



## VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION

By: Mary Fitzpatrick, Legislative Analyst II

### Who is Eligible for Vocational Rehabilitation?

Eligible individuals are those who (1) have significant physical or mental conditions that pose a substantial barrier to employment and (2) require vocational rehabilitation services in order to prepare, find, and succeed in employment.

For more on eligibility determinations, see [OLR Report 2014-R-0098](#).

### ISSUE

This report discusses Connecticut's Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program administered by the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS) and the Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind (BESB) within the Department of Rehabilitation Services (DORS).

### SUMMARY

BRS and BESB administer VR programs in Connecticut to help individuals with disabilities secure employment. States administer VR programs in accordance with federal law and regulations (Title I of the 1973 federal Rehabilitation Act).

The federal Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) oversees state VR programs and distributes grant funding for them. In 2016, Connecticut received \$21.2 million. Generally, states must provide matching funds of 21.3%.

Program components include:

1. supported employment services for those with the most significant disabilities who require services to maintain employment;
2. transition services, which are coordinated activities designed to help students with disabilities transition to the workplace;
3. state rehabilitation councils that work with state VR agencies to develop the state VR plan; and
4. community rehabilitation providers that contract with state VR agencies to provide services.



In 2014, 1,407 BRS participants became employed with a mean hourly wage of \$17.87. Over the same period, 114 BESB participants became employed with a mean hourly wage of \$20.13.

## **PROGRAM PURPOSE AND STRUCTURE**

Under federal law, state VR programs help people with disabilities prepare for and secure employment by providing vocational rehabilitation services, such as needs assessments; counseling and guidance; job-related services (e.g., job search and placement assistance); and referrals to other agencies.

States administer VR programs in accordance with Title 1 of the federal Rehabilitation Act ([29 U.S.C. 701 et seq.](#)) and applicable regulations. Federal law requires states to submit a state plan for VR services to RSA, which is part of the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services within the U.S. Department of Education. Among other things, the state VR plan must:

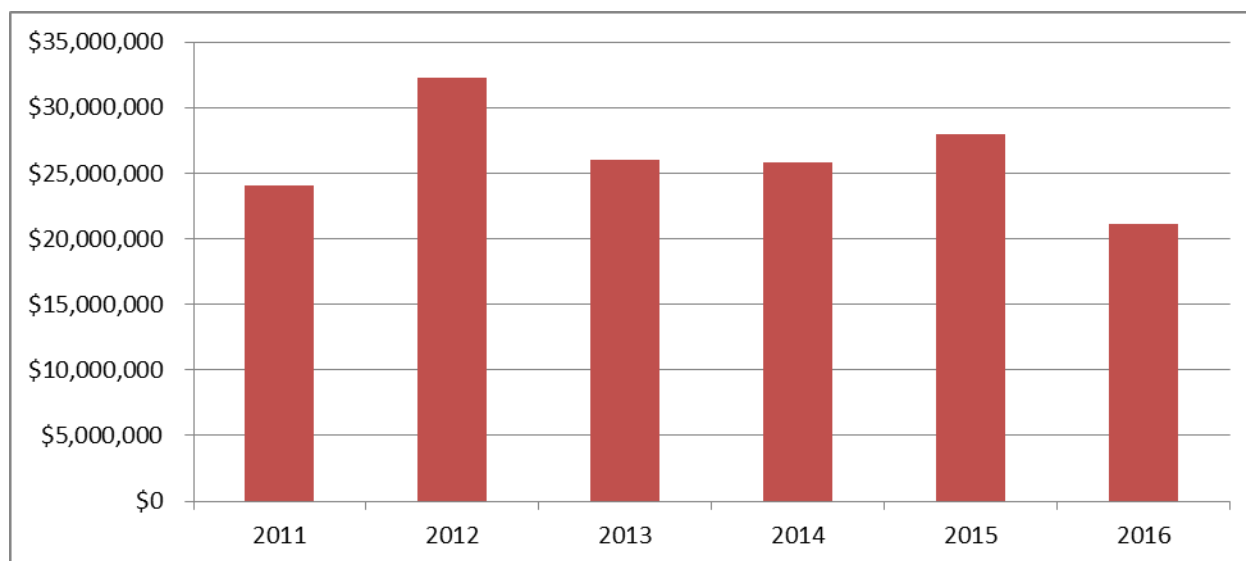
1. designate either (a) one agency to administer the entire plan or (b) two agencies, provided one agency administers the part of the plan pertaining to services for the blind and the other agency administers the rest of the plan;
2. include a comprehensive system of personnel development to ensure an adequate supply of qualified state rehabilitation professionals and paraprofessionals; and
3. require a timely development and implementation of an individualized plan for employment (IPE) that describes the individual's employment outcome, the specific rehabilitation services needed to achieve it, and responsibilities of the VR agency and the individual receiving services ([34 C.F.R. § 361.45, - .46](#)).

Connecticut has two VR agencies, both within DORS. BESB serves legally blind adults ([CGS § 10-306 et seq.](#)) and BRS serves all other individuals with disabilities ([CGS § 17b-650 et seq.](#)).

