

Vocational Rehabilitation Services: A Texas Primer

Texas Workforce Investment Council
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The Mission of the Texas Workforce Investment Council

Assisting the Governor and the Legislature with strategic planning for and evaluation of the Texas workforce system to promote the development of a well-educated, highly skilled workforce for Texas.

Texas Workforce Investment Council

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Introduction

The workforce system in Texas includes several workforce programs and services administered by eight state agencies and 28 local workforce boards, along with independent school districts and community and technical colleges. System partners deliver 18 workforce programs and related services, as well as education programs that support career preparation and advancement.

One of these programs, vocational rehabilitation (VR), plays a crucial role by enabling individuals with disabilities to prepare for and obtain employment through a variety of services ranging from career counseling to support for postsecondary education.

Scope of the Report

The Texas Workforce Investment Council (Council) prepared this report as a high-level overview of the VR program in Texas, focusing largely on VR services. This report is intended to provide readers with current information about the VR program structure in Texas, funding, program delivery, relevant legislation, and program participants.

The Texas Workforce Investment Council

The Council was created by the Texas Legislature in 1993 and was charged with promoting the development of a well-educated and highly skilled workforce for Texas. The Council assists the Governor and the legislature with strategic planning, research, and evaluation of the Texas workforce system.

State and federal statutes require the Council to promote alignment, integration, and collaboration of programs and services that are separate but need to work together. While the Council works to facilitate and promote partnerships, its impact is demonstrated through initiatives that improve outcomes for workforce customers and employers of Texas.

Statutory Directive

As required in Chapter 2308 of the Texas Government Code, the Council is charged with evaluating the Texas workforce system for effectiveness and providing recommendations to the Governor. The Council evaluates workforce programs administered by agencies represented on the Council to identify any duplication of or gaps in the services provided by those programs; to identify other problems that adversely affect the delivery of services; and to develop and implement comprehensive strategies to address problems identified by the Council.

Vocational Rehabilitation Program

The VR program provides services for eligible individuals with disabilities. The objective of the program is to enable individuals with disabilities to gain and maintain competitive integrated employment so they may work and live as independently as possible. In order to meet this objective, services are customized to an individual's specific needs and may include assessments, counseling, medical treatment, assistive devices, vocational training for job skills, job search and placement assistance, and other services that will prepare the individual for competitive integrated employment. The VR program also provides services to help businesses hire, train, and retain qualified individuals with disabilities.

Governing and Relevant Legislation

The VR program can be traced back to World War I. In 1917, President Wilson signed into law the Smith-Hughes Act, which provided federal funds to states on a matching basis and created the Federal Board for Vocational Education. One year later, the Soldier's Rehabilitation Act extended funding for disabled veterans that included financial support and job training. Two years later, Congress passed the Smith-Fess Act, which expanded the Soldier's Rehabilitation Act to include anyone with a disability and provided VR guidance, training, occupational adjustment services, and job placement services.

President Roosevelt signed into law the Social Security Act of 1935. This act established the permanent federal VR program; extended eligibility requirements, restoration services, and VR services for the blind; and improved the ability of an individual with a disability to obtain a job.

The Vocational Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1954 increased and restructured the roles of the federal and state government in the VR program, increased funding, expanded services to mentally challenged individuals, and provided grants for colleges and universities to train rehabilitation counselors. The VR program expanded to focus on services for the severely disabled and civil rights for individuals with disabilities with the passage of The Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Various amendments to the act followed in the years after to strengthen services and emphasize customer involvement.

President Clinton signed into law the Workforce Investment Act and Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1998; both reauthorized and extended the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 for five years. The acts consolidated vocational rehabilitation legislation with several employment and training programs into block grants to states, streamlined administrative procedures, and focused on high quality employment outcomes. This set of amendments increased supports for informed customer choice and increased the options for customers in finding high quality employment.

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014 (WIOA, Public Law 113-128) was enacted on July 22, 2014. This act expanded VR programs and the support for students and youth with disabilities as they transition from education to employment. Under WIOA, the VR program reaffirms that individuals with disabilities, including those with the most significant disabilities, are capable of achieving high-quality employment.

The governing rules for vocational rehabilitation services in Texas are included in the Texas Administrative Code, Title 40, Part 20, Chapter 856. The purpose of the VR program rules is to delineate how VR services are provided to eligible individuals with disabilities so they are able to engage in competitive integrated employment and become self-sufficient.

The Texas Labor Code, Chapter 352, includes the provisions for vocational rehabilitation services.

The United States Code, Title 29, Chapter 16, Subchapter 1, states the federal purpose and provisions for VR and other rehabilitation services, while the Code of Federal Regulations, Title 34, Part 361, includes the regulatory information for the state VR services program.

Vocational Rehabilitation Funding

The VR program is authorized through WIOA Title IV and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended. The Department of Education provides the funding for the VR program through the Rehabilitation Services Administration division, and the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) operates the state program.

Funds are distributed to states based on the statutory formula that takes into account population and per capita income in determining the amount of federal funds made available to states for VR program purposes. Grant funds are administered under the approved VR services portion of the combined state plan in accordance with WIOA. VR regulations require that states incur a portion of expenditures under the VR services portion of the combined state plan from non-federal funds to meet its cost sharing requirements. The federal share of funding for VR services and the administration of the VR services portion of the combined state plan is 78.7 percent. States are required to match a portion of the federal funding for the VR program in order to meet the cost sharing requirements through the expenditures of state funds (not to exceed 21.3 percent of total funding).

Maintenance of effort is required by the VR program, authorized under Title I of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended. Maintenance of effort requirements ensure that state agencies receiving federal funds with a matching component do not reduce the amount of non-federal expenditures from year to year.

WIOA requires states to reserve and expend 15 percent of the federal portion of the state allotment received for the provision of pre-employment transition services to students with disabilities who are in school and age 14-22. Pre-employment transition services are job exploration counseling, work-based learning experiences, counseling for postsecondary educational programs, workplace readiness training to develop social skills and independent living, and instruction in self-advocacy.

The Social Security Administration Vocational Rehabilitation Reimbursement Program

The Social Security Administration administers the VR reimbursement program. Under the program, the Social Security Administration reimburses VR agencies the cost of certain administrative and tracking costs and services provided to Social Security Administration recipients, if services resulted in employment. The VR program is eligible to receive cost reimbursement from the Social Security Administration after providing services if the customer:

- Was a recipient of social security disability insurance or social security insurance at the time VR services were received; and
- Was working for a continuous nine months out of a 12-month period either during or after VR services were received.

