

**State Plan for the State Vocational Rehabilitation Services Program
And State Plan Supplement for the State Supported Employment Services Program
Connecticut Dept of Social Services - Bureau of Rehabilitation Services State Plan
for Fiscal Year 2013 (submitted FY 2012)**

Attachment 4.2(c) Input of State Rehabilitation Council

Required annually by all agencies except those agencies that are independent consumer-controlled commissions. Identify the Input provided by the state rehabilitation council, including recommendations from the council's annual report, the review and analysis of consumer satisfaction, and other council reports. Be sure to also include: the Designated state unit's response to the input and recommendations; and explanations for the designated state unit's rejection of any input or recommendation of the council.

SRC Participation

The State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) Chair and/or members of the SRC have collaborated with the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS) and attended or participated in the following:

1. BRS Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA);
2. BRS 2013 State Plan;
3. BRS 2012 Public Meetings;
4. BRS Transition Committee;
5. Connect-Ability Employment Summit 2011;
6. Council of State Administrators for Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR) Fall 2011 and Spring 2012 Conference;
7. National Council of State Rehabilitation Councils (NCSRC) Conferences (2) and Teleconferences (6);
8. SRC Meetings (six per year);
9. Review of Administrative Hearing Outcomes (1); and
10. A survey of the BRS offices.

Legislative Changes

Effective July 1, 2011, the State Legislature removed the Vocational Rehabilitation program from the Department of Social Services and combined it with several other disability-related programs to form the new Bureau of Rehabilitative Services. This new agency now includes the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services, the Board of Education and Services for the Blind, the Commission on the Deaf and Hearing Impaired, the Driver Training Program for Persons with Disabilities, and the Worker's Compensation Commission. This merger aligns services together that may assist consumers who have some similarity in need. While the merger in name was effective in July, the actual transition is still a work in progress. Amy Porter was

recently appointed as the Director of the new Bureau of Rehabilitative Services. SRC members have monitored the transition to ensure that the needs of VR consumers remain a priority as the new agency works out the details.

Expanding Services

BRS has recently hired counselors, employment specialists and support staff in all three service regions. These new individuals will bring fresh talent and skills in serving our constituents to find or keep employment. As staff becomes more familiar with the needs of consumers and the tools and resources to assist them, we anticipate more consumers will become or remain productive employees. Welcome aboard!

Based on budget projections and the recent ability to fill counselor positions, BRS proposes to lift the Order Of Selection (OOS) starting October 1, 2012 to serve all consumers with disabilities, not just those with a most significant or significant disability (Priority #1 and Priority #2). This OOS has been in effect since 1991. Given the current difficult economic atmosphere, we are pleased that BRS has carefully assessed that now is the best time to expand services to more consumers. We are equally pleased that BRS will continue to monitor this expansion so that it does not overly stress the capacity of monetary and human resources available to meet consumers' needs.

Office Surveys

The Consumer Satisfaction Committee of the SRC led members in surveying the offices to determine visibility, accessibility, and consistency of information offered to consumers upon their initial visit. The committee developed the survey and members of the SRC visited BRS offices to inquire about receiving services. They assessed how easy the office was to find, how easy it was to park, how easy it was to enter the building and find staff that were knowledgeable about vocational rehabilitation services. Some offices stand alone and are independent of other services; some are co-located with One-Stop Centers at the State Labor Department. Some offices schedule appointments to meet with a counselor and some schedule group orientation meetings that offer general information about possible services available at BRS. As a result of conducting this survey, SRC members gained better insight regarding what

consumers face and how they begin their collaboration with the VR program. They also learned more about constraints that impact the VR staff and their ability to serve consumers.

BRS 2012 Public Meeting

BRS and the SRC hosted three public meetings in April 2012 in Hartford, Norwich, and Torrington. Consumers, their families, and others interested in the VR program were invited to review the draft of the 2013 State Plan and to share their comments regarding this draft at the public meeting. More than 5,000 consumers received invitations via mail to attend the public meetings. Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) partners were notified electronically from the distribution of our flyer and the posting on the BRS website.

Eight representatives of the SRC attended the public meetings to assess the effectiveness of the VR program by listening to consumer comments and questions. Top-ranking staff, led by Amy Porter, BRS Director, presented an overview of the State Plan, highlighted the goals for the vocational rehabilitation (VR) program, and explained why BRS plans to eliminate the Order of Selection (OOS) effective October 1, 2012. They responded to questions in the group setting and were available for individual conversations for topics that were not shared publicly. A few Counselors and Consultants also attended to support the public meetings.

