt by a Respondent to designate all materials submitted in a response to this RFI as proprietary, confidential and/or to claim copyright protection for such materials. In the event of any challenge to an assertion of confidentiality with which DHS does not concur, the Respondent to this RFI shall be solely responsible for defending its designation by submitting a response to this RFI detailing why that specific information is exempt from disclosure. The Respondent waives any claims of copyright protection set forth within any materials submitted in the response.

III. RFI Submission

All responses should be submitted via email to Amanda Gerson, Coordinator of Vocational Rehabilitation and Transition Services, Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired, at amanda.gerson@dhs.nj.gov. Responses to this RFI should be submitted no later than August 28, 2020.