If it is determined that the VR program is eligible, a reimbursement claim is developed and submitted to Social Security Administration for payment.

Vocational Rehabilitation in Texas

Transfer to the Texas Workforce Commission

Senate Bill (SB) 208, passed by the 84th Texas Legislature, required the transfer of two designated state units that included the division for individuals with visual impairments and the division for individuals with other disabilities from the Texas Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services (DARS) to TWC. Effective September 1, 2016, the following programs were transferred to TWC:

- The vocational rehabilitation program for individuals with visual impairments, including the Criss Cole Rehabilitation Center;
- The general vocational rehabilitation program for individuals with other disabilities;
- The Independent Living Services program for older individuals who are blind; and
- The Business Enterprises of Texas program.

On October 1, 2017, TWC integrated the two separate designated state units into one designated state unit within the agency. With the completion of combining staff and two designated state units, TWC continues to work to ensure that VR practices align with the agency's capacity, efficiency, and organizational competency.

The integration involved reorganizing the state, regional, and field-level staff from both divisions; consolidating policies; and restructuring service delivery to ensure that there was no disruption of services and that the newly integrated division continued to meet customers' individualized needs.

TWC is working to integrate the VR staff into local workforce solutions offices. Co-location will improve the VR delivery process, offer access to thousands of employers, and provide increased job opportunities.

Benefits of the Transfer and Integration

The transition and integration of the VR program from DARS to TWC streamlined, strengthened, and increased efficiency in order to achieve better outcomes for customers. Individuals with disabilities now have one entity from which to access services, as well as the benefit of access to a network of local employers.

With the integration of the VR program, all six WIOA core programs are operated by TWC. The six core programs include:

- WIOA Adult, Title I;
- WIOA Dislocated Worker, Title I;
- WIOA Youth, Title I;
- Adult Education and Literacy, Title II;
- Wagner-Peyser Act Program, Title III; and
- Vocational Rehabilitation, Title IV.

Additionally, TWC operates the Choices Temporary Assistance for Needy Families employment program, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Employment and Training Program, and subsidized child care funded through the Child Care and Development Block Grant and Child Care Development Fund.

The added benefit of having these multiple workforce programs housed in a single agency is the opportunity to integrate, streamline, and align programs for multiple populations. This can promote a greater focus on enhanced employment outcomes through VR integration with the state's 28 local workforce boards and their network of relationships with and knowledge of employer needs within the regions.

TWC as the Designated State Agency

Federal regulations require that the state agency designated to administer the VR state plan must be either the state agency primarily concerned with VR, or a state agency that includes a vocational rehabilitation division or other organizational unit.

States are allowed to designate one agency to provide VR services or two distinct agencies to provide services: one to serve individuals who are blind and visually impaired and another to serve individuals with other disabilities. In Texas, TWC is the designated state agency that administers and provides VR services.

Vocational Rehabilitation Services as the Designated State Unit

In Texas, the division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services at TWC serves as the designated state unit under federal law. Program regulations state that certain functions are reserved solely for staff of the designated state unit and are non-delegable outside of the designated state unit. These non-delegable responsibilities include:

- The nature and scope of services, eligibility, and provision of services;
- The determination of employment outcomes;
- The implementation of policy formulation;
- The allocation and expenditure of VR funds; and
- The participation of the designated state unit in the one-stop service delivery system.

National Comparison of Designated State Units

The following chart illustrates the total number of designated state units that provide VR services and the type of state agency where those units reside.

| Designated State Units (as of 04/20/18) | Agency Where VR Designated State Unit is Located |
|--------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 22 | Health and Human Services Agencies |
| 18 | Workforce Agencies |
| 18 | Rehabilitation Services or Disability Agencies |
| 11 | Education Agencies |
| 8 | Standalone Commissions or Departments/Rehabilitation Commissions |
| 1 | Governor's Office |
| 1 | Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs |

Agency Structure and Organization

TWC is directed by three Governor-appointed commissioners and managed by an executive director to operate an integrated workforce development system and administer unemployment benefits in the state. The organizational chart below illustrates TWC leadership, which provides guidance, direction, and oversight for the division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services.



Note: Reprinted from *Presentation to the Rehabilitation Council of Texas* by C. Fuller, 2017.

Division Structure

TWC VR is part of Texas Workforce Solutions, which is a statewide network that includes TWC, 28 local workforce development boards, community partners, and contracted service providers. This system supports access to the workforce solutions offices and statewide services. At the state level, the division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services is composed of four departments: Business Enterprises of Texas, the Field Services Delivery Department, the Program Operations Department, and the Program Policy and Support Department.



Note: Reprinted from *Presentation to the Rehabilitation Council of Texas* by C. Fuller, 2017.

The Program Policy and Support Department includes multiple units that provide guidance, case consultation, training, and policy support to regional and field offices. In addition, the department is responsible for program evaluation and quality assurance. The department includes the Office of Blind Services Support, which provides specialized technology and assessment services to VR customers and consultation and support to VR staff serving customers with visual impairments.

The Field Services Delivery Department includes the Criss Cole Rehabilitation Center, six regional offices, and local management units, each with multiple physical locations. Each region is composed of three to six management units. Services are provided to customers through direct service delivery at approximately 130 field offices, some of which have been transitioning into the local workforce board's workforce solutions offices.



Note: Reprinted from *Presentation to the Rehabilitation Council of Texas* by C. Fuller, 2017.

State Rehabilitation Council

Statewide rehabilitation advisory councils were established with the Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1992. With the passage of the Workforce Investment Act and Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1998, the state rehabilitation advisory councils were changed to state rehabilitation councils.

The Rehabilitation Council of Texas (RCT) is the designated state rehabilitation council. RCT helps ensure that Texans with disabilities have access to effective vocational rehabilitation services that result in competitive integrated employment, independence, and community participation.

