a. Input of State Rehabilitation Council

All agencies, except for those that are independent consumer-controlled commissions, must describe the following:

1. input provided by the State Rehabilitation Council, including input and recommendations on the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan, recommendations from the Council's report, the review and analysis of consumer satisfaction, and other Council reports that may have been developed as part of the Council’s functions;

The MCB RC has made the following recommendations for FFY 2018 on VR services

* Make budget recommendations and advocate, when appropriate, to ensure that MCB both receives sufficient VR funding and provides appropriate and cost-effective services for consumers;
* Through interaction with pertinent MCB staff, as well as the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and the AIM Library, continue to try to ascertain the number and percentage of blind students currently receiving braille instruction and orientation and mobility instruction, and what criteria are being used to make such decisions;
* Ensure that MCB’s social services and vocational rehabilitation staff can fully participate in IEP meetings for children and youth;
* Enhance the service delivery of MCB VR counselors to increase job development activities, job placement services, technology services, job retention, and job coaching services to all individuals (including individuals with other disabilities in addition to blindness) receiving vocational services at MCB regional offices;
* Work with committee chairs to grow and increase the productivity of RC committees;
* Work and advocate for accessibility of state and local government portal systems, including all applications for services and all documents posted on these portals; and
* Continue to work with state officials to support the Commonwealth’s initiative to move forward as a model employer.

For some time, the MCB RC has been concerned that the availability and quality of braille instruction provided by school systems to elementary through high school age children can vary in quality and frequency from town to town. The MCB RC supports the agency ‘s decision to take the lead in revitalizing the Braille Literacy Council. The MCB RC has made no specific recommendations during the past year to the agency on this issue.

The MCB RC is concerned about the increasing difficulty that blind job seekers have in filling out inaccessible company applications. The agency does have employment specialists as well as VR counselors who can help consumers but does agree that this is a major issue and that advocacy from consumer groups and collaboration is very important for the long term in making these websites more accessible. The MCB RC has made no specific recommendations during the past year to the agency on this issue.

MCB and the MCB RC are concerned that vending stands in Massachusetts have been on the decline. MCB continues to explore other opportunities away from the food industry in an attempt to diversify the program. A partnership has been established with the Lottery Commission where MCB has offered to evaluate and test new lottery machines currently being procured by the department for accessibility. The MCB RC has made no additional recommendations during the past year to the agency on this issue.

MCB RC members remain very interested in the effects of MCB ‘s usage of Section 257 (State statute) to evaluate the purchase pricing of services through community providers. The intent of the law is to simplify pricing and make it more efficient. MCB has explained that this rate restructuring will benefit consumers heavily impacted by older and more complicated pricing, including the deaf-blind and multiply-impaired populations. Most vendors are happy with the newer simpler 257 rates. In 2017, the state increased the rates for services provided through the Competitive Integrated Employment contracts. The price increase will be in effect as of July 1, 2018. In the RC annual report, the MCB RC had expressed a commitment to increasing employment prospects of MCB’s supported employment consumers by exploring opportunities with the state’s Department of Developmental Services. The rate increase assures access to more providers for MCB consumers. MCB will continue to update the Council on this issue on a regular basis as implementation continues.

 MCB RC has continued to review the consumer satisfaction studies conducted annually on a routine basis. The Council had in previous years provided input into the design of these studies as well as the design of the comprehensive needs assessment study. The data collection for the latest comprehensive needs assessment study was completed before the new requirements for inclusion of need for pre-employment transition services were added. The MCB RC agreed with the agency proposal for a separate needs assessment survey to be sent out for parents to fill out for this population (age 14-22) about their educational services, pre-employment transition services, transition services and vocational services. The MCB RC has been working with the agency on the development and implementation of the 2018 comprehensive needs assessment methodology in line with the requirements and focus of WIOA on competitive integrated employment. One focus group has been held and a draft survey has been developed. The MCB RC approved a survey that the agency mailed out to registered consumers as part of the comprehensive needs assessment seeking feedback on VR services. Two questions on the survey asked the recipients if they needed VR services including Pre-ETS. The survey also solicited consumer email addressed to facilitate further communication. The survey identified a total of 285 consumers seeking VR services (264 for general VR services and 56 for Pre-ETS). The agency has already utilized the email addresses by emailing MCB’s annual report to consumers that highlighted successful VR consumers. The report has been met with positive feedback. MCB will continue to use email as a communication tool with consumers and as part of its needs assessment strategy.

MCB, in consultation with the MCB RC and a number of other agencies serving the blind, commissioned a comprehensive needs assessment that was completed in 2005. The methodology used for the assessment was a telephone poll conducted by UMass Poll of a random sample of registrants. The MCB RC was satisfied with the original comprehensive needs assessment conducted for MCB by the UMass Poll, so it was decided that MCB staff would replicate the comprehensive needs assessment. Other needs assessments were completed during FY 2009 and FY 2012. A fourth needs assessment, using the same questions and methodology was completed in 2016. In addition, a separate needs assessment was completed relative to the needs of youth aged 14-22 for educational services, pre-employment transition services, transition services, and vocational services.

