

2. (A) Core program activities to implement the State's strategy:

Describe the activities that the Department of Services for the Blind (DSB) will fund to implement the State's strategies. Also describe how these activities will be aligned across the core and partner programs, including using co-enrollment and other activities.

The Department of Services for the Blind

The Department of Services for the Blind (DSB) is the designated state agency for Title IV Vocational Rehabilitation services in Washington State for residents who experience functional vision loss as a barrier to finding employment, keeping a current job, or promoting within a career. Eligible participants often have multiple co-occurring disabling conditions that are addressed by agency staff in tandem with issues of blindness/visual impairment in order to move the individual towards greater independence, inclusion, and economic vitality. The agency provides vocational services statewide with approximately 80 FTE staff in seven office locations. Vocational and blindness rehabilitation services are provided in participant home and work locations, and each eligible participant has access to the in-house staff services of an inter-disciplinary team including a vocational rehabilitation counselor; a rehabilitation teacher, low vision specialist and orientation & mobility specialist; an adaptive technology specialist; and a rehabilitation technician. If more intensive (daily) adaptive skills of blindness training are required by an individual, they can be available through the agency's residential training center. If vocational or training services are required beyond those provided by in-house staff, the agency collaborates with community resources and/or contracts with external vendor service providers. DSB activities are strongly aligned with implementation of the State's strategies.

DSB activities towards State Strategy: High skills/High wages

The DSB will leverage its existing success towards contributing to the State's strategy of **High skills/High wages**, and will create new pathways to greater self-sufficiency for DSB participants through deeper collaboration among core and partner programs.

The DSB will continue to provide the comprehensive, participant-centered, individualized vocational and blindness rehabilitation services that have consistently made the Rehabilitation Services Administration's rating of the agency's outcomes the strongest among all national vocational rehabilitation agencies – blind or general - in quality of employment achieved and wages earned. The DSB will continue to provide highly professional and informed counseling and guidance services to assist the participant through issues of adjustment to disability, vocational and skill gap-assessment, career matching, and integration into the workplace. The DSB will continue to make use of client-centered tools, such as deep practice of Motivational Interviewing,

to assist the participant to identify the pathways of change that fit best for the individual. The DSB will continue to provide the services that assist an individual who has had a change in vision to keep the high paying job they are skilled at, and will continue to assist individuals require supports to expand and challenge their current work circumstances through promotional opportunities. The DSB will continue to develop, refine, and provide relevant job readiness and entrepreneurial exploration workshops for participants to refine their self-marketing skills and explore self-employment as an option. The DSB will continue to provide the highest quality blindness rehabilitation skills assessment and training which are essential to creating an equal footing among non-disabled peers and within the community and workplace. The DSB will continue to provide cutting-edge adaptive skills assessment, tools matching and training that are critical to developing the technical access, efficiencies and competencies that meet business workforce needs. The DSB will continue to provide vocational and academic training, work experience, and paid internship / apprenticeship opportunities that bring the participant the technical and professional skills needed by business, broaden the participant perspective on workplace culture and expectations, and help a workplace recognize the talent of the individual blind participant through active demonstration of value to the business. The DSB will continue to partner among DSB staff, the participant, and employer to provide on-site workplace evaluations for accessibility recommendations and tools. The DSB will continue to refine its message and outreach methods to inform potential eligible participants, business and partners of our comprehensive services. The DSB will continue to refine facilitation of services for historically underserved communities such as non-native-English speaking communities, secondary disabilities such as mental & behavioral health, and youth.

Under the new Combined State Plan, the DSB expects the new relationship among core group and partner programs to allow engaging in activities that enhance and increase opportunity for our eligible participants towards the State's strategy of High Skills/High Wages. These activities are aspirational and developing, as our agency and its participants have been largely denied access to the benefits of the greater workforce system since the 1998 WIA implementation; future success of these activities will depend on partners' active awareness that the DSB is a core Title IV partner, and that access and navigation issues are addressed with highest priority among all partner programs.

