

Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Title IV: Vocational Rehabilitation Services

SNAPSHOT

Overview: Title I of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 authorizes the federal government to make grants to state agencies for vocational rehabilitation services. Title IV of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014 reauthorized this funding for state grants.

Type of Program: Formula grants go to states based on population, average per capita income, and original allotment at the time of the 1974 legislation. States must have an approved Title I plan that is part of the larger state unified plan, which describes coordination between all WIOA titles.

Eligibility and Targeting: State agencies determine eligibility and provision of service. Eligibility is limited to adults who have a physical or mental impairment that results in substantial employment barriers and who require Title IV services to “prepare for, secure, retain, advance in, or regain employment that is consistent with the applicant’s strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities, interests, and informed choice.”³⁵ States must give priority of services to persons with the “most significant disabilities”; others can be put on a waiting list.³⁶

Services/Program Support: Participants receive individualized employment plans and a variety of services can be provided on an individual or cohort basis. Services can include assessment of needs; career coaching and career choice assistance; job search, placement, and retention; interpreter services; education and training services, including tuition, books, and supplies; and occupational license fees, tools, and equipment.³⁷ WIOA included three new purposes for Title IV: emphasizing competitive integrated employment, increasing employer involvement, and supporting individuals with disabilities as they transition from secondary to postsecondary education.

Non-federal Funds: States must provide a match of at least 21.3 percent. If the state does not provide this proportion of match, their federal allocation is reduced and can be allotted to other states.

HOW PROGRAM CAN SUPPORT CAREER PATHWAYS

Occupational training can be an important component of the Individualized Plan for Employment required for each Title IV participant. Resources for eligible individuals can provide career navigation services throughout a career pathway and a variety of support services, including transportation, specialized equipment, and interpreter or reading services. Vocational rehabilitation funds can be

used to support individuals or groups of individuals, allowing cohort career pathway experiences.

WIOA requires each state to reserve 15 percent of its federal funds for pre-employment services for youth with disabilities who are transitioning out of secondary school. This requires partnership with local education agencies that provide services under the Individuals with Disabilities Act, which funds special education for

children with disabilities from birth to age 21.³⁸ WIOA's increased emphasis on services to successfully transition students to postsecondary education means that working with higher education institutions is also important.

PROGRAM LIMITATIONS

Title IV participants must exhaust every other source of federal funding before Vocational Rehabilitation funds can be used. For example, Title IV participants entering higher education would need to apply for financial aid and use a Pell Grant or other federal financial source prior to using Title IV funds to cover tuition.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR STATES

- Across the country, public opinion and expectations about disability and employment are changing. Emerging policies and practices, court-directed initiatives, increased disability advocacy efforts, and progressive statewide plans resulting from the Supreme Court's *Olmstead* decision are driving the rapid pace of this transformation. The *Olmstead v L.C.* ruling requires states to eliminate unnecessary segregation of persons with disabilities and to ensure that persons with disabilities receive services in the most integrated setting appropriate to their needs.³⁹ The U.S. Department of Justice Civil Rights Division is working with the Department of Health and Human Services, state and local government officials, and disability rights groups to create effective, nationwide programming to make the Americans with Disabilities Act a reality. Deliver integrated education and training (IET) by contextualizing academic content to specific occupations and career pathways;
- The Department of Labor's Disability Employment Initiative (DEI) works with state and local providers to increase coordination of education and training programs and to build community partnerships that provide better service to individuals with disabilities and improve employment outcomes. In 2014, DEI awarded grants specifically designed to increase the participation of youth and adults with disabilities in existing career pathway systems;
- Align curricula and assessments across adult edu-

cation, postsecondary education, and job training programs;

- **Minnesota** DEI Career Pathways will merge these powerful strategies to help 155 adults with disabilities (age 18+) succeed in career pathways education and employment. The project will include a specific focus on veterans, TANF recipients, ESL/ ABE participants, ex-offenders, and Wagner Peyser universal customers, as well as active and wait-listed Vocational Rehabilitation consumers. Three regions with robust career pathway programs in manufacturing, health care, and business administration will strengthen their partnerships and adapt education and services to support adults with disabilities—supporting them through career pathway education and training all the way employment. Cross-agency state leadership will support and sustain these strengthened models through revised policies, professional development, braided resources, and new career pathways practices.