



issue brief

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Rehabilitation Research & Training Center

Supporting Transition-Aged Youth After WIOA: A Look At State Vocational Rehabilitation Agencies

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The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) of 2014 is transforming how federally funded job training programs help prepare workers for the labor force. The law is aimed at increasing opportunities, through innovation and support, particularly for those facing barriers in the labor force. One implication of the law is a renewed emphasis on the role that state vocational rehabilitation agencies (SVRAs) play in preparing transition-age youth for employment. WIOA requires that at least 15 percent of SVRA resources be spent on providing preemployment transition services (PETS) to transition-age youth. PETS include job-based counseling, work-based learning experiences, postsecondary counseling, workplace readiness training, and self-advocacy instruction.

Introduction

To meet this requirement, SVRAs may expand existing programs or offer new ones. Administrators and counselors can look to other SVRAs to identify new programs; because information on SVRA programs is not centralized, however, it may be difficult to gather this information. Furthermore, the published literature contains limited information on these programs, either on the services provided or on their effectiveness.

This brief provides an overview of current programs that SVRAs offer to transition-age youth. Using information from 2015 state plans and recent Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) monitoring reports, we identified 186 SVRA programs that focus on serving transition-age youth and 89 additional programs that could serve youth. (For more details, see the methods appendix at the end of this issue brief.) Most of the programs emphasize improving employment outcomes, but some also aim to enhance other outcomes (such as high school completion and postsecondary education).

This brief and the database are products of the Rehabilitation Research and Training Center (the Center) on Vocational Rehabilitation Practices for Youth and Young Adults. The Center was funded by the National Institute for Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research (NIDILRR) to expand the evidence base on VR services for youth and young adults with disabilities in the United States.

Database of SVRA Programs

To help SVRA administrators more easily access the wealth of information on programs that other SVRAs offer, we compiled a database of the 275 programs we identified that are available to transition-age youth. To do this, we reviewed the 2015 state plans that SVRAs provided to RSA, along with RSA's most recent monitoring reports, for the 51 combined or general SVRAs (one for every state, plus the District of Columbia). In addition to 186 transition-specific programs, the database includes 89 programs that do not specifically target transition-age youth and agencies' involvement with Project SEARCH, for a total of 275 programs.

The database is a resource for SVRA administrators looking for ideas to create new programs or enhance existing ones. It includes a brief description of each program, whether the program targets specific subpopulations, and program components, such as whether the program offers internship opportunities, job coaching, or training for youth, their families, or counselors. Administrators can filter programs in the database based on SVRA and program characteristics to help identify programs that serve specific clients or functions. The database can be accessed on the Center's website. (Figure 1 shows a preview of the database).

Figure 1

Preview of Online Database Listing Programs, by SVRA

State Vocational Rehabilitation Agency	Program Name	Description	Targets Transition Aged Youth	Target Population Served	Program Offerings
Alabama (ADRS)	Jointly Funded Job Coaches	Provide services to students in final year of high school; provides information on job application process including appropriate attire and punctuality; on-site job coaching	Yes	Not specified	Resume and/or job coaching
Alabama (ADRS)	Project SEARCH	Places students finishing high school in a real work setting with a large employer; develops client work habits and skills	Yes	Not specified	No information
Alabama (ADRS)	GATE (Gaining Access to Employment) Program	Training program that takes consumers from sheltered work or day habitation and fully immerses them in industry training	No	Not specified	Job training
Alabama (ADRS)	Transition Conference	Provides transition training and updates for counselors, transition staff, and education officials	Yes	Not specified	Staff training and collaboration
Alabama (ADRS)	Prison transition initiative	Serves youth with disabilities incarcerated in adult prisons	Yes	Incarcerated	Resume and/or job coaching, life skills
Alabama (ADRS)	College Prep Program 4.10	Serves youth with disabilities	Yes	Not specified	No information

Key Findings

On average, SVRA reports described five programs for transition-age youth, although there is substantial agency variation in the number and types of programs (Figure 2). For example, three agencies (New Mexico; Washington, DC; and Wyoming) describe no programs, but one agency (New Hampshire) describes nine programs. Most programs are not statewide; rather, they serve a small number of youth who live in selected geographic areas.

