

Program and Policy Insight



**Comprehensive Statewide
Needs Assessment
for the
Oregon Commission for
the Blind Final Report**

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 Overview

1.1.1 Purpose of the Needs Assessment

The Oregon Commission for the Blind (OCB) partnered with the Department of Human Services (DHS) Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) to conduct a needs assessment of individuals who are vision impaired, including barriers, service needs, and potential changes to system infrastructure. DHS contracted with Program and Policy Insight, LLC (PPI), to conduct a Comprehensive Needs Assessment (detailed analysis, information, and recommendations) for both Oregon Vocational Rehabilitation and Oregon Commission for the Blind. This report details findings on the vocational rehabilitation needs of Oregonians with vision impairment and related service implications for OCB.

1.1.2 Methodology

The Oregon Commission for the Blind Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA) was guided by core research questions that informed data collection and analysis methods. The research questions and the methodology employed for the needs assessment are based on an analysis of best practices in the field, a review of methods employed in past CSNAs, and the contractor's professional expertise. The research questions and methodology were also reviewed and informed by the client steering committee during initial and ongoing project meetings and contract negotiations.

Four methods were selected to answer the research questions, including: 1) review and summary of existing data; 2) key informant/stakeholder interviews; 3) stakeholder focus groups; and 4) stakeholder surveys for clients, staff, community partners, and employers. Data analysis synthesized findings across the four core data sources to identify key needs, issues, trends, opportunities, and recommendations. Throughout the summary report, findings from analyses are compared to identify common themes and variations across data sources.

1.1.3 Report Navigation

The report includes an overview of the needs assessment, population and policy context, and findings related to barriers, services, and system infrastructure. Several appendices include an overview of the methodology, more detailed information on prevalence and caseload data, a summary response to federal standards, copies of all data collection instruments, survey results tables, and recommendations for changes to future needs assessments.

1.2 Oregon Commission for the Blind Population and Policy Context

1.2.1 Oregon Commission for the Blind Overview

The Oregon Commission for the Blind's (OCB's) mission is to "Empower Oregonians who are blind to fully engage in life." OCB's vocational rehabilitation program provides the same services as Oregon Vocational Rehabilitation, but with the value add of specialized training and expertise that address the unique challenges and barriers that individuals with vision loss face related to obtaining and maintaining employment.

The Commission for the Blind's Vocational Rehabilitation program has 28 full time equivalent positions that provide vocational rehabilitation counseling and placement services directly to clients statewide.

1.2.2 Impact of Vision Impairment

Compared to the general vocational rehabilitation population, people who are blind are significantly more likely to identify employer attitudes toward people with disabilities, lack of transportation, lack of assistive technology, concern over loss of benefits, and limited relevant job skills as barriers to employment. The unique impact of vision impairment can inform service needs for individuals who are blind.

1.2.3 Key Environmental Factors

OCB works within a broader context of federal, state, and local factors – laws, lawsuit settlements, regulations, policies, procedures, politics, economy, people, history, and more. These factors continually shape and reshape how OCB accomplishes its mission.

- Oregon, like the nation, lost many jobs during the 2007-2009 “great recession.” Since then, it has regained these jobs plus another 6.5 percent as of early 2017.¹ Oregon’s continued labor market strength is predicated on either continued population growth or higher labor market participation.
- In 2015, Oregon settled the Lane v. Brown lawsuit that alleged Oregon’s employment services system unnecessarily placed people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) in, or put people with IDD at risk of entering, sheltered workshops instead of in integrated jobs in the community, in violation of the Americans with Disabilities Act and the 1999 Supreme Court decision in Olmstead v. L.C. As a result, Oregon has made many changes, embracing and furthering Employment First policy at the state and local level.²
- The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) is working to increase strategic collaboration across programs investing in skill development. This includes all Department of Labor-funded programs, as well as other programs administered by the Department of Education and the Department of Health and Human Services. WIOA implementing regulations were effective in September 2016, and states have been working to update associated state-level regulations, policies, and procedures since

¹ Herald and News, Mateusz Perkoski, “Oregon has recovered the jobs lost during the ‘great recession’, February 2, 2017, heraldandnews.com.

² Employment First policy states that work in integrated jobs is the first and priority option in planning employment services for working age adults and youth with IDD. (Oregon Department of Human Services, Employment First, <http://www.oregon.gov/>)

that time. These new requirements were not associated with additional funding to support implementation of the changes.

1.2.4 Prevalence of Disability

According to the American Community Survey, 14.4 percent of Oregonians of all ages experience disability, which is equivalent to 562,324 residents. Among the 2,444,680 Oregonians of working age (ages 18-64), 2015 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates report that an estimated 2.1 percent, or 50,204, have a vision difficulty. This may include individuals who experience vision loss outside of OCB eligibility, which is limited to legal blindness or associated progressive conditions. This rate of vision difficulty is roughly on par with the United States average of 1.9 percent.

1.2.5 Target Population, Labor Force Participation and Employment Gap

The “target population” represents some of the potential clients for OCB services – people with vision loss who are currently unemployed. There are between 4,673 and 29,137 Oregonians in the target population for OCB, although, as noted above, not all individuals who report vision difficulty through the ACS survey may be eligible for OCB vocational rehabilitation services, so this estimate should serve as a reference rather than presumed client base.

People with disabilities are much more likely than people without disabilities to elect to stay out of the labor force. Sixty (60) percent of Oregonians with vision loss are either not in the labor force (50 percent) or are unemployed (10 percent).

The difference in employment rates between people with and without disabilities is nine percent for people with vision loss electing to be in the labor force. The employment gap for people with vision loss jumps to 32 percent when people not in the labor force are included in the calculation. This higher employment gap demonstrates the propensity of individuals with disabilities to opt out of the labor force altogether.

1.3 Key Findings on Barriers to Employment for Individuals with Vision Impairment

Stakeholder consensus emerged around key barriers to employment for individuals with vision impairment:

- **Transportation.** Transportation was the employment barrier identified by the most OCB clients, and is particularly acute for individuals experiencing blindness who often rely on public transit or private ride share companies as their only means of transportation.
- **Employer perception.** Employer attitudes toward people with disabilities is particularly pronounced for people with vision impairments. Sixty-eight (68) percent of OCB clients had experienced employer attitudes as a barrier to employment. Additionally, limited public awareness of and familiarity with the capabilities of individuals with vision impairment creates ongoing barriers to daily life, school, and employment.
- **Self-perception.** Sixty-four (64) percent of OCB clients said that their uncertainty about employment due to their disability had posed a barrier to employment for them. Low incidence disabilities like blindness provide fewer support opportunities or access to role models who have achieved successful employment. Family attitudes about employment for people with disabilities may also contribute to employment barriers.
- **Assistive technology.** The need for assistive technology is acute for people with vision impairment. Access to training, equipment, and employer-support must be addressed to support client employment.
- **Vocational skills and experience.** Having a marketable skill is critical for employment for any individual, and pronounced for individuals with disabilities. Limited vocational skills, work experience, and soft skills hinder client employment prospects.
- **Confounding barriers.** OCB clients may require support to address confounding service barriers related to poverty, housing, or food insecurity, that impede employment progress.

1.4 Key Findings on Service Provision for Individuals with Visual Impairment

Stakeholder consensus regarding service provision needs for individuals with vision impairment include:

- **OCB Offices are accessible.** Clients generally do not perceive language, physical office location, or hours to be significant barriers to service.
- **Perceptions of service accessibility and support vary by respondents.** In general, more OCB staff tended to view OCB services as accessible and supportive than did clients or community partners. Community partner survey respondents were least likely, compared to staff or clients, to view OCB services as accessible or supportive.
- **Employment-related supports.** Vocational training, work experience, and long-term job supports are key services for supporting individuals with vision impairment on their path to employment.
- **Assistive technology.** Orientation and mobility training, as well as access to assistive devices and related training, are critical to improving clients' ability to navigate and thrive in employment settings.
- **Supportive services.** Transportation, independent living skills training, and referrals to community partners can help clients address confounding barriers that hinder employment and independence. Additionally, benefits counseling can inform clients of the impact of employment on their wages and support transition to work.
- **Pre-employment transition services.** Youth with vision impairment need dedicated support to ensure a successful transition from high school to college or the workforce.
- **Barriers and service needs for key target populations.** Findings from the Oregon Vocational Rehabilitation Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment suggest that individuals with significant disabilities, youth with disabilities in transition, and individuals with disabilities from racial or cultural minority groups face unique barriers and service needs. These findings can inform service delivery among individuals with visual impairment.

1.5 Key Findings on Service System Infrastructure

Analysis across data sources revealed consensus around service system infrastructure strengths and opportunities for improvement. The findings and recommendations articulated throughout the report are based on stakeholder feedback and suggestions.

1.5.1 Feedback on OCB Vocational Rehabilitation Staffing

- **Regional capacity.** Due to the limited number of staff, stakeholders discussed OCB capacity challenges with providing services outside of the Portland metro area, particularly in eastern Oregon. Additional multidisciplinary trainers able to travel to rural areas could help connect rural clients unable to travel to Portland to needed services more efficiently.
- **Awareness of OCB.** Stakeholders discussed a lack of awareness of OCB by the general public and referral sources, like medical providers. Clients suggest broader, overall outreach and visibility campaigns to increase awareness and de-stigmatize blindness.
- **Counselor capacity.** Staff, clients, and partners expressed a desire for more consistent and in-depth connections between OCB staff and clients, to support improved communication, service delivery, and employment outcomes.
- **Leadership.** OCB leadership were lauded for their continuous improvement approach, including monthly measures meetings and associated evidence-based problem-solving groups. Specific improvements to service delivery were cited, as well as an overall culture of excellence.
- **Training.** Staff expressed a desire for additional training in mental health, substance use disorder, intellectual and developmental disabilities, deaf-blindness, and technology to better serve and appropriately triage clients with other community partners. Some clients and community partners wanted to see additional training related to blindness for OCB staff.
- **Reporting and paperwork.** Increased reporting on performance requirements, including those associated with WIOA, and administrative or contract paperwork requirements detract from counselor time with clients.

1.5.2 Feedback on Contracted Vendor Relationships

- **Contracts.** Stakeholders liked how the hourly pay structure of OCB's job developer contracts allowed developers to invest additional time with clients needing more customized rehabilitation support. Some cited how having separate job developer and job coach contracts from Oregon Vocational Rehabilitation exacerbated capacity issues, since contractors often chose to work with one agency over the other.
- **Capacity.** There are waiting lists for job developers and other contracted services because of limited contracted vendor resources in some areas, particularly in eastern Oregon. Stakeholders suggested increased outreach and education could help to recruit additional contractors.
- **Training.** Contractor training was perceived as lacking sufficient focus on working with clients with visual impairments and adaptive technology. Stakeholders suggested having clearer contractor qualifications and/or a career pathway as well as targeted training for OCB client needs. Stakeholders also wanted to see more contractor training on IDD, mental illness, substance use disorder, and deaf-blindness.
- **Reporting and paperwork.** Contractor paperwork and reporting is purportedly cumbersome for becoming a contractor and working with OCB counselors and clients. Separate OCB and Oregon Vocational Rehabilitation contracting processes mean increased and divergent reporting and paperwork requirements for contractors wanting to work with both agencies.
- **Communication.** Despite efforts to increase communication between OCB counselors and contractors, clients report that communication problems persist in some cases. Sometimes this is related to mismatched training and job placement timing, and other times related to client choice/person-centered planning. Stakeholders suggested increased inclusion of peers and other communication improvements to address these challenges.

1.5.3 Feedback on Employer Relationships

- **OCB Experience.** Overall, employers who worked with OCB vocational rehabilitation had positive experiences. Employers had mixed perceptions of the usefulness of individual vocational rehabilitation services, with many respondents unaware of services. Recruitment and referral, as well as assistive technology consulting, training, and support were seen as most useful.
- **Labor Market.** Oregon’s economy and job opportunities are growing, with a low unemployment rate, although the unemployment rate for people with disabilities (10.5 percent) is more than twice as high as people without a disability (4.6 percent).³ The BLS reports that 80 percent of the disabled population ages 16-64 is not in the labor force, compared to 35 percent of the non-disabled population.
- **Liability and Cost.** Stakeholders felt that employer concerns about liability, potential lawsuits for discrimination, and accommodation costs were barriers to employment. Stakeholders suggested deepening OCB relationships with employers and creating opportunities for open dialog could help to address these barriers.
- **Progressive Employment Model.** OCB’s pilot implementation of Vermont’s progressive employment model has supported a strong focus on developing and maintaining strong employer relationships, lighter touch employment exposure (e.g. informational interviews, company tours, job-shadows), as well as brief or more extended work experience options. Stakeholders would like to see the model expanded throughout OCB and to Oregon Vocational Rehabilitation.
- **Outreach and Education.** OCB develops and maintains relationships with employers through outreach and education efforts, the employment development coordination team, and business liaison efforts. Increasing these efforts could benefit clients and employers.

³ Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Employment status of the civilian noninstitutional population by disability status and selected characteristics, 2016 annual averages” (www.bls.gov)

1.5.4 Feedback on Community Partner Relationships

- **Limited partnerships.** Clients most commonly do not work with partners beyond OCB. For those who receive services from others, these are most commonly with Self-Sufficiency, Aging and People with Disabilities, IDD, education (in addition to WorkSource and Oregon Vocational Rehabilitation). Partnerships are limited by a lack of awareness of OCB and its services, which is related to limited OCB staff capacity to network, due to their limited staff size, as well as limited partner resources to work with people who are blind. Stakeholders suggest increased education and outreach to build and maintain partnerships.
- **Employment First.** The Employment First initiative has facilitated increased collaboration between vocational rehabilitation, the education system, and IDD providers to support people with IDD in finding employment. OCB has historically been less actively partnering with IDD providers, but this is changing as the client population with IDD as a secondary disability increases.
- **Oregon Vocational Rehabilitation Collaboration.** OCB and Oregon Vocational Rehabilitation work collaboratively at client and system levels. The agencies share a small number of clients with multiple disabilities and job developers throughout the state, with the highest prevalence being in eastern Oregon. The two collectively represent the interests of individuals with disabilities in local and statewide settings. Stakeholders suggest deepening the partnership through increased training, sharing of resources, and improved information exchange on shared clients.

1.5.5 Feedback on Workforce Relationships

- **WorkSource Referral.** OCB vocational rehabilitation counselors have historically not referred clients to WorkSource due to accessibility issues. Referrals that do occur have been primarily for job preparation workshops/services and job search/referral assistance.
- **WorkSource Accessibility.** WorkSource services are perceived as less accessible to people with disabilities and accommodations are seen as

lacking, particularly for people who are blind. Stakeholders suggest training for WorkSource on accessibility and that WorkSource ensure systems, resources, and technology are accessible for people with vision loss.

1.5.6 Feedback on Students in Transition Service System

- **Summer Work Experience Program.** The Summer Work Experience Program (SWEPE) is considered a best practice to provide work experiences and an opportunity to increase life skills and experience for youth who are blind and transitioning to adulthood.
- **OCB Transition Counselors.** OCB counselors provide pre-employment transition services (Pre-ETS) as defined by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act to students who qualify for OCB services. Survey respondents felt many students who are blind are underserved by Pre-ETS. OCB could look at increased involvement in Oregon Youth Transition Programs as well as with transition network facilitators and Employment First initiatives to increase school system awareness of OCB services.

1.6 Recommendations for Strategic Changes to OCB Service Provision

This OCB vocational rehabilitation comprehensive statewide needs assessment incorporated a broad focus and a large amount of data. Analysis of stakeholder input on barriers, service needs, and service deficits, as well as service system infrastructure issues, resulted in recommendations for strategic changes to OCB vocational rehabilitation service provision. Solicited feedback fell within three broad categories:

1. **Support holistic success.** Oregon Vocational Rehabilitation works in concert with varied other services and supports to promote stability and self-sufficiency. Leveraging community partners, integrating natural supports, and expanding best practices can facilitate holistic participant success.
2. **Reduce system constraints** Addressing capacity constraints through greater public and client outreach, increased staff, and increased training, could further support vocational rehabilitation staff and contractors as they work

with clients to effectively address rehabilitation needs through a responsive service system.

3. **Improve collaboration in service delivery.** Increased accessibility resources for partners, a more prominent role in statewide and local Employment First and Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act initiatives, and improved blindness and other disability training and support will help to promote improved collaboration with clients, contractors, employers, and partners.

1.6.1 OCB Recommendations Summary

The following tables summarize the recommendations for strategic changes to services and system infrastructure. These recommendations represent stakeholder suggestions for service and system changes that could positively impact OCB clients and other Oregonians eligible for OCB services. Numbers are associated with recommendations, and letters represent stakeholder suggested strategies for implementing these recommendations. These recommendations do not take into account resources required for implementation or applicability related to program regulations or restrictions.

Figure 1: Summary of OCB Service-Level Recommendations

Outreach	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Increase general public awareness of people with disabilities and their value as contributing members of the community. 2. Increase prospective client awareness of OCB and the services it provides.
Employment-Related Supports	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Develop opportunities for ongoing training to refresh or upgrade vocational skill and access to new assistive technology. 4. Expand opportunities for internships and work experience. 5. Consider how to provide longer-term job support to a wider breadth of OCB clients.
Assistive Technology	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. Continue technical assistance to facilitate integration of assistive technology in proprietary software settings. 7. Expand assistive technology training after placement to maintain skills and adapt to technological updates.

	<p>8. Increase communication with employers regarding financial support for assistive technology.</p> <p>9. Pursue faster turnaround of assistive technology requests for “real time” employment opportunities.</p>
Orientation and Mobility	<p>10. Consider longer duration orientation and mobility training options.</p> <p>11. Develop opportunities for prevocational orientation and mobility support.</p>
Supportive Services	<p>12. Continue to support clients’ transportation needs, including transportation needs after placement, in conjunction with community partners.</p> <p>13. Strengthen referrals to and follow-up with community partners to address clients’ confounding barriers to employment.</p> <p>14. Increase parent and family outreach and support groups.</p> <p>15. Increase opportunities for client group and peer support.</p> <p>16. Ensure consistent benefits counseling for all clients.</p>
Pre-Employment Transition Services	<p>17. Expand SWEP program to reach more youth.</p> <p>18. Build relationships with parallel pre-employment vocational rehabilitation transition services such as Youth in Transition Program and Transition Network Coordinators for networking and possible collaboration.</p>
Service Needs for Key Target Populations	<p>19. Increase staff training for specialty caseloads including intellectual and developmental disabilities, mental health, and deaf-blindness.</p> <p>20. Increase cultural and linguistic representativeness of OCB staff to reflect current and prospective clients.</p> <p>21. Provide targeted outreach and communication to families from racial or ethnic minority groups.</p>

Figure 2: Summary of OCB Systems-Level Recommendations

Outreach	<p>1. Increase existing and potential partner and employer, as well as potential contractor and staff member awareness of OCB and the services it provides.</p>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Actively participate in Employment First, WIOA, and Youth Transition Program initiatives/meetings. b. Develop a policy task force or business advisory board to help develop infrastructure around employer outreach and engagement. c. Increase presentations to regional employers, peer to peer presentations by employers who have hired people with vision impairment, and by employees with vision impairment. d. Create safe spaces where employers or the public could ask sincere questions without fear of offending someone or violating policies.
Capacity to Serve	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Analyze workloads to determine staffing/contracting needs. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Consider hiring more multidisciplinary trainers who can travel to rural areas. 3. Analyze impact and feasibility of combining contracting process with Oregon Vocational Rehabilitation and/or ODDS. Determine how many contractors overlap, and if there could be increased capacity by combining processes. 4. Analyze other methods to increase job developer, training, and assessment capacity, such as increased outreach/advertising or self-direction options.
Regulations, Policies, and Processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Provide continued staff and contractor training on regulation and policy updates made in response to federal requirements. 6. Standardize expectations around communication between counselors and clients. 7. Analyze for efficiencies in data collection and reporting for staff and contractors. Consider methods of maximizing automated and electronic data sharing/collection as well as methods of sharing data with more partners to support service delivery collaboration.
Staff and Contractor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 8. Provide increased targeted blindness and technology training to staff and contractors.