The MCB RC is considering whether a web-based interface is appropriate for further data collection. The RC has expressed concerns that Survey Monkey is not secure so the security and accessibility of Google Forms or other web-based survey facilities will be explored. One of the MCB RC goals for federal fiscal year 2018 is to expand committees and work with the chairs to increase the productivity of RC committees. MCB will work with a committee on needs assessment to finalize the needs assessment methodology.

The MCB RC has had a long-term interest in transportation accessibility and its impact on the ability of consumers to pursue vocational objectives. The director of MCB ‘s Mobility Unit attends a number of meetings on regional and statewide transportation issues to keep the agency informed on issues relevant to transportation accessibility. MCB and the RC are closely following new transportation options such as UBER, Lyft etc. A number of blind persons who are proficient with technology have benefitted from these services. While the MCB RC believes that lack of transportation is a major barrier to consumers’ ability to participate in VR services and to obtain employment, it has made no specific recommendations during the past year to the agency on this issue.

The MCB RC continues to pay close attention to the agency’s implementation of the Work Force Innovation and Opportunity Act. MCB provides updates on the effort at each meeting. The agency and the council have continued to refine goals and priorities and plans for innovation and expansion based on the new law. MCB and the Rehabilitation Council are in full support of the Workforce Development Plan Vision that all Massachusetts residents will benefit from a seamless system of education and workforce services that supports career pathways for individuals and leads to a more informed, educated, and skilled workforce, which meets the Commonwealth ‘s businesses’ demands and sustains a thriving economy.

The agency and the council are committed to the following paths to the realization of that vision:

WIOA and its state plan requirements have been discussed at each quarterly meeting of the Rehabilitation Council since its enactment.

* Work with Core Program partners to promote Career Pathways for individuals who are legally blind and to improve the one-stop delivery system.
* Strengthen the alignment of the MCB VR program with the other core programs of the workforce development system.
* Use state and regional labor market information analysis to develop more employment options for consumers who are legally blind, utilizing regional labor market data, regional economic development agencies, and business intelligence gathered from interactions with core partners.
* Participate in the development of a coordinated, streamlined regional strategy for business partner outreach and follow up.

The agency ‘s performance on RSA standards and indicators has at all times met the minimum level of overall performance established by RSA.

Agency-specific results for FFY 2016 (this is the most recent period with available data) for all Individuals are:

* Percentage of total consumers who received services from the agency was 93% whereas the national average is 71.90%.
* The employment rate for MCB was 83.1%; the national average for blindness agencies was 65.80%.
* Percentage of MCB consumers who exited with employment was 80.6%; the national average for blindness agencies was 47.30%.
* Average hourly earnings for competitive employment outcomes for MCB was $24.16; the national average was $15.61.
* Quarterly median earnings for MCB was $7,501; the national average was $4,927.

Agency-specific results for FY 2016 for youth under age 25 are:

* Percentage of total MCB individuals who exited with employment: 75.76%, the national average 30.27%.
* The employment rate for MCB consumers 75.76%, the national average: 48.50%.
* Competitive employment outcomes for MCB consumers: 96.00%, the national average: 96.72%

For the FFY 2016, RSA introduced new standards and indicators to align with WIOA requirements. RSA has measures for all consumers and added a separate group for youth under 25 years. In addition, as required by WIOA, homemaker closures have been eliminated. MCB shared the new measures with MCB RC members. The chair of the RC was involved in MCB’s Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) Vocational Rehabilitation program monitoring the week of September 11, 2017 where the measures were discussed. The MCB RC has made no specific recommendations during the year on VR performance evaluations. It did make recommendations and participate as a partner in the development of the plan goals. All of the MCB RC recommendations on plan goals have been adopted and are included in this plan.

The Rehabilitation Council submits an annual report to the Governor of Massachusetts and to the Rehabilitation Services Administration.

•2. the Designated State unit's response to the Council’s input and recommendations; and

The MCB RC has made no specific recommendations during the past year on VR services and performance evaluations. It did make recommendations and participate as a partner in the development of the plan goals. All of the MCB RC recommendations on plan goals were jointly developed, agreed to, and adopted and are included in this plan (Section l. State Goals and Priorities).

3. the designated State unit’s explanations for rejecting any of the Council’s input or recommendations.

No input or recommendations were rejected.

i. Comprehensive System of Personnel Development; Data System on Personnel and Personnel Development

(Formerly known as Attachment 4.10)). Describe the designated State agency's procedures and activities to establish and maintain a comprehensive system of personnel development designed to ensure an adequate supply of qualified State rehabilitation professional and paraprofessional personnel for the designated State unit, including the following:

1. Data System on Personnel and Personnel Development

A. Qualified Personnel Needs.

Describe the development and maintenance of a system for collecting and analyzing on an annual basis data on qualified personnel needs with respect to:

i. the number of personnel who are employed by the State agency in the provision of VR services in relation to the number of individuals served, broken down by personnel category;

The average caseload per MCB vocational rehabilitation counselor is 70 vocational rehabilitation consumers. Growth in MCB’s consumer base has been fairly static during the past few years. Based upon this pattern and an agency turnover rate of about 3 %, it is projected that there will be a need for some 5--7 entry-level direct services staff over the next five years. The agency estimates that in FY 2019, it will serve approximately 1,300 legally blind individuals. The agency believes that numbers and types of personnel listed below are adequate and will continue to be adequate in five years, based on projections of the number of individuals to be served, including individuals with significant disabilities, the number of personnel expected to retire or leave the field, and other relevant factors.