Table 1

Percentage of SVRAs with transition-specific youth programs, by program goals and components

Program Goals and Components	Percentage of Agencies
Number of agencies	51
Program goals	
Employment	90.2
Postsecondary education	47.1
High school completion	23.5
Program components	
Job training	54.9
Life skills	43.1
Resume building or job coaching	33.3
Internships	37.3
Outreach and training for youth and their families	35.3
Training and conferences for staff	39.2
Assessment of client needs	39.2

Sources: Analysis of the 2015 SVRA state plans and the most recent monitoring reports found at <https://rsa.ed.gov/about-your-state.cfm> as of December 2015

Table 2

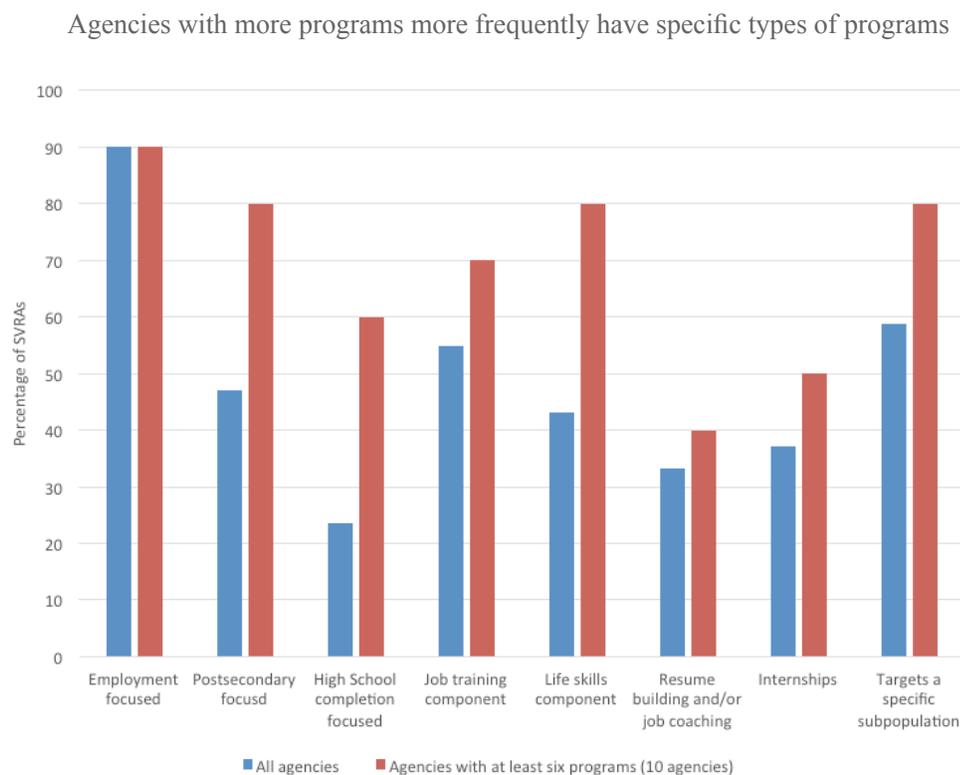
Percentage of SVRAs with transition-specific youth programs, by population served

Target Population	Percentage of Agencies
Number of agencies	51
Youth with autism	11.8
Youth with blindness	9.8
Incarcerated youth	9.8
Youth with psychiatric impairments	5.9
Minority youth	7.8
Youth with severe or complex disabilities	15.7
Other target population specified	29.4

Sources: Analysis of the 2015 SVRA state plans and the most recent monitoring reports found at <https://rsa.ed.gov/about-your-state.cfm> as of December 2015

As Figure 2 shows, some agencies have more programs than others. We found that agencies with more programs offer a greater variety of programs. To illustrate, Figure 3 compares the offerings of the 10 agencies with the most transition-specific programs (six or more) to those of the full sample of 51 agencies. Agencies with more programs more often offer programs that target improving postsecondary education and high school completion. A greater share of them also offer programs with each of the program components we measured. In addition, these agencies more frequently have programs that target a specific transition-age youth subpopulation.