<p>Training and Skillsets</p>	<p>9. Work to hire and contract with more people who are blind or experience visual disabilities.</p> <p>10. Provide increased training/resources regarding working with people with IDD, mental illness, substance use disorder, and deaf-blindness for staff and contractors, potentially in collaboration with Oregon Vocational Rehabilitation.</p> <p>11. Consider developing a career pathway or more defined job developer/contractor qualifications related to working with people who have visual impairments.</p> <p>12. Connect partners with resources/training to improve accessibility for people who are blind, particularly WorkSource Oregon.</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">a. WorkSource ensures all systems, resources, and technology are accessible to people with vision loss.</p>
<p>Collaborative Service Delivery</p>	<p>13. Define community partners, roles and responsibilities, and referral approaches.</p> <p>14. Improve data sharing on shared clients, automating information where possible.</p> <p>15. Work with Oregon government to have government serve as a model employer for people with disabilities.</p> <p>16. Consider expanding the Progressive Employment model more broadly, including to Oregon Vocational Rehabilitation, sharing development efforts and data to more effectively and efficiently collaborate with employers and support clients.</p> <p>17. Pursue partnerships with organizations that can provide supplemental or follow-up services through braided funding, including the Office of Developmental Disability Services.</p>

2. OVERVIEW

2.1 Purpose of the Needs Assessment

The Oregon Commission for the Blind (OCB) partnered with the Department of Human Services (DHS) Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) to conduct a needs assessment of individuals who are vision impaired, including barriers, service needs, and underlying service system infrastructure. DHS contracted with Program and Policy Insight, LLC (PPI), to conduct a Comprehensive Needs Assessment (detailed analysis, information, and recommendations) for both Oregon Vocational Rehabilitation and Oregon Commission for the Blind. This report details findings on the vocational rehabilitation needs of Oregonians with vision impairment and related service implication for OCB.

2.1.1 Federal Standards

The federal standards for conducting the comprehensive needs assessment defines minimally expected content. As stated in federal guidelines, the comprehensive statewide assessment must:

- Describe the rehabilitation needs of individuals with disabilities residing in the state, including:
 - Individuals with the most significant disabilities;
 - Individuals who are from racial or ethnic minority groups;
 - Individuals who are unserved or underserved by vocational rehabilitation programs;
 - Individuals with disabilities served through other components of the statewide workforce development system; and
 - Youth and students with disabilities including their need for and coordination of pre-employment transition services.
- Provide an assessment of the need to establish develop, or improve community rehabilitation programs within the state.

PPI worked with Oregon Vocational Rehabilitation and OCB staff, as well as with members of the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC), to develop a framework and activities related to the Comprehensive Needs Assessment. The SRC is a Governor-

appointed body that serves as a policy partner with the public vocational rehabilitation program. The SRC has legislated responsibilities that include surveying customer satisfaction, developing an annual report, and participating in the development of the state plan.

2.1.2 Needs Assessment Framework and Limitations

Needs assessments are intended to gather expressed and observed needs of stakeholders through collection and analysis of primary and secondary data. Needs assessments are conducted to identify gaps between existing services and needed services; they provide information to guide strategies to reach the desired state of program performance or outcomes. Needs assessments do not provide an evaluative assessment of how well program operations or services function. Although the OCB needs assessment collected information on stakeholder perception of service and system strengths, it did not evaluate service provision or system infrastructure. The feedback collected on strengths is intended to provide useful context of existing services and inform development of further strategies in response to needs assessment findings.

The needs assessment conducted for Oregon Vocational Rehabilitation and Oregon Commission for the Blind used diverse data sources, including quantitative responses to survey questions and qualitative responses solicited through key informant interviews and stakeholder focus groups. Survey data lends itself to easy tabulation and numeric reporting. Analysis of interview and focus group data can codify qualitative data to provide a sense of the degree of consensus around needs assessment themes. Feedback that was raised by one or two individuals is indicated as such in needs assessment reporting. Feedback shared by multiple stakeholders and across different stakeholder groups emerged as key findings. When feedback was limited to select stakeholder groups it is described accordingly.

2.2 Methodology

The Oregon Vocational Rehabilitation Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA) was guided by core research questions that informed data collection and analysis methods. The research questions and the methodology employed for the needs assessment are based on an assessment of best practices

in the field, a review of methods employed in past CSNAs, and the contractor's professional expertise. The research questions and methodology were also reviewed and informed by the client steering committee during initial contract negotiations and ongoing project meetings.

2.2.1 Research Questions

The following research questions guided needs assessment activities and analysis:

1. *What does the VR/OCB **target population** look like?*
 - What is the prevalence and regional distribution of prospective VR/OCB clients?
 - What is the prevalence of selected VR/OCB target populations, including: persons who are blind, persons with the most significant disabilities, students transitioning from high school, and individuals with disabilities from racial/ethnic minority groups.
 - What is the regional distribution of VR/OCB staff and branch offices, and does the distribution reflect overall client target population estimates?
 - What is the regional distribution of contracted job development providers, and does the overall distribution reflect the overall client target estimates?⁴
2. *What are the primary **barriers to employment** for VR/OCB clients, and/or what are their **service needs**?*
 - What are the primary barriers to employment for VR/OCB clients?
 - What vocational rehabilitation services do VR/OCB clients need to support achievement of employment goals?
 - How do barriers to employment vary for selected subgroups, including the selected target populations (listed above)?
 - How are the service needs different for selected subgroups, including the selected target populations (listed above)?

⁴ Data on contracted job developer positions was not consistently available. This research question was not pursued with extant data, but related feedback on job developer capacity and distribution was discussed via other data collection methods.

- How do the barriers and service needs of people with disabilities who are underserved or unserved by VR/OCB vary?
3. *How can VR/OCB services best support client efforts to achieve positive employment outcomes?*
- What are the strengths of VR/OCB services?
 - What limits the accessibility and availability for prospective and/or current clients?
 - Are services adequately available to VR/OCB clients through vendors?
 - What kinds of staff support are most important for providing high-quality services?
 - How do VR/OCB partnerships with outside stakeholders or organizations support high-quality services?
 - What strategic changes to VR/OCB service provision, if any, are likely to improve employment outcomes for clients?
 - Are individuals with disabilities served through other components of the statewide workforce system? If so, how are they served?
 - How are pre-employment or other transition services provided to students, and how are these services coordinated with transition services provided under IDEA for youth and students with disabilities?

2.2.2 Data Collection

Four methods were selected to answer the research questions, including: 1) review and summary of existing data; 2) key informant/stakeholder interviews; 3) stakeholder focus groups; and 4) stakeholder surveys for clients, staff, community partners, and employers. The following provides a summary of data collection activities:

- To assess the prevalence of disability, the employment status of people with disabilities, and the characteristics of Oregonians and VR/OCB clients with disabilities, the research team consulted national surveys, state-level data, program-level administrative data, vocational rehabilitation needs assessments from other states, and relevant national reports and policy articles.
- The key stakeholder interviews offered the opportunity to gain an in-depth understanding of the strengths and needs associated with

vocational rehabilitation service delivery and outcomes according to VR/OCB clients and people working in the field. Stakeholders were nominated by OCB, Oregon Vocational Rehabilitation, and the SRC, and a second wave of stakeholders were nominated based on recommendations from initial interviewees. A total of 32 interviews were conducted with key stakeholders.

- The focus groups provided the opportunity to have meaningful conversations about vocational rehabilitation strengths and needs with four different categories of respondents: VR/OCB staff; agency partners, providers and employers; current or former VR/OCB clients; and, students in transition from high school. PPI worked with regional offices to invite staff, partners, and clients to participate. A total of 20 focus groups were held in five different regions of the state to gather a wide range of perspectives and to enable assessment of possible regional variation. The five regions were: Portland, Eugene/Springfield, Medford, Bend/Redmond, and La Grande.
- The surveys of four different stakeholder groups – clients, staff, providers, and employers – provided primarily quantitative data to complement the interviews and focus groups. The surveys also expanded the reach of the needs assessment by providing an opportunity for more stakeholders from across the state to provide input. A total of 877 vocational rehabilitation clients, 47 OCB clients, 81 vocational rehabilitation staff, 26 OCB staff, 101 community partners, and 71 employers completed the survey. OCB provided PPI with staff email addresses; staff were emailed direct links to the survey for participation. OCB, OVR, and the SRC provided a list of community partners to receive the community partner survey link; this list was supplemented by some individuals who participated in the community partner focus groups. For client surveys, PPI created an electronic link which OCB distributed to clients served within the last year. Finally, OCB provided email addresses for employers that had partnered with OCB to support people with disabilities; these employers, in addition to those submitted by Oregon Vocational Rehabilitation, received the employer survey link.

2.2.3 Data Analysis

Data analysis synthesized findings across the four core data sources to identify key needs, issues, trends, opportunities, and recommendations. Throughout the summary report, findings across analyses are compared to identify common themes and variations across data sources.

More detailed information on needs assessment methodology can be found in Appendix A: Methodology.

2.3 Report Navigation

The report includes this overview, the six sections listed below that describe the activities and results of the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment.

- Oregon Commission for the Blind Population and Policy Context
- Barriers to Employment for Individuals with Vision Impairment
- Service Provision for Individuals with Vision Impairment
- Client Barriers and Service Needs
- Service System Infrastructure
- Recommendations for Strategic Changes to OCB Service Provision

Several appendices, attached under separate cover, provide supplemental or more detailed information to support the OCB Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment, including:

- Appendix A: Methodology
- Appendix B: Survey Protocols
- Appendix C: Response to Required Federal Needs Assessment Standards
- Appendix D: Recommendations for Changes to Future Needs Assessments
- Appendix E: Disability Prevalence, Characteristics, and Client Caseload Demographics

Throughout the report, identification of program strengths and opportunities and recommendations for improvement reflect stakeholder input collected during the needs assessment process. Additionally, illustrative quotes collected from interviews, focus groups, or surveys are presented with two asterisks (**) in advance, to distinguish them as direct stakeholder feedback.

3. OREGON COMMISSION FOR THE BLIND CONTEXT

3.1 Oregon Commission for the Blind Overview

The Oregon Commission for the Blind's (OCB's) mission is to "Empower Oregonians who are blind to fully engage in life." OCB serves clients who experience vision loss through three programs (this report is only focused on the Vocational Rehabilitation program):

- Older blind, for individuals who are 55 or older who experience vision loss and are experiencing difficulties with everyday activities.
- Independent living, for people under 55 who are not looking for work who are legally blind.
- Vocational rehabilitation, for people 16 to 55 years old who are needing assistance to obtain or maintain employment who are legally blind or have a progressive eye condition likely leading to legal blindness. All services relate to an individual's employment goals.

OCB's vocational rehabilitation program provides the same services as Oregon Vocational Rehabilitation, but with the value add of specialized training and expertise that address the unique challenges and barriers that individuals with vision loss face related to obtaining and maintaining employment. Specific services related to individuals' employment goals include the orientation and career center for the blind residential training program, living with blindness class, adaptive devices, Braille training, career exploration, communication/socialization class, low vision assessment and training, meal preparation class, stamina class, orientation and mobility training, techniques of daily living class, technology center, woodshop, and the Summer Work Experience Program.

Clients can move between OCB programs. The independent living programs have limited funding, so clients tend to move from independent living to vocational rehabilitation as their perceptions of their ability to work shift through participation with OCB services and supports.

3.2 Impact of Vision Impairment

The Oregon Vocational Rehabilitation Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment, conducted in parallel with the OCB effort, collected information on barriers and service needs of all individuals with disabilities in the state. This analysis shed light on the unique impact of vision impairment relative to other disabilities and provides an additional layer of context regarding barriers and service needs for individuals who are blind.

In the Oregon Vocational Rehabilitation Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment, individuals with disabilities were asked to identify whether or not they had faced a range of barriers to employment. In nine out of 18 categories, people who were blind reported these barriers significantly more frequently than rest of the vocational rehabilitation client population. For example, individuals who identified as having a visual disability such as blindness were significantly more likely to identify employer attitudes toward people with disabilities, lack of transportation, lack of assistive technology, concern over loss of benefits, and limited relevant job skills as barriers to employment compared to the general vocational rehabilitation population.⁵ In the general vocational rehabilitation population, nearly 90 percent (89 percent) of individuals who are blind reported employer attitudes as a barrier to employment; this was the largest share of respondents citing this barrier across all target populations. Increased employer outreach and education specific to blindness is particularly important for these individuals. Individuals who are blind also face increased isolation, limited public awareness, and limited outreach regarding disability resources due to the low incidence of their disability.

3.3 Key Environmental Factors

OCB works within a broader context of federal, state, and local factors – laws, lawsuit settlements, regulations, policies, procedures, politics, economy, people, history, and more. These factors continually shape and reshape how OCB accomplishes its mission. Highlights of recent key environmental factors shaping

⁵ Survey respondents who self-reported a visual disability such as blindness may or may not meet OCB eligibility requirements.

OCB service delivery include the economy, Lane v. Brown and Employment First, and the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act.

3.3.1 Economy

Oregon, like the nation, lost many jobs during the 2008-2013 “great recession”. According to state economist, Mark McMullen, the state lost roughly 8 percent of its jobs. Since then, it has regained these jobs plus another 6.5 percent as of early 2017.⁶ The unemployment rate in July 2017 was 3.8 percent.⁷ The economy expansion is expected to endure nationally. Oregon’s continued labor market strength is predicated on either continued population growth or higher labor market participation. Oregon has seen recent growth in labor market participation in response to there being more and higher paying jobs.⁸ Vocational rehabilitation and the broader workforce development system can help to support ongoing labor market participation growth.

3.3.2 Lane v. Brown and Employment First

In 2015, Oregon settled the Lane v. Brown lawsuit that alleged Oregon’s employment services system unnecessarily placed people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) in, or at risk of entering, sheltered workshops instead of in integrated jobs in the community, in violation of the Americans with Disabilities Act and the 1999 Supreme Court decision in *Olmstead v. L.C.* Oregon has made many changes as a result, embracing and furthering Employment First work at the state and local level.⁹ The state developed Integrated Employment

⁶ Herald and News, Mateusz Perkoski, “Oregon has recovered the jobs lost during the ‘great recession’, February 2, 2017, heraldandnews.com.

⁷ State of Oregon Employment Department, “Oregon Current Labor Force and Industry Employment,” qualityinfo.org.

⁸ Oregon Office of Economic Analysis, “Oregon Economic and Revenue Forecast: September 2017,” oregon.gov/das/ODE/Documents/forecast0917.pdf.

⁹ Employment First policy states that work in integrated jobs is the first and priority option in planning employment services for working age adults and youth

Plans committing to implement strategies for the Oregon Department of Human Services and Oregon Department of Education to improve the employment service system for people with IDD.¹⁰ Oregon Vocational Rehabilitation and OCB in collaboration with Office of Developmental Disability Services have been actively transitioning individuals from sheltered workshops to integrated community employment opportunities and using employment pathway services to support people throughout their transition to work and community integration. Robust transition services including Youth Transition Programs, Transition Network Facilitators, Student Work Experience Program, and pre-employment transition services are serving youth with IDD as they transition to adulthood. Local communities have regular Employment First meetings to continue to move the needle on services for people with IDD statewide.

3.3.3 Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)

WIOA is working to increase strategic collaboration across programs investing in skill development. This includes all Department of Labor-funded programs as well as other programs administered by the Departments of Education and Health and Human Services. WIOA requires states to strategically align workforce development programs through a single unified strategic plan for core programs (including Oregon Commission for the Blind); promotes accountability and transparency through use of evidence-based and data-driven programs that report on common performance indicators across core programs with regular evaluation; fosters regional collaboration through alignment of workforce development programs with regional economic development strategies; improves the American Job Center system; improves services to employers and promotes work-based training; provides access to high quality training; enhances workforce services for the unemployed and other job seekers; improves services to people with disabilities; makes key investments in serving disconnected youth and other

with IDD. (Oregon Department of Human Services, Employment First, <http://www.oregon.gov/>)

¹⁰ United States Department of Justice, “Justice Department Reaches Proposed ADA Settlement Agreement on Oregon’s Developmental Disabilities System,” September 8, 2015.

vulnerable populations; enhances the job corps program; and streamlines and strengthens the strategic roles of workforce development boards.¹¹

WIOA implementing regulations were effective in September 2016, and states have been working to update associated state-level regulations, policies, and procedures since that time. Some of the most impactful changes are broader collaboration in planning and service delivery, increased performance measurement, and additional focus on service provision for youth transitioning to adulthood (15 percent allotment for provision of pre-employment transition services [Pre-ETS]). These new requirements were not associated with additional funding to support implementation of the changes.

3.4 Disability Prevalence

3.4.1 Overall Disability

According to the American Community Survey, 14.4 percent of Oregonians of all ages report experiencing a disability, which is equivalent to 562,324 residents. This rate is slightly higher than the national average of 12.4 percent experiencing disability. Among the working age population, defined as residents ages 18-64, 12.2 percent of Oregonians experience disability, or 297,936 residents.

When looking at the non-senior population, the majority of people with disabilities in Oregon are between ages 35 and 64. Similar to national averages, disability status in Oregon increases with age.¹²

Among all people with disabilities, Native Americans/Alaska Natives report experiencing the highest rate of disability among all racial and ethnic groups (19 percent), followed by 18 percent of multi-racial working age individuals, and 16 percent of working age African Americans. Although Native American/Alaska Native communities in Oregon experience a greater prevalence of disability

¹¹ United States Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, “WIOA Overview,” doleta.gov/WIOA.

¹² U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates, 2015, Table S1810

relative to other racial groups, they comprise 1.9 percent of the overall population of working age people with disabilities in the state.¹³

Additional detail pertaining to disability prevalence can be found in Appendix E: Disability Prevalence, Characteristics, and Client Caseload Demographics.

3.4.2 Prevalence by Disability Type

Among the 2,444,680 Oregonians of working age (ages 18-64), 2015 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates report that an estimated 2.1 percent, or 50,204, have a self-reported vision difficulty.¹⁴ It is important to note that not all individuals who report vision difficulty through the ACS survey are likely to meet the OCB eligibility requirements, however, the rate of vision difficulty overall is roughly on par with the United States average of 1.9 percent¹⁵. The American Community Survey allows respondents to identify more than one disability.¹⁶

¹³ U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates, 2015, Table S1810 (total) and Tables B18101A-I (race/ethnicity)

¹⁴ People with vision difficulty are identified in the American Community Survey by households answering “yes” to the question, “Is anyone blind or does anyone have serious difficulty seeing even when wearing glasses?” for household members 16 or older. The American Community Survey changed disability categories in 2008. Prior to then, blindness and vision impairments were included in a broader sensory disability definition.

¹⁵ To be eligible for OCB vocational rehabilitation services, individuals must experience legally blindness or a progressive condition leading to legal blindness.

¹⁶ Estimates of vision difficulty vary depending on the source. The 2015 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates indicate 50,204 Oregonians with vision difficulties, while the 2013 American Community Survey 3-Year estimates indicate 48,834. The 2015 5-Year Estimates are used as the default throughout the report, since they are the most current, stable data; however, the 2013 3-Year data are used for vision disability employment gap and target population tabulations, since 2015 employment status data are either not available or stable by type of disability. Note that not all individuals who report a vision difficulty may meet the OCB eligibility requirements.

Figure 3: Prevalence of Disability by Disability Type among Working Age (18-64) Oregonians Compared to United States Percentages, 2015

Disability Type	Oregon Count of All People Ages 18-64	Oregon Count of People with Disabilities Ages 18-64	Oregon Percent of People with Disabilities Ages 18-64	United States Percent of People with Disabilities Ages 18-64
Hearing difficulty		68,357	2.8%	2.1%
Vision difficulty		50,204	2.1%	1.9%
Cognitive difficulty		137,325	5.6%	4.3%
Ambulatory difficulty		136,800	5.6%	5.2%
Self-care difficulty		49,686	2.0%	1.9%
Independent living difficulty		186,986	7.6%	3.6%
Total	2,444,680	297,936	12.2%	10.3%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates, 2015, Table S1810

3.5 Estimating the Target Population and Employment Gap

The “target population” represents potential clients for OCB services, and can be defined in two ways. One approach is to consider people with vision disabilities who are in the labor force and looking for work, but currently unemployed as the OCB target population. Alternatively, based on American Federation for the Blind and the National Federation of the Blind guidance on calculating the unemployment rate for people with vision disability, OCB may consider the target population to include unemployed people in and out of the labor force (actively looking for work and not looking for work). Individuals in these groups may or may not be currently receiving OCB services. Using 2013 American Community Survey data (the most recent data available with stable employment status detail for people with disabilities), the following analysis estimates the size of the OCB target population.

This analysis also calculates employment rates and the employment gap for the target population. Employment gap is the difference in employment rates between the non-disabled population and the population experiencing disability. The formula used to calculate the employment gap for people with vision disability is as follows:

$$\text{Employment Gap Percentage} = \text{Employment Rate for People without Disability} - \text{Employment Rate for People with Vision Disability}^{17}$$

Employment rate may be calculated using only individuals in the labor force, or individuals in and out of the labor force, as recommended by the American Federation for the Blind and The National Federation of the Blind.

