



State Rehabilitation Council

Public input for FY 2008 Vocational Rehabilitation Plan

The State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) for the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program of the Georgia Department of Labor will hold public comment hearings throughout the State regarding the state plan for delivery of vocational rehabilitation services for fiscal year 2008.

SRC COMMITTEE: PUBLIC INPUT SESSIONS – May 7-18th, 2007

Each year, the Georgia VR program is required to submit to the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) a plan which addresses how it proposes to provide a broad array of vocational rehabilitation services to Georgians with disabilities who are eligible. Public input and participation is requested regarding substantive changes, additions or improvements in the delivery of those VR services.

RSA is the federal agency responsible for administrative and fiduciary oversight for vocational rehabilitation funding disbursed by the United States Congress.

LOCATIONS, DATES and TIMES OF MEETINGS:

May 14	Macon Georgia Dept. of Labor Career Ctr. 3090 Mercer University Drive	10:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m. and 4:00 – 7:00 p.m.
May 15	Athens VR Regional Office 125 Athens West Parkway	10:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m. and 4:00 – 7:00 p.m.
May 16	Suwanee Gwinnett County Public Library Suwanee Branch 361 Main Street	1:00 – 6:00 p.m.
May 17	Rome Coosa Room Rome-Floyd County Library 205 Riverside Parkway	10:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.
May 18	Atlanta Floyd Room, West Tower 20 th Floor Sloppy Floyd Building 2 Martin Luther King, Jr. Drive	10:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m. and 4:00 – 7:00 p.m.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ABOUT MEETINGS:

A toll free number is available to request accommodations at the meetings. The toll-free number for VR Customer Service is 1-866-489-0001. VR Centers assist in giving information to clients. The State Plan, including the Strategic Plan, will be available one week prior to the first meeting.

PUBLIC INPUT:

Interpreters will be provided for non-English speaking participants, ASL etc.

Citizens attending the hearing who wish to comment for the record will be limited to five minutes; no two-way dialogue is permitted. Those who wish to comment but cannot attend the hearing in person may send written statements to Linda Shepard, Parents Educating Parents & Professionals, Inc., 3680 Kings Highway, Douglasville, GA 30135; or email them to shepard.linda@peppinc.org. Written statements are limited to two (2) pages, double spaced. PEPP will use “Survey Monkey” to conduct a survey on proposed changes to the plan. The survey and any additional information will be posted to our website on the home page www.peppinc.org.

The Georgia VR State Plan for fiscal 2008 may be reviewed online at www.vocrehabga.org, or in print at any regional or local VR office in the state. To locate the nearest office, or for more information about the public hearing, call VR Customer Service at 404-486-6331 or statewide toll free 1-866-489-0001.

Talking points have been drafted below and the full state plan can be viewed or downloaded at <http://www.vocrehabga.org/plnindex08.htm> or people can go to Ga. Dept of Labor, click on right side on Rehabilitation Services, then click on left side on State Plan, then click on 2008.

The survey hosted by PEPP, Inc can be accessed by clicking here <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.asp?u=399543830889> or visit the PEPP website at www.peppinc.org for all releases, survey link, talking points and updates.



Parents Educating Parents & Professionals, Inc. (PEPP) is proud to assist with the 2008 Vocational Rehabilitation Public Hearings. Send written comments to the attention of Linda Shepard, PEPP, by mail to 3680 Kings Highway, Douglasville, GA 30135; or email to shepard.linda@peppinc.org. Please limit written statements to two (2) pages. A survey of the proposed plan is also available at our PEPP web page at www.peppinc.org. You may also call our office at (770) 577-7771 or toll free at 800-322-7065 if you have any questions about submitting your comments or accessing the survey.

Comments and survey responses must be received by May 21, 2007.

***FY 08 State Plan – 110 Vocational Rehabilitation Program
Highlight Topics for Public Hearings***

1. **Plans to enhance services for clients who are Deaf, Blind and Deaf-Blind.** As noted in **Attachment 4.11(c) (1)** one of the State's top priorities and objectives is to augment services for customers with sensory disabilities to increase employment outcomes for this population. Attachment 4.11 (d) describes a variety of strategies to achieve that objective, including the following found on **page 8** for a continuum of specialized services:

- Establish and fill specialized staff positions for Rehabilitation Counselors, Assistive Work Technology (AWT) and other staff statewide;
- Create a State VR Sensory Unit that will be headed by a Director of Deafness, a Director of Blindness and a Coordinator of Deaf-Blindness to provide leadership, quality assurance and technical assistance to the field staff and community partners;
- Provide specialized sensory disability training (such as American Sign Language, Deaf Culture, specialized service techniques, and Center for the Visually Impaired training) for new specialized staff positions as well as current positions;
- Provide specialized transition services for young adults through specialized staff working with local school systems and at RWSIR and Cave Spring Rehabilitation Center (CSRC);
- Supply specialized AT: specialized equipment, computers and software for learning labs at RWSIR and CSRC, augmentative communication devices, etc;
- Increase specialized services: Enhance service available through Community Rehabilitation Programs (CRPs) and provide more interpreters, orientation and mobility (O & M) training, rehabilitation teachers, specialized needs assessments, communication skills training, leadership and self-advocacy skills, etc;
- Increase recruitment activities to attract more people to become interpreters, O & M specialists and rehabilitation teachers in Georgia. Also, perform recruitment activities to fill the specialized staff positions.
- Provide specialized training for clients: life skills assessments and training, employment training including work adjustment, job readiness, etc, and BEP specific training;
- Enhance education for students with sensory disabilities through RWSIR, CSRC, partnering with local school systems, Department of Technical and Adult Education and universities and colleges;
- Emphasize job development for clients with sensory disabilities
- Enhance residential services for education and training at RWSIR, CSRC and other CRPs; and
- Increase outreach and marketing.