RCT consists of 15 members and the majority are individuals with disabilities. Members are appointed by the Governor to serve a term of three years with the option to be reappointed for a second three-year term. Federal regulations require that the makeup of RCT must be composed of:

- At least one representative of the Statewide Independent Living Council;
- At least one representative of a parent training and information center;
- At least one representative of the client assistance program;
- At least one qualified vocational rehabilitation counselor, with knowledge of and experience with vocational rehabilitation programs, who shall serve as an ex officio, nonvoting member of the Council if the counselor is an employee of the designated state agency;
- At least one representative of community rehabilitation program service providers;
- Four representatives of business, industry, and labor;
- Representatives of disability advocacy groups representing a cross section of individuals with physical, cognitive, sensory, and mental disabilities;
- Representatives of individuals with disabilities who have difficulty in representing themselves or are unable to represent themselves due to their disabilities;
- Current or former applicants for, or recipients of, vocational rehabilitation services;
- At least one representative of the Texas Education Agency responsible for the public education of students with disabilities who are eligible to receive services under this title and part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act; and
- At least one representative of the Texas Workforce Investment Council.

RCT is organized into standing committees to increase effectiveness and to provide a more focused review of the VR program. The standing committees include the membership and education committee; planning and review committee; policy, procedures, and personnel development committee; and customer satisfaction and needs assessment committee.

The role and responsibilities of RCT include the following:

- Review, analyze, and advise TWC on VR program performance, eligibility, effectiveness, and program functions;
- Develop and review state goals for the VR program in partnership with TWC;
- Submit reports of progress to the Rehabilitation Services Administration commissioner;
- Assist in the preparation of the state plan, state plan modifications, reports, and comprehensive needs assessments;
- Review and analyze the effectiveness of customer satisfaction;
- Prepare and submit an annual report to the Texas governor and Rehabilitation Services Administration commissioner;
- Organize and coordinate activities and maintain relationships between the division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services and various stakeholders to avoid duplication; and
- Maintain and coordinate a relationship between TWC and the Statewide Independent Living Council and centers for independent living within Texas.

Client Assistance Program

The Client Assistance Program is a free service, provided through Disability Rights Texas advocacy group that was established to assist and advise individuals with disabilities on the benefits and services of the vocational rehabilitation program. The Client Assistance Program is funded through grants from the Rehabilitation Services Administration. The Client Assistance Program advises customers and other individuals with disabilities of available services and benefits under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended. In addition, the Client Assistance Program advocates for customers in relation to services provided under the Rehabilitation Act. The program helps provide legal representation to customers

involved in formal appeal hearings with VR agencies and produces annual reports for the Rehabilitation Services Administration with demographic information on individuals with disabilities who received services.

Program Delivery Structure

The VR program provides a variety of individualized services that assist eligible individuals with disabilities to prepare for, obtain, retain, or advance in competitive integrated employment. Vocational rehabilitation counselors assist individuals with various primary disabilities, and may manage specialized caseloads in which the majority of customers have a specific primary disability, such as individuals who:

- Are blind or visually impaired;
- Are deaf or hard of hearing;
- Are students or youth with disabilities;
- Are diagnosed with a neurodevelopmental disorder; or
- Are military veterans who have disabilities.

VR Process

Service levels are divided into phases in the VR initial process to facilitate caseload management and to document which rehabilitation services have been provided to each customer. This process includes:

- The initial contact with the customer;
- Determining whether VR services is the right resource for the customer;
- Gathering identifying information;
- Scheduling an appointment for completing an application;
- Completing the application;
- Explaining services, expectations, and customer rights;
- Obtaining necessary signatures; and
- Conducting a preliminary and comprehensive assessment.

The VR overall process is divided into phases in order to facilitate caseload management. The process includes the following:

- Referral/intake
- Application/profile
- Eligibility
- Comprehensive assessment
- Plan development
- Active services
- Employment
- Successful closure

Qualified VR counselors are critical to ensuring proper expertise of eligibility, plan development, and successful case closure.

Application

Often, before the application process begins, customers will make contact with a VR counselor to ask questions and receive additional information on the program. During the initial contact, both the counselor and customer are able to gain an understanding of the customer's needs.

If the customer continues the process, the VR counselor assists the customer in completing the application by conducting a diagnostic interview. During the application process, the VR counselor is able to explain the expectations of the VR program, the roles of the customer and counselors, and the customer's rights. The VR counselor helps gather, analyze, and review the information necessary and required for determining if the customer is eligible for services.

Eligibility

Title 34, CFR §361.42, bases eligibility for VR services on the following criteria:

- The applicant has been determined to have a physical or mental impairment;
- The impairment results in a substantial impediment to employment; and
- The applicant requires VR services to prepare for employment consistent with the applicant's abilities and capabilities.

Eligibility for services is not income-based, but if the applicant's income exceeds the basic living requirement of the VR program, the applicant will need to contribute for some services, unless an exception has been granted or the individual is receiving social security disability benefits. The basic living requirement is based on the federal poverty guidelines and changes annually when adjusted for inflation.

Comprehensive Assessments

All assessments are administered to help applicants/customers better understand their skills, abilities, and interests and to assist the counselor in making decisions in partnership with the customer regarding the customer's eligibility and ability to go to work, ultimately. A preliminary assessment is started after the application and profile process is complete. A preliminary assessment gathers information that establishes whether the applicant is eligible for vocational rehabilitation services.

Assessments are conducted after a customer has been found eligible. The customer's medical, psychological, vocational, educational, and other related factors that could have an impediment to employment are all analyzed during the assessment period. If additional information is needed to determine the appropriate employment outcome and services, the VR counselor conducts an assessment of the customer's strengths, capabilities, interests, and needs for supported employment services. The assessment may include:

- An analysis of the customer's work experience, educational achievement, functional capacities, and vocational aptitudes;
- An evaluation of the customer's ability to acquire occupational skills appropriate for successful job performance; and
- A review of the customer's capacity to perform in a work environment consistent with the customer's informed choice.

Title 34, CFR §361.52, defines informed choice as the principles that require the customer to be informed and involved in choosing between services, objectives, entities providing services, and methods used to provide services.

Individualized Plan for Employment

Once eligibility has been determined and followed by assessments, an individualized plan for employment is developed by the customer and VR counselor. The plan describes the customer's goal of gaining competitive integrative employment. Each plan is exclusive for each customer's individual situation.

Title 34, CFR §361.46, explains that the individualized plan for employment must:

- Establish the begin and end dates of the services that will be provided;
- Include a specific employment goal that matches the customer's strengths, capabilities, interests, and informed choice;
- Identify the services crucial to reach the employment goal;
- Consist of counseling and guidance including reasonable and necessary services;
- Name service providers;
- Explain the terms and conditions for the delivery of services; and
- Include the customer's views and comments about the plan.