The DSB expects our counseling staff to be active and equal partners among the regional and local Business Service Teams, where the talents of agency participants can be more effectively matched with business needs through sharing of sector strategy and real time labor market information. The DSB expects to enter agency participants into any shared profile mechanism that is developed among the core and partner programs, and to connect agency participants to the array of wrap-around services they

are eligible for. The DSB expects partner programs to begin to identify shared core participant job readiness skill needs, and to work with partners to develop trainings - and share presentation efforts where applicable – to strengthen the skill sets of our agency participants through access to all. The DSB expects that the new partnership will make our staff and agency participants more informed beneficiaries of relevant targeted workforce vocational training and apprenticeship opportunities towards gaining higher skills that match an individual’s aptitude despite visual disability, and thereby securing higher wages and greater self-sufficiencies. The DSB expects to explore bridges among the partner Department of Labor Youth programs to fully engage blind youth in integrated and competitive work experience opportunities that fit individual need.

DSB activities towards State Strategy: Business Engagement

The DSB will work towards the State’s strategy of increased **Business Engagement** by developing the agency’s array of services that businesses may require or desire of us, thereby facilitating the employment of qualified individuals who are blind, low vision or deaf blind. The agency will deepen collaboration with core and partner programs in order to better connect our blind participants’ aptitudes to the skills training and business connection pathways that work best for business needs.

A DSB-offered array of services for business can include many components. One component is to increase awareness among business of the agency’s range of services, in order to provide an easy pathway for business to retain a talented employee whose work performance may be impacted due to a change in vision. Another aspect is the ability to fulfill business recruitment needs through connecting the business with the talents of job-ready and skilled agency participants, and to offer the ability to create individualized and low-risk opportunities for the business so that a participant might best showcase their ability and potential value to the workplace. The DSB can provide guidance on issues of disability in the workplace, including education around the Americans with Disabilities (ADA) Act; information on how to benefit from federal and local incentives for hiring of individuals with disabilities, and offer supports to the business for successfully meeting required mandates for hiring of individuals with disabilities. The DSB can offer workplace accommodation recommendations and supports, and education and guidance on making the workplace a disability-friendly and inclusive environment. The DSB can connect business to disability-related resources, training and/or education available in the community at large. The DSB will engage business in identifying supply chain needs, and can assist in establishing entrepreneurs and small businesses that might best fulfill that supply chain need.

Due to the small size of the DSB customer base and agency staffing in comparison to other workforce partner programs, the agency and its eligible participants will benefit from the broader infrastructure that state plan partners develop and nurture towards

increased business engagement. The DSB alone cannot fully provide the amount of skilled talent business requires, and the DSB as a separate entity cannot efficiently engage business statewide. The DSB will rely on active inclusion of its staff in the WorkSource Business Services Teams, and depend on the accessibility of workforce programs for agency participants, in order to meet the broader engagement of business in a manner that works best for business – through a seamless single point of contact. DSB counselors do develop relationships with local business partners, and will guide those relationships (as applicable) into the greater workforce system in order to best fulfill the business needs.

DSB activities towards State Strategy: Access and Technology

The DSB views the State’s strategy for **Access and Technology** as the highest priority for the success of our agency participants to connect to and benefit from core group and partner program services which might prepare and provide a pathway to them meeting the workforce needs of business.

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act makes accessibility a more prominent expectation for workforce partners, and the DSB will gladly champion universal accessibility among the core group and partner programs, in particular for potential beneficiaries of the workforce system array of services and programs who are blind, low vision or deaf blind.

The DSB has helped workforce partners to broaden their understanding of what universal accessibility means beyond basic architectural access, and DSB has assisted the workforce partners in codifying universal access as an element in the One-Stop certification process. The DSB will continue to remind partner programs of the potential costs of not providing accessible electronic and programmatic services, and will continue to provide technical assistance and referral for procurement, testing and maintenance of electronic data systems and processes that are accessible and usable by adaptive technology users.

The DSB will be active in assisting with the recruitment of local and state advisory boards for access and technology in order to provide useful guidance to state and local workforce systems on developing and refining greater universal accessibility to communities with barriers to employment.

DSB activities towards State Strategy: Youth Opportunities

The DSB will leverage existing success towards contributing to the State’s strategy of **Youth Opportunities**, and will create new pathways for youth to gain essential experience and pathways towards the world of work.