Please provide comments and suggestions on:

- How can we improve services to increase employment outcomes for clients with sensory disabilities?
- How can we enhance sensory services and develop additional service options at CRPs, RWSIR and CSRC.
- How can we improve our recruitment results for specialized staff positions and for specialized service providers in Georgia?

2. **Plans to enhance services at the Roosevelt Warm Springs Institute for Rehabilitation (RWSIR) and at the Cave Spring Rehabilitation Center (CSRC).** As described in **Attachments 4.11(c) (1) and Attachment 4.11 (d)**, several goals, objectives and strategies relate to enhancing residential vocational services at RWSIR and CSRC. As described in the **Business Needs Justifications attached to the Comprehensive Needs Assessment in 4.11 (a)**, VR field counselors refer clients primarily ages 18 - 20 to these programs when their educational experiences did not adequately prepare them for living independently and going to work.

Many clients exit the public school system with a certificate of attendance instead of a diploma; thus, they are not allowed to access post secondary educational institutions. The RWSIR and CSRC programs provide education and training that assists clients in achieving their high school diplomas or a GED. Clients often need these program services for driver's education, training and assistance in obtaining a driver's license. A valid driver's license is an essential key for employment and independence, particularly in rural Georgia. Young adults with significant disabilities benefit from the opportunity to live away from home in a dormitory setting to develop social and independent living skills that will enhance their ability to go to work and live independently in the community.

There are only two residential vocational rehabilitation training programs in Georgia: the RWSIR in rural Warm Springs about 60 miles south of Atlanta and the CSRC located in the Northwest Georgia Mountains about 20 miles north of Rome. Together these programs have a maximum capacity of 200 beds available for the entire state. On June 30, 2006 there were 5,618 clients age 18 – 20 receiving VR services, and another 1,599 were closed on that date. There is great potential for more clients to benefit from these programs if the facilities had the capacity.

Please provide comments and suggestions on:

- What are the benefits and value of these residential vocational rehabilitation programs?
- How can we improve these residential program services to increase employment outcomes for people with significant disabilities?

3. **Plans to improve transition services for students with disabilities.**

As noted in **Attachment 4.11(c) (1)** a top priority for the State and one of its goals is to enhance transition services for students with disabilities to increase successful employment outcomes. The objectives relating to this goal as described on **page 2** of that document are:

- The VR Program will increase the number of transition students who go to work by 5% (47 additional clients successfully employed).
- The VR Program will collaborate with local school systems and the Department of Education to increase the number of dedicated rehabilitation counselors located in the schools by at least two new cooperative agreements per year.
- RWSIR will expand its partnership with the Department of Technical and Adult Education to develop at least two new certificate skills training programs for VR Unit students.
- The Business Enterprise Program (BEP) will create internships or mentoring opportunities for students who are blind to work with licensed blind vendors and/or explore careers in that field.
- RWSIR will initiate replacing the dormitory, enhance staffing patterns and improve training to increase capacity and improve services.

Please provide comments and suggestions on:

- How can we improve transition services to increase the number of students with disabilities who become successfully employed?
- How can we improve collaboration with local school systems and the State Department of Education to increase the number of dedicated rehabilitation counselors located in high schools?

4. Plans to cultivate relationships with more employers and meet their workforce needs. As noted in **Attachment 4.11(c) (1)** one of the State's goals is to help employers meet their human resources needs. **Attachment 4.11 (d)** describes a variety of strategies to achieve that goal and associated objectives, including the following strategies found on **pages 3 – 4**:

- The Rehabilitation Employment Specialists will continue to collaborate with the Employment Marketing Representatives in the Career Centers to expand relationships, avoid duplication of contacts with employers, and maximize employment opportunities for people with disabilities, particularly in for jobs with higher wages. The 110 Rehabilitation Program Leadership will work with GDOL Field Services and Employment Services Leadership to develop a more coordinated process and consistent, systematic approach statewide for these activities as well as to develop and provide the information technology programs needed to support this effort.
- The 110 Program will cultivate relationships with the State Employer Committee and Local Employer Committees by continuing to attend their meetings, participate in their initiatives, and educate them about the potential that people with disabilities have to be great employees for their businesses. This includes participation and attendance at the Annual State Employer Committee Conference. Through these relationships, the 110 Program will enlist Employer Committees' support to increase the number of employers who hire VR clients for the first time. Usually once employers experience people with disabilities as excellent employees, they will hire more VR clients.
- BEP will collaborate with VR to facilitate having the BEP licensed blind vendors hire more qualified people with disabilities as helpers in the BEP facilities.
- VR will collaborate with Georgia Industries for the Blind to refer clients who are blind and assist with job placement for those who choose to work in manufacturing and packaging jobs.
- RWSIR will participate in the Meriwether County manpower and employer coalitions and will identify the local employers who would benefit most from employing VR students in the RWSIR skills training programs. RWSIR will then develop a new customized skills training program to meet the workforce needs of each unique employer. The CSRC will conduct similar activities in the Floyd County area.

Please provide comments and suggestions on:

- How can we enhance relationships with employers to increase the number of employers who hire VR clients for the first time?
- How can we improve collaboration with employers and technical schools to develop specific skills training programs to meet workforce needs, especially for jobs in high demand with higher salaries?