Prior to VR services being provided, VR counselors determine whether comparable services and benefits are available to the customer through other programs, using identified services and benefits first. The following comparable benefits may be selected to document the use of comparable benefits in the individualized plan for employment:

- Educational institutions (elementary and secondary)
- Educational institutions (postsecondary)
- Federal student aid (such as Pell grants, the Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant, work study, etc.)
- Medicaid programs
- Medical health provider (public or private)
- Medicare
- Mental health provider (public or private)
- Public housing authority
- Scholarships
- Tuition waivers
- Veteran's Administration
- Welfare agency (state or local government)
- Worker's compensation

Active Services

Active services may include counseling and guidance, physical or mental restoration, or training. Customers receive active services once their individualized plan for employment has been completed and agreed to by the customer and VR counselor.

Competitive Integrated Employment

The employment focus of VR is to assist the customer in finding competitive integrated employment. Competitive integrated employment is employment that provides competitive earnings with an integrated location and opportunities for advancement. Title 34, CFR §361.5 explains that competitive earnings is work that is performed on a full-time or part-time basis (including self-employment) and must be compensated at a rate that is:

- Equal to or greater than the federal, state, or local minimum wage rate, whichever is higher;
- Comparable to the customary rate paid by the employer to employees without disabilities in similar positions with comparable skills, experience, and training;
- Comparable to the income received by other individuals who are not individuals with disabilities and who are self-employed in similar occupations; and
- Eligible for the level of benefits provided to other employees.

Title 34, CFR §361.5, defines integrated employment as work that is performed at a location typically found in the community. Integrated work includes employees with a disability performing the duties of a position with other employees within that same position who are not individuals with disabilities. Integrated work also presents opportunities for advancement that are similar to those for other employees who are not individuals with disabilities and who have similar positions.

Title 34, CFR §361.5, further explains that integrated employment is required to be consistent with the customer's strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities, interests, and informed choice. Competitive integrated employment is determined on a case-by-case basis. The VR counselor will decide if the individual with the disability is able to be employed and is able to interact with others without disabilities while performing his or her job duties. Students with disabilities are extended the same provision of services necessary to achieve competitive integrated employment.

Case Closure

When a customer obtains successful employment, the VR counselor monitors the customer's stability and provides counseling and guidance services as needed.

Employment is considered successful after a period of not less than 90 days, the customer is satisfied, and the job is consistent with the employment goal as documented in the individualized plan for employment, wage and working conditions conform to federal and state laws, and the customer's wages and benefits meet the definition of competitive integrated employment.

Before the customer's case can be successfully closed, the customer must have:

- Received the VR services that resulted in the customer's employment outcome;
- Achieved the employment outcome that was described on the individualized plan for employment and consistent with the customer's interests, strengths, and capabilities;
- Maintained employment for at least 90 days and remain employed at time of case closure;
- Received notification on case closure; and
- Received information on post-employment services.

Post-Closure Services

Post-closure services are defined as services to assist customers in maintaining, regaining, or advancing in employment after they have been determined to be rehabilitated. The goal of post-closure services is for the customers to become self-sufficient and retain stable employment. Post-closure services also help customers with problems that may emerge after a period of time after employment.

Eligibility for post-closure services requires that the customer:

- Is determined to be rehabilitated;
- Is able to maintain employment;
- Continues to have a disability; and
- Has an employment related problem.

Role of the VR Counselor

Title 34, CFR §361.18(c), provides the scope of functions to ensure that designated state VR counselors are adequately trained and prepared. In Texas, VR counselors are required to have a baccalaureate degree and a master's degree in rehabilitation counseling or a closely related field. VR counselors must have specialized training and experience that allows them to work effectively with individuals with disabilities and assist them in achieving competitive integrated employment. VR counselors must have an

understanding of the functional limitations for individuals with traumatic brain injury, post-traumatic stress syndrome, mental illnesses, autism, blindness, or deafblindness. VR counselors have significant responsibilities that include:

- Determining eligibility;
- Providing counseling and guidance;
- Understanding disabilities and what the possibilities are;
- Knowing the community resources that are available;
- Understanding barriers to employment and how to mitigate them;
- Developing the individualized plan for employment; and
- Understanding local and state labor markets.

Providers

The VR program purchases goods and services from individuals and entities that provide VR related services through contracts. Provider programs provide employment and training services, medical services, and rehabilitation technology that enable individuals who have disabilities to maximize their opportunities for employment. Providers that work with the division for Vocational Rehabilitation Services to meet the various needs of the customers include:

- Private nonprofit providers that help customers prepare for, attain, and retain employment;
- Community resource coordination groups who develop customized service plans for those customers whose needs can only be met through interagency coordination; and
- Community rehabilitation program providers who provide different approved rehabilitation services.

While the list below is not inclusive of all providers, it does include the following major categories:

- Employment and training services
 - Career advancement
 - Job coaching
 - Job development, placement, and retention services
 - Extended employment
 - Supported employment services and extended services
 - Services to family members if necessary to enable the applicant or eligible individual to achieve an employment outcome
 - Assessment for determining eligibility and vocational rehabilitation needs
- Medical services
 - Medical, psychiatric, psychological, and social services
 - Recreational therapy
 - Evaluation or control of specific disabilities
 - Psychosocial rehabilitation
 - Physical and occupational therapy
 - Speech, language, and hearing therapy
 - Medical, psychiatric, psychological, and social services
 - Personal assistance services
- Rehabilitation technology
 - Testing, fitting, or training in the use of prosthetic and orthotic devices
 - Durable medical equipment
 - Vehicle modifications
 - Residential modifications
 - Orientation and mobility services for the blind and visually impaired

Partnerships

The division for Vocational Rehabilitation Services partners with federal, state, and local agencies to achieve successful employment outcomes. Arrangements for services are also made with other public or nonprofit agencies. Partnerships are essential in that all entities involved have one common goal. The table below displays a sample of partner agencies and the services offered at each one.

| Agency | Service |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Texas Health and Human Services Commission | Provides home and community-based services under Medicaid <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Waiver programs ○ Blind Children’s Program ○ Office for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services ○ Centers for Independent Living |
| Texas Department of State Health Services | Provides mental health services |
| Texas Education Agency | Coordinates services for transition-age students with disabilities |
| Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired | Assists with transition to postsecondary life programs |
| Social Security Administration | Provides employment incentives |
| Texas Department of Transportation | Assists with transportation |
| Texas Veterans Commission | Assists with accessing benefits |
| Texas Department of Insurance’s Division of Workers’ Compensation | Ensures that workers compensation recipients are referred to and have the ability to file for VR services |

Additional entities that partner with the division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services to meet the various needs of the customers include:

- Local workforce boards and workforce solutions offices
- Employers
- Education services centers and independent school districts
- Community organizations
 - Mayor’s committees

Program Delivery System

The program delivery system for vocational rehabilitation includes services provided directly by VR field staff as well as those purchased directly from a variety of community rehabilitation programs and other vendors as necessary for the customer to meet his or her employment goal. In addition, VR customers may be referred to services offered by other community programs and WIOA core partners.