3.5.1 Labor Force Participation

People with disabilities are much more likely than people without disabilities to elect to stay out of the labor force. Fifty-six percent of working age (ages 18-64) people with disabilities living in the community (not institutionalized) in Oregon are not in the labor force, which means they are neither working, nor seeking work. This is equivalent to 163,543 people with disabilities who have elected to stay out of the labor force. In comparison, only 20 percent of working age people without disabilities have elected to stay out of the labor force (or 423,074 people).¹⁸

As shown in **Error! Not a valid bookmark self-reference.**, labor force participation varies by disability. Fifty percent of people with vision loss are not in the labor force and an additional ten percent are unemployed; the remaining 40 percent are employed. The American Federation for the Blind and the National Federation of the Blind calculate unemployment rates to include individuals opting out of the labor force as well as those unemployed within the labor force, which equates to 60 percent unemployment for Oregonians with vision loss. This compares to

¹⁸ U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 3-Year Estimates, 2013, Table B18120

roughly 70 percent of individuals with vision loss nationally who remain unemployed.¹⁹

Figure 4: Count and Percent of Working Age Oregonians (18-64) with Disabilities by Type of Disability and Employment Status, 2013

Disability	Count of Employed	Percent of Employed within each Disability Type	Count of Unemployed Individuals in the Labor Force within each Disability Type	Percent of Unemployed Individuals in the Labor Force within each Disability Type	Count of Not in Labor Force within each Disability Type	Percent of Not in Labor Force within each Disability Type	Total
Cognitive	34,001	26%	12,965	10%	84,109	64%	131,075
Ambulatory	32,848	24%	9,424	7%	93,689	69%	135,961
Independent living	15,534	16%	5,587	6%	73,212	78%	94,333
Hearing	33,300	48%	4,898	7%	31,172	45%	69,370
Vision	19,697	40%	4,673	10%	24,464	50%	48,834
Self-care	7,376	15%	2,010	4%	39,368	81%	48,754
Any disability (all types)	100,842	35%	25,955	9%	163,543	56%	290,340

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 3-Year Estimates, 2013, Table B18120

3.5.2 Employment Gap

To estimate the employment gap for individuals who are not employed, including those in the labor force and those who have opted out, we consider that there are 48,834 individuals with vision loss in Oregon. Of those 48,834 individuals with vision loss in Oregon, 40 percent are employed. In comparison, 72 percent of working age individuals without disability are employment, suggesting an employment gap of approximately 32 percent.

¹⁹ “Blindness and Low Vision Fact Sheet.” National Federation of the Blind. <https://nfb.org/fact-sheet-blindness-and-low-vision>

When considering only individuals with disabilities in the labor force, there are 24,370 working age Oregonians with vision disabilities in the labor force, either employed or not employed. Of those 24,370 people with vision disabilities in the labor force, 81 percent are employed and 19 percent (or 4,673) are unemployed.²⁰ In comparison, 90 percent of working age individuals without disability are employed and 8 percent are unemployed. Thus, the employment gap for individuals with vision loss – the difference in employment rates between people with and without disabilities – is 9 percent for people with vision loss electing to be in the labor force.²¹

The higher employment gap for individuals with vision loss both in and out of the labor force demonstrates the propensity of disabled individuals to opt out of the labor force altogether. The employment gap for people reporting vision loss is similar to that of people with any disability, which is 10 percent for people in the labor force and 38 percent for people both in and out of the labor force.²²

3.5.3 Target Population

For the purposes of estimating potential candidates for OCB services, this analysis uses two lenses. When using the broader perspective of people without jobs in and out of the labor force, OCB’s target population is 29,137, including unemployed people reporting vision disabilities who are actively looking for work as well as those who have opted out of the labor force. The narrower lens, focusing only on individuals reporting vision disabilities who are in the labor force – that is, people with vision loss who are actively looking for work, but are currently unemployed -- reduces OCB’s target population to 4,673. It is important to note that the ACS definition of vision difficulty may not align with eligibility for OCB vocational

²⁰ The definition of “unemployed” for the American Community Survey is a person not currently employed, but looking for work and available to take a job if offered one (Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics)

²¹ U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 3-Year Estimates, 2013, Table B18120

²² U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates, 2015, Table C18120

rehabilitation services, so the target population estimate should only be viewed as a reference for service provision, and may overestimate potential clients.

Figure 5: OCB Target Population Estimates and Employment Gap, Oregon, 2013

Labor Force Status	Overall Population With Vision Disability (Ages 18-64)	Overall Population Without Any Disability (Ages 18-64)	Employment Rate With Vision Disability	Employment Rate Without Any Disability	Employment Gap	Estimated Target Population (with Vision Disability)
In the Labor Force	24,370	1,719,009	81%	90%	9%	4,673
In and Not in Labor Force	48,834	2,142,083	40%	72%	32%	29,137

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 3-Year Estimates, 2013, Table B18120

3.5.4 Employment Gap and Target Population by County

As shown in **Error! Not a valid bookmark self-reference.**, the employment rate for people with vision difficulties in the labor force varies by county, ranging from a low of 16 percent in Deschutes County, for individuals both in and out of the labor force, to a high of 41 percent in Lincoln County, when including individuals both in and out of the labor force.

Figure 6: Employment Rate for Working Age Oregonians (18-64) in the Labor Force with Vision Difficulties and without Disabilities, Employment Gap, and Target Population by County, 2013

County	Employment Gap for People with Vision Disability in Labor Force	Employment Gap for People with Vision Disability in and out of Labor Force	People with Vision Disability Target Population Estimate Range
Clackamas	8%	38%	207-1,804
Deschutes	4%	16%	174-860
Douglas	23%	33%	265-988
Jackson	-1%	31%	163-1,964
Lane	7%	33%	335-2,885
Lincoln	12%	41%	82-744
Linn	16%	39%	153-890
Marion	11%	37%	407-2,636
Multnomah	10%	32%	1,053-5,768
Umatilla	5%	30%	69-499
Washington	11%	29%	569-2,608
Yamhill	5%	31%	128-929
Remaining counties	9%	29%	1,068-6,562
Oregon	9%	32%	4,673-29,137

Note: Stable data for all Oregon counties are not available.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 3-Year Estimates, 2013, Table B18120

3.5.5 Clients Served Compared to the Target Population

As shown in **Error! Not a valid bookmark self-reference.**, OCB served 676 clients in FFY2016. When this figure is compared to the overall count working age of Oregonians with vision difficulties, including those who are not in the labor force, OCB serves 1.4 percent of this population. When OCB’s estimate of clients served

in a given year is compared to unemployed working age Oregonians with vision disability in the labor force, OCB serves 14.5 percent of this population. As noted above, it is important to note that the ACS definition of vision difficulty may not align with eligibility for OCB vocational rehabilitation services, so the target population estimate should only be viewed as a reference for service provision.

Figure 7: OCB Clients Served as a Percentage of All Oregonians with Vision Difficulties and Estimated Target Population, 2013 (ACS) and FFY2016 (OCB)

OCB Clients Served (all ages)	All Oregonians with Vision Difficulties (ages 18-64, In and Not in Labor Force)	OCB Clients Served as Percent of All Oregonians with Disabilities	OCB Target Population (Unemployed People with Vision Difficulties, Ages 18-64 in Labor Force)	Clients Served as Percent of Target Population
676	48,834	1.4%	4,673	14.5%

Note: The OCB caseload count in this table represents the total number of clients served in FFY2016. All other tables with caseload data in this report and the appendices are calculated on the number of clients closed in FFY2016, which was 180 clients.

Source: OCB, caseload data, clients served in FFY2016; U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 3-Year Estimates, 2013, Table B18120 (vision difficulty)

4. BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENT

4.1 Key Findings

- **Transportation.** Transportation was the employment barrier identified by the most OCB clients, and is particularly acute for individuals experiencing blindness who often rely on public transit or private ride share companies as their only means of transportation.
- **Employer perception.** Employer attitudes towards people with disabilities is particularly pronounced for people with vision impairment. Sixty-eight (68) percent of OCB clients had experienced employer attitudes as a barrier to employment. Additionally, limited public awareness of and familiarity with the capabilities of individuals with vision impairment creates ongoing barriers to daily life, school, and employment.
- **Self-perception.** Sixty-four (64) percent of OCB clients said that their uncertainty about employment due to their disability had posed a barrier to employment for them. Low incidence disabilities like blindness provide fewer support opportunities or access to role models who have achieved successful employment. Family attitudes about employment for people with disabilities may also contribute to employment barriers.
- **Assistive technology.** The need for assistive technology is acute for people with vision impairment. Access to training, equipment, and employer-support must be addressed to support client employment.
- **Vocational skills and experience.** Having a marketable skill is critical for employment for any individual, and pronounced for individuals with disabilities. Limited vocational skills, work experience, and soft skills hinder client employment prospects.
- **Confounding barriers.** OCB clients may require support to address confounding service barriers related to poverty, housing, or food insecurity, that impede employment progress.

4.2 Barriers to Employment for Individuals with Vision Impairment

OCB clients, staff, and vocational rehabilitation community partner organizations were asked to provide input through online surveys, focus groups, and/or interviews on the barriers to employment faced by individuals with disabilities. The following section provides a summary analysis of client barriers across all data sources, providing key barriers to employment for individuals with vision impairment.

In the following table, client percentages represent the percent of clients who indicated they had faced the barrier. Staff and partner percentages represent the percent of staff or partners who indicated that people with disabilities sometimes or always face the barrier. The number of individuals responding to each barrier sub-question varies by barrier. In almost all cases, OCB community partners were more likely, compared to staff or partner respondents, to perceive clients as sometimes or always facing a barrier to employment.²³ In many cases, clients were less likely to report having faced a barrier than were staff or partners indicating that clients sometimes or always faced this barrier to employment. This pattern in reporting may be due to clients' reporting that they had directly faced a barrier, and staff and partners reporting on how frequently they felt people with disabilities, on the whole, face each barrier.

²³ OCB community partners infrequently replied "Don't Know" to any barrier question. Program staff were more likely to report "Don't Know" to several barrier questions; roughly one-third of program staff indicated that they did not know how often clients faced the following barriers: limited relevant job skills, employer attitudes towards people with disabilities, slow job market, cultural/family attitudes, lack of long-term services, lack of information regarding disability resources, lack of physical accessibility, lack of personal care attendants, immigration status, and conviction for criminal offenses. For a more detailed breakdown of survey responses, please see Appendix G.

Figure 8: OCB Stakeholder Feedback on Barriers to Employment

	Clients	Staff	Partners
Lack of transportation	74%	73%	89%
Employer attitudes towards people with disabilities	68%	69%	86%
Uncertainty about employment because of their disability	64%	73%	97%
Lack of assistive technology	57%	69%	63%
Concern over loss of benefits (e.g. Social Security benefits)	47%	77%	97%
Lack of information regarding disability resources	47%	54%	71%
Slow job market	43%	63%	75%
Cultural/family attitudes toward employment for people with disabilities	38%	62%	86%
Limited work experience	36%	73%	97%
Lack of affordable housing	34%	77%	81%
Lack of long term services and ongoing job coaching	34%	62%	74%
Limited relevant job skills	32%	69%	92%
Lack of physical accessibility	19%	52%	64%
Lack of affordable child care	15%	73%	56%
Lack of personal care attendants	11%	42%	69%
Convictions for criminal offenses or other legal issues	9%	23%	64%
Language barrier	6%	44%	47%
Immigration status	4%	27%	42%

Note: In Figure 8, client percentages represent the percent of clients who indicated they had faced the barrier. Staff and partner percentages represent the percent of staff or partners who indicated that people with disabilities sometimes or always face the barrier. The number of individuals responding to each barrier question varies by barrier.

Source: OCB CSNA Client Survey, 2017

4.2.1 Transportation

As shown in Figure 8, 74 percent of OCB clients, 73 percent of OCB staff, and 89 percent of OCB partner survey respondents identified transportation as a key

barrier to employment for individuals who are blind. This was the employment barrier identified by the most OCB clients, and the OCB service received by the second greatest proportion (14 percent) of OCB clients in 2016.²⁴ Individuals with visual impairment or blindness often rely on public transportation or private ride share companies as their only means of transportation and are uniquely depending on this assistance. Reliance on public transportation limits job opportunities to those that are accessible by transit, and often adds considerable commute time for individuals. Moreover, people who live in areas unserved by public transportation may have no reliable means of getting to and from work.

4.2.2 Employer Attitudes Toward People with Disabilities

Sixty-eight (68) percent of OCB clients had experienced employer attitudes as a barrier to employment, and OCB staff (69 percent) and OCB partner survey respondents (86 percent) felt that employer attitudes towards people with disabilities posed a barrier to employment sometimes or always. Responses across all OCB stakeholder groups suggest that employer attitudes towards employability is a pronounced barrier for individuals with vision impairment relative to other disabilities. In findings from the Oregon Vocational Rehabilitation Community Statewide Needs Assessment, individuals who experience vision impairment cited the greatest difference in barriers compared to the general vocational rehabilitation population for multiple barriers. Such barriers included employer attitudes toward people with disabilities, lack of transportation, lack of assistive technology, concern over loss of benefits, and limited relevant job skills.

Staff, community partners, and program clients all noted employers' lack of confidence in people with vision impairment's ability to work, lack of employer awareness of supports and assistive technology for people with vision impairment, and lack of opportunities to connect with people with vision impairment as key barriers to employer partnership. Employer outreach is considered critical to addressing employer attitudes that hinder employment success for clients. Sixty-seven (67) percent of the employers that responded to the OVR/OCB needs assessment survey were not at all aware or only slightly aware of OCB services.

²⁴ Among clients whose cases closed in 2016, 14 percent received transportation services in FFY2016.

4.2.3 Self-perception of Employability

Clients, staff, and partners agreed that self-perceptions about their own employability impede their employment progress. Sixty-four (64) percent of OCB clients said that their uncertainty about employment due to their disability had posed a barrier to employment for them. Almost all OCB partners (97 percent) and nearly three-quarters (73 percent) of OCB staff felt that clients' uncertainty about employment due to their disability sometimes or always posed a barrier. Several OCB partners and staff noted that individuals with low-prevalence disabilities, such as blindness, may be even less exposed to other individuals with their condition, or role models who are employed, compared to individuals with other disabilities. The lack of interaction with successful, employed individuals with vision impairment can limit their own sense of direction and potential.

4.2.4 Assistive Technology

Lack of assistive technology was another key barrier to employment faced by a majority of OCB clients (57 percent). Nearly 70 percent of OCB staff (69 percent) and 63 percent of OCB partner survey respondents identified this as a barrier to employment sometimes or always. All stakeholder respondents noted that for individuals with visual impairment, technical training around JAWS (Job Access With Speech) software—a screen reader program for Microsoft Windows that allows individuals with visual impairment to read the screen through text-to-speech output or a refreshable Braille display—is critical. However, they also noted challenges in using JAWS on proprietary software used by some companies, which can limit individuals with visual impairment's job responsiveness and suitability.

4.2.5 Impact on Benefits

Fear of losing benefits is a common barrier to employment for individuals with disabilities, including individuals who are blind or have vision impairment. Although less than half of OCB clients (47 percent) identified loss of benefits as a barrier to employment for them, almost all OCB partners (97 percent) and more than three quarter of OCB staff (77 percent) identified this issue as a barrier for some or all individuals with vision impairment. These were two of the top barriers cited by OCB staff and OCB partner survey respondents. Many people may be reluctant to

seek employment due to concern over the impact on benefits, including Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) or Supplemental Security Income (SSI), or may try to balance retaining Social Security benefits with employment.

4.2.6 Awareness of OCB Services

Nearly half of OCB clients (47 percent) noted that lack of information about disability resources had served as a barrier to employment. Fifty-four (54) percent of staff and 71 percent of OCB partners felt that this was sometimes or always a barrier for people with disabilities. OCB staff commented that the program only serves a fraction of Oregonians who are blind, and it is important to reach unserved individuals and raise awareness of OCB services. The limited awareness of OCB services is in part due to the low incidence of vision impairment, which can make identifying target individuals challenging.

4.2.7 Public Perception

OCB clients and staff felt that an underlying lack of public awareness of and familiarity with the capabilities of individuals with vision impairment creates ongoing bias toward this group. This dynamic impacts individuals' daily life, school, and employment experiences. Indeed, one OCB partner suggested that the number one barrier to employment for individuals with vision impairment is sighted people's fears and barriers to understanding solutions. OCB clients noted a significant misconception among employers and coworkers about the capabilities of people who are visually impaired, and several discussed general bias from community members when performing routine day to day tasks. They expressed concern over the people they will encounter in routine tasks, school, or employment, and whether those people will accept or dismiss them based on their vision impairment. Moreover, they describe personally bearing the burden of outreach and education to overcome public perceptions due to lack of a systemic response to this dynamic.

As one client noted:

***“The onus is on us to break our own barriers and help reduce fear among sighted people.”*

4.2.8 Family Perception of Employability

In addition to self-perception, family values and norms affect individuals' employment process. Eighty-six (86) percent of OCB partners and 62 percent of OCB staff felt that cultural or family attitudes towards employment for people with disabilities sometimes or always posed a barrier for clients. More than one-third (38 percent) of clients reported facing this barrier to employment.

OCB partners and staff suggested that parents' hesitance towards their children's employment can limit work opportunities. More specifically, expectations for individuals and families can be too low or too high. Some cannot imagine possibilities beyond menial labor, others feel as though their child can do anything, and others want their children protected. Additionally, staff and partner stakeholders commented that many parents do not know any other individuals who are blind, and have not developed the expectation of or right to employment for their children. Parents may not be aware of resources for their children, and may employ "angel syndrome", as described by one partner, whereby they may want to do things for their children instead of supporting their children in learning how to do things for themselves.

4.2.9 Vocational Skills

Program staff and community partners noted lack of vocational skills as a key barrier to employment for people with disabilities. Seventy-three (73) percent and 97 percent of OCB staff and partners, respectively, felt that lack of relevant job skills posed a barrier for clients sometimes or always. Thirty-two (32) percent of clients said they faced this barrier.

Having a marketable skill is critical for employment for any individual, but especially people with disabilities. One program staff respondent noted that even janitorial or similar positions require specialized vocational skills. Moreover, as one staff remarked, even entry level jobs may be particularly challenging since they may require more multi-tasking and multi-skill set than specialized positions.

As one client commented:

***“It’s important to have a sellable trade. It’s easier to market yourself if you are a skilled person who happens to be blind. But if you are a blind person who can be trained, that sounds like work to an employer. If people are getting a really marketable, tangible skill, or filling a vocational demand, it makes an easier ask for needed accommodations.”*

4.2.10 Work Experience

Program staff, community partners, and program clients all voiced a need for more volunteer or work experience opportunities to bridge clients into employment. Seventy-three (73) percent of program staff and 97 percent of community partners cited limited work experience as a barrier to clients sometimes or always. Thirty-six (36) percent of respondents reported that they faced this barrier.

Program staff and partners remarked that some OCB clients may be entering the job market for the first time at age 30 or 40, with limited vocational skills or work experience. OCB staff and partners also observed that without programs like Student Work Experience Program (SWEP), students who are blind may not gain any pre-graduation employment experience.

4.2.11 Soft Skills

Similar to work experience, some program staff and partners noted lack of soft skills as a barrier to employment. OCB partner respondents remarked that these social and interpersonal interaction skills can be particularly challenging for individuals who are blind and do not have access to visual communication or cues. Moreover, many people who are blind may develop behaviors, such as rocking, to acquire more sensory input that can be off-putting to sighted individuals. Additionally, group behavior norms can be hard to read for individuals with vision impairment, which may lead to judgement about their skills and capabilities.

4.2.12 Confounding Barriers

Program staff, partners, and clients all cited the need to address confounding service barriers related to poverty, housing, or food insecurity, that may impede

employment progress. Seventy-seven (77) percent of OCB staff and 81 percent of OCB partners identified lack of affordable housing as a barrier to employment sometimes or always for individuals with disabilities. One-third (34 percent) of OCB clients report having faced this barrier. Staff (73 percent) and partners (56 percent) also felt lack of affordable child care was a barrier to work sometimes or always, though a smaller proportion (15 percent) of clients reported this barrier.

As one OCB staff member explained:

***“Typically, if people had sporadic work history, generational poverty, or other issues, these things don’t go away when they become blind. For clients that experience other barriers to employment that don’t have anything to do with blindness, they need support to partner better and identify these more clearly to address them effectively.”*

4.2.13 Geographic Service and Employment Gaps

Although 67 percent of OCB staff, 66 percent of OCB clients, and 56 percent of OCB partners indicated that OCB services are sometimes or always conveniently located in communities where clients live (see Figure 9, in Section 3 below), focus group and interview respondents identified limited service availability in rural areas as a prevalent barrier to employment. These stakeholders discussed how rural communities are generally less served by OCB staff than more populous areas because there are fewer staff members and contracted providers (job developers and trainers/coaches) serving larger geographic areas with dispersed populations. Indeed, 82 percent of OCB staff and 67 percent of OCB partners considered people who live in rural areas of the state to be unserved populations of individuals with disabilities (see Figure 15 in Section 3 below).