* Administrative Staff: 16, Rehabilitation Counselors & Employment Specialists: 19, Other Direct Service (AT engineers, OM, RT, etc.): 14, Direct Service Supervisors: 4 and Clerical and Support Staff: 5

ii. the number of personnel currently needed by the State agency to provide VR services, broken down by personnel category; and current vacancies.

* Administrative Staff: 0, Rehabilitation Counselors & Employment Specialists: 1, Other Direct Service (AT engineers, OM, RT, etc.): 1, Direct Service Supervisors: 0 Clerical and Support Staff: 0

iii. projections of the number of personnel, broken down by personnel category, who will be needed by the State agency to provide VR services in 5 years based on projections of the number of individuals to be served, including individuals with significant disabilities, the number of personnel expected to retire or leave the field, and other relevant factors.

* Projected vacancies over the next five years: Administrative Staff: 2 Rehabilitation Counselors: 1 Other Direct Service (AT engineers, OM, RT, etc.): 1 Direct Service Supervisors: 0 Clerical and Support Staff: 1

B. Personnel Development

Describe the development and maintenance of a system for collecting and analyzing on an annual basis data on personnel development with respect to:

i. a list of the institutions of higher education in the State that are preparing VR professionals, by type of program;

Assumption College

Springfield College

University of Massachusetts at Boston

Many MCB staff have graduated from these programs over the years; one staff member was awarded an M.S. in Rehabilitation Counseling at the University of Massachusetts in May 2017 and another a M.S. in Rehabilitation Counseling at Assumption College in 2016.

ii. the number of students enrolled at each of those institutions, broken down by type of program; and

In a given academic year, upwards of 100 undergraduate students and 125 graduate students are enrolled in degree programs, either full-time or part-time, as rehabilitation "majors" at Assumption College, Springfield College, Salve Regina, and the University of Massachusetts at Boston.

iii. the number of students who graduated during the prior year from each of those institutions with certification or licensure, or with the credentials for certification or licensure, broken down by the personnel category for which they have received, or have the credentials to receive, certification or licensure.

Each year, upwards of 50 undergraduate students are awarded the Bachelor’s degree and upwards of 60 graduate level students graduate with credentials to qualify for certification by the Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification and/or licensure by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

2. Plan for Recruitment, Preparation and Retention of Qualified Personnel

Describe the development and implementation of a plan to address the current and projected needs for qualified personnel including, the coordination and facilitation of efforts between the designated State unit and institutions of higher education and professional associations to recruit, prepare, and retain personnel who are qualified, including personnel from minority backgrounds and personnel who are individuals with disabilities.

* As part of its ongoing In-Service Training Program, MCB’s Staff Development Unit regularly conducts needs assessments of the professional staff to identify training requirements and areas needing attention. The Staff Development Unit also utilizes the resources of Technical Assistance Center at the Institute for Community Inclusion for needs assessment data; direct training programs; and referral and evaluation of trainers, lecturers, and presenters. MCB’s Staff Development Unit utilizes this data to plan, budget and provide the most comprehensive training plan possible.
* MCB is a leader in the area of adaptive technology and has long utilized its in-house resources to keep its professional staff current in this area.
* Training on the Rehabilitation Act is regularly included in the annual training calendar.
* Recruitment is conducted through mechanisms such as the Massachusetts online job recruitment site and at job fairs. Preparation is accomplished through new staff orientation, supervision, and on-going training.
* MCB has had a productive relationship with the graduate rehabilitation-counseling program at Assumption College. MCB has been able, over the past several years, to recruit one student to complete an internship at the agency. Six graduates, trained in rehabilitation of the blind, have been hired as MCB rehabilitation counselors. MCB also has developed a positive relationship with the University of Massachusetts, Master of Science in Rehabilitation Counseling program and has hired several recent graduates as rehabilitation counselors. Another college, Cambridge College, has recently begun offering coursework in Rehabilitation Counseling. MCB is in contact with the college and sends job openings to the college.

3. Personnel Standards

Describe the State agency's policies and procedures for the establishment and maintenance of personnel standards consistent with section 101(a)(7)(B) and 34 CFR 361.18(c) to ensure that designated State unit professional and paraprofessional personnel are adequately trained and prepared, including:

A. standards that are consistent with any national or State-approved or -recognized certification, licensing, registration, or other comparable requirements that apply to the profession or discipline in which such personnel are providing VR services; and