The DSB will continue to provide its array of workshops, programs and paid work experience to students and youth with visual disability. The DSB will continue to provide

short-term summer workshops in Seattle and Spokane that provide pre-employment transition services to students with visual disability, and will expand those group services to more locations around the state and more frequently throughout the year. The DSB will fund the two-week summer program that provides individual eligible students vocational assessments and experience exploring the world of work through informational interviews and job-shadowing. The DSB will continue to organize and manage the summer six-week paid work experience program for eligible students age 16+, and will expand the program and staffing to provide more paid work experience and pre-employment transition service opportunities in a year. The DSB will continue to nurture the relationships with business that support these work opportunities for blind youth. The DSB will continue to organize and manage the summer university transition program to prepare students for the self-advocacy skills needed for the adult world of higher education. The DSB will continue to support fifth year students who require intensive adaptive skills training through the Washington School for the Blind before transitioning into adult pathways of higher education or work. The DSB will continue to build relationship and participate in IEP meetings with school districts, teachers of the visually impaired, students and families throughout the state. The DSB will continue to present at events such as the Pacific Northwest Association of Educators of Rehabilitation (PNWAER) to inform educators and families who work with students who might be eligible for vocational rehabilitation services.

The DSB will explore methods for supporting work experience for students with visual disability more locally across the state and more broadly throughout the year other than summer. The DSB is in discussion with the Washington School for the Blind and other partners to assist in more consistently identifying and enrolling students with 504 plans who are eligible for vocational rehabilitation services. The DSB is working with the Washington State School for the Blind to co-fund a new Business Specialist position housed at the school which will be responsible for securing and supporting work experience for students both at the school and through the agency. The DSB is in discussion with the Washington State School for the Blind on how to best promote work experience for students while simultaneously acknowledging competing pressures and tight timelines of academic requirements. The DSB is exploring with other partners new methods for providing pre-employment transition services to students with visual disability, focusing in particular upon the adaptive and soft skills necessary to succeed in an adult workplace culture.

DSB activities towards State Strategy: Performance and Accountability

The DSB will work with core and partner programs to develop systems that enhance the State's strategy of **Performance and Accountability**. The DSB is working towards inter-agency agreements that will allow the agency to provide second and fourth quarter employment and wage data. The DSB will need to develop systems among partner

programs to track training achievements of agency participants after exit from program. The DSB will collaborate with core and partner programs to track and share performance data around business engagement activity.

2. (B) Alignment with activities outside the plan:

How are activities not covered in plan aligned among core and partner programs to assure coordination and avoid duplication?

The DSB engages in activities with the Washington State School for the Blind (WSSB), school districts, teachers of the visually impaired, and families of students with a visual disability. If the student has a co-occurring disability, we advise co-enrollment with our partner agency the DSHS Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR). DSB, DVR and the Office of Superintendent of Instruction (OSPI) have a memorandum of understanding of how all parties support transition youth services.

The DSB engages with the Center for Change in Transition Services (CCTS). The CCTS is a Washington State Needs Project funded annually by federal resources from the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI). The goal of CCTS is to improve post-school outcomes for students with disabilities in the state. CCTS has provided transition services training, resources and technical support to DSB staff in support of the agency's transition youth services.

The DSB engages with the Blind Youth Consortium, a quarterly meeting of partner agencies (DSB; Washington State School for the Blind; Washington Sensory Disability Services; Lighthouse for the Blind; Washington Talking Book and Braille Library; OSPI Educational School Districts; the Department of Early Learning; the Department of Health; Seattle Children's Hospital; University of Washington) to collaborate and share resources on blind youth issues within Washington State. The group worked to refine coordination of Birth – 3 vision services statewide, and have collaborated in the need to identify and provide services for individuals with either ocular and/or cortical visual impairment at the earliest point.

The DSB engages actively with Public Institutions of Higher Education. DSB and DVR have entered into a formal agreement with the Public Institutions of Higher Education in Washington. This agreement facilitates collaboration for our participants with disabilities who are attending Higher Education schools in Washington State. One of the primary components in the agreement concerns cost sharing for certain high cost accommodations.

The DSB engages with the Washington Assistive Technology Act Program (WATAP) to broaden access and services to adaptive technology for the agency participants. The DSB and WATAP have an interagency agreement to facilitate equipment loans, technology assessment services and trainings. The DSB informs agency participants of

funding mechanisms for adaptive technology through the Washington Access Technology Fund, and works with the Deaf Blind Equipment Program to coordinate technology assessment and training.

The DSB engages in activities with tribal vocational rehabilitation programs, meeting quarterly in each region of the state with the eight partner tribal programs and the DVR, and all partners meet annually to refine the memorandum of understanding on how we will partner on service delivery.

The DSB engages with the Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment program through the Veteran's Administration (VA), and the agency has entered into a memorandum of understanding among the DVR and the VA on how all will partner to provide services among potentially shared customer base.