Figure 3



Sources: Analysis of the 2015 SVRA state plans and the most recent monitoring reports found at <https://rsa.ed.gov/about-your-state.cfm> as of December 2015

Note: The 10 agencies with at least six programs are Alabama, Colorado, Georgia, Montana, Nevada, New Hampshire, New York, South Carolina, South Dakota, and Virginia.

Discussion

SVRAs vary substantially in the number of programs offered specifically for transition-age youth, ranging from zero to nine programs. Most SVRAs have programs that directly focus on employment, and fewer have programs that focus on other goals (such as high school completion or postsecondary education).

As agencies move forward to satisfy WIOA requirements and to help administrators understand the breadth of programs offered to clients at other agencies, the accompanying database can be a source for ideas on how to expand or create new programs. Our data are limited to only what the agencies reported in the state plans and monitoring reports, and some SVRAs might not have reported all their programs for youth or provided complete details about their programs; however, no other data source provides comprehensive information on SVRA offerings. The database can be accessed on the center's website at www.vrpracticesandyouth.org.

Methods Appendix

In this appendix, we describe our methodology for extracting information on SVRA programs that we include in the database. Our data come exclusively from two sources: (1) the SVRAs' 2015 RSA state plans, and (2) RSA's monitoring reports posted as of December 2015 (available on <http://rsa.ed.gov>). We limited our sources to state plans and monitoring reports to ensure that we used comparable data for all agencies. In addition, we limited our analysis to the 51 combined and general SVRAs; consequently, we exclude SVRAs specific to the blind and visually impaired or that serve U.S. territories.

Our primary focus was on identifying programs that serve transition-age youth. For our document review, we used a standardized tool to abstract key data from the state plans and monitoring reports. We reviewed the documents for innovations, initiatives, and efforts to serve transition-age youth to improve employment or education outcomes. We conducted a keyword search using "transition," "youth," "young adults," and "students." Through this process, we compiled a list to document each identified program from an SVRA, along with its characteristics. Program characteristics we documented include hiring new staff for transition services; measuring, monitoring, or evaluating the effectiveness of youth services; conducting outreach through high schools and other state and local agencies; coordinating with community colleges; and targeting programs to specific types of youth. We identified 186 programs that specifically target transition-age youth.

In addition to the SVRA programs specifically serving transition-age youth, the database contains two other sets of programs that could benefit these youth. These are (1) SVRA programs that are not youth specific but that could improve employment and education outcomes (58 programs); and (2) 31 Project Search programs described in the SVRA documents, even though the SVRA may not manage them.

Two caveats are important to consider when reviewing the database and interpreting the results. First, our data are limited to what the agencies reported in the state plans and monitoring reports. Some SVRAs might not have reported all their programs for youth or provided complete details about their program; however, no other data source provides comprehensive information on SVRA offerings. Second, although the agencies update and report the state plans annually, the timeliness of the monitoring reports varies, ranging from 2009 to 2013; earlier reports might not capture recently initiated SVRA programs. Despite these caveats, the compilation of the 275 programs into a unified source should be useful to SVRAs as they seek to expand offerings.

References

Mann, David R. "Employment Programs for Transition-Age Youth with Disabilities That Feature Vocational Rehabilitation Services and Supports: A Literature Review." Youth-VR RRTC issue brief. 2015. Available at <http://vrpracticesandyouth.org>

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Funding & Citation

by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Community Living, Grant Number: 90RT5034-02-01

Swankoski, K., Rosenbluth, S., Sevak, P. (2016) Supporting Transition-Aged Youth After WIOA: A Look At State Vocational Rehabilitation Agencies. VR and Youth Rehabilitation Research and Training Center Info Brief, Issue No. 02. Rockville, MD: TransCen, Inc.