5. SERVICE PROVISION FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENT

5.1 Key Findings

- **Offices are accessible.** Clients generally do not perceive language, physical office location, or hours to be significant barriers to service.
- **Perceptions of service accessibility and support vary by respondents.** In general, more OCB staff tended to view OCB services as accessible and supportive than did clients or community partners. Community partner survey respondents were least likely, compared to staff or clients, to view OCB services as accessible or supportive.
- **Employment-related supports.** Vocational training, work experience, and long-term job supports are key services for supporting individuals with vision impairment on their path to employment.
- **Assistive technology.** Orientation and mobility training, as well as access to assistive devices and related training, are critical to improving clients' ability to navigate and thrive in employment settings.
- **Supportive services.** Transportation, independent living skills training, and referrals to community partners can help clients address confounding barriers that hinder employment and independence. Additionally, benefits counseling can inform clients of the impact of employment on their wages and support transition to work.
- **Pre-employment transition services.** Youth with vision impairment need dedicated support to ensure a successful transition from high school to college or the workforce.
- **Barriers and service needs for key target populations.** Findings from the Oregon Vocational Rehabilitation Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment suggest that individuals with significant disabilities, youth with disabilities in transition, and individuals with disabilities from racial or cultural minority groups face unique barriers and service needs. These findings can inform service delivery among individuals with visual impairment.

5.2 Introduction

Client, staff, and community partner survey respondents provided their perspective on access to vocational rehabilitation services. The figure below includes the number and percentage of responses agreeing or strongly agreeing with service-related statements. The figure is ordered by percentage of client responses, highest to lowest. The response number (n) varied per statement.

Clients generally do not perceive language, physical office location, or hours to be significant barriers to service. Nearly 90 percent of clients also believed that clients are actively involved in completing the Individualized Plan for Employment through OCB. In general, more OCB staff tended to view OCB services as accessible and supportive than did clients or community partners. Community partner survey respondents were least likely, compared to staff or clients, to view OCB services as accessible or supportive, however, they were also more likely to respond “Don’t Know” to the response options, suggesting less familiarity with OCB service accessibility and support.²⁵

²⁵ No OCB staff member reported “Don’t Know” to any of the questions illustrated in Figure 9. Less than 10 percent of clients reported “Don’t Know” to all response categories except “OCB programs provide adequate disability-related accommodations” (13 percent “Don’t Know”) and “There is sufficient service coordination between OCB and other service providers” (11 percent “Don’t Know”). More than one-third of OCB partners reported “Don’t Know” for five of the response options. Please see Appendix G for more detail on survey responses.

Figure 9: OCB Client, Staff, and Community Partner Perception of OCB Vocational Rehabilitation Services, Number and Percentage Agreed or Strongly Agreed by Stakeholder Type

	Clients	Staff	Community Partners
Clients are able to receive OCB services in their preferred language	91%	88%	44%
OCB offices are physically accessible	91%	92%	66%
Clients are actively involved in completing the Individualized Plan for Employment through OCB	89%	96%	53%
OCB office hours are convenient for clients	84%	100%	53%
Clients are supported in receiving OCB assessment services	85%	92%	59%
Clients are supported in completing the OCB application	83%	96%	53%
OCB programs provide adequate assisted technology	77%	88%	72%
Public transportation is available to help clients get to OCB services	77%	61%	44%
OCB programs provide adequate disability-related accommodations	76%	96%	72%
Clients are supported in accessing OCB training or education programs	74%	96%	65%
OCB services are conveniently located in communities where clients live	66%	67%	56%
There is sufficient service coordination between OCB and other providers in the community	59%	79%	47%

Source: OCB CSNA Client, Staff, and Community Partner Surveys, 2017

Across all service categories, program staff and clients raised concern about limited awareness of OCB services, and the opportunities for greater outreach to

prospective clients and the public. Despite growing caseloads, stakeholders feel Oregonians may be unserved because OCB's presence is small and there is limited outreach to the public about their services. OCB staff noted that the program only serves a fraction of Oregonians who are blind, and it is important to reach unserved individuals and raise awareness of OCB services. As noted in the barriers section above, nearly half of OCB clients (48 percent) noted that lack of information about disability resources had served as a barrier to employment.

In addition to outreach to individuals who have vision impairment, OCB client stakeholders suggested broader, overall outreach and visibility campaigns among the general public to normalize the idea of people with vision impairment as valuable, contributing members of the community. Staff proposed a widespread marketing campaign to raise awareness. Clients suggested recruiting volunteers who would learn about OCB and individuals with vision impairment, and then spread their awareness through their own networks. They could serve as community based allies to increase visibility and public reception.

To collect more detailed information on program services, program staff and community partners were asked to identify how many people with disabilities with whom they work need a list of articulated vocational services, including employment-related supports, assistive technology, and other supportive services. Staff and partner respondents were asked to identify whether none, few, some, or most/all of their clients needed a given service. In the figures below, we present the proportion of program staff and partner respondent who indicated that some or most/all of their clients needed a given service.

Client survey respondents were asked directly whether or not they needed a given vocational service. In the figures below, we present the proportion of clients who reported needing a given service. Program stakeholders were also asked their perception of receipt of services, which is discussed in each section below. We integrate these survey data with focus group, interview, and existing data findings to provide an overall picture of service provision for individuals with vision impairment.

5.3 Employment-Related Supports

In survey responses, the largest share of OCB staff, community partners, and clients identified vocational counseling, vocational assessment, job placement, and job coaching as most needed employment-related services. Large shares of respondents in each group also selected technical training as a key service, and community partner respondents, in particular, identified post-employment services as critical to success.

Figure 10 presents the percent of program staff and community partners that reported that some/most/all people with disabilities that they work with need each employment-related service. The client column presents the percent of program clients who indicated that they needed each service.

Figure 10: Stakeholder Perception of Need for Employment-Related Services

	Clients	Staff	Partners
Vocational assessment	73%	82%	83%
Vocational counseling	68%	88%	91%
Technical training	60%	100%	60%
Academic education	50%	56%	40%
Vocational tuition assistance	45%	56%	34%
Job placements	60%	75%	94%
Job coaching	43%	69%	91%
Self-employment supports	31%	53%	18%
Post-employment services	50%	69%	69%

Note: In Figure 10, client percentages represent the percent of clients who indicated they needed the service. Staff and partner percentages represent the percent of staff or partners who indicated that some, most, or all people with disabilities need the service.

Source: OCB CSNA Client, Staff, and Community Partner Surveys, 2017

5.3.1 Vocational Training

In keeping with survey findings, staff, partner, and client focus group and interview participants noted that most clients need dedicated vocational training, or at least

updates to their existing skills. Sixty (60) percent of clients reported a need for technical training; all OCB staff and 60 percent of OCB partners indicated that some, most, or all individuals with disabilities need technical training. Seventy-two (72) percent of clients that reported needing technical training indicated that they had received such service, as did 67 percent of those requiring vocational tuition assistance. Eighty-one (81) percent of those who reported a need for academic education reported receiving this service.²⁶

In addition to greater access to upfront training, stakeholders across all groups noted that ongoing training to provide skill maintenance and advancement is important. OCB staff noted that although clients may receive robust training while in the OCB classroom, if they don't continue to use those skills regularly they will atrophy, and the client may no longer be able to perform related functions (e.g. use Excel or other computer programs) on the job. OCB staff commented that limited funding for post-employment supports or non-vocational rehabilitation independent living training limits the ability of OCB to provide ongoing training options.

5.3.2 Work Experience

Clients and staff alike observed that work experience or volunteer internships were critical to many individuals in achieving employment. Youth clients felt that the SWEPP program dramatically expanded their expectations around viable employment paths. Additionally, program staff remarked that the Progressive Employment Model provides diverse introductory opportunities for clients, and less pressure for an immediate decision by employers. Both parties have a chance

²⁶ Among OCB clients whose cases closed in 2017, six percent received job readiness training, five percent received job placement assistance, and just one percent received occupational or vocational training. However, because the caseload data received included only individuals who closed cases in FFY 2016, they are likely to have been further advanced in the training process, and therefore not receiving vocational services as extensively in their year of closure.

to become familiar with one another and try out the relationship before establishing a permanent position.

5.3.3 Long-Term Job Support

OCB staff, partners, and clients noted the need for longer term job support to retain positions and advance in careers. Thirty-four (34) percent of OCB clients identified lack of long term services and job coaching as a barrier to employment, and 62 percent and 74 percent of OCB staff and partners, respectively, felt that this was a barrier to employment for some or all clients. Half of OCB clients indicated a need for post-employment supports, and 69 percent each of OCB staff and partners felt that some, most or all OCB clients needed post-employment supports. As one OCB staff stated:

***“Job positions change and morph over time, so ongoing help can be critical. It seems like without it, there may be a glass ceiling of sorts for people who are blind—they may not be offered ongoing job opportunities and their employment may be more static. Once an individual is employed, they need opportunities to grow and change. This isn’t always offered or supported, and the employer may not know how to transition or progress transitions, or what resources are available to help in the process.”*

Despite interest in long-term job support among stakeholders, OCB staff respondents noted limited funding to provide these services through post-employment support or non-vocational rehabilitation independent living training. OCB vocational rehabilitation services by definition have limited time with clients and employers. Although the Workforce and Innovation Opportunity Act is necessitating a closer look at longer term success after job placement, stakeholders felt there is insufficient focus on follow up services after successful employment placement. This was discussed in general as well as related to ongoing training for rapidly changing assistive technology.

***“Technology has advanced so quickly, that unless you have refresher training on what is out there and available, you are missing out.”*

Sixty-seven (67) percent of individuals who identified a need for post-employment supports cited receiving the service, however, we do not know the intensity or length of these post-employment service requests. Individuals with co-existing conditions, such as developmental disability or mental health issues, may have access to funding streams to support these services through supported employment (for individuals with IDD) or Individual Placement and Support (IPS) programs (for individuals with mental illness). Staff discussed their inability to deliver services to other clients, those not connected to supported employment or IPS, unless they reopen cases to provide post-employment support when an individual loses or is in danger of losing a job. This requires a continued connection to the employer and/or employee by the counselor or job developer, which can be difficult to maintain. Moreover, resources for post-employment support are limited.

5.3.4 Self-Employment Supports

OCB contracts with small business development consultants to work with clients to develop self-employment options. Interviewees felt this approach accommodated a wider range of abilities and interests than strictly making job matches or customizing positions within businesses. Although just one-third of clients identify self-employment supports as a need, 92 percent of these individuals reported receiving this service; this was the largest share reporting receipt among any employment-related service in the survey.

5.3.5 Person-Centered Planning

Program staff, partners, and clients all voiced the need for person-centered planning to drive client activities and progress. Seventy-seven (77) percent of OCB clients felt that their vocational rehabilitation counselor informed them of their choices when developing their rehabilitation plan. Seventy-one (71) percent of OCB clients indicated that their counselor considered their interests, strengths, abilities, and needs when developing their rehabilitation plan. OCB employs well-trained counselors with the capacity to get to know individual clients and develop a plan for employment that reflects client's wants and needs.

5.4 Assistive Technology

Ninety (90) percent of OCB clients identified a need for technological aids and devices; 94 percent of OCB staff and nearly three-quarters (74 percent) of community partner survey respondents identified these devices as critical services to support employment for some or all of people with disabilities. Of the 413 services provided to OCB clients who closed cases in FFY2016, rehabilitation technology was the most frequent service provided (74).

Figure 11 presents the percent of program staff and community partners who reported that some or most/all of the people with disabilities that they work with need each assistive technology service. The client column presents the percent of program clients who indicated they needed each service.

Figure 11: Stakeholder Perception of Need for Assistive Technology

	Clients	Staff	Partner
Durable medical equipment	27%	31%	29%
Orientation and mobility services	74%	94%	57%
Technological aids and devices	90%	94%	74%
Speech to text support or ASL interpreting	38%	44%	34%

Source: OCB CSNA Client, Staff, and Community Partner Surveys, 2017

5.4.1 Technological Aids and Devices

Stakeholders across all groups commonly discussed the need for technology accommodations and training for OCB clients in the workplace. Assistive technology is central for many individuals with visual disabilities to perform job duties. Interviewees and focus group participants generally felt OCB does a good job providing adaptive devices, technology, and related training. Eighty-nine (89) percent of clients who said they needed technological aids and devices indicated that they had received such service. Ninety-four (94) percent and 58 percent, respectively, of program staff and community partners suggested that technological aids and devices were received by some or most/all of clients who needed such services.

Despite generally high levels of service receipt for technological aids and devices, clients and staff cited ongoing barriers to getting assistive technology in place, particularly when it needs to interact with companies' proprietary software or in more secure settings, such as a bank or financial institutions. Additionally, OCB clients indicated interest in more assistive technology training, both during vocational rehabilitation training, but also after placement, as technology evolves and their job requirements and exposure to new platforms may change. OCB client, staff, and partner feedback also suggests that increased communication with employers on availability of assistive technology and transparent communication of responsibility for purchase and training could facilitate employer receptivity to hiring people with assistive technology needs. Finally, stakeholder staff and partners indicated that faster turnaround of assistive technology requests can facilitate "real time" employment offers, and provision of ongoing check-ins with employed clients can ensure that their assistive technology infrastructure and skills remain up to date.

5.4.2 Orientation and Mobility

Ability to navigate different environmental settings and independently travel from one place to another are critical skills for employment. For individuals who are blind or visually impaired, orientation and mobility classes improve clients' skills and independence in diverse and unfamiliar environments. Seventy-four (74) percent of clients indicated a need for orientation and mobility (O&M) services; among those, 84 percent reported receiving these services. The majority of OCB staff and partners indicated a need for these services, and receipt of these services, among individuals who are blind.

Clients overwhelmingly provided positive feedback about OCB's targeted instruction, including orientation and mobility training, the technology center, and daily living activities. Several clients indicated that the instruction they had received through the center had enabled them to pursue new careers or greatly improve efficiency in their existing work.

Although OCB staff, clients, and several partners were pleased with the level of intensity of existing O&M services, three OCB partners remarked that a longer, more extensive training program would equip clients with deeper orientation and mobility independence and skill. Additionally, OCB clients indicated interest in

more O&M counselors to increase capacity in support and services, and of a need to increase orientation and mobility training options outside of vocational rehabilitation programs, such as those previously provided through the homemakers' program. Staff and clients suggested prevocational support and training to meet this need.

5.5 Supportive Services

The vast majority of OCB clients, staff, and partners identified transportation services as a need for people with disabilities. Program clients (63 percent), staff (69 percent), and community partners (89 percent) also identified referrals to community resources as a key need to achieving employment goals for themselves (clients) or some or most/all of the individuals they work with (program staff and partners). Independent living skills training, social security benefit planning, and group and peer support were also considered key needs by all stakeholder groups.

Figure 12 presents the percentage of program staff and community partners who reported that some or most/all of the people with disabilities that they work with need each supportive service. The client column presents the percent of program clients who indicated a need for each service.

Figure 12: Stakeholder Perception of Need for Supportive Services

	Clients	Staff	Partner
Referrals to community resources	63%	69%	89%
Family and caregiver support	32%	69%	69%
Group and peer support	47%	76%	74%
Housing	19%	44%	66%
Independent living skills training	63%	82%	83%
Medical care	26%	63%	83%
Social security benefit planning	55%	75%	86%
Transition services from high school to adult services	20%	41%	63%
Transition services from institution to community	5%	13%	40%
Transportation	75%	72%	100%
Behavioral supports	14%	41%	69%
Cognitive therapy	18%	18%	40%
Mental health treatment	18%	35%	71%
Substance use treatment	0%	0%	23%

Source: OCB CSNA Client, Staff, and Community Partner Surveys, 2017

The majority of clients who reported needing a supportive service indicated receipt of that services, including 81 percent of individuals who reported needing independent living skills training, 78 percent who reported needing transition services from high school to adult programs, 69 percent needing family and caregiver support, and 67 percent requiring transportation.

More than half of OCB staff considered transportation, social security benefit planning, independent living skills training, group and peer support, and referrals to community resources to be received by some, most, or all clients that need them. Similarly, more than half of OCB partner survey respondents felt that some or most/all individuals who need a supportive service receive it, with the exception of transition services from an institution.

5.5.1 Family and Caregiver Support

To address family hesitation around employment for individuals who are blind, and to build a support community for family members, OCB staff and partners suggested engaging with parents earlier on in the process to develop a better road map for their children's possibilities and expectations. Nearly 70 percent of program partners and staff alike, and 32 percent of program clients identified caregiver support as a need for some or most/all clients (partners and staff) or themselves (clients). Almost 70 percent of clients who reported this need confirmed that they had received the service, and 40 percent and 64 percent of program staff and partners, respectively, felt that individuals who needed this service received it.

Staff and partners noted that earlier and better connection between education service providers for individuals who are blind and families of children who are blind can help shape families' expectations, and can help parents form a positive view of blindness and visual impairment. This, in turn, can help parents support greater independence for their kids and develop high standards for their children. Moreover, this earlier contact can provide needed resources, support, and community to families who may be struggling with isolation due to the low prevalence of vision impairment in the general public.

5.5.2 Group and Peer Support

Low-incidence disabilities, such as blindness, can lead to feelings of isolation and lack of connection. Program staff, partners, and clients observed that peer groups can help normalize common circumstances, provide support, and help problem solve based on other peers' experiences. Three quarters of program staff and partners felt that some or most/all individuals with disabilities need this service, compared to 47 percent of clients that identified the need. Roughly half of staff and partners felt that some or most/all clients who needed the service received it, and 60 percent of clients reported receipt.

OCB clients were pleased with peer to peer networking opportunities, including the cohort training model and SWEP program for youth with vision impairment, and particularly appreciated hearing from employed individuals who are blind through OCB speaker presentations. They suggested increased opportunities to

network with other individuals who are blind, mentorships between OCB clients and employed individuals who are blind, and increased self-advocacy classes and support.

5.5.3 Social Security Benefit Planning

The vast majority of program staff and partners indicated that some or most/all clients need social security benefit planning, and just over half of clients reported this need. Sixty-three (63) percent of staff and 58 percent of partners felt some or most/all individuals who needed the service received it, as did 55 percent of clients themselves.

Program staff and partners noted the need for continued messaging to communicate the continuum of available benefits as employment status evolves. These stakeholders suggest that this may be particularly important for families, who may have misconceptions about the impact of work on benefits.

5.6 Pre-employment Transition Services

OCB works with students 14 and older who are legally blind or have a condition that will lead to blindness to help ensure a successful transition from high school to college or the workforce. OCB vocational rehabilitation services for transition age youth include:

- Job exploration counseling
- Work-based learning experiences
- Counseling on opportunities for enrollment in comprehensive transition or postsecondary educational programs
- Workplace readiness training
- Instruction in self-advocacy, which can include peer mentoring
- Summer Work Experience Program

Figure 13 presents the percent of program staff and community partners who reported that some or most/all of the people with disabilities that they work with need each pre-employment transition service. The client column presents the percent of program clients who indicated that they needed each service. Note that the sample size of clients responding to the need for and receipt of pre-

employment transition services is very small; client findings may not be representative of the broader client population receiving pre-employment transition services.

Figure 13: Stakeholder Perception of Need for Pre-Employment Transition Services

	Clients	Staff	Partner
Job exploration counseling	50%	59%	80%
Work-based learning experiences	50%	59%	83%
Counseling on post-secondary education options	100%	59%	60%
Workplace readiness training	50%	59%	77%
Instruction in self-advocacy, including peer mentoring	50%	59%	77%
Pre-employment transition coordination	N/A	59%	83%

Source: OCB CSNA Client, Staff, and Community Partner Surveys, 2017

Less than one-third of OCB staff viewed any pre-employment transition service as being received by some or most/all clients who need it, with the exception of work-based learning experiences, where 40 percent of staff felt that some or most/all clients that need the service receive it. Perception of receipt among OCB partners was somewhat more positive, with 61 percent of partners suggesting job exploration counseling and work-based learning experiences as being received by some or most/all clients who need it, and roughly half identifying workplace readiness training and pre-employment transition coordination as well received. Clients considered transition services from high school to adult programs to be well-received; 78 percent of those who reported the need indicate receipt of the service.

Youth clients received many pre-employment transition services through the Student Work Experience Program (SWEP), and provided positive feedback on the experience. In particular, they were excited to gain work experience through internships, and found the on-going job coaching extremely valuable. They also described self-advocacy, peer mentoring, and workplace readiness training throughout the tenure. The majority of SWEP participants felt that the experience

had been transformational in increasing their confidence, and sense of independence and competency. As a result of their experience, they were eager to plan for opportunities to seek employment or higher education, secure their own apartment, and develop employment and further education goals.

5.7 Variation in Barriers and Service Needs for Key Target Populations

OCB is interested in learning whether barriers and service needs vary across different subgroups of clients. The survey sample size of OCB clients prevented subgroup analysis to investigate variation in barriers to employment or service needs for people with the most significant disabilities, people from racial, ethnic, or cultural minority groups, and youth participants. However, input received through qualitative OCB data collection can supplement survey subgroup analysis conducted for the broader Oregon Vocational Rehabilitation Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment. Although this data refers to disabilities more broadly and are not limited to vision impairment, the emerging lessons are relevant to OCB clients and prospective services.

A larger share of people with the most significant disabilities and people from racial, ethnic or minority groups reported experiencing each barrier to employment compared to the vocational rehabilitation participant population as a whole. However, youth in transition described fewer barriers than the broader vocational rehabilitation population.

The following findings are significant at the 0.05 level:²⁷

- In 10 of 18 categories, people with most significant disabilities reported these barriers significantly more frequently than the rest of the vocational rehabilitation population.