## **FUNDING LEVELS**

RSA distributes funds to states through grants based on a formula that includes population and per capita income. Generally, states must contribute a 21.3% match. Table 1 shows funding levels for Connecticut's VR program from 2011 to 2016. The table shows the combined amount for both grants and does not include the state matching funds.

**Table 1: Federal Grant Funding for Connecticut's VR program (2011-2016)**



Source: [Rehabilitation Services Administration](#)

## **OTHER PROGRAM COMPONENTS**

### ***Supported Employment***

In addition to VR grants, RSA also distributes grants to state VR agencies for supported employment (SE) services under Title VI-B of the Rehabilitation Act. States use these funds to provide SE services to people with the most significant disabilities who require SE services to maintain employment. Generally, supported employment is a regular job in the community with supports (e.g., job coaching) to help the person keep the job.

BRS provides SE services on a time-limited basis. Generally, the bureau works with state agencies, private nonprofit organizations, and others to transition participants from SE to appropriate ongoing employment support programs. For the last five years, Connecticut (BRS and BESB) has received \$300,000 per year for SE services, the minimum amount for this grant.

### ***Transition from School to Work***

Federal law requires state VR agencies to plan and coordinate transition services for students with disabilities who are eligible for VR services ([29 U.S.C § 721\(11\)\(D\)](#)). Under federal law, transition services are a coordinated set of activities for a student, designed with an outcome-oriented process, promoting movement from school to post school activities. The services must be based on the individual student's needs and take into account the student's preferences and interests. They

must include instruction, community experiences, the development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives, and where appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation ([29 U.S.C § 705\(36\)](#)).

State law additionally authorizes such services and requires DORS to prioritize students whose termination date for receipt of public school services is most immediate ([CGS § 17b-612](#)). DORS' transition services program for both BRS and BESB ("[Level Up](#)") serves students ages 16 to 21. According to [DORS](#), 10 BRS Level Up Counselors serve 22 to 25 schools each, while BESB currently serves 160 transition student with three BESB Level Up Counselors, two VR counselors and one coordinator.

According to [BESB's VR policy manual](#), the bureau also identifies potential VR clients in its Children's Services program. When a student is eligible for VR services, the bureau prepares the student's IPE in coordination with the local education agency's Individual Education Plan for that student (IEP, a written statement of educational goals, instructional objectives, and specific educational and transitional services, among other things).

### ***State Rehabilitation Councils***

The law requires state VR agencies to work with a State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) when developing its state VR plan, conducting needs assessments, and developing other goals and priorities. [BRS](#) and [BESB](#) each have an SRC. Federal law includes separate but similar representation requirements for SRCs generally and those serving the blind ([29 U.S.C. §725](#)). SRCs must include representatives of business, industry, and labor as well as representatives of disability advocacy groups, among others.

### ***Community Rehabilitation Providers (CRP)***

Nationwide, VR programs rely heavily on CRPs (generally, local community organizations) to provide various services for people in state VR programs. DORS contracts with CRPs to provide assessment services, which are opportunities for VR consumers to have their skills, strengths, and weaknesses evaluated in a real work situation in the community. Assessment services may include site development, on-site evaluations, and provision of consumer wages, among other things. CRPs may also provide other services, including job coaching, job placement, and interview preparation. For more information, see [DORS' CRP Handbook](#).

The Department of Social Services manages a [CRP database](#) for youth and young adults with disabilities to search for CRPs offering various services.

## PROGRAM PERFORMANCE

RSA monitors state VR programs and publishes various performance measures of VR agencies. Table 1 shows performance measures for New England states in the most recent year available. Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, and Vermont have two VR agencies: one for blind individuals and one for all other eligible individuals. New Hampshire and Rhode Island have one VR agency.

Table 1: Program Performance in New England States (2014)

State	Eligible State Residents	Cases Closed with Employment	Working at least 35 hours per week	Mean Hourly Wage
Connecticut (general)	4,288	1,407	49%	\$17.87
Connecticut (blind)	350	114	50%	\$20.13
Maine (general)	5,725	1,010	45%	\$12.30
Maine (blind)	248	116	40%	\$14.61
Massachusetts (general)	11,139	3,744	36%	\$12.69
New Hampshire	4,525	1,092	40%	\$13.04
Rhode Island	2,714	608	40%	\$11.41
Vermont (general)	5,401	1,873	40%	\$11.73
Vermont (blind)	128	74	49%	\$17.01

Source: [RSA](#)

## RESOURCES

BESB: [Vocational Rehabilitation Program Policy and Procedure Manual](#), October 2014.

DORS: [CRP Handbook](#)

DORS: [Level Up Plan 2016-2017 Presentation](#), 2016

DSS: [Connect-ability CRP Search](#), 2016.

RSA: [Fiscal Snapshot \(View Info About Connecticut\)](#), 2016.

RSA: [Fiscal Year 2013 Monitoring Report on the Connecticut Bureau of Rehabilitation Services Vocational Rehabilitation Program](#) January 23, 2014.

MF:cmg