In accordance with 34 CFR 361.18 c (2)(I), the highest requirements in the State applicable to a professional discipline means the highest entry-level academic degree needed for any national or State approved or recognized certification, licensing, or registration requirement. In Massachusetts, pursuant to 34 CFR 361.18 (c) (2)(I), the degree needed if a person chooses to apply for state licensure is a master’s in rehabilitation counseling or a related field. Persons who have attained a master’s degree in rehabilitation counseling or have been awarded a license in rehabilitation counseling by the Board of Allied Mental Health and Human Services Professions before July 1, 1999 are deemed to have met the academic standard. Meeting the academic standard requires the attainment of a master’s degree in rehabilitation counseling or a related field from a recognized educational institution and successful completion of a graduate-level course in each of the following areas: • Job Placement or Occupational Information; • Vocational Assessment and Evaluation; • Vocational Counseling; and • Medical or Psychosocial Aspects of Disabilities The Massachusetts Commission for the Blind defines a person with a master’s degree in a related field as one who has a master’s degree with a major in Counseling, Guidance, Psychology, Education, Special Education, Social Work, Human Services, Human Development, Sociology, or in a major that has been determined to be comparable by the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind. Some years ago, the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind developed an Action Plan to Comply with Section 101(a)(7) of the Rehabilitation Act in conjunction with the Regional Office of the Rehabilitation Services Administration. This plan called for completion of a plan by which all existing Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors (VRCs) who did not have a master ‘s degree in rehabilitation counseling or a related field would be on a mandatory schedule to fulfill this academic requirement, consistent with the ongoing provisions of federal law and in accordance with the MCB State Division of Human Resources and labor union policies and/or agreement(s). All vocational rehabilitation counselors who did not meet this standard have now completed additional graduate-level work to meet CSPD requirements. The Massachusetts Commission for the Blind has for a number of years begun to apply the master’s-level standard to new hires, if at all possible.

B. the establishment and maintenance of education and experience requirements, in accordance with section 101(a)(7)(B)(ii) of the Rehabilitation Act, to ensure that the personnel have a 21st century understanding of the evolving labor force and the needs of individuals with disabilities.

MCB actively recruits new rehabilitation staff from area graduate-level college and university programs. The agency also provides a number of short-term training opportunities for vocational rehabilitation staff. Examples of short-term training provided in FY 2017 include:

* [Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)](https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osers/rsa/wioa-reauthorization.html) (3-part series)
* Case Documentation Writing
* ADA Training: Employer Responsibilities
* Traumatic Brain Injury
* VR Ethics Training - Client Rights in Transition and Client Employment Rights
* Trauma & Survivor Services
* Vision, Eye Diseases and Functional Impact
* Basics of Work Incentives
* Nuts and Bolts of SSI and SSDI, State Benefits and Health Insurance
* Visible at Last: Best Bests for Delivering Services to the Transgender Population
* Adjusting to the Challenges of Vision Loss: How You Can Help
* Transition Assessments
* Mental Health: Mood Disorders and Anxiety Disorders
* Human Service Work Safety
* Assistive Technology Day for MCB Staff

In June 2017, all vocational rehabilitation staff attended a ‘Visons of Collaboration’ conference on pre-employment employment transition services. The focus of this annual conference is creating stronger, more productive collaborations between MCB vocational professionals and teachers of the visually impaired as well as other transition and special education representatives.

4. Staff Development.

Describe the State agency's policies, procedures, and activities to ensure that, consistent with section101(a)(7)(C) of the Rehabilitation Act, all personnel employed by the designated State unit receive appropriate and adequate training in terms of:

A. System of staff development

a system of staff development for professionals and paraprofessionals within the designated State unit, particularly with respect to assessment, vocational counseling, job placement, and rehabilitation technology, including training implemented in coordination with entities carrying out State programs under section 4 of the Assistive Technology Act of 1998; and

The Steering Committee of the Massachusetts Workforce Investment Board will work with MCB, Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission and Department of Career Services to coordinate cross-training for staff including training on labor market information and technology tools which are high priorities. Cross-training staff will be available across all partners (economic development organizations, Workforce Development Boards, One-Stop Career Centers, TANF-SNAP, adult education, vocational rehabilitation, business services, veterans, and other key programs) on the online technology tools available to individuals across programs including JobQuest, TORQ, Career Information System, etc. MCB VR staff members have also participated in several webinars offered by the Job Driven Vocational Rehabilitation Technical Assistance Center (JDVRTAC) including a live-webinar: Common Performance Measures Technical Assistance and Training – WINTAC NDI Team, National Disability Institute

The agency also offers participation in an Aspiring Supervisor Certificate Program in order to prepare interested staff to apply for supervisory positions that are expected to become vacant within the next few years.

MCB intends to take advantage of any other webinars and training opportunities on workforce and labor force needs offered by the JDVRTAC.

B. Acquisition and dissemination of significant knowledge

procedures for the acquisition and dissemination of significant knowledge from research and other sources to designated State unit professionals and paraprofessionals.

The Commission acquires and routinely disseminates rehabilitation materials and research to staff such as the latest publications from the Institute on Rehabilitation on Issues, training materials from the Research and Training Centers, training guides and resource materials produced by recipients of RSA training grants, and literature from the American Foundation for the Blind and the National Research and Training Center on Blindness and Low Vision at Mississippi State University. In addition, each counselor and supervisor has a personal computer giving them access to a wide variety of software applications and websites to acquire rehabilitation materials and research reports.

5. Personnel to Address Individual Communication Needs

Describe how the designated State unit has personnel or obtains the services of other individuals who are able to communicate in appropriate modes of communication with or in the native language of applicants or eligible individuals who have limited English speaking ability.

The agency has two Rehabilitation Teachers who are fluent in Spanish, and another Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor who is fluent in both Albanian and Greek languages. One VR supervisor speaks French and the language of the Congo; one speaks Italian. MCB also has one staff member is fluent in Polish and another staff member is fluent in Kiswahili. MCB VR counselors who work with deaf-blind individuals are proficient in American Sign Language.