VR services are individualized to meet the needs of each participant. Services support the development of knowledge, skills, abilities, and behaviors needed to reach the employment goal. Services available and provided may include:

- Referrals to community support systems such as advocacy organizations;

- Vocational counseling and guidance with employment and postsecondary education options;
- College and technical school training;
- Interpreter services for customers who are deaf and hard of hearing;
- Assessments to determine assistive technology needs;
- Assessments to determine assistive devices such as hearing aids, prosthetics, braces, and wheelchairs;
- Orientation and mobility training for participants who are blind;
- Speech and physical occupational therapies;
- Psychiatric and psychological services;
- Personal assistance services;
- Medical treatment to reduce or remove barriers to employment;
- Work-based learning experiences for high school students with disabilities;
- Training in work place behaviors;
- Support for customized employment, self-employment and supported employment; and
- Instruction in self-advocacy (Texas Workforce Solutions, 2017).

Texas Administrative Code, Title 40, Part 20, states “as appropriate to the vocational rehabilitation needs of each eligible person, provides goods and services necessary to render a customer employable, subject to certain limitations,” but “services are provided only when planned in advance and contained in the customer’s individualized plan of employment.”

Physical and Mental Restoration Services

As described in the *Vocational Rehabilitation Services Manual* (2017, C-700), physical and mental restoration services are those services necessary to correct or substantially modify the customer’s impediment to employment. Examples of typical physical and mental restoration services include the following:

- Medical services;
- Surgery;
- Counseling by a licensed professional Counselor or psychologist;
- Diagnosis and treatment of mental or emotional disorders by a psychiatrist or licensed psychologist
- Hospitalization for surgery or treatment;
- Prescription eye glasses;
- Drugs and supplies incidental to surgery or treatment;
- Physical, speech, or hearing therapy; and
- Prosthetics or other assistive devices.

Medical services that are sponsored or supported by the division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services must have a direct effect on the customer’s ability to perform the employment goal, or the services must support other needed VR services. Medical treatment may include the services of a physician, surgeon, anesthesiologist, chiropractor, radiologist, pathologist, physician's assistant, physical therapist, and/or speech therapist.

Mental restoration services include services that are clinically necessary to achieve a planned employment outcome and are provided only to customers whose mental or emotional disorders are stable or slowly progressive and can be corrected or stabilized within a reasonable time.

Academic and Vocational Training

A variety of academic and vocational training is available through accredited colleges and universities, vocational and technical schools, certified public or private businesses, and community rehabilitation program training. The training services are provided to customers who require added knowledge or skills in order to obtain employment consistent with the customer's aptitudes and ability, and are compatible with their physical or mental impairments. Vocational and other training services include personal and vocational training, books, tools, and other training material necessary to complete the course of training.

For academic training, the VR program pays for the required fees and a set amount towards tuition to a public college or university, including technical training to get an associate's degree. College tuition and/or fees may be waived for customers who are deaf and attending any institution of higher education using public funds if they are a Texas resident, accepted for enrollment by the institution, and provide a statement of purpose and course of study (Texas Workforce Commission, 2017). For vocational or technical training from proprietary schools, the program pays for tuition limited to \$3,000.

Other Training

The Criss Cole Rehabilitation Center is a residential vocational rehabilitation training facility that serves adults who are legally blind by helping them learn alternative techniques to prepare for, find, or retain employment, attend a college, and live independently in the community.

The Criss Cole Rehabilitation Center believes that individuals who are blind have the right to actively participate in employment, community, and society. The center provides individualized services to meet the needs of eligible adults through the following programs:

- Proficiency training produces instruction to obtain and develop skills needed to attain the employment goal. Training options include reading, writing braille, personal navigation skills with assistive devices, training in technology devices, meal preparation, and organizational skills.
- Career focus training teaches skills for customers to achieve their identified academic and career goals that may include job-search training, work-experience, and on-the-job training, self-employment, and college preparation.

Community Rehabilitation Program services, described in more detail under Employment Services in the following section, are for customers who need to learn the skills and behaviors to determine personal strengths and weaknesses, set practical goals, communicate and interact with others effectively, and prepare, enter, and retain or advance in competitive integrated employment successfully.

Other training services available include:

- Tutoring in reading, writing, and math only in connection to academic or vocational training as specified in the customer's individualized plan for employment;
- General Educational Development test;
- High school credit courses;
- Adult continuing education objectives;
- Drivers education for a modified vehicle; and
- English as a second language.

Employment Services

As stated in the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, one of the primary responsibilities of VR counselors is to offer employment assistance to customers. "Counselors are responsible for completing accessing and planning activities with each customer to determine the nature and scope of services needed to support the

customer in obtaining and maintaining employment in their chosen career” (Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended in §7(2)(B)).

Employment services are provided through community rehabilitation programs and may include a variety of services, including specialized job placement assistance, work readiness training, and vocational adjustment training. Employment services are designed for customers who need help in developing the skills and behaviors to assess personal strengths and weaknesses, set goals, communicate and interact effectively, and prepare for and retain competitive integrated employment. In Texas, there are almost 500 community rehabilitation programs.

Vocational adjustment training is for work readiness and is designed to help a customer learn and adapt to the day-to-day workplace routine. Vocational adjustment training provides the customer an opportunity to develop the competencies and fundamental skills needed to behave in a successful manner on the job and in the community. The purpose of the vocational adjustment training program is to help address vocational impediments, prepare customers to enter the work world, and increase the customer’s self-sufficiency.