²⁷ For this analysis, a finding that is significant at the 0.05 level means that the difference in the number of people reporting each barrier across subgroups is likely to be due to true underlying difference across subgroups, rather than chance, 95 percent of the time.

- In 5 of 18 categories, people with disabilities who were from racial or ethnic minority groups reported the barrier significantly more frequently than the rest of the vocational rehabilitation population.
- In 4 of 18 categories, youth in transition reported the barrier significantly less frequently than the rest of the vocational rehabilitation population, with no categories where youth reported a barrier more frequently than the rest of the vocational rehabilitation population.

Figure 14 provides an overview of differences in barriers to employment for key target populations. A **plus sign (+)** indicates that the key target population was significantly more likely to report the barrier compared to the vocational rehabilitation population in general. A **minus sign (-)** indicates that the key target population was significantly less likely to report the barrier compared to the vocational rehabilitation population in general.

Figure 14: Difference in Barriers by Key Target Populations

	Individuals with Most Significant Disability	Individuals with Disabilities from Racial/Ethnic Minority	Youth in Transition
Lack of transportation	+		
Employer attitudes towards people with disabilities	+	+	-
Lack of assistive technology	+		
Concern over loss of benefits (e.g. Social Security benefits)	+		
Lack of information regarding disability resources	+		
Cultural/family attitudes toward employment for people with disabilities	+	+	-
Lack of long term services and ongoing job coaching	+		
Limited relevant job skills	+	+	-
Lack of physical accessibility	+		
Lack of affordable child care		+	
Lack of personal care attendants	+		
Convictions for criminal offenses or other legal issues		+	-

Source: OCB and OVR CSNA Client Surveys, 2017

There were few or no differences between individuals in populations of interest and the broader vocational rehabilitation population for the following barriers:

- Uncertainty about employment because of their disability
- Limited work experience
- Slow job market

- Lack of affordable housing
- Language barrier
- Immigration status

When analyzing differences by populations of interest related to service need and receipt, at a 0.05 significance level, youth in transition were more likely to report a need than the general population for 13 different service categories. Individuals with significant disabilities were more likely to report a statistically greater need for ten different service categories, compared to the general population, and clients with visual impairment and individuals from racial or ethnic minority groups were more likely to report a statistically significant difference in need in five and four different service areas, respectively. Also at the 0.05 significance level, individuals with significant disabilities were also more likely to report receiving services less often than the general population across nine different service areas.²⁸

5.7.1 Persons with the Most Significant Disabilities

Program staff and community partners note that people with more severe disabilities require more intensive service such as more coaching, more repetition, and more time to feel comfortable in new environments. Stakeholder feedback suggests that these individuals may have mental health, communication, and physical limitations, and are often relegated to more menial, less stimulating employment opportunities.

Yet the responsibility for providing needed services to people with significant disabilities is often unclear. Program staff and partners note that there is a sense in the field that the job developers can do these activities, and indeed some job developers are performing daily living activities. However, others observed that

²⁸ For this analysis, a finding that is significant at the 0.05 level means that the difference in the number of people reporting a need and/or receipt of services across subgroups is likely to be due to true underlying difference across subgroups, rather than chance, 95 percent of the time.

they are not trained in personal care, and that these tasks are the responsibility of personal care assistants. Yet some personal care assistants may not be sure of their role in these tasks while a person is employed and limit services on the job. Ambiguity around the delegation for these services can hinder access and delivery of services to these individuals.

Additionally, program staff and partners remarked that individuals who work with clients with IDD typically need more specialized training. Program staff and partners had mixed feedback on the capacity to serve these individuals within the existing infrastructure. Some staff and partners lauded the offices who had IDD specialists on staff. Others felt that increased IDD training across all counselors and providers would better serve program clients since no one specialist can serve all individuals with IDD in any given region. Stakeholders commented that certain relationships, such as a partnership with the Oregon Office of Development Disabilities Services, can provide braided funding that supports longer-term services. In some cases, employers may be more willing to work with these individuals because of the stability of funding and assistance.

In addition to individuals with IDD, program staff and partners also noted the challenge in adequately serving individuals with traumatic brain injury, or those on the border of IDD diagnosis. These individuals often require the same intensive, long term services that those with IDD do, but they do not have access to the same long-term funding streams and supports.

Individuals with IDD or traumatic brain injury are sometimes the hardest to place in jobs, and for those with communication barriers, it can be difficult to develop appropriate service plans. Several program stakeholders commented that people with complex disabilities may be weeded out of the vocational rehabilitation system due to the system's internal incentives, such as outcome payments, to work with people who are easier to place.

Program staff and community partners noted additional target populations of people with disabilities who face unique challenges of their own. Like individuals who experience blindness, individual who experience deafness or hearing impairment face related challenges of a low-incidence disability with high assistive technology needs. Staff remarked that certain resources, including a deaf vocational rehabilitation counselor in Washington, have been useful resources to

vocational rehabilitation staff. Veterans also face unique challenges, though program staff observed that they have their own veterans' supported employment program, so interaction with traditional vocational rehabilitation services varies. Finally, individuals who experience Autism Spectrum Disorder may also face unique challenges. Many individuals may perform too well on adaptive tests to be eligible for services, however, sustained limited executive functioning and related cognitive issues make it difficult for these individuals to thrive without assistance.

5.7.2 Students Transitioning from High School

To best serve students with disabilities transitioning from high school, program stakeholders felt that educating the family is as important as educating the student. Stakeholders indicated that some families may view opportunities from a deficit-based framework and may not expect their child to ever be able to work. One program partner noted that society has not historically asked kids with disabilities to plan for future or vocational engagement. Parents and teachers may not have this expectation; indeed, some parents may have been expecting sheltered workshop trajectory for their child.

Staff and partner feedback suggests that other families may come from a service entitlement framework and expect their children to be eligible for services beyond the purview of vocational rehabilitation. Stakeholder input suggests that families can use greater education to develop appropriate service expectation and learn how to best support their child as they transition from high school.

Program stakeholders also observed a great need for workplace readiness training for youth. Some program staff and partners suggested that schools are often preparing students for more school, rather than work, so they lack tangible vocational skills when the graduate. Moreover, stakeholders indicated that schools are not preparing students with soft skills or workplace readiness competency.

Stakeholders feel that Youth Transition Programs (YTP) in Oregon generally do a great job filling these gaps and providing vocational awareness, workplace readiness, and transition competency. YTP services are provided by a collaborative team including a transition specialist, a vocational rehabilitation counselor, special educator, administrator, youth, and their families. Participating students receive pre-employment transition supports to address individualized transition needs

generally during the last two years of high schools and continuing into the early transition years after leaving high school.

Students who drop out of school cannot take advantage of YTP programs. Program stakeholders cited a need to identify youth with disabilities who may have dropped out of school and can't be reached by existing transition services. Identifying these youth before they cycle into the vocational rehabilitation system as adults can establish improved vocational, workplace readiness, and system navigation skills.

Despite a growing service network for youth in transition, program stakeholders also observed that they may place undue expectations on youth in transition that are not commensurate with analogous expectations for youth without disabilities. As one program staff member described it:

***“For students in transition, many expect them to know exactly what they want to do and the path to get there at a young age—we don’t expect the same level of clarity and planning from people without disability. We give students less flexibility to pursue, fail, and regroup.”*

5.7.3 Individuals with Disabilities from Racial/Ethnic Minority Groups

Program staff and community providers commented that the broader context of racial and ethnic equity impacts access and service delivery for individual with disabilities from racial, ethnic, or cultural minority groups. One program staff member reflected that the systemic interaction of race and economy has implications for both services and job opportunities, which may not be as available in lower income, often minority neighborhoods. Program staff also described ongoing work, especially in the Portland region, to provide better outreach and accessibility to racially diverse clients, and discussed ongoing agency efforts to ensure cultural awareness as a tenet of service delivery. They also noted visible welcoming material for the LGBTQ community. Among OCB client survey respondents, 68 percent agreed or strongly agreed to the statement “My vocational rehabilitation counselor was sensitive to my cultural background.”, while one-fifth replied “Don’t Know” to this question. To increase access and service provision for individuals from racial and cultural minority groups, program staff suggested enhanced efforts to recruit persons of color and diverse ethnicities

and sexual orientations into education programs that prepare them to serve as vocational rehabilitation counselors. As one program staff indicated:

***“If we could increase representation within vocational rehabilitation from minority communities, it could help us work more effectively within those communities.”*

Another program partner described an initiative aimed to increase multicultural, multilingual access to services. The Latino Connection, a partnership between vocational rehabilitation and Easter Seals, was designed to facilitate greater access and service provision. In this model, Latino Connection staff are paired with a vocational rehabilitation counselor. Latino Connection provides specialized instruction such as English for the workplace, cultural differences in the workplace, English as a Second Language, workplace readiness, and on-the-job skills. They also facilitate placement, particularly in Latino firms looking for Latino workers, or non-Latino firms interested in increasing their diversity.

Similar to working with youth in transition, many program stakeholders noted the need to educate families about service and employment opportunities for their family member with a disability. Program staff and partners indicated that many cultures may not have expectations that individuals with disabilities can work, so there is a persistent cultural barrier to seeking services and employment. Language barriers within these communities may also exacerbate access issues, especially during the multi-step enrollment process. Program staff noted limited availability to adequately serve non-English speakers, and efforts to work with partner organizations, such as the Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization to increase outreach and access.

5.7.4 Under and Unserved Individuals with Disabilities

Program staff and community partner survey respondents were asked to identify which individuals they consider to be primarily unserved or underserved populations. People who live in rural areas of the state and people with mental health conditions were two responses identified by the greatest share of both program staff and partners. More than half (52 percent) of community partner respondents also felt that people who have criminal convictions are likely to be under or unserved. Additionally, during interviews and focus groups, program and

staff and partners identified individuals with deaf-blindness as under or unserved, with limited outreach and staff training in serving this population.

Figure 15: Primary Unserved or Underserved Populations

	Program Staff (n=22)	Community Partners (n=33)
People who live in rural areas of the state	82%	67%
People with a mental health condition	64%	70%
People with intellectual disabilities	36%	42%
People who are from racial or ethnic minority groups	36%	39%
People who have criminal convictions	36%	52%
People who are between the ages of 16 to 21	32%	30%
People with a substance use disorder	27%	48%
People with physical disabilities	23%	24%
Other	27%	15%

Source: OCB CSNA Staff and Community Partner Surveys, 2017

Providing consistent outreach and services to every part of broad rural regions for every part of the rehabilitation process is challenging. In some cases, staff that provide specific training are based in Salem or Eugene and travel to different parts of the state to provide services; depending on their schedule, program staff report that it may take months to connect a rural client with needed training. Finding quality vendors who will work in vast rural areas is also challenging since contractually they are not reimbursed for their travel time. If appropriate for a client, individuals from rural areas may be referred to Portland for limited residential services to access continuous training and services.

Program staff and community partners were also asked to identify strategies to serve under and unserved populations. A public awareness campaign was the strategy identified by the greatest share of program staff (54 percent), and increased staff was identified by the greatest share of community partners (69 percent), and half (50 percent) of OCB staff. Improving interagency collaboration and increased transportation options were also identified as strategies to serve the underserved by more than 60 percent of community partners.

Figure 16: Strategies to Serve Under and Unserved Populations

	Program Staff (n=26)	Community Partners (n=33)
Public awareness campaign	54%	57%
Increase staff	50%	69%
Staff training to work specialty caseloads	46%	57%
Provide more job skills development training	46%	54%
More interactions with community	42%	57%
Improve interagency collaboration	38%	60%
Increase transportation options	38%	63%
Increase diversity of staff (race, ethnicity, gender, etc.)	31%	31%
Other	19%	14%

Source: OCB CSNA Staff and Community Partner Surveys, 2017

6. SERVICE SYSTEM INFRASTRUCTURE

6.1 Key Findings

Analysis across data sources revealed consensus around service system infrastructure strengths and opportunities for improvement. The findings and recommendations articulated throughout the report are based on stakeholder feedback and suggestions.

6.1.1 Feedback on OCB Vocational Rehabilitation Staffing

- **Regional capacity.** Stakeholders discussed OCB capacity challenges associated with providing services outside of the Portland metro area, particularly in eastern Oregon. Additional multidisciplinary trainers able to travel to rural areas could help connect rural clients unable to travel to Portland to needed services more efficiently.
- **Awareness of OCB.** Stakeholders discussed a lack of awareness of OCB by the general public and referral sources, like medical providers. Clients suggest broader, overall outreach and visibility campaigns to increase awareness and de-stigmatize blindness.
- **Counselor capacity.** Staff, clients, and partners expressed a desire for more consistent and in-depth connections between OCB staff and clients, to support improved communication, service delivery, and employment outcomes.
- **Leadership.** OCB leadership were lauded for their continuous improvement approach, including monthly measures meetings and associated evidence-based problem-solving groups. Specific improvements to service delivery were cited, as well as an overall culture of excellence.
- **Training.** Staff expressed a desire for additional training in mental health, substance use disorder, intellectual and developmental disabilities, deaf-blindness, and technology to better serve and appropriately triage clients with other community partners. Some clients and community partners wanted to see additional training related to blindness for OCB staff.
- **Reporting and paperwork.** Increased reporting and paperwork requirements detract from counselor time with clients.

6.1.2 Feedback on Contracted Vendor Relationships

- **Contracts.** Stakeholders liked how the hourly pay structure of OCB's job developer contracts allowed developers to invest additional time with clients needing more rehabilitation support. Some cited how having separate job developer and job coach contracts from Oregon Vocational Rehabilitation exacerbated capacity issues, since contractors often chose to work with one agency over the other. Stakeholders suggested exploring the feasibility of combining contracts using an hourly pay structure to increase capacity.
- **Capacity.** There are waiting lists for job developers and other contracted services because of limited contracted vendor resources in some areas, particularly in eastern Oregon. Stakeholders suggested increased outreach and education could help to recruit additional contractors.
- **Training.** Contractor training was perceived as lacking sufficient focus on working with clients with visual impairments and adaptive technology. Stakeholders suggested having clearer contractor qualifications and/or a career pathway as well as targeted training for OCB client needs. Stakeholders also wanted to see more contractor training on IDD, mental illness, substance use disorder, and deaf-blindness.
- **Reporting and paperwork.** Contractor paperwork and reporting is purportedly cumbersome for becoming a contractor and working with OCB counselors and clients. Separate OCB and Oregon Vocational Rehabilitation contracting processes mean increased and divergent reporting and paperwork requirements for contractors wanting to work with both agencies.
- **Communication.** Despite efforts to increase communication between OCB counselors and contractors, clients report that communication problems persist in some cases. Sometimes this is related to mismatched training and job placement timing, and other times related to client choice/person-centered planning. Stakeholders suggested increased inclusion of peers and other communication improvements to address these challenges.

6.1.3 Feedback on Employer Relationships

- **OCB Experience.** Overall, employers who worked with OCB vocational rehabilitation had positive experiences. Employers had mixed perceptions of the usefulness of individual vocational rehabilitation services, with many respondents unaware of services. Recruitment and referral, as well as assistive technology consulting, training, and support were seen as most useful.
- **Labor Market.** Oregon’s economy and job opportunities are growing, with a low unemployment rate, although the unemployment rate for people with disabilities (10.5 percent) is more than twice as high as people without a disability (4.6 percent).²⁹ The BLS reports that 80 percent of the disabled population ages 16-64 is not in the labor force, compared to 35 percent of the non-disabled population.
- **Liability and Cost.** Stakeholders felt that employer concerns about liability, potential lawsuits for discrimination, and accommodation costs were barriers to employment. Stakeholders suggested deepening OCB relationships with employers and creating opportunities for open dialog could help to address these barriers.
- **Progressive Employment Model.** OCB’s pilot implementation of Vermont’s progressive employment model has supported a strong focus on developing and maintaining strong employer relationships through work experience options. Stakeholders would like to see the model expanded throughout OCB and to Oregon Vocational Rehabilitation.
- **Outreach and Education.** OCB develops and maintains relationships with employers through outreach and education efforts, the employment development coordination team, and business liaison efforts. Increasing these efforts could benefit clients and employers.

²⁹ Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Employment status of the civilian noninstitutional population by disability status and selected characteristics, 2016 annual averages” (www.bls.gov)

6.1.4 Feedback on Community Partner Relationships

- **Limited partnerships.** Clients most commonly work with no partners beyond OCB. For those who receive services from others, these are most commonly with Self-Sufficiency, Aging and People with Disabilities, IDD, education (in addition to WorkSource and Oregon Vocational Rehabilitation). Partnerships are limited by a lack of awareness of OCB and its services, which is related to limited OCB staff capacity to network, as well as limited partner resources to work with people who are blind. Stakeholders suggest increased education and outreach to build and maintain partnerships.
- **Employment First.** The Employment First initiative has facilitated increased collaboration between vocational rehabilitation, the education system, and IDD providers to support people with IDD in finding employment. OCB has been less actively partnering with IDD providers, but this is changing as the client population with IDD as a secondary disability increases.
- **Oregon Vocational Rehabilitation Collaboration.** OCB and Oregon Vocational Rehabilitation work collaboratively at client and system levels. The agencies share a small number of clients with multiple disabilities and job developers in eastern Oregon. The two collectively represent the interests of individuals with disabilities in local and statewide settings. Stakeholders suggest deepening the partnership through increased training, sharing of resources, and improved information exchange on shared clients.

6.1.5 Feedback on Workforce Relationships

- **WorkSource Referral.** OCB vocational rehabilitation counselors are not likely to refer clients to WorkSource. Referrals that do occur are primarily for job preparation workshops/services and job search/referral assistance.
- **WorkSource Accessibility.** WorkSource services are perceived as less accessible to people with disabilities and accommodations are seen as lacking, particularly for people who are blind. Stakeholders suggest training for WorkSource on accessibility and that WorkSource ensure systems, resources, and technology are accessible for people with vision loss.

6.1.6 Feedback on Students in Transition Service System

- **Student Work Experience Program.** The Student Work Experience Program (SWEPE) is considered a best practice to provide work experiences and an opportunity to try new things for youth who are blind and transitioning to adulthood.
- **OCB Transition Counselors.** OCB counselors provide pre-employment transition services (Pre-ETS) as defined by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act to high school students who qualify for OCB services. Survey respondents felt many students who are blind are underserved by Pre-ETS. OCB could look at increased involvement in Oregon Youth Transition Programs as well as with transition network facilitators and Employment First initiatives to increase school system awareness of OCB services.

6.2 Introduction

OCB provides vocational rehabilitation services and supports to clients as part of a broader system or a series of interconnected systems, which vary based on individual client needs and wants. Important components of the OCB vocational rehabilitation system infrastructure include:

- **Staff** – vocational rehabilitation counselors, rehabilitation/technology instructors, managers/executive director, administrative support/policy analysts/finance.
- **Vendors** – contractors who provide job development, job coaching, and training to clients.
- **Employers** – local and statewide businesses that provide employment and work experience opportunities.
- **Partners** – partner agencies that provide other long term or acute services and supports to provide client stability, employability, and self-sufficiency. Two specific areas of partnership focused on by this analysis are:
 - **Workforce development** – WorkSource activities and services used by OCB clients.
 - **Student transitions** – OCB’s Summer Work Experience Program as well as initiatives collectively supported by OCB, Oregon Vocational Rehabilitation, the Oregon Department of Education, and the Office

of Developmental Disability Services for youth transitioning to adulthood.

6.3 OCB Staff

OCB provides vocational rehabilitation services and supports with 60 total staff from five regional offices statewide. The breakdown of OCB staff by role is: seven managers/executive director; 22 rehabilitation and technology instructors; 13 vocational rehabilitation counselors; 18 administrative staff/policy analysts/finance staff. OCB vocational rehabilitation staff collectively serve more than approximately 675 statewide clients annually. High caseloads, geographically dispersed clients, limited employment opportunities and employer relationships, and limited community services and weak partner relationships present service delivery challenges.

Staff survey respondents were asked for their perception of frequency of service provision challenges. The figure below includes the number and percentage of responses stating that items listed were always or sometimes a challenge, or rarely or never a challenge. The figure is ordered by percentage of staff selecting always or sometimes a challenge responses, highest to lowest. For ease of interpreting valid results, “Don’t Know” responses are excluded from percentage calculations. However, cases where the “Don’t Know” patterns varied across groups or were large enough to influence interpretation of broader results are describe in the narrative or reference. Detailed survey responses are provided in Appendix G.

More than two-thirds of staff felt high caseloads (81 percent) and associated increases of individuals with multiple disabilities (76 percent) sometimes or always created service provision challenges. A lack of job availability (80 percent), lack of community services (80 percent), as well as lack of quality relationships with employers (72 percent) and partner agencies (64 percent), were also commonly cited service delivery challenges. Policy and procedure clarity, staff training, and turnover were more apt to be seen as rarely or never challenges.