6. Coordination of Personnel Development Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

As appropriate, describe the procedures and activities to coordinate the designated State unit's comprehensive system of personnel development with personnel development under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

The Memorandum of Understanding between MCB and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education contains provisions to explore ways to develop cross-training opportunities on transition and pre-employment transition services and the first annual ‘Visions of Collaboration’ conference was held in June 2017 for all VR staff, Pre-ETS counselors, TVIs and other transition team partners in Massachusetts school districts. In 2017 MCB developed Memorandum of Understanding with the Department of Mental Health and the Department of Developmental Services. These Memoranda of Understanding include provisions for the cross training of staff to improve shared client service delivery. In January 2017 the Department of Developmental Services delivered training for all VR staff and the Department of Mental Health will be delivering training in April of 2018. In March 2017 MCB delivered training “Adjustment to the Challenges of Vision Loss” for the Department of Developmental Services at their annual “A FOCUS on Vision” conference. In March 2017 the MA Office on Disability delivered a training program for all VR staff on ADA Training: Employer Responsibilities. In September 2017 MCB delivered cross training for all Department of Transitional Assistance’s Service Coordinators who are responsible for the effective service delivery of agency services for clients with disabilities. In addition, MCB has had VR and Pre-ETS staff attend ongoing training at the Federation for Children with Special Needs.

#### k. Annual Estimates

Describe:

##### 1. The number of individuals in the State who are eligible for services;

The number of potentially eligible legally blind persons in Massachusetts is approximately 26,000, the number of persons currently registered as legally blind; approximately, 65% of the registrants are aged 65 and older.

##### 2. The number of eligible individuals who will receive services under:

###### A. The VR Program;

The Massachusetts Commission for the Blind estimates that approximately 1,300 legally blind individuals per year will receive VR services as active consumers during FF18. In October 2017, MCB established a new eligible category for individuals with low vision with a progressive visual impairment (including dual sensory loss) and a diagnosis leading to legal blindness. MCB shall provide all VR services to individuals who qualify for services under the low vision category in accordance with the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as most recently amended. This improves the opportunity for the caseload to grow substantially. The definition of legal blindness in Massachusetts is: A person is legally blind if his/her visual acuity is, with correction, 20/200 or less in the better eye, or if, regardless of visual acuity, the peripheral field of his/her vision is reduced to a radius of 10 degrees or less. The definition for the new category includes a visual acuity of 20/70 or less in the better eye after best correction, due to a condition that is expected to lead to legal blindness; or a visual field no greater than 40 degrees’ radius in the better eye with correction, due to a condition that is expected to lead to legal blindness.

###### B. The Supported Employment Program; and

It is estimated that 20-30 individuals with the most significant disabilities will be provided with Supported Employment services.

###### C. each priority category, if under an order of selection;

The Massachusetts Commission for the Blind is not under an Order of Selection and does not anticipate that an Order of Selection will be necessary in FFY 2018.

##### 3. The number of individuals who are eligible for VR services, but are not receiving such services due to an order of selection; and

The Massachusetts Commission for the Blind is not under an Order of Selection and does not anticipate that an Order of Selection will be necessary in FFY 2018.

##### 4. The cost of services for the number of individuals estimated to be eligible for services. If under an order of selection, identify the cost of services for each priority category.

The projected annual cost of services for FFY 2018 will be approximately $10,700,000. About $7,000,000 will be from Section 110, the Basic Vocational Rehabilitation Program. RSA announced that for FFY 2018 there will be no federal funds for Supported Employment, MCB will utilize federal and state vocational rehabilitation funds instead.

Description (m)—Order of Selection, if circumstances have changed within the State (section 101(a)(5)(A) and (B) of the Rehabilitation Act);

##### 2. If the designated State unit has elected to serve eligible individuals, regardless of any established order of selection, who require specific services or equipment to maintain employment.

The Massachusetts Commission for the Blind is not under an Order of Selection and does not anticipate that an Order of Selection will be necessary in FFY 2018. However, due to historic and systemic issues, MCB’s VR program is operating at a deficit if not for carryover funding. Since carryover funding is declining at a rapid pace, if this is not resolved in the near term, MCB will need to adopt an Order of Selection before the completion of the state plan.

#### o. State's Strategies

Describe the required strategies and how the agency will use these strategies to achieve its goals and priorities, support innovation and expansion activities, and overcome any barriers to accessing the VR and the Supported Employment programs (See sections 101(a)(15)(D) and (18)(B) of the Rehabilitation Act and section 427 of the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA)):

##### 1. The methods to be used to expand and improve services to individuals with disabilities.

The goals, jointly developed by the agency and the Rehabilitation Council, are listed below along with the priorities and strategies for innovation and expansion that will be used to reach the goals.

Goal I: To have sufficient resources to serve all eligible individuals, as measured by the Rehabilitation Council’s annual evaluation of the agency’s progress toward the goal.

Priorities:

* Monitor the agency budget and regularly advocate full funding of the VR program to ensure that in the years ahead the MCB can carry out its obligations to its many consumers. A measure for evaluation is the amount of state vocational rehabilitation funds appropriated by the Massachusetts Legislature.
* Monitor the allocation of funds for the Deaf-Blind Extended Supports Program and the Supported Employment Program. A measure for evaluation is the amount of state funds appropriated by the Massachusetts Legislature for the agency’s state-funded Deaf-Blind Extended Supports Program. Some of these funds are used for on-going supported employment services after VR services are completed.