On-the-job training provides the customer an opportunity to build skills and restore employment if the customer has a history of skills and a work history. Each on-the-job training opportunity is individualized to meet the needs of the employer and customer; pays the same rate and benefits of other individuals hired into the position; requires training of the customer to acquire skills necessary at the employer’s worksite; and is a commitment that the employer will retain the customer after the on-the-job training period has ended.

Another employment service available through the VR program is work experience. This type of training presents the opportunity for the customer to experience a real work environment that is consistent with the customer’s strengths, capabilities, interests, and informed choice. Work experience is offered as a volunteer, internship, or temporary short-term paid work setting lasting no longer than 12 weeks.

Rehabilitation Technology

The *Vocational Rehabilitation Services Manual* (2017, C-203) explains that rehabilitation technology is the use of technology by individuals with disabilities so that they are able to improve their functional capabilities. Rehabilitation technology refers to assistive technology, vehicle modifications, residential modifications, and durable medical equipment. The VR program works with customers to provide technology evaluations, demonstrations, technical advice, and information that support customers.

Assistive technology means any item, piece of equipment, or product designed to help individuals with vision loss or other disabilities. Examples of assistive technology include screen readers, screen magnifiers for low-vision computer users, video magnifiers, and braille readers. The VR program works with customers to provide technology evaluations, demonstrations, technical advice, and information that support customers in reaching employment goals.

Vehicle modification services help remove barriers to transportation with the use of a personal vehicle. Vehicle modifications are considered after other transportation options have been explored and it has been determined that an accessible vehicle is the most cost efficient approach for the customer. Customers may receive help with the purchase of a vehicle for modifications only when necessary for the customer to participate in job-related training or employment. The cost of vehicle modifications can range from under \$1,000 for simple hand controls to many thousands of dollars for van conversions with complex driving systems. Vehicle modification may range from a minor modification to a passenger car, such as installing hand controls, to modifying a van in order to:

- Install a wheelchair lifting device;

- Raise the roof;
- Install automatic door openers;
- Lower the floor;
- Install special steering; and
- Install a wheelchair tie-down.

Residential modifications provide home and job-site modifications so that customers are able to perform essential tasks of a particular job or activities of daily living that improve the customer's ability to function independently in the home. Residential modifications are critical and necessary for the customer's employment. Residential modifications include equipment ramps; stair glides and lifts; and household equipment.

Durable medical equipment is also available as a rehabilitative technology. The VR program allows for purchasing medical equipment such as:

- Rehabilitation or hospital beds;
- Manual and power wheelchairs;
- Bathroom assistive devices;
- Patient lifts (manual or power);
- Seating and positioning systems; and
- Scooters.

Supported Employment

Supported employment is a VR service that is offered to customers with the most significant disabilities. Supported employment enables VR customers to enter competitive integrated employment by providing individualized assistance in finding an appropriate job match and establishing extended services and long-term supports within the work environment. This program can be used for customers with any type of disability; however, the services that are most common are intellectual and developmental disabilities, significant mental health conditions, or autism. Oftentimes, these customers have been institutionalized, excluded from community services, or in segregated work programs (U.S. Department of Education, 2017).

Additionally, the *Vocational Rehabilitation Services Manual* (2017, C-1200) explains that supported employment services may include the following activities:

- Ongoing assistance and/or long-term services to establish and maintain resources such that could include transportation, child care, housing, food, personal assistance services, and financial needs;
- Long-term support and repetitive instruction to communicate with employers and others, identify strengths, and weaknesses related to employment, encourage learning skills, establish goals related to employment, and assist with disability management; and
- Comprehensive training in areas such as grooming, hygiene, and suitable work attire.

Transition Services

Consistent with Title 34, CFR §361.42, transition services promote the progression from school to post-school occupations and services that may include postsecondary education, vocational training, adult education, and competitive integrated employment. Transition services are provided to eligible and potentially eligible students with disabilities to move them from receiving special education services to receiving VR services and to help minimize potential delays in service delivery from school to employment or independence. All transition services are a strategy of VR services and must help students with disabilities in achieving a successful outcome.

Project SEARCH

Project SEARCH is a program that promotes partnerships between businesses, school districts, and VR agencies with 27 sites across the state. The Project SEARCH business-led pre-employment training program is a one-year school-to-work program. The program includes a combination of career exploration, classroom instruction, and hands-on training through worksite rotations. The program takes place in a business setting and the workplace facilitates the teaching and learning process as marketing work skills and obtaining employment. Project SEARCH advocates for long-term and meaningful competitive integrated employment for customers with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Project HIRE

Project HIRE, a partnership between the division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services and community organizations, is funded by the Texas Council for Developmental Disabilities and is a supported education model that provides the following services:

- Support from education coaches;
- Support groups for individuals and family;
- Work experience opportunities;
- College readiness programs; and
- Mentoring to help individuals identify and achieve goals.

Project HIGHER

Project HIGHER is a sister program to Project HIRE and follows the same structure. The program was developed through a partnership among the legacy Texas Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services, the University of Texas El Paso, El Paso Community College, the Volar Center for Independent Living, and area employers, along with Workforce Solutions Borderplex.

Project SWEEP

In collaboration with West Texas Education Service Centers, the division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services offers Project SWEEP, a five-week summer program designed for teenagers with disabilities. Job-readiness training is the emphasis the first week, followed by four weeks of work experience. The program includes orientation and mobility skills, daily living skills, job-seeking skills, on-the-job skills, and social skills.

Pre-employment transition services assist students with disabilities who are eligible for VR services in identifying career interests. WIOA expanded the types of services available to youth and students with disabilities who are transitioning from school to postsecondary education and into competitive integrated employment settings. Pre-employment transition services also include workplace skills training through internships and other work-based learning opportunities, all of which are arranged in collaboration with local education agencies (Rehabilitative Services Administration, 2016b).

Pre-employment Transition Services

WIOA defines three types of pre-employment transition services: required, authorized, and coordinated. Pre-employment transition services are a subset of transition services that include:

- Job exploration counseling, which includes information on in-demand occupations, labor market information, and career pathways;
- Work-based learning experiences, which may include internships, on-the-job training, or apprenticeships;
- Counseling on opportunities for enrollment in educational programs at institutions of higher education to include advising and providing resources for success;
- Workplace readiness training to develop social skills and independent living, which include

interpersonal skills, job-seeking skills, and financial literacy; and

- Instruction on advocacy that includes mentoring and participating in leadership activities, (Rehabilitative Services Administration, 2016b).