The DSB engages with the Washington Sensory Disability Services (WSDS). DSB staff partner with WSDS in providing referrals and services to children who are deaf or hard of hearing, blind or visually impaired, or deaf-blind, by providing training and other support to families and service providers. They are a strong partner within the Blind Youth Consortium.

The DSB engages with the Office of the Deaf & Hard of Hearing (ODHH). ODHH is a state agency that provides resources for our Deaf Blind participants, including telecommunication-related services, reasonable accommodations to access DSHS services and human services via regional service centers of the deaf and hard of hearing. ODHH manages the funds for the Deaf Blind Service Center, which provides information, referral and Support Service Providers for environmental interpretation.

The DSB engages with the Helen Keller National Center (HKNC). The Helen Keller National Center is a resource for DSB on Deaf-Blind resources and can provide contracted services to DSB participants as well as trainings for DSB staff for working effectively with DSB Deaf Blind participants.

2. (C) Coordination, alignment and provision of services to individuals:

Describe how the Department of Services for the Blind (DSB) will coordinate activities and resources among the core and partner programs to provide comprehensive, high-quality, customer-centered services, including supportive services individuals with barriers to employment.

The DSB will champion the State's strategy of Access and Technology, which has the express intent of identifying potential barriers to services for the communities identified within the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, and developing ways for addressing those barriers. The success of this strategy will be critical for the ability of blind, low vision and deaf blind individuals to access the workforce array of services and

opportunities. If the State's Access and Technology strategy is successful, the DSB will be able to offer a wider array of vocational trainings and opportunities to agency participants, providing stronger and more effective pathways to employment that both meets participant aptitude and business need. The DSB will continue to be a resource to partner programs for technical assistance in creating service delivery systems, processes and tools that are disability-friendly, inclusive, and accessible. The DSB will continue to advocate among partner programs that universal accessibility elements often provide benefit for the general public and will often result in more streamlined, usable services for all.

The DSB as a Title IV Rehabilitation Program has a long history of participant-centered service provision with client-focused concepts such as "informed choice" and "comprehensive and individualized services" incorporated since 1998 into the fabric of our work and services, and the DSB can and will provide technical assistance and unique perspectives among our Combined State Plan partners towards improved customer service provision.

The DSB will work to increase awareness among partner agency staff of the array of services offered through the DSB, and which their customers may also benefit from. The DSB will assist in the education of its own agency staff to the array of services available through our workforce partners that our agency participants might also benefit from.

2. (D) Coordination, alignment and provision of services to business:

Describe how the Department of Services for the Blind (DSB) will coordinate activities and resources among the core and partner programs to provide comprehensive, high-quality services to employers to meet their current and projected need.

As stated in response 2(A) above, the DSB will work towards the State's strategy of increased **Business Engagement** by developing the agency's array of services that businesses may require or desire of us, thereby facilitating the employment of talented individuals who are blind, low vision or deaf blind. The agency will deepen collaboration with core and partner programs in order to better connect our blind participants' aptitudes to the skills training and business connection pathways that work best for business needs.

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2 (H) Coordinating with Economic Development strategies:

Describe how the Department of Services for the Blind (DSB) activities identified in 2 (A) will be coordinated with economic development entities, strategies and activities in the state.

The DSB activities should be well-aligned with Washington’s economic development strategies, if agency participants have access to core group and partner services and programs.

Blind, low vision and deaf blind users of the workforce system have typically been left unserved in the good work of the state’s sector industry strategies. In addressing the business needs for identifying and developing targeted training to fill workforce gap needs in the key sector industries, Washington State’s workforce system has a stellar reputation, but those with visual disability have not typically benefited from the

programs, apprenticeships and opportunities. With the new partnership through the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, the DSB expects the needs of its blind and low vision customer base to also be served in the workforce programs supporting key sectors of aerospace, agriculture, information and communications technology, clean energy, rural economic development, and life sciences.

The DSB and its Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act partners are the key players in Washington State economic strategy for workforce development, and the DSB encourages and supports science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) employment goals and vocational and academic training for all eligible participants who have aptitude and interest, and look to collaborate with the Washington School for the Blind and other partners to develop workshops and programs that will encourage interest in STEM activities at a young age.

The DSB will continue to identify eligible participants with aptitude for entrepreneurialism, and continue to support start-up opportunities of small business as an important means for blind, low vision and/or deaf blind individuals to join in on the key Washington State economic development strategy of encouraging small business. Blind business owners often become employers themselves, helping drive the state's workforce engine.