Measurement Methodology:

* The Rehabilitation Council’s annual evaluation of the agency’s progress toward the goal.
* The agency’s success in maintaining or increasing its state budget.

Goal II: To develop more employment options for VR consumers, including supported employment, as measured by the Rehabilitation Council’s annual evaluation of the agency’s progress toward the goal.

Priorities:

* Develop and implement plans to increase training opportunities for transition and pre-employment transition consumers who are not going to college.
* Continue and expand the agency’s internship program for legally blind students and youth who are attending college and high school graduates who are not going to college or out-of-school youth with the result that the number of students and youth who participate increases each year.
* Coordinate the agency’s internship program with other pre-employment transition services
* Support the other components of the statewide workforce development system in assisting individuals who are legally blind by: offering to provide all One-Stop Career Centers with an evaluation of their accessibility to visually-impaired consumers; providing on-site VR services to legally blind consumers who have scheduled appointments at One-Stop Career Centers; providing training about blindness and visual impairment to the of workforce development agencies; providing consultation to workforce development staff; working with workforce development agencies to develop apprenticeship and on-the-job training opportunities for legally blind consumers; identify job-driven training opportunities for legally blind consumers; and developing an improved referral process among the partner agencies.
* Expand and develop a wide range of pre-employment transition services to enhance transition and employment opportunities for students who are legally blind and for potentially eligible students with disabilities as mandated by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) through: implementation of the new agreement with the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE); working more closely with schools and teachers of the visually-impaired; working more closely with the Massachusetts Federation for Children with Special Needs (the state Parent Training and Information Center) to provide better outreach and information to parents about pre-employment transition services, vocational rehabilitation services, and the opportunities for coordination and cooperation between MCB and school personnel; providing group pre-employment transition services both after-school and during school vacations.
* Strengthen agency use of labor market information. MCB vocational rehabilitation counselors use the Occupational Outlook Handbook website of the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the Massachusetts Labor Market Information website, and the American Foundation for the Blind Explore Careers website in counseling consumers about vocational choice. Agency data show that computer science, education, human services, and customer service occupations predominate among jobs obtained by consumers who are legally blind. Data shows that these fields are all growing in the state of Massachusetts. The agency intends to offer updated training on the use of these and other resources to counselors and employment specialists.

Measurement Methodology:

* The Rehabilitation Council’s annual evaluation of the agency’s progress toward the goal.
* The number of consumers who complete the agency’s internship program.
* The number of students who participate in pre-employment transition services.

Goal III: To help legally blind persons, including students and potentially eligible students, to develop and increase the independence needed to be successful in competitive employment, as measured by the Rehabilitation Council’s annual evaluation of the agency’s progress toward the goal.

Priorities:

* Advocate and educate consumers and public officials on pedestrian safety issues which impact travel by pedestrians who use a white cane or service dog to seek and maintain employment.
* Advocate for better access to and improvement of public transportation and paratransit systems in order to increase the employment outcomes of persons who are legally blind.
* Increase consumers’ access to adaptive equipment as measured by the number served by the agency’s Technology for the Blind Unit.
* Increase pre-employment transition, transition, and college students’ access to educational materials, resources and websites.
* Advocate for improved accessibility of federal and state government and private internet sites and documents.

Measurement Methodology:

* The Rehabilitation Council’s annual evaluation of the agency’s progress toward the goal.
* The number of consumers who are served by the agency’s Technology for the Blind Unit and the Carroll Center’s training program.

Goal IV: Increase the effectiveness and efficiency of vocational rehabilitation services delivery, as measured by the Rehabilitation Council’s annual evaluation of the agency’s progress toward the goal.

Priorities:

* Annually review the agency performance on RSA standards and indicators, performance accountability measures under section 116 of WIOA, and on other statistical measures of effectiveness and recommend actions to improve performance when appropriate.
* Improve communication and collaboration between VR counselors in MCB’s regional offices and VR counselors in MCB’s Deaf-Blind Extended Support Unit to enhance services to consumers.
* Improve communication and collaboration among MCB staff (VR counselors, children’s service workers and social workers) in order to facilitate services to pre-employment transition consumers who have reached their fourteenth birthday and to identify on a case by case basis the most appropriate departments within MCB to meet these individuals’ needs.
* Improve communication and collaboration between MCB VR counselors and all other state, federal, contracted and private agencies providing technology, vocational training and employment services to MCB consumers, including eligible and potentially eligible pre-employment transition consumers.
* Provide appropriate after-school assistive technology and orientation and mobility services as pre-employment transition services to eligible and potentially eligible middle and high school students.
* Provide appropriate job exploration and counseling pre-employment transition services such as mentorships and exposure to real life career information.
* Provide appropriate work readiness pre-employment transition services in areas such as financial management, budgeting, and social skills.

Measurement Methodology:

* The Rehabilitation Council’s annual evaluation of the agency’s progress toward the goal.
* The number of students who participate in pre-employment transition services.

##### 2. How a broad range of assistive technology services and devices will be provided to individuals with disabilities at each stage of the rehabilitation process and on a statewide basis.