Figure 17: Staff Perception of Service Provision Challenge Frequency

	Always or Sometimes a Challenge	Rarely or Never a Challenge	n
High caseloads	81%	8%	26
Lack of availability of appropriate jobs	80%	0%	25
Lack of community services	80%	0%	25
Increases of individuals with multiple disabilities	76%	0%	25
Lack of quality relationships with potential employers	72%	4%	25
Lack of quality relationships with partner agencies working with clients	64%	4%	25
Lack of community rehabilitation programs	64%	8%	25
New/changing regulations	64%	8%	25
Lack of financial resources	58%	23%	26
Limited information shared by those working with individual	56%	28%	25
Lack of clear policy guidelines	36%	48%	25
High employee turnover	32%	48%	25
Lack of clear organizational procedures	32%	48%	25
Lack of staff training opportunities	28%	56%	25

Source: OCB CSNA Staff Survey, 2017

The following subsections focus on themes from these survey responses and interview and focus group data collection methods using the lens of vocational rehabilitation staff. Additional themes related to the broader service system (contractors, employers, and community partnerships/services) are discussed in subsequent sections.

6.3.1 OCB Vocational Rehabilitation Caseloads and Staff Capacity

OCB staff survey respondents and interviewees discussed growing caseloads and increasing complexity of client needs. OCB, similar to Oregon Vocational Rehabilitation, has experienced growth related to a number of factors, including

the closure of sheltered workshops, and more focus on transition work with schools.

OCB staff perceived the caseload increase to be associated with individuals with multiple disabilities or more complex needs, particularly related to sheltered workshop closures and Employment First. Staff report a growth in the percentage of clients with intellectual and developmental disability (IDD). Forty-three (43) percent of 2016 OCB clients were categorized as having the most significant disability, with another 45 percent as significantly disabled.³⁰ Individuals with a cognitive impairment as a primary disability made up one percent of the 2016 OCB client population, and 11 percent of the population as a secondary disability.³¹

Despite growing caseloads, interviewees and focus group attendees generally felt OCB staff were in touch with concerns on the ground and able to meet client needs effectively and efficiently. Stakeholders attributed this to the small overall size of OCB's vocational rehabilitation program. Individuals spoke positively about OCB efforts to streamline access to services, resulting in reduced eligibility and planning timeframes.

***“Everything the Commission is doing is on point, but it needs to be on a larger scale.”*

Staff capacity concerns were most commonly tied to geography. Many interviewees and focus group attendees discussed how the Portland metro area is the best served area in Oregon, especially with the training center located there, and how rural areas are particularly underserved.

***“It is hard to extend training services outside of the Portland metro area. We don't see that in Medford, or in eastern Oregon. There are a whole lot less resources outside of Portland.”*

OCB staff often meet clients in their homes to mitigate client transportation barriers. With limited staff located statewide, this approach requires travel on the

³⁰ OCB, caseload data, participants closing in FFY2016

³¹ OCB, caseload data, participants closing in FFY2016. This 11 percent is comprised of 19 individuals with cognitive impairments as secondary disabilities.

part of OCB staff members. If possible, OCB sends clients from rural or underserved areas to Portland for assessment and training services. When not possible, trainers travel long distances to provide services to these clients. This can commonly cause long waiting times for rural clients to receive assessment and training services. Additionally, there is only one multidisciplinary trainer who travels to rural areas, which means clients needing more than one type of training often have to work with multiple trainers. This can be challenging to manage and create an overall barrier to services.

Another stakeholder complaint related in part to staff capacity limitations was inconsistent communication. Clients and partners discussed slow response times to questions, insufficient communication, and general inconsistency in communication style. Stakeholders discussed the need to standardize expectations around counselor communication.

Communication inconsistency aligns with staff input around the desire to spend more time with clients for improved service delivery. OCB staff survey respondents said they would use additional time, if available, providing job development services (35 percent) or with clients (31 percent). Staff interviewees and focus group attendees discussed a desire for time to conduct in depth vocational assessments “like in the old days” and to have more lead time with clients, particularly with students transitioning to employment.

6.3.2 OCB Leadership

Interviewees noted OCB’s implementation of an agile, continuous learning approach to quickly identify and mitigate service delivery and administrative issues. Staff discussed monthly measures meetings with associated evidence-based problem-solving groups. The implementation of continuous plan-do-study-act cycles has helped the agency address issues quickly over the past few years.

OCB staff express alignment with this culture of excellence created from the top. Many see their work as more of a mission than a job. This alignment of work with staff values help to support higher morale and better outcomes. A community partner survey respondent noted:

***“A particularly positive thing about working with OCB is that a concern for the clients is present throughout the organization - it can be seen even in the administrative arm at the headquarters. The whole place feels like family and that's a true accomplishment.”*

6.3.3 Regulations, Policies, and Procedures

Vocational rehabilitation regulations, policies, and procedures have changed significantly in recent years as a result of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act and Employment First-related initiatives. Two-thirds (64 percent) of staff surveyed said new or changing regulations always or sometimes created service delivery challenges. However, issues around new and changing regulations did not trickle down consistently to concerns over OCB policies or procedures. Approximately one-third of survey respondents cited issues of inconsistent or unclear policies and procedures as service delivery barriers.

Interviewees and focus group participants did not broadly discuss concerns about OCB policy interpretation and related consistency in counselor interpretation. Some staff felt the agency was less included in community or statewide policy conversations, particularly related to Employment First implementation in response to the Lane v. Brown lawsuit. Counselor inconsistency issues cited by stakeholders were primarily related to communication, which was discussed in the preceding staff capacity subsection.

6.3.4 Staff Qualifications and Training

Only a small percentage of OCB staff survey respondents felt staff training was insufficient, with 28 percent saying staff training deficiencies are sometimes or always a challenge, and eight percent saying they would put additional time toward training if available. However, a few training themes emerged around specific areas from which counselors and trainers could benefit. Staff across all data collection approaches discussed a desire for additional training related to mental health, substance use disorder, intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD), deaf-blindness, and technology. Interviewees spoke of the benefits of having additional training to support appropriate triage/referrals for clients. Training could also clarify roles and responsibilities of OCB within the broader service and

support system for vocational rehabilitation clients. There could be an opportunity for OCB to collaborate with Oregon Vocational Rehabilitation on these targeted trainings, or perhaps leverage Oregon Vocational Rehabilitation specialists in a consultative role.

Stakeholders additionally discussed the challenge of finding vocational rehabilitation counselors and trainers specifically trained in rehabilitating people with blindness. The low incidence of blindness is connected to a limited concentration of expertise in how to serve people who are blind. It is reportedly common for OCB staff to have a general vocational rehabilitation background and less understanding of blindness. Interviewees discussed how this can create communication challenges with clients and community partners. However, interviewees and focus group attendees also talked about OCB staff who are blind, and how this is an asset to blind clients since they have walked the walk.

***“I’ve had two counselors at OCB; one was legally blind and that makes a difference. She saw things in me that I didn’t see.”*

Some stakeholders expressed a desire for more blindness-related training for OCB staff. Clients specifically suggest staff experience blindness for a day while trying to perform normal job duties (e.g. using a screen reader at work).

6.3.5 Reporting, Paperwork, and Information Technology

Reporting and paperwork requirements have grown in recent years, largely driven by new WIOA and federal regulations. Employment plans have become longer and, as a result, harder for some clients to understand. The increased reporting and paperwork has detracted from counselors’ ability to spend time with clients. Many staff members discussed feeling overwhelmed by paperwork and unable to provide thoughtful counseling or rehabilitation services as a result. Paperwork and data collection requirements contribute to the increasing length of the overall process. Fifty (50) percent of staff survey respondents said less paperwork would improve OCB vocational rehabilitation service delivery. Staff generally wanted to reallocate time expended on paperwork to meaningful time counseling and working with clients. Related to reporting and paperwork, staff stakeholders discussed challenges with efficient use of information technology. Forty-two (42)

percent of staff survey respondents said they wanted better data management tools.

6.4 Contracted Vendors

OCB has 53 contracts for the following client-delivered services:

- Independent living skills evaluation and training
- Orientation and mobility skills evaluation and training
- Adaptive communication skills evaluation and training
- Computer technology skills evaluation and training
- Software/hardware support
- Career exploration
- Work evaluation and training, job coaching
- Job development
- Small business development consultation

6.4.1 Job Developer Role, Contract, and Capacity

Job development includes a wide variety of services, such as assessment, resume writing and interviewing, in addition to locating jobs and working with employers, employees, and OCB vocational rehabilitation counselors to make the placement successful. Job developers are paid an hourly rate versus a lump sum or progress payments for successful placement. Interviewees and focus group attendees appreciated how this approach allowed job developers to invest additional time in clients as needed, and be paid for their effort. Stakeholders felt this approach meant clients are served fairly, versus incentivizing preference for easier to place clients. This approach also allows for greater diversity in job developers, in terms of being accessible for individuals as well as agencies. Just over half of OCB job development contracts are with agencies or nonprofits (21 out of 40); 15 contracts are with individuals; and four are with small businesses.

Slow job placement was generally seen as related to limited job developer capacity. The majority of OCB contractors (40 out of 53) provide job development services. OCB does not have any job developers in eastern Oregon, and relies on Oregon Vocational Rehabilitation job developers to serve its clients in the region. Unfortunately, Oregon Vocational Rehabilitation's job developers are over-capacity

in the eastern region, so OCB clients and Oregon Vocational Rehabilitation participants are both underserved.

***“The impression that I have is that they need access to more job developers experienced working with and developing opportunities for blind job seekers.”*

Stakeholders cited an additional job developer capacity limitation related to working with OCB clients with IDD. Interviewees and focus group attendees say OCB is having difficulty finding job developers who have availability and experience with people with IDD. Many felt that the developers with this experience are too busy with Oregon Vocational Rehabilitation participants to be able to also work with OCB clients.

OCB and Oregon Vocational Rehabilitation have separate contracting processes for job developers, and as a result, some contractors may choose to only serve one client population or the other. OCB has a smaller volume of clients, but a preferred pay structure per multiple focus group attendees and interviewees from throughout the state. Stakeholders felt OCB’s contracting process may be more intensive since OCB contractors often go into clients’ homes. Stakeholders suggested analyzing whether a combined contracting process could be implemented, using OCB’s hourly rate. Assessment participants also expressed a desire to see higher job developer wages to reduce turnover and an emphasis on hiring more job developers who are blind to provide role models to clients.

Survey participants commonly expressed a desire to nurture stronger relationships with employers to create or open up more job opportunities for OCB clients. Job developers play an important role in employer relationships. When job developers know a business well, they are able to have a vision of how a jobseeker could add value and create capacity for other staff members by customizing job roles. Stakeholders cited weaknesses in employer relationships as a result of limited job developer capacity, in addition to limited staff capacity as discussed earlier.

6.4.2 Other OCB Contracted Roles

In addition to job development, OCB contracts for a wide range of training, coaching, technology, and consultation support for clients. OCB contracts with 20

career exploration, 11 technology, ten small business development, three independent living, and three orientation and mobility providers. Many of these contractors also provide job development services to clients.

As discussed earlier, OCB also has staff who provide rehabilitation instruction to OCB clients. OCB uses contractors when staff do not have the capacity, geographic reach, or specific skillsets to provide needed client services and supports. Stakeholder concerns about limited capacity for OCB to perform assessments or training for clients, particularly in rural areas, reflect on staff and contractor capacity constraints.

As with job development, OCB has a variety of entity types (individuals, nonprofits, and small businesses) providing other contracted services, which suggests flexibility to maximize the pool of available resources. Capacity limitations may be related to the need for wider knowledge of OCB and its desire for qualified resources, and the low prevalence of blindness-related expertise in the state.

6.4.3 Contractor Training, Reporting/Paperwork, and Communication

OCB does not have a required contractor training course. Rather, the Commission certifies contractors based on their application. Each contract type has required skills/competencies included in the application. Some contract types, like job development, don't have associated certifications. In these cases, OCB oversees performance to assess fit. Other contract types, like orientation and mobility training, have related certifications. OCB will test proposed vendor skillsets in these more measurable areas if applicants do not have associated certifications.

Similar to OCB staff, stakeholders discussed the need for more blindness and adaptive technology training for OCB contractors. Such training would allow contractors to work more effectively with clients and employers. Stakeholders suggested a career pathway or more defined job developer/contractor qualifications related to working with people who experience vision loss.

***“Job developers need more knowledge of vision impaired clients. Some have learned on the job, but they have not received training on how to work with people who are blind.”*

Training and other resources related to working with clients with IDD, mental illness, substance use disorder, and deaf-blindness could benefit contractors in addition to OCB staff.

Focus group participants and interviewees also discussed challenges for contractors associated with paperwork and reporting. The application process to become a certified vendor was cited as cumbersome and overwhelming. As discussed previously, having separate contracting processes for OCB and Oregon Vocational Rehabilitation also is thought to reduce the number of OCB contracted job developers and coaches, particularly those with skillsets to work with people with IDD.

OCB has standardized and increased communication requirements to improve collaboration between counselors, clients, and job developers. OCB encourages weekly meetings between all job developers and OCB counselors, in addition to monthly written progress reports. Weekly meetings are used to prevent communication disconnects, but they still can and do happen. Stakeholders discussed instances where both the developer and counselor were out of step with the client preferences, and it took an advocate or peer to help redirect vocational rehabilitation services to match client preferences. Peer or advocate inclusion throughout the OCB vocational rehabilitation person-centered planning/implementation process could help to reduce miscommunications.

Additionally, staff talked about cases where pre-employment training and job placement timing were misaligned. Long gaps between training and finding employment can result in clients losing newly trained skills. Staff suggested improved developer-counselor communication to reduce timing issues, in addition to more effort focused on maintaining learned skills.

***“We have trained clients, and 12 to 18 months later they get a job. But they have lost those skills in that timeframe. If they don’t use them, they lose them. I see that happening a lot.”*

Further expansion of the Progressive Employment model, discussed in the next section, could also help to address training-employment placement timing gaps, with quicker placement.

6.5 Employers

OCB is aware of the need for robust employer engagement for program success. Employer relationship development and maintenance is the responsibility of OCB staff and contractors. Capacity for both staff and contractors impact OCB's ability to engage businesses. Twenty-two (22) percent of OCB staff survey respondents said relationships with local employers needed to be strengthened.

6.5.1 Oregon Employment Opportunities

Oregon's economy is growing, with private businesses adding jobs faster than government. In 2016, the state's private sector grew at a 3.3 percent annual rate, adding 45,800 jobs. Government job growth in the same year was at a 2.0 percent per year rate, adding 6,100 federal, state, and local Oregon government positions. This compares with an annual population growth rate of 1.7 percent. Construction was the fastest growing industry between 2013 and 2016 (+16,400 jobs/ 6.9 percent annual growth rate), followed by management of companies (7,200, 6.0 percent), professional and technical services (11,700, 4.6 percent), leisure and hospitality (22,400, 4.1 percent), administrative and waste services (10,100, 3.6 percent), and health care and social assistance (22,300, 3.4 percent).³²

The state has a low overall unemployment rate of 3.8 percent.³³ Job expansion and a low overall unemployment rate have resulted in more job vacancies. In 2016, Oregon businesses reported 50,800 job vacancies with 64 percent or 32,700 difficult to fill. Job vacancies included varied skill, experience, and education requirements. Health care and social assistance had the largest number of vacancies. Other hard to fill jobs were in construction, personal care, nursing, food, transportation, and plumbing industries.³⁴ Despite labor market growth, people with disabilities experience much higher rates of unemployment. The Bureau of

³² Nick Beleiciks, "Oregon Businesses Adding Jobs Faster than Government," March 20, 2017.

³³ State of Oregon Employment Department, Oregon Economic Indicators, July 2017 seasonally adjusted unemployment rate, www.qualityinfo.org.

³⁴ Gail Kiles Krumenauer, State of Oregon Employment Department, "A Lack of Applicants in a Growing Economy," May 2017.

Labor Statistics indicates an unemployment rate of 10.5 percent for people with disabilities in the United States in 2016.³⁵ People with vision disabilities opt out of the labor force at a high rate, with 53 percent not participating in Oregon’s labor force.³⁶

6.5.2 Employer Perception of Barriers for People with Disabilities

National research validates employer stakeholder perceptions of recruiting and hiring people with disabilities. A review of analyses on employer perceptions related to hiring, retaining, and advancing workers with disabilities point to commonly defined obstacles.^{37 38 39}

- **Cost.** Employers worry about the cost of accommodations, health care premiums, worker’s compensation, extra supervisory time, and time for additional bureaucratic/paper work.
- **Awareness.** Employers commonly were unsure how to accommodate a person with a disability in the workplace, and many had limited experience interacting with people with disabilities in life.

³⁵ Unemployed persons is defined by BLS as those who did not have a job, were available for work, and were actively looking for a job in the 4 weeks preceding the survey. “Actively looking” includes interviewing, calling contacts, etc. in contrast to “passive looking,” such as looking at want ads. (www.bls.gov)

³⁶ U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 1-Year Estimates, 2015, Table B18120.

³⁷ H. Stephen Kaye, Lita H. Jans, Erica C. Jones. “Why Don’t Employers Hire and Retain Workers with Disabilities,” *Journal of Occupational Rehabilitation*, 2011.

³⁸ Source: Cornell University Employment and Disability Institute, “Research Brief: Employer Practices and Policies Regarding the Employment of Persons with Disabilities,” 2012.

³⁹ Robert Fraser, Icek Ajzen, Kurt Johnson, James Hebert, and Fong Chan, “Understanding Employers’ Hiring Intention in Relation to Qualified Workers with Disabilities, 2011,” *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation* 35 (2011) 1-11, 2011.

- **Legal Liability.** Employers felt that hiring a worker with a disability put them at higher risk of a lawsuit or formal discrimination complaint if the worker was disciplined or fired for under-performance.
- **Job Performance.** Employers were uncertain whether workers with disabilities could perform to the same standards as workers without disabilities. Some felt that workers with disabilities would be absent more often because of illness, struggle to perform essential job functions, and be less adaptable to fulfilling multiple roles.

Employer survey respondents noted additional challenges associated with recruiting and hiring people with disabilities, including:

- **Qualified applicants.** Difficulties finding applicants with disabilities who have adequate education, skills, and experience.
- **Employer creativity/flexibility.** Hard to change mindset of hiring managers to rethink job opportunities for people with disabilities.
- **Accommodations.** Difficulties providing adequate/appropriate accommodations for employees with disabilities.
- **Training.** More extensive training needed for employees with disabilities.
- **Employee peer attitudes.** Ensuring that other employees are inclusive/accepting of employees with disabilities.
- **Communication.** Problems with or lack of communication between employers and employees with disabilities.

OCB staff, partners, and clients noted considerable fear among employers in hiring people who are blind. Several OCB clients felt that employers' fear of lawsuits or offending someone can stifle needed dialogue to understand the capabilities of and resources to support people who are blind.

Concerns over cost of accommodations were also cited as barriers to employment by stakeholders. However, employer survey respondents generally (64 percent) found OCB's services related to accommodations and assistive technology (consulting with employer and training employee) very or somewhat useful.

The figure below represents employer perceptions on the usefulness of specific OCB vocational rehabilitation services. The table is ordered by the percentage

viewing a service as somewhat or very helpful, high to low. Recruiting and referring applicants was seen as the most useful OCB service, followed by consulting on workplace accommodations and adaptive technology and training on assistive technology.

Figure 18: Employer Perception of OCB Service Usefulness (n=14)

OCB Service	Somewhat or Very Useful	Not at all or Slightly Useful	Don't Know
Recruiting and referring qualified applicants to my business	86%	7%	7%
Consulting with my business about workplace accommodations and assistive technology	64%	7%	29%
Training staff how to use assistive technology in the workplace to help employees with disabilities	64%	0%	36%
Training staff how to successfully work with co-workers with disabilities	57%	7%	36%
Securing assistance needed by my employees with disabilities	57%	0%	43%
Connecting my business with potential employees through internships, mentoring opportunities and training customized to my business needs	57%	14%	29%
Consulting about how to implement business strategies that support the inclusion of people with disabilities as customers and employees	50%	7%	43%
Training staff to accommodate persons with disabilities to perform work at my business	50%	7%	43%
Developing retention programs to support employees who develop or acquire a disability	50%	14%	36%
Training staff about the Americans with Disabilities Act and related employment law	36%	21%	43%
Consulting with my business about labor relations, legal, and compliance issues	36%	14%	50%

Source: OCB CSNA Employer Survey, 2017

Other types of assistance employer survey respondents noted that would be helpful to support the employment of a person with a disability include:

- **Information/awareness.** More awareness or education about existing services, so they can be better leveraged.

- **Staff connection/communication.** Regular, ongoing communication with Oregon Vocational Rehabilitation staff and vocational rehabilitation representatives available locally.
- **Access.** Shorter wait times and easier access.
- **Transportation.** Increased transportation support for clients.