Federal regulations require VR agencies to reserve 15 percent of federal VR funds to provide pre-employment transition services to assist students with disabilities transitioning from secondary school to postsecondary education programs and employment in competitive integrated settings.

Statewide Initiatives

Pathways to Careers is an initiative that provides opportunities for students with disabilities to receive pre-employment transition services. The initiative provides applied learning opportunities through internships and work experiences by offering students information about career pathways and enabling them to make informed choices about postsecondary degrees and credentials. The following are strategies from the Pathways to Careers initiative.

Summer Earn and Learn (FY 2018)

The Summer Earn and Learn program offers paid pre-employment transition services for students with disabilities over the summer and is conducted in partnership with local workforce boards and their employer partners. This program offers work experience opportunities with local employers, paid wages, and skills that students need to gain employment. The typical work experience placement is a minimum of five weeks, with a work readiness element occurring either before or during the work experience component.

Charting the Course (in the planning phase)

Charting the Course: Planning for Life and Career after High School is a program that will provide a series of education and planning events for students with disabilities and their families beginning when the student is in eighth grade. This program will help students transition into high school and support planning for further education and employment. The Charting the Course program will include approximately 13 education and planning events over five years for students with disabilities and their families to learn information about:

- TWC's labor market and career information and employment opportunities;
- Postsecondary education and training opportunities;
- Vocational rehabilitation services;
- Work incentives; and
- Public and community services.

Explore STEM!

Explore STEM! includes non-residential summer programs that provide students with disabilities the opportunity to learn about science, technology, engineering, and mathematics occupations. Explore STEM! also offers education and training to prepare students for STEM-related employment. Hands-on experiences and exposure to individuals already working in these fields play an important role when increasing the awareness of students interested in pursuing a STEM-related career.

Transition Planning for Students in Private and Home Schools (in the planning phase)

This program is designed to foster partnerships that help advance participation and engagement of students with disabilities enrolled in private or homeschool education in pre-employment transition services. Activities in the program provide students opportunities to explore and develop career interests, which is critical for a successful career.

Student Hire Ability Navigator Project

This initiative provides a navigator in each workforce development area to help improve access to employment and training services and employment opportunities exclusively for students with disabilities. Each navigator serves as a resource in providing VR services in the workforce solutions offices in that area.

Pre-Employment Transition Services Elective Course Curriculum

The pre-employment transition services elective course is designed for students with disabilities. This course provides the opportunity for students to learn and develop pre-employment transition skills. The curriculum covers career exploration, work readiness, postsecondary opportunities, work-based learning, and self-advocacy.

Pre-Employment Transition Tools for Students

Pre-employment transition tools are online advising tools for counselors, students, parents, and other stakeholders to help students make meaningful decisions about college or career plans. The online tools are intended to offer effective strategies and resources for providing college and career counseling to students with disabilities.

Program Participants in Texas

This section illustrates vocational rehabilitation services for persons with general disabilities. The data provide a snapshot of participants served by the VR program and include the number of customers served, age, gender, primary disability, and type of occupation.

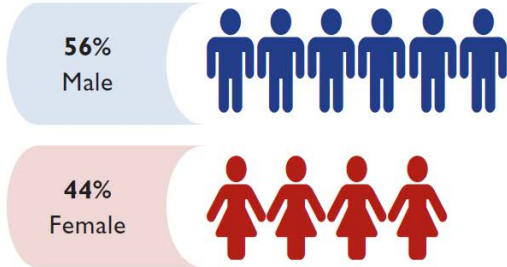
The following information is reprinted and adapted from the RCT report entitled *Rehabilitation Council of Texas 2017 Annual Report* (2017, pages 14-17).

Total Number Served – Physical Disabilities

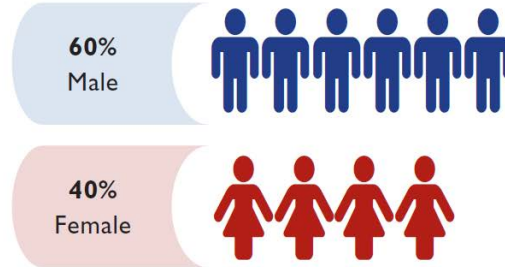
Total number served: 89,283

Total number served under age 23: 26,485

Percent Served by Gender—All Ages



Percent Served by Gender—Under Age 23



*Gender is unknown or unavailable for 29 consumers; missing for 13 consumers under 23

Percent Expenditure by Service Type

| Category | All Ages | Under 23 |
|--------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|
| Other Goods & Equipment | 1% | 0% |
| Post Acute Brain Injury | 1% | 0% |
| Maintenance & Transportation | 3% | 4% |
| Prosthetics & Orthotics | 5% | 1% |
| Job Placement Services | 6% | 5% |
| Assistive Technology | 6% | 1% |
| Other Services | 4% | 7% |
| Pre-Employment Transition Services | 5% | 15% |
| Medical Services | 10% | 1% |
| Supported Employment Services | 9% | 13% |
| Hearing Aids & Interpretive Services | 14% | 4% |
| Training | 22% | 41% |
| Diagnostic & Evaluation | 15% | 7% |
| TOTAL | 100% | 100% |

Disabilities Served

| Primary Disability | Number – All Ages | Percent – All Ages | Number – Under Age 23 | Percent Under Age 23 |
|-------------------------------------------|-------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|
| All Other Impairments | 220 | 0% | 93 | 0% |
| Cardia/Respiratory/Circulatory | 1,923 | 2% | 150 | 1% |
| Traumatic Brain Injury/Spinal Cord Injury | 1,961 | 2% | 317 | 1% |
| Unavailable | 7,623 | 9% | 1,872 | 7% |
| Substance Abuse | 1,990 | 2% | 64 | 0% |
| Other Chronic Diseases/Disorders | 5,404 | 6% | 334 | 1% |
| Deaf & Hard of Hearing | 13,362 | 15% | 1,919 | 7% |
| Mental/Emotional/Psychosocial | 16,058 | 18% | 2,871 | 11% |
| Neurological/Musculoskeletal/Orthopedic | 17,857 | 20% | 2,416 | 9% |
| Neurodevelopmental Disorders | 22,885 | 26% | 16,449 | 62% |
| TOTAL | 89,283 | 100% | 26,485 | 100% |