Relevant strategies listed in the previous section:

* Increase consumers’ access to adaptive equipment as measured by the number served by the agency’s Technology for the Blind Unit.
* Increase pre-employment transition, transition, and college students’ access to educational materials, resources and websites.
* Advocate for improved accessibility of federal and state government and private internet sites and documents.
* Improve communication and collaboration between MCB VR counselors and all other state, federal, contracted and private agencies providing technology, vocational training and employment services to MCB consumers, including eligible and potentially eligible pre-employment transition consumers.
* Provide appropriate after-school assistive technology and orientation and mobility services as pre-employment transition services to eligible and potentially eligible middle and high school students.

##### 3. The outreach procedures that will be used to identify and serve individuals with disabilities who are minorities, including those with the most significant disabilities, as well as those who have been unserved or underserved by the VR program.

* The agency has long placed a high priority on outreach to minority and underserved persons. The agency has for some years had a Diversity Committee within the agency. The committee consists of the Commissioner (or designee), the Director of Communications, vocational rehabilitation counselors, Human Resources Liaison, representatives of the agency Staff Development Unit, and support staff. The goal of the committee is to increase access to services for multi-cultural and minority consumers. The Diversity Committee has participated in the development of the curriculum for agency diversity training and has promoted staff attendance at community conferences which address issues relevant to provision of services to specific groups such as immigrants from Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East and Cambodia.
* One strategy which the Diversity Committee uses is to invite the staffs of community groups with which the agency would like to develop closer relationships to attend brown bag events at MCB and share information and recommendations about outreach to minority group members who are legally blind.
* Regional staff identify agencies and associations serving minority communities throughout the state and attend health fairs, church groups and other community events relevant to members of minority communities. MCB is listed in the Boston Community Health Education Center Resource Guide which leads to invitations to attend events to promote the agency’s services among Boston’s minority communities.
* The agency’s needs assessment studies and public hearings have for a number of years identified the lack of availability of ESL instruction for blind persons as a very serious problem. A Massachusetts consumer group, the Association of Blind Citizens, has developed an audio (tape and CD) ESL course for blind and visually-impaired persons.
* MCB will continue to focus on outreach to individuals with minority backgrounds who are blind or visually impaired. MCB conducted listening sessions in 2016 across the Commonwealth, attended by hundreds of consumers who are legally blind, including minorities and other stakeholders. Feedback from the listening sessions These listening sessions has allowed MCB to better deliver services across all consumers.
* The agency’s Staff Development Unit has for a number of years worked to assist staff to better address the needs of traditionally underserved minority groups. A training program on cultural diversity and rehabilitation issues is offered to vocational rehabilitation staff. In addition, the Director of Communications continues to arrange periodic luncheon seminars for staff on topics relevant to provision of services to minority populations.

##### 4. The methods to be used to improve and expand VR services for students with disabilities, including the coordination of services designed to facilitate the transition of such students from school to postsecondary life (including the receipt of VR services, postsecondary education, employment, and pre-employment transition services).

Relevant strategies and methods listed in a previous section:

* Develop and implement plans to increase training opportunities for transition and pre-employment transition consumers who are not going to college.
* Continue and expand the agency’s internship program for legally blind students and youth who are attending college and high school graduates who are not going to college or out-of-school youth with the result that the number of students and youth who participate increases each year. Coordinate the agency’s internship program with other pre-employment transition services.
* Expand and develop a wide range of pre-employment transition services to enhance transition and employment opportunities for students who are legally blind and for potentially eligible students with disabilities as mandated by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA).
* Increase pre-employment transition, transition, and college students’ access to educational materials, resources and websites.
* Improve communication and collaboration among MCB staff (VR counselors, children’s service workers and social workers) in order to facilitate services to pre-employment transition consumers who have reached their fourteenth birthday and to identify on a case by case basis the most appropriate departments within MCB to meet these individuals’ needs.
* Improve communication and collaboration between MCB VR counselors and all other state, federal, contracted and private agencies providing technology, vocational training and employment services to MCB consumers, including eligible and potentially eligible pre-employment transition consumers.
* Provide appropriate after-school assistive technology and orientation and mobility services as pre-employment transition services to eligible and potentially eligible middle and high school students.
* Provide appropriate job exploration and counseling pre-employment transition services such as mentorships and exposure to real life career information.
* Provide appropriate work readiness pre-employment transition services in areas such as financial management, budgeting, and social skills.

The RC supported MCB’s statewide event held in June 2017 for providers of Pre-ETS Services to come together and learn about PRE-ETS requirements. There is a lack of coordination of Special Education in the Commonwealth which is complicated by the fact that there are more than 350 local school districts, in addition to numerous independent private school organizations. MCB held a statewide conference referred to as “Visions of Collaborations” in June with approximately 125 professionals in attendance. Valuable information on pre-employment transition services was disseminated and attendees were trained to ensure that referrals are made for those individuals who need the both Pre-ETS services and vocational rehabilitation services. The conference also sought to improve partnerships and enhance coordination between MCB as the VR agency, Teachers of the Visually Impaired (TVIs), Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialists, local school district Special Education representatives and a representative from Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE).

##### 5. If applicable, plans for establishing, developing, or improving community rehabilitation programs within the State.

Not applicable.

##### 6. Strategies to improve the performance of the State with respect to the performance accountability measures under section 116 of WIOA.