6.5.3 Employer Awareness, Outreach, and Education

Stakeholders commonly suggested addressing perceived barriers to employing people with disabilities through increased employer relationships/communication. OCB is working to do this through increased employer outreach and education and general relationship building. Stakeholders discussed OCB's employment development coordination team, which works with both clients and employers. Team members travel to educate potential employers on assistive technology and how a blind person could perform successfully in their workplace. They also encourage employers to visit OCB training facilities to learn about the support OCB provides to employees and employers. The employment development coordination team also supports clients with weekly career building activities. OCB's business liaison has been working to develop larger-scale relationships with businesses and promote inclusion statewide.

These interactions could help dispel myths around the resources needed to support people with disabilities, build the case for the bottom line value of workers with disabilities, and decrease fear and stigma of hiring individuals with disabilities. Additionally, increased employer interaction expands employer knowledge of OCB resources to support employers and employees with disabilities. One OCB partner noted:

***“Why wouldn't you hire someone who is blind? They have been problem solving their whole lives. We have to help employers understand this as a skill.”*

These efforts could also help promote the idea of hiring people with disabilities as just another aspect of diversity. As one staff person explained:

***“It really is just this, and some employers are starting to come around to this line of thinking. It doesn’t have to be a separate function—should be considered like any other diversity initiative.”*

OCB staff, partners, and clients suggested increased presentations to regional employers and peer to peer presentations by employers who have hired people with vision impairment and by the employees with vision impairment themselves could help normalize hiring people with disabilities. Clients also recommended creating a safe space for employers or the public to ask questions as an opportunity to increase conversations and lead to more awareness and acceptance.

Stakeholders additionally discussed how Oregon government agencies fall short on serving as a model employer. Government is one of the largest employers in the state. Several community partners and OCB staff recommended more proactive attempts by government to increase employment of people with disabilities within the system, as well as development of a policy task force or business advisory board to help develop infrastructure around employer outreach and engagement.

6.5.4 OCB Successes and Progressive Employment Model

Employers who have worked with OCB have generally felt positive about their experience. Eighty-six (86) percent of surveyed employers said they had a satisfactory or very satisfactory experience. Employer survey respondents were asked whether they actively recruited or employed people with disabilities in the last year. In general, businesses were more likely to hire than to recruit people with disabilities (86 percent of respondents employed a person with a disability in the last year; 64 percent actively recruited).

***“We were loaned a person to work in our administrative staff for nearly a year part time at the Commission’s expense. This person was an asset to our operation. The position he filled was something new we did not have before. It worked so well that we added it to our budget for this FY and held a recruitment and hired this person as he was the most qualified. This has been an excellent experience for us.”*

Employers noted the following successes in recruiting and hiring people with disabilities:

- **Valuable employees.** Employees with disabilities have proven to be successful at their jobs/valuable employees with adequate accommodations and training.
- **Low turnover.** Employees with disabilities have lower turnover/are a loyal workforce.
- **Counselor relationships.** Vocational rehabilitation counselors work effectively with employers and employees to navigate challenges that arise.

OCB is piloting the Progressive Employment model developed in Vermont, which is predicated on the concept of two customers – businesses and people with disabilities. Using this approach, businesses are seen as both partners and customers of vocational rehabilitation. OCB works with employers to provide a menu of work experiences, including job tours, practice interviews, short-term work experiences, and internships. Vermont’s model also includes risk reduction options for employers, including options for liability and worker’s compensation coverage.⁴⁰

Stakeholders are generally very supportive of the progressive employment model implementation in Oregon. Staff and partners expressed a desire to see the model expanded to more of the caseload, feeling the work experience opportunities benefit both clients and employers.

***“The progressive employment model works really well. There’s less pressure on employers to make the decision to hire them without experience; they can try it out and see how they do.”*

Some interviewees and focus group participants discussed the need to work with employers more collaboratively across workforce development agencies, specifically OCB and Oregon Vocational Rehabilitation. Stakeholders suggest using the progressive employment model in both agencies, and sharing development efforts and data to more effectively and efficiently collaborate with employers and support clients.

⁴⁰ <https://www.explorevr.org/content/vermont-progressive-employment-model>.

6.6 Community Partnerships

OCB works with a range of community partners. Specific partners often vary by community and by individual jobseekers' needs or circumstances. Many of these partners are associated with different funding streams and policy-making authorities and use discrete information technology solutions, which contribute to collaboration challenges. However, Employment First and Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)-related initiatives are working to increase effective collaboration across service and support systems.

Typical OCB vocational rehabilitation partnerships include workforce, health, education, and family support providers. Employers, courts/probation and parole, and transportation are additional partners. OCB works to have cooperative relationships with partners to streamline referral and service delivery to maximize success for clients.

6.6.1 Partnership Overview

Client survey respondents were asked to indicate which OCB partners they receive services from. Two-thirds (64 percent) did not work with listed community partners. The most common identified partner was Self-Sufficiency, followed by Aging and People with Disabilities services and WorkSource Oregon.

Figure 19: Partners from which Clients Received Services

	Services Received (n=47)
None of the above	64%
Self-Sufficiency	11%
Aging and People with Disabilities	9%
WorkSource Oregon	6%
Don't know	6%
Developmental Disabilities Services	4%
Education department	2%
Community mental health programs	0%
Child welfare	0%
Community drug and alcohol programs	0%
Parole and probation department	0%

Source: OCB CSNA Client Survey, 2017

Vocational rehabilitation staff survey participants were asked to select up to three community partners with whom OCB has the strongest relationships as well as three whose relationship with OCB needs improvement. The figure below shows responses ordered by perception partnership strength, highest to lowest. The three partnerships seen as strongest are with 1) OCB contracted vendors; 2) disability advocacy organizations; and 3) education department. “Other” strong partnerships included independent living agencies and benefits planning services. Staff felt community mental health program partnerships needed the most improvement, in addition to OCB contracted vendors, Aging and People with Disabilities services, employment department, and local businesses and employers. Many staff did not know about partnership strength or weaknesses. “Other” responses represented options included already – WorkSource, OCB contractors, and “I don’t know”.

Figure 20: OCB Staff Perception of Partners Having Strong Relationships with OCB and Partnerships Needing Improvement

	Strong Relationship (n=24)	Needs Improvement (n=23)
OCB contracted vendors	50%	22%
Disability advocacy organizations	33%	9%
Education department	29%	9%
Don't know	29%	22%
Aging and People with Disabilities	21%	22%
Local businesses and employers	21%	22%
Local private community providers	17%	13%
Other	8%	13%
Self-Sufficiency	4%	9%
Developmental Disabilities Services	4%	17%
Employment department	4%	22%
Native tribes	4%	4%
Child welfare	0%	4%
Community mental health programs	0%	35%
Community drug and alcohol programs	0%	4%
Parole and probation department	0%	0%

Source: OCB CSNA Staff Survey, 2017

6.6.2 Partner Outreach and Awareness

Notably, survey respondents across stakeholder types (clients, staff, and partners) expressed a lack of knowledge about OCB-community provider partnerships and/or a lack of use of services from partners. Stakeholders indicated that OCB's small size make it difficult for staff to have adequate reach and bandwidth to network with the broad range of community partner organizations. Limited availability of accessible technology also hinders client use of partner services in some cases.

Survey respondents were asked in an open-ended question about the biggest successes and challenges to collaboration between OCB and community service providers. The most common response from staff was that partners do not know OCB exists, which is often related to staff members not having time to dedicate to networking. Staff also discussed the lack of resources (qualified staff and adaptive equipment) for the blind. Community partners echoed staff sentiments, saying OCB staff do not have sufficient capacity to invest a lot of time in relationships with partners.

***“Because of the workload in the regional offices, it is very difficult to develop the relationships with other service providers.”*

Where relationships exist, there is general satisfaction on the part of partners and staff. More than two-thirds (68 percent) of OCB community partners are satisfied or very satisfied working with OCB in their region.

However, the lack of relationships and limited capacity of partners to serve people who are blind create barriers for OCB clients. Staff and partner survey respondents were also asked why the vocational needs of people with disabilities were unmet by service providers. Responses in the figure below are ordered by OCB staff perception of barriers, highest to lowest. The most common responses by OCB staff were a deficit of providers, lacking provider skillsets for specific disabilities, and a burdensome OCB contracting process. Community partners put low quality provider services as the top barrier, followed by burdensome contracting process, insufficient staff, and lacking provider skillsets.

Figure 21: Staff and Community Partner Perception of Primary Reasons Vocational Rehabilitation Service Providers Are Unable to Meet Needs of People with Disabilities

	Community Partners (n=99)	OCB Staff (n=24)
Not enough providers available in area	29%	58%
Providers lack staff with skillsets to work with specific disabilities	23%	33%
OCB contracting process is burdensome to vendors	37%	29%
Don't know	4%	29%
Providers lack adequate staff to meet needs	13%	21%
Low quality of provider services	38%	17%
Other	14%	4%
N/A - Providers are meeting the needs of people with disabilities	8%	4%

Source: OCB CSNA Staff and Community Partner Surveys, 2017

Addressing confounding service needs requires strong relationships with referral organizations, and clear communication between OCB vocational rehabilitation counselors and clients regarding the appropriate resources to address different needs. Nearly 70 percent of staff and 90 percent of partners felt that some or most/all individuals needed referrals to community partners. Sixty percent of individuals identified this need. Half of OCB staff felt that this service was received by some or most/all of the individuals who need it, compared to nearly 80 percent of program partners. Just over half (52 percent) of clients who reported this need indicated receipt.

Program staff and partners specifically discussed the need to reach medical providers who don't know that OCB exists, or what services are available. Connecting medical professionals to OCB vocational rehabilitation could improve outreach and referrals to the program. The limited awareness of OCB services is in part due to the low incidence of vision impairment, which can make identifying target individuals challenging.

Increasing connections with community partners and supporting the ability of partners to serve people who are blind may create more capacity in the broader

service system. These partner agencies may assist people who are blind to receive services addressing stability and self-sufficiency needs outside of, in addition to, OCB. Issues around information sharing and accessibility would need to be addressed to make partnerships effective.

6.6.3 Self-Sufficiency

OCB client survey respondents most commonly cited Self-Sufficiency as a partner from which they receive services. Oregon's Self-Sufficiency Offices connect individuals to food benefits (Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program) and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) cash benefits, child care assistance, and Refugee services. People with disabilities can also connect to food and nutrition services through their local Seniors and People with Disabilities Program, which is often an APD program.

Eleven (11) percent of client survey respondents said they work with Self-Sufficiency programs, and nine percent of staff surveyed felt this partnership needed to be strengthened. Program stakeholders noted the importance of partnerships that can address clients' basic underlying needs, such as food and shelter. Interviewees and focus group participants did not discuss Self-Sufficiency partnerships at length, with one counselor referring to clients not needing to bring paperwork with them if they have a file with Self-Sufficiency, suggesting basic shared data access.

6.6.4 Aging and People with Disabilities

Nine percent of client survey respondents receive services from Oregon Department of Human Services Aging and People with Disabilities (APD) Program. APD provides a wide range of home and community based services to seniors and adults with disabilities, including home care and personal support workers to support activities of daily living, behavior support, adult foster homes, and others.

Interviewees and focus group participants rarely discussed APD providers. Some talked about the importance of relationships between Centers for Independent Living and OCB, particularly in terms of referrals and community inclusion efforts. One survey respondent commented:

***“Centers for Independent Living, in particular, have voiced a desire for more collaboration and coordination with OCB, especially in terms of participants that may be in areas with limited ongoing access to OCB teachers.”*

Some interviewees discussed high turnover in Centers for Independent Living staff as a barrier to stronger relationships. Survey respondents generally felt the relationship weakness was a result of limited OCB staff capacity.

6.6.5 Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

Individuals with a cognitive impairment as a primary disability make up one percent of the OCB client population, and 11 percent of the population as a secondary disability.⁴¹ Stakeholders, in particular partners and staff, noted how OCB is serving a larger IDD population in recent years, particularly as a result of sheltered workshop closures and Employment First-related initiatives.

The IDD service system related to employment is comprised of cooperative efforts by OCB or Oregon Vocational Rehabilitation, Office of Developmental Disability Services (ODDS), local IDD brokerages, county IDD service providers, and the broader IDD service delivery system. OCB/Oregon Vocational Rehabilitation, ODDS, and IDD providers share information, leverage and braid funding, and work as a team to support jobseekers with IDD, trying to ensure continuity of employment services before, after, and with OCB/Oregon Vocational Rehabilitation. Employment First meetings occur regionally and at the state level to support alignment and collaboration.

Stakeholders lauded vocational rehabilitation system improvements to collaboration that have helped individuals with IDD more seamlessly transition between employment pathway or discovery services to vocational rehabilitation to ongoing supported employment services, preferably with the same vendor. Staff feel like employers are more likely to engage with vocational rehabilitation knowing that individuals with IDD are connected to long term funding and support.

⁴¹ OCB, FFY2016 caseload data. This 11 percent is comprised of 19 individuals with cognitive impairments as secondary disabilities.

Stakeholders felt there is room for growth in OCB-IDD service provider partnerships. IDD service providers expressed a desire to build a deeper partnership with OCB to better serve clients who are blind and have IDD.

***“I know that the blind commission has services, but I have not had a lot of interaction recently with the agency. Their services for folks with IDD have been limited in the past.”*

A specific service delivery challenge relates to contracting. OCB and ODDS have different contract requirements for job coaches and other contracted vendors. These differences sometimes result in vendors working with one system and not the other, breaking continuity in service provision for clients. Changing job coaches or other contracted vendors is difficult for clients and inefficient for contractors.

6.6.6 Mental Health

Seven percent of OCB clients have psychosocial or other mental impairments as a secondary disability.⁴² OCB is able to partner with mental health programs through two primary mechanisms – Individual Placement and Support and Ticket to Work. OCB can collaborate with Addictions and Mental Health programs who provide individual placement and support services through 33 programs, as well as with the Oregon Supported Employment Center for Excellence that oversees the fidelity of individual placement and support programs. Ticket to Work is another avenue through which individuals with mental health conditions can access supported employment services through community mental health programs. Interviewees and focus group participants spoke highly of the individual placement and support model and its ability to support recovery through work, as well as the extended supported employment and case management services available to clients after exiting vocational rehabilitation.

***“Mental health collaboration with IPS is a great model, and has improved over time.”*

⁴² OCB, FFY2016 caseload data. This seven percent is comprised of four percent (7) with other mental impairments and three percent (6) with psychosocial impairments as secondary disabilities.

One third of OCB staff survey respondents felt partnerships with mental health providers should be strengthened. OCB interviewees and focus group attendees did not speak to OCB-community mental health partnerships, but did express a need for mental health and substance use disorder services for OCB clients.

6.6.7 Education

The Oregon Department of Education is another central partner in Employment First partnerships. Twenty-nine (29) percent of surveyed OCB staff perceive this relationship as strong. The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act is creating changes in transition service delivery for students with disabilities through pre-employment transition services (Pre-ETS). A subsequent section discusses youth transition services in depth.

OCB also works closely with institutions specializing in education and training for individuals who are blind or have disabilities.

- **Washington School for the Blind.** Stakeholders discussed OCB's partnership with the Washington School for the Blind which has an on-campus program to promote independent living for youth who have transitioned from high school and mostly attend Clark Community College. OCB provides targeted instruction to these youths.
- **Columbia Regional Program.** Interviewees mentioned the Columbia Regional Program, from which some clients receive services/education.
- **Higher education.** Stakeholders cited OCB's partnership with the post-secondary education system, in particular the Collaboration on Rehabilitation in Education (CORE), which provides students with disabilities with support for ongoing education in private and public universities. OCB also contributes financially to an individual's higher education schooling costs.

6.6.8 Employers

Employer relationship development and maintenance is the responsibility of OCB staff and contracted job developers. As discussed above, capacity for both staff and contractors impact OCB's ability to engage businesses. Twenty-two (22)

percent of OCB staff survey respondents cited the need to improve relationships with local employers/businesses. Survey data indicated that staff would like to dedicate additional time and energy toward enhancing employer relationships and job development. The prior section discusses employers in more detail.

6.6.9 Workforce/WorkSource

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act has required additional collaboration with the broader Oregon workforce system. Local leadership teams, including vocational rehabilitation, are working on how to connect more people to workforce services throughout the health and human services infrastructure.

WorkSource Oregon is discussed in more detail in the forthcoming section 6.7.

6.6.10 Oregon Vocational Rehabilitation

OCB works collaboratively with Oregon Vocational Rehabilitation for individual, shared clients as well as partners in the broader vocational rehabilitation, workforce development system. In terms of individual clients, OCB can serve people who have other disabilities in addition to blindness. Forty-eight (48) percent of OCB's caseload has an identified secondary disability: 25 percent have physical impairments; 11 percent have cognitive impairments; seven percent have mental impairments; and five percent have sensory/communicative impairments.

OCB in consultation with Oregon Vocational Rehabilitation can also decide to jointly serve the client if determined that substantial rehabilitation services could be best provided by cooperative efforts involving the expertise of counselors from both agencies. Interviewees and focus group participants said only a small number of joint cases exist, and widely felt the two agencies collaborated well. High turnover in Oregon Vocational Rehabilitation staff was cited by an interviewee as an obstacle to maintaining local relationships. OCB and Oregon Vocational Rehabilitation have separate information technology systems through the same vendor, which do not interface. Staff share information on clients manually.

Additional collaboration occurs with shared contracted job developers. OCB does not have job developers contracted in eastern Oregon, and relies on developers contracted with Oregon Vocational Rehabilitation to serve OCB clients.

On a systems level, OCB and Oregon Vocational Rehabilitation collaboratively:

- Plan for statewide vocational rehabilitation service availability including assistive technology.
- Participate in statewide independent living planning and plan implementation.
- Train staff and invest in relationship development between local agency staff.
- Develop joint projects to leverage additional resources and improve service delivery.
- Provide technical assistance to other workforce partners to evaluate and ensure service accessibility.
- Communicate vocational rehabilitation interests and concerns to policymakers.
- Maintain regular communication regarding federal maintenance of effort requirements and allotment expenditures.

Opportunities for increased collaboration between OCB and Oregon Vocational Rehabilitation include:

- Increased collaborative training, particularly related to IDD, mental illness, substance use disorder, and deaf-blindness.
- Providing access to specialists on the same disability areas.
- Improved data sharing on shared clients.

6.6.11 Other Partnerships

Additional partnerships discussed by stakeholders include:

National Federation of the Blind of Oregon (NFBO), which provides support, information, and resources regarding a wide range of professions, recreational activities, special interests, legislative issues, fundraising projects, and other areas related to blindness.

American Council of the Blind of Oregon (ACBO), which strives to increase the independence, security, equality of opportunity, and quality of life, for all blind and visually-impaired people.

Tribal Vocational Rehabilitation Programs, which are grant funded and serve federally recognized Native Americans. Clients can work with state or one of the five specialized Tribal Vocational Rehabilitation programs. Tribal programs have memorandums of understanding with OCB and Oregon Vocational Rehabilitation.

Benefits Counselors, provide counseling to clients so they understand the rules about Social Security benefits and employment.

6.7 Statewide Workforce System

The Oregon Employment Department supports jobseekers statewide through WorkSource Oregon. WorkSource Oregon is OCB's primary workforce system partner serving people with disabilities. Oregon Vocational Rehabilitation is also OCB's workforce partner. The OCB-Oregon Vocational Rehabilitation partnership is discussed in the previous section on partnerships.

6.7.1 OCB and WorkSource Collaboration

Focus group participants and interviewees discussed efforts to increase collaboration between OCB, Oregon Vocational Rehabilitation, and the Employment Department to better support clients with disabilities and increase efficiency in service delivery. The Workforce Investment and Opportunity Act (WIOA) is one force behind the increase in collaborative efforts. WIOA requires states to strategically align workforce development programs across agencies. The relationship is moving away from siloed systems that refer to one another without communication or other collaboration, to one where both agencies collectively serve clients or make real-time referrals by connecting the client immediately to the appropriate program either in-person or through technology. WIOA specifically requires physical and programmatic accessibility to employment and training services for people with disabilities.

OCB clients are somewhat aware of WorkSource services, with half of client survey respondents (23 of 46) familiar with WorkSource Oregon and 17 having previously used their services. Surveyed staff were not likely to refer clients to WorkSource. Only four percent sometimes or always make referrals. Almost a quarter (22 percent) never refer clients to WorkSource. Most OCB staff (57 percent) reported "Don't Know" when asked how often they refer participants to WorkSource.

The figure below outlines specific WorkSource services, and how often vocational rehabilitation staff survey respondents refer clients to these services, as well as staff perception of which services are the most and least helpful. Job preparation workshops or services and job search or referral activities are the most commonly referred to and seen as the most helpful. National Career Readiness Certificate testing received mixed reviews of usefulness. As a note of caution, OCB staff and client survey sample sizes related to experience working with WorkSource are small, meaning the responses may not be representative of broader OCB staff or client perceptions of WorkSource services.