About 25 people who were not staff or SRC members attended the public meetings. Few of the attendees had read the State Plan prior to the meeting, but copies were provided for their review. Consumers who spoke publicly appreciated the professionalism of the counselors in assisting them and were grateful to BRS for making a positive difference in the quality of their lives. Several counselors were praised by name for the assistance they had provided to specific consumers. While similar themes were not presented at each meeting, some questions were generated regarding the newly acquired Driver Training Program in the Bureau of Rehabilitative Services and the Bureau's ability to provide assistance to the ever growing population of students who are identified with Autism. Consumers in attendance later took advantage of an opportunity for one-on-one discussions following the group presentations.

Evaluations of the public meetings were also distributed to enable attendees to share feedback on the process and to make suggestions for improvements. Overall, the public meetings were well-received and BRS received positive feedback in several areas for the public meetings:

- Open forum;
- Informative, willing to answer questions;
- Representatives at meetings were courteous; and
- Thanks for your help.

In addition to providing comments at the public meetings, anyone who could not attend, but wanted to share a comment or ask a question could send it by mail, e-mail, or fax. This period for written communication was extended beyond the dates of the public meetings in case someone was unable to attend the public meeting, but still wanted to submit their comments. Written comments were acknowledged and those that contained issues were passed on to District Directors for follow-up as needed.

Of particular note is a letter submitted by one of our VR partners:

“Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the BRS Annual State Plan. On behalf of the State Unit on Aging (Aging Services Division of the Department of Social Services), I want to commend the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services for a comprehensive plan that involves many partnerships. We are pleased to work in partnership with BRS in Aging and Disability efforts, in particular, the Aging and Disability Resource Centers.

The draft plan appropriately acknowledges the ADRC counseling services, technical enhancements, marketing materials, the role of the Community Choices Counselors and the Community Choices Counselor training and certification.

Thank you for including the role of the ADRCs in the plan and the continued partnership of the State Unit on Aging with BRS.”

Follow-up to Previous Recommendations

The SRC had significant interest in being a part of the selection process for the new agency director, however that desire was unfulfilled. As Amy Porter was selected as the new director, we are pleased with the outcome.

The SRC is also pleased to learn that video telephones have been installed in the BRS offices which will help facilitate working with consumers who are deaf.

SRC Recommendations to BRS for State Plan 2013

As a result of the SRC office surveys this year, the following recommendations are offered:

Recommendation 1 –

- Signage to locate the building and direction to the BRS office needs improvement in these offices:
 - Danbury, Enfield, Hartford, Middletown, Norwich, Torrington, & Waterbury.

We are aware that the consolidation of the new Bureau of Rehabilitative Services may require a name change for the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services. We hope that signs and directions to the office locations will be highly visible to all visitors in all offices.

BRS Response: We agree that the signage could use improvement in each of these offices. When we finalize the name of the overall agency and the individual programs, we will develop a plan to address the concerns to the greatest extent possible. There are times when landlord issues or physical space may limit our options for signage, but we will take these into consideration in the development of our plan.

Recommendation 2 –

- The following offices need more accessible parking:
 - Danbury, Hartford, Stamford & Waterbury.

BRS Response: We agree that there is a need for more accessible parking in each of these offices. We will raise this issue with staff from the Department of Administrative Services. We also anticipate that an overall agency space plan will be developed over the next year, and as this is occurring, we will be sure to raise the issue of

parking. As with the issue of signage, there are often landlord issues or issues of physical space that may limit our options.

Recommendation 3 –

- Availability of BRS staff to greet consumers upon arrival needs to be addressed in the following locations:
 - Danbury, Danielson, Hartford, & Torrington.

BRS Response: The physical layout and entry point into the designated BRS space in these four offices is not conducive to the presence of a receptionist or other staff to greet consumers upon arrival. We will continue to focus on the response time of BRS staff, so that individual consumers are brought into the BRS space as quickly as possible. In addition, we will discuss alternatives with the SRC, combining a discussion of their observations with our physical constraints in these specific offices.

Recommendation 4 –

- Staff was overall helpful, informative, and pleasant. There was at least one person in Norwich who seemed to be exceptional in providing customer service, even anticipating questions yet to be asked. Perhaps BRS could add customer service training so that more staff has the same level of skills in welcoming consumers and anticipating their needs.

BRS Response: It is great to hear the example of exceptional service. We strive to be a customer-service oriented agency, and again, will have further discussions with the SRC about what set this individual and office apart from others so that we know where to focus our efforts. As part of our training calendar, we often provide training opportunities in the area of customer service, so we have a vehicle to use to incorporate any specific information recommendations that come out of our discussions with the SRC.

General Note from BRS: As a general note, we want to acknowledge the work that the SRC members put in to conducting

this evaluation of the BRS offices. Many members participated, and travelled to different offices within the state to get a real-world perspective on what a consumer might experience. We appreciate the time and effort, as well as the specific feedback, and will try to address your recommendations individually.