Total Successful Closures – Physical Disabilities

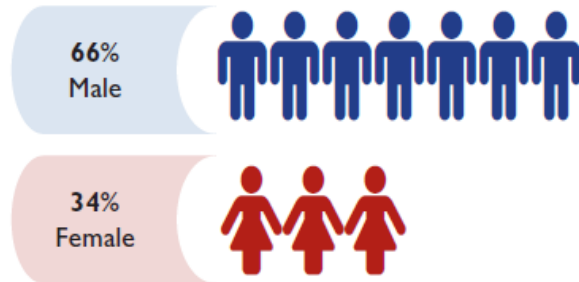
Total successful closures: 14,037

Total successful closures under age 23: 2,465

Percent Served by Gender—All Ages



Percent Served by Gender—Under Age 23



Percent of Successful Closures by Occupation

| Successful Closures by Occupation | Successful Closures All Ages | Successful Closures Under 23 |
|----------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| All Other Occupations | 0% | 0% |
| Computer, Engineering & Science | 2% | 1% |
| Construction and Extraction | 3% | 2% |
| Installation, Maintenance & Repair | 4% | 4% |
| Management, Business & Financial | 5% | 1% |
| Production | 5% | 6% |
| Sales & Related | 7% | 8% |
| Healthcare Practitioners, Technical & Healthcare Support | 8% | 5% |
| Education, Legal, Community Service, Arts & Media | 8% | 2% |
| Transportation & Material Moving | 10% | 8% |
| Office & Administrative Support | 22% | 29% |
| Service | 24% | 34% |
| TOTAL | 100% | 100% |

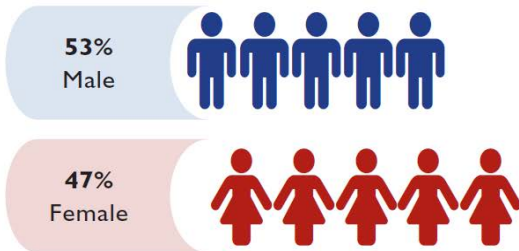
Total Number Served – Visual Disabilities

Visual disabilities data include blindness, significant visual impairments, and deafblindness.

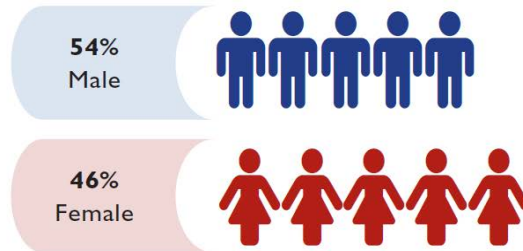
Total number served: 10,719

Total number served under age 23: 2,550

Percent Served by Gender—All Ages



Percent Served by Gender—Under Age 23



*Gender is unknown or unavailable for 1,586 consumers (2 Under Age 23), the majority of whom have not completed an application

Percent Expenditure by Service Type

| Service Category | All Ages | Under 23 |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|
| Job Placement | 1% | 0% |
| Supported Employment | 1% | 2% |
| Eyeglasses, Lenses, Low Vision Devices, Orthotics/Prosthetics | 3% | 3% |
| Maintenance & Transportation | 6% | 10% |
| All Other Goods & Services | 6% | 4% |
| Training (including Orientation & Mobility) | 10% | 12% |
| Assistive Technology, including related evaluation & training | 5% | 3% |
| Pre-Employment Transition Services | 22% | 23% |
| Medical Services | 11% | 26% |
| Supported Employment Services | 10% | 14% |
| Hearing Aids & Interpretive Services | 26% | 4% |
| TOTAL | 100% | 100% |

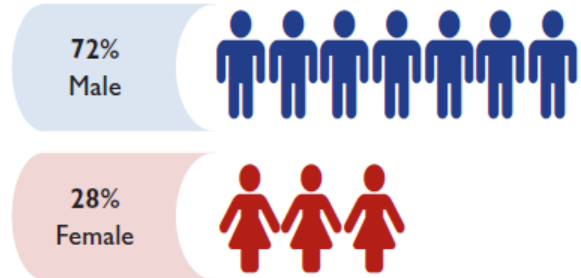
Total Successful Closures – Visual Disabilities

Total successful closures: 1,319

Percent Successful Closures by Gender—
All Ages



Percent Successful Closures by Gender—
Under Age 23



Percent of Successful Closures by Occupation

| Successful Closures by Occupation | Successful Closures, All Ages | Percent Successful Closures, All Ages | Successful Closures, Under Age 23 | Percent Successful Closures, Under Age 23 |
|----------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|
| All Other Occupations | 78 | 6% | 0 | 0% |
| Computer, Engineering & Science | 37 | 3% | 1 | 2% |
| Installation, Maintenance & Repair | 56 | 4% | 2 | 3% |
| Construction and Extraction | 49 | 4% | 2 | 3% |
| Transportation & Material Moving | 67 | 5% | 8 | 13% |
| Healthcare Practitioners, Technical & Healthcare Support | 103 | 8% | 2 | 3% |
| Sales & Related | 92 | 7% | 6 | 9% |
| Management, Business & Financial | 118 | 9% | 5 | 8% |
| Production | 113 | 9% | 5 | 8% |
| Education, Legal, Community Service, Arts & Media | 169 | 13% | 6 | 9% |
| Office & Administration Support | 221 | 17% | 14 | 22% |
| Service | 214 | 16% | 15 | 23% |
| TOTAL | 1,317 | 100% | 64 | 100% |

Concluding Comments

The VR program is designed to assess and provide services for eligible individuals with disabilities-physical, intellectual, and visual. The VR program plays a crucial role by enabling individuals with disabilities to prepare for and obtain employment through a variety of services ranging from career counseling to support for postsecondary education. The program focuses attention on an individual's strengths, abilities, and capabilities so that they are able to obtain competitive integrated employment that will offer opportunities for advancement and lead to economic self-sufficiency.

Individuals with disabilities are a critical resource for Texas employers and the economy because they offer unique skill sets and traits that have the potential of strengthening the Texas labor market. Individuals with disabilities are often challenged with barriers to competitive integrated employment. The VR program assists Texans by providing support and opportunities to acquire the skills to join the workforce, as well as by providing services to keep Texans employed through the use of adaptive strategies and technologies.

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