Figure 22: Staff Feedback on which WorkSource Oregon Services they Refer to, and which WorkSource Oregon Services they Find Most Helpful and Least Helpful

WorkSource Oregon Service	Referred (n=5)	Most Helpful (n=5)	Least Helpful (n=4)
Job preparation workshops or services	80%	60%	25%
Job search or referral activities	60%	40%	25%
Labor market information or research	40%	40%	0%
National Career Readiness Certificate (NCRC) testing	20%	20%	75%
WIOA (Workforce Investment Opportunity Act) training funds	0%	0%	0%
Other	0%	0%	0%

Source: OCB CSNA Staff Survey, 2017

Client survey respondents had relatively positive reviews of WorkSource Oregon. Over half (59 percent or 10) who have used WorkSource found their services somewhat helpful. Almost a quarter (24 percent or 4) found them very helpful, and 18 percent (3) found them not at all helpful. As noted above, OCB client survey sample sizes related to experience working with WorkSource are small, meaning the responses may not be representative of broader OCB client perceptions of WorkSource services.

6.7.2 WorkSource Oregon Accessibility

Survey respondent, interviewee, and focus group participant feedback suggested that accessibility remains a significant barrier to accessing WorkSource services. Staff survey respondents discussed how WorkSource staff could benefit from training related to accessibility issues. One person commented that front office staff are not prepared to work with totally blind individuals. Additionally, OCB staff recommended that WorkSource ensure all systems, resources, and technology are accessible to people with vision loss.

***“For decades, the Employment Department and Worksource Oregon (formerly, The Job Council) have been inaccessible to my multiple diagnosis caseloads. For example, there are no screen readers at Worksource or the Employment Department, so any person with a visual impairment may not use the computers to apply for jobs there. Also, one client - who needed a typing test - needed me to go sit with her and dictate the typing test at The Job Council.”*

Interviewees and focus group participants agreed that programs and services are less accessible to people with disabilities because WorkSource staff members do not have training on how to work with these individuals. Stakeholders felt that OCB was less connected to WorkSource than Oregon Vocational Rehabilitation. Similar to survey respondents, interviewees and focus group attendees perceived WorkSource and the broader workforce development system as lacking an understanding of blindness.

WorkSource stakeholders discussed their efforts to increase accessibility through providing accommodations including American Sign Language interpretation, and disability-focused vocational academy partnerships.

6.8 Student-Focused Service System

OCB works with students 14 and older who are legally blind or have a condition that will lead to blindness to help ensure a successful transition from high school to college or the workforce.

Among Oregonians with vision difficulties ages five and older, 42 percent are ages 35 to 64 years of age. This compares to 54 percent of OCB caseload that fall into

this age range. Thirty-eight (38) percent of OCB clients are ages 18 to 34, compared to 12 percent of people with vision difficulties statewide.

Figure 23: Distribution of Oregonians with Vision Difficulties by Age compared to the OCB Caseload, 2015 (Oregon) and FFY2016 (OCB)

Oregon Age Range	Oregon Count	Oregon Percent	OCB Age Range	OCB Count	OCB Percent
5 to 17 years	4,953	5.3%	14 to 17 years	0	0.0%
18 to 34 years	10,874	11.7%	18 to 34 years	68	37.8%
35 to 64 years	39,330	42.3%	35 to 64 years	97	53.9%
65 and over	37,768	40.6%	65 and over	15	8.3%
		100.0%			100.0%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates, 2015, Table S1810; OCB caseload data, clients closing in FFY2016

OCB primarily serves students transitioning to adulthood through OCB transition counselors and the Summer Work Experience Program.

6.8.1 Summer Work Experience Program

OCB’s Summer Work Experience Program (SWEP) is a five to six week specialized, hands on, residential summer training program for Oregon teens age 16-20 who are legally blind or transitioning to blindness. OCB provides two versions of the SWEP program – one in Salem is more of an introductory version for youth who need more assistance with daily living activities and on-the-job supports, and the other in Portland for students who are ready to transition to work.

SWEP participants have the chance to complete a paid summer work experience, develop essential workplace skills, build self-confidence, and prepare for future employment opportunities. Stakeholders broadly felt SWEP was a best practice for

youth transitioning to adulthood. Many discussed how work experience provided through SWEP was unique and instrumental in setting up youth for success in life.

***“SWEP has prepared me for the sighted world and life – for things you don’t get exposed to at home, but rather on the job.”*

***“Without certain programs like SWEP, kids who are blind or visually impaired are not getting pre-graduation employment experience.”*

Stakeholders spoke about the importance of SWEP in shifting student expectations. SWEP reportedly allows students to try out ideas and skills, and sometimes fail, learning from mistakes.

6.8.2 Youth Transition Counseling

In addition to SWEP, OCB counselors work with youth who are eligible for OCB services in high school. OCB has two counselors who specialize in transition-age youth and others who serve youth as part of a mixed caseload.

These counselors provide Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) required pre-employment transition services to students who are blind (youth ages 16-21 who are currently enrolled in school). The five required pre-employment transition services are:

1. Job exploration counseling.
2. Work-based learning experiences, which may include in-school or after school opportunities, or experience outside the traditional school setting (including internships) that is provided in an integrated environment to the maximum extent possible.
3. Counseling on opportunities for enrollment in comprehensive transition or postsecondary educational programs at institutions of higher education.
4. Workplace readiness training to develop social skills and independent living.
5. Instruction in self-advocacy, which may include peer mentoring.

Despite the strengths of OCB’s youth transition work, some interviewees discussed opportunities to better connect with this population. For example, some students

don't choose to participate in transition services while in school, or may not have a Youth Transition Program available to them that could lead a student to OCB services. If students take a break between school and connecting to OCB services, they may have lost and need to be re-taught the structures or routines and soft skills obtained through school attendance. Additionally, staff capacity issues and limited awareness among school systems of OCB services provide further opportunities for growth. Some staff also expressed a desire to be involved with students earlier in their school careers, and to have more communication including increased involvement at individualized education program (IEP) meetings.

Beyond outreach and education opportunities discussed earlier, OCB could increase its visibility in schools through increased collaboration with Youth Transition Programs, Employment First meetings/initiatives, and Transition Network Facilitators.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STRATEGIC CHANGES TO OCB SERVICE PROVISION

This OCB vocational rehabilitation comprehensive statewide needs assessment incorporated a broad focus and a large amount of data. Analysis of stakeholder input on barriers, service needs, and service deficits, as well as service system infrastructure issues, resulted in recommendations for consideration to OCB vocational rehabilitation service provision. Solicited feedback fell within three broad categories:

1. **Support holistic success.** Oregon Vocational Rehabilitation works in concert with varied other services and supports to promote stability and self-sufficiency. Leveraging community partners, integrating natural supports, and expanding best practices can facilitate holistic participant success.
2. **Reduce system constraints.** Addressing capacity constraints could provide space for vocational rehabilitation staff and contractors to work with clients to effectively address rehabilitation needs through a responsive service system.
3. **Improve collaboration in service delivery.** Increased accessibility resources for partners, a more prominent role in statewide and local Employment First and Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act initiatives, and improved blindness and other disability training and support will help to promote improved collaboration with clients, contractors, employers, and partners.

7.1 OCB Recommendations: Detailed Discussion

7.1.1 Focus on Longer Term Success

Vocational rehabilitation services and supports are one component of a larger system or set of systems helping individuals and families achieve stability and self-sufficiency. The broader goal of these collective efforts is that people live meaningful, enriched lives with a sense of purpose. Health, human services, family support, educational, and related systems individually and collaboratively work to ensure people are meaningfully integrated into their communities. Work is a vital component of people's sense of purpose and belonging. Related components, such as food security, housing, transportation, social supports, and physical and

behavioral health, help to ensure individual stability to allow people to obtain, maintain, and advance in employment. While OCB does not have responsibility for many of these focal areas, they impact client outcomes. Specific recommendations for OCB based on stakeholder feedback include:

Develop shared goals for clients across service systems. Work collaboratively with other health, human services, family support, educational, and workforce stakeholders to continue to make progress on defining, implementing, and learning from shared goals for individual, family, and community strength and success. OCB vocational rehabilitation data may be used by another agency with a broader care coordination purview for individual clients, such as Office of Developmental Disability Services (ODDS), as well as aggregated at the system or state level. Related to this are constraints of information exchange, further complicated by disparate information technology, which would need to be addressed to support shared planning/goals.

Continue to participate in broader conversations about aligning and transitioning between educational or youth and adult systems. Youth and adult systems do not align well in terms of terminology, philosophy (strengths versus deficits based), providers, and services. These differences contribute to youth and families falling into service provision gaps. Vocational rehabilitation has an important place at the table to continue to address these challenges since it works with youth and adults.

Analyze how to better leverage strengths of community partnerships. If working within this broader, overarching framework of stability and self-sufficiency, OCB could collectively define participating or relevant community and state level partners. Information and referral/warm handoff processes could be defined to support client navigation of available services and supports. OCB could support partners with accessibility resources and training. Stakeholder input suggests specific resources that could be better leveraged to support vocational rehabilitation clients in the short term, including:

- Legal resources
- Social Security benefits counseling
- Medical, mental health, and substance use disorder providers
- Housing resources
- Transportation resources

- Training resources
- Education providers

Better integrate peers, mentors, and natural supports. Peers, mentors, natural, and generic community support provide important social supports. Stakeholders commonly discussed their importance in youth transition to adulthood and sustaining employment gains. SWEP connects youth to peers, and additionally some OCB offices have implemented peer discussion groups. Additionally, OCB's cohort based training model provides natural peer support.

Increase focus on longer-term client outcomes. Vocational rehabilitation collects data and reports on longer term outcomes like employment maintenance and advancement. The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act is requiring increased focus on sustaining employment gains. However, contract structure and overall capacity limitations have meant that placement is the primary driver of actions. Aligning performance measures, policies, processes, and related contracts with a longer-term and broader definition of client success and increasing related system capacity may help to support longer-term self-sufficiency through employment retention and advancement.

Expand implementation of evidence-based/informed and promising vocational rehabilitation practices. Progressive Employment was seen as a promising approach to more effectively engaging employers and clients. Progressive Employment aligns with Employment First philosophy by eliminating the need to be job ready through a robust employment path within the array of work experiences. Stakeholders generally wanted to see a more robust employment path with more options for on the job training, internships, apprenticeships, occupational skills training, and volunteerism. Associated with this, stakeholders desired stronger connections to businesses and employers through increased focus on job development on the part of OCB staff and contractors.

Provide supported employment to more clients. Clients connected to IDD, mental health, or veteran's services have access to long-term employment supports. Additional client groups could benefit from ongoing support or follow up. Vocational rehabilitation counselors must be creative to uncover supported employment opportunities for people with brain injury. Counselors can use Impaired Related Work Expenses or other customized work incentives through the

Social Security Administration to pay for extended employment support. Counselors can also use post-employment services as a workaround for supported employment. Post-employment services are provided after a person obtains employment, as necessary to assist him or her maintain, regain, or advance in employment. Eligibility does not have to be re-determined to engage in post-employment services. Leveraging post-employment services requires a strong relationship between the counselor or business outreach specialist and employer or individual, so cases can be swiftly reopened and post-employment support can be authorized in a timely way when a situation arises requiring Vocational Rehabilitation intervention to maintain employment. This allows for intensive services to be reintroduced for a short period of time, covering for the absence of ongoing formal services when appropriate.

Continue to promote a multifaceted learning culture at OCB. A focus on recruiting and retaining high-performing staff, including increased training and resources to support services to people who are blind in addition to IDD, mental health, substance use disorder, and deaf-blindness focused training will help to promote staff and organizational performance.

7.1.2 Reduce System Constraints

According to many stakeholders, capacity constraints throughout the vocational rehabilitation system have limited the ability of OCB staff and contractors to work as effectively as possible with clients and employers. Stakeholders want to see the positive work of OCB expanded to support more people who are blind and employers statewide. Specific recommendations for vocational rehabilitation include:

Increase outreach and education. The public broadly and potential clients, partners, contractors, and staff need to know that OCB exists and about the services it provides. Stakeholders suggested outreach and visibility campaigns among the general public to normalize the idea of people with vision impairment as valuable, contributing members of the community as well as campaigns targeted on specific populations/stakeholders.

Develop and implement person-centered, individual-driven employment plans. Clients should have agency, and individual voice and choice should be central

throughout their interaction with vocational rehabilitation. Plans should reflect client goals and strengths, and incorporate/align with broader support systems. The process for implementing the plans should be client led. Broader use of the Progressive Employment model could help counselors creatively connect clients to more individualized vocational supports/employment opportunities.

Consider ways to make the vocational rehabilitation system more responsive. The current system works at a similarly slow speed for all clients, regardless of individual need or circumstances. Specific stakeholder suggestions included:

- ***Analyze staff workloads*** to ensure OCB staff and contractors are able to adequately meet the full range of client needs statewide. Use this information to determine next steps related to requesting position authority or funding, changing contracting approach, or informing other collaborative work with workforce development system partners.
- ***Consider ways to prioritize cases or further specialize counselors*** to make the system responsive to varying needs. In particular, determine ways to best serve clients with multiple or complex disabilities, such as IDD. This may include leveraging Oregon Vocational Rehabilitation resources.
- ***Standardize counselor communication expectations*** to ensure clients receive timely responses to questions, sufficient information, and consistency across counselors.
- ***Analyze paperwork and reporting requirements*** to determine if there are ways to streamline/reduce or specialize related workloads to allow counselors more time with clients.
- ***Engage clients as soon as possible*** so they are not sitting idly while waiting to connect to vocational rehabilitation services. One branch office has piloted employability plans for clients while waiting for an eligibility determination.
- ***Continue cultural shift to Employment First philosophy.*** Education, training, outreach, and general communication, as well as policy and procedures should continue to emphasize and align with Employment First principles.

Improve training and support for OCB vocational rehabilitation staff and contractors, particularly related to working effectively with clients who are blind as well as for those who have IDD, mental illness, substance use disorder, and/or deaf-blindness. OCB could look to Oregon Vocational Rehabilitation to support disability-specific training or consultative support. Staff support and technical

assistance should be focused on offices and counselors needing additional support based on outcomes data.

Continue to shift expectations toward employment at younger ages. Stakeholders discussed the need to create expectations of integrated employment at an early age, well before transition age activities. This will contribute to a larger cultural shift as well as shifting individuals' and families' expectations. Stakeholders pointed to programs in western Oregon that are talking to youth with disabilities at an earlier age about working as an adult, as well as programs in Washington and other states conducting college preparation activities targeting middle school students. Many spoke about the need to educate families as well as the individual about the differing expectations of OCB and employment versus school.

7.1.3 Improve Collaboration in Service Delivery

Vocational rehabilitation works with a broad array of service providers to support individuals and families. Stakeholders throughout the analysis discussed the need for increased and improved collaboration to improve client long term success. Specific recommendations include:

Incorporate more employer and partner networking in vocational rehabilitation counselor role. Increased counselor capacity should allow for additional time devoted to developing and growing relationships locally, which can support client success through increased Progressive Employment opportunities.

Consider aligning contracts with other systems/agencies, such as Oregon Vocational Rehabilitation and Office of Developmental Disability Services, to increase capacity for service delivery and increase service delivery consistency for clients. Stakeholders discussed differing processes and requirements from agencies to conduct similar job roles, and how, as a result, some chose one agency with which to work. Clients are negatively impacted by having less choice in contracted providers and more often having inconsistency in service providers as they transition between service system/funding sources.

Increase collaborative and effective job development. Deficits related to employer relationships and job development/availability were consistent themes in the analysis. Suggested improvements include:

- *Increase employer outreach and education*, possibly through a business advisory board or policy task force board to help develop infrastructure around employer engagement.
- *Work across agencies to strategically engage employers*, rather than having employers be approached by multiple agencies in a manner that discourages effective relationships.
- *Have the government serve as a model employer* to increase employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities.
- *Continue to increase WorkSource collaboration and accessibility* so individuals with disabilities can more effectively use their services.

Analyze options for increased co-location or specialization. Co-location allows for improved collaboration/information exchange between partnering agencies and system navigation for clients. Stakeholders discussed the effectiveness of WorkSource co-location historically. Staff also discussed the merits of having a volunteer coordinator and IDD specialists available to support staff and clients. Task specialization should be a focus of any future OCB/Oregon Vocational Rehabilitation staffing study.

Expand transition efforts to underserved populations of youth. This includes working more deliberately with Youth Transition programs as well as extending transition work to reservations and school districts not implementing Youth Transition Programs or actively engaged with Transition Network Facilitators. Also, consider how to extend transition work to students who have dropped out of high school or took a break between their educational and vocational pursuits.

7.2 OCB Recommendations: Summary

The following tables summarize the recommendations for strategic changes to services and system infrastructure. These recommendations represent stakeholder suggestions for service and system changes that could positively impact OCB clients and other Oregonians eligible for OCB services. Numbers are associated with recommendations, and letters represent stakeholder suggested strategies for implementing these recommendations.

Figure 24: Summary of OCB Service-Level Recommendations

Outreach	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Increase general public awareness of people with disabilities and their value as contributing members of the community. 2. Increase prospective client awareness of OCB and the services it provides.
Employment-Related Supports	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Develop opportunities for ongoing training to refresh or upgrade vocational skill and access to new assistive technology. 4. Expand opportunities for internships and work experience. 5. Consider how to provide longer-term job support to a wider breadth of OCB clients.
Assistive Technology	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. Continue technical assistance to facilitate integration of assistive technology in proprietary software settings. 7. Expand assistive technology training after placement to maintain skills and adapt to technological updates. 8. Increase communication with employers regarding financial support for assistive technology. 9. Pursue faster turnaround of assistive technology requests for “real time” employment opportunities.
Orientation and Mobility	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 10. Consider longer duration orientation and mobility training options. 11. Develop opportunities for prevocational orientation and mobility support.
Supportive Services	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 12. Continue to support clients’ transportation needs, including transportation needs after placement, in conjunction with community partners. 13. Strengthen referrals to and follow-up with community partners to address clients’ confounding barriers to employment. 14. Increase parent and family outreach and support groups. 15. Increase opportunities for client group and peer support. 16. Ensure consistent benefits counseling for all clients.
Pre-Employment Transition Services	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 17. Expand SWEP program to reach more youth. 18. Build relationships with parallel pre-employment vocational rehabilitation transition services such as Youth in Transition

	Program and Transition Network Coordinators for networking and possible collaboration.
Service Needs for Key Target Populations	<p>19. Increase staff training for specialty caseloads including intellectual and developmental disabilities, mental health, and deaf-blindness.</p> <p>20. Increase cultural and linguistic representativeness of OCB staff to reflect current and prospective clients.</p> <p>21. Provide targeted outreach and communication to families from racial or ethnic minority groups.</p>

Figure 25: Summary of OCB Systems-Level Recommendations

Outreach	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Increase existing and potential partner and employer, as well as potential contractor and staff member awareness of OCB and the services it provides. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Actively participate in Employment First, WIOA, and Youth Transition Program initiatives/meetings. b. Develop a policy task force or business advisory board to help develop infrastructure around employer outreach and engagement. c. Increase presentations to regional employers, peer to peer presentations by employers who have hired people with vision impairment, and by employees with vision impairment. d. Create safe spaces where employers or the public could ask sincere questions without fear of offending someone or violating policies.
Capacity to Serve	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Analyze workloads to determine staffing/contracting needs. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Consider hiring more multidisciplinary trainers who can travel to rural areas. 3. Analyze impact and feasibility of combining contracting process with Oregon Vocational Rehabilitation and/or ODDS. Determine how many contractors overlap, and if there could be increased capacity by combining processes. 4. Analyze other methods to increase job developer, training, and assessment capacity, such as increased outreach/advertising or self-direction options.

<p>Regulations, Policies, and Processes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Update regulations and policies to align with federal requirements, and train staff and contractors on changes made. 6. Standardize expectations around counselor communication. 7. Analyze for efficiencies in data collection and reporting for staff and contractors. Consider methods of maximizing automated and electronic data sharing/collection as well as methods of sharing data with more partners to support service delivery collaboration.
<p>Staff and Contractor Training and Skillsets</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 8. Provide increased targeted blindness and technology training to staff and contractors. 9. Work to hire and contract with more people who are blind or experience visual disabilities. 10. Provide increased training/resources regarding working with people with IDD, mental illness, substance use disorder, and deaf-blindness for staff and contractors, potentially in collaboration with Oregon Vocational Rehabilitation. 11. Consider developing a career pathway or more defined job developer/contractor qualifications related to working with people who have visual impairments. 12. Connect partners with resources/training to improve accessibility for people who are blind, particularly WorkSource Oregon. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. WorkSource ensures all systems, resources, and technology are accessible to people with vision loss.
<p>Collaborative Service Delivery</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 13. Define community partners, roles and responsibilities, and referral approaches. 14. Improve data sharing on shared clients, automating information where possible. 15. Work with Oregon government to have government serve as a model employer for people with disabilities. 16. Consider expanding the Progressive Employment model more broadly, including to Oregon Vocational Rehabilitation, sharing development efforts and data to more effectively and efficiently collaborate with employers and support clients.

	17. Pursue partnerships with organizations that can provide supplemental or follow-up services through braided funding, including the Office of Developmental Disability Services.
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