• Annually review the agency performance on RSA performance accountability measures under section 116 of WIOA, and on other statistical measures of effectiveness and recommend actions to improve performance when appropriate.

##### 7. Strategies for assisting other components of the statewide workforce development system in assisting individuals with disabilities.

Relevant strategies in a previous section:

•Assist the other components of the statewide workforce development system in assisting individuals who are legally blind by: offering to provide all One-Stop Career Centers with an evaluation of their accessibility to visually-impaired consumers; providing on-site VR services to legally blind consumers who have scheduled appointments at One-Stop Career Centers; providing training about blindness and visual impairment to the workforce development agencies; providing consultation to workforce development staff; working with workforce development agencies to develop apprenticeship and on-the-job training opportunities for legally blind consumers; identify job-driven training opportunities for legally blind consumers; and developing an improved referral process among the partner agencies.

In 2017, MCB along with other WIOA partners entered into an MOU with One Stop Career Centers. Under the MOU, access to MCB programs, services, and resources will be made available at all OSCCs. Local areas will determine how MCB programs and services are accessed through the OSCCs based on the volume of customers and the availability of MCB staff. Legally Blind and visually impaired consumers will receive access to MCB services at the OSCCs in one or more of the following ways:

* OSCC staff will be appropriately trained to provide information to legally blind and visually impaired consumers about programs, services, and activities available through MCB.
* OSCC staff will make a direct link between the legally blind and visually impaired consumer and MCB staff to schedule an appointment, or to receive useful information about programs and services.
* Based on need, MCB staff will be physically present at the OSCC to provide services.

MCB will support an integrated service delivery strategy in which OSCC staff will provide Career Center

services to legally blind and visually impaired customers by:

* Assisting the Local Boards with training OSCC staff to use assistive technology with visually

 impaired or legally blind consumers who seek career center services.

* Providing training to OSCC staff on accessibility requirements for legally blind and visually impaired consumers.
* Assisting with accommodations related to workshops for legally blind and visually impaired consumers.
* Providing training to OSCC staff so that staff have basic knowledge of programs, services,

 and resources available through MCB.

* Ensuring that MCB Employment Services Representatives and OSCC Business Service Representatives collaborate so that legally blind and visually impaired consumers receive appropriate job matching by reviewing consumers skills, communicating employer qualifications and organization culture, and sharing employer contacts.
* Providing sensitivity training to OSCC staff.

MCB believes that these strategies will significantly improve consumer access and utilization of career center services.

Since apprenticeships have seldom been available to legally blind consumers, MCB continues to research information available through the Massachusetts Division of Apprenticeship Standards, the U.S. Department of Labor’s Office of Disability Employment Policy, and other vocational rehabilitation agencies to learn more about apprenticeships for legally blind persons and how to access opportunities through the Massachusetts Apprenticeship Initiative (MAI) or other resources in Massachusetts and New England.

##### 8. How the agency's strategies will be used to:

###### A. achieve goals and priorities by the State, consistent with the comprehensive needs assessment;

As stated in a previous section:

The Rehabilitation Council (MCB RC) has continued to review the consumer satisfaction studies conducted annually and the comprehensive needs assessment on a routine basis and the members and the agency have used them in developing the goals and priorities.

###### B. support innovation and expansion activities; and

The goals, jointly developed by the agency and the Rehabilitation Council, are listed below along with the priorities and strategies for innovation and expansion that will be used to reach the goals.

Goal I: To have sufficient resources to serve all eligible individuals, as measured by the Rehabilitation Council’s annual evaluation of the agency’s progress toward the goal.

Priorities:

Monitor the agency budget and regularly advocate full funding of the VR program to ensure that in the years ahead the MCB can carry out its obligations to its many consumers. A measure for evaluation is the amount of state vocational rehabilitation funds appropriated by the Massachusetts Legislature.

* Monitor the allocation of funds for the Deaf-Blind Extended Supports Program and the Supported Employment Program. A measure for evaluation is the amount of state funds appropriated by the Massachusetts Legislature for the agency’s state-funded Deaf-Blind Extended Supports Program. Some of these funds are used for on-going supported employment services after VR services are completed.

Measurement Methodology:

* The Rehabilitation Council’s annual evaluation of the agency’s progress toward the goal.
* The agency’s success in maintaining or increasing its state budget.

Goal II: To develop more employment options for VR consumers, including supported employment, as measured by the Rehabilitation Council’s annual evaluation of the agency’s progress toward the goal.

Priorities:

* Develop and implement plans to increase training opportunities for transition and pre-employment transition consumers who are not going to college.
* Continue and expand the agency’s internship program for legally blind students and youth who are attending college and high school graduates who are not going to college or out-of-school youth with the result that the number of students and youth who participate increases each year. Coordinate the agency’s internship program with other pre-employment transition services.
* Expand and develop a wide range of pre-employment transition services to enhance transition and employment opportunities for students who are legally blind and for potentially eligible students with disabilities as mandated by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) through: implementation of the new agreement with the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE); working more closely with schools and teachers of the visually-impaired; working more closely with the Massachusetts Federation for Children with Special Needs (the state Parent Training and Information Center) to provide better outreach and information to parents about pre-employment transition services, vocational rehabilitation services, and the opportunities for coordination and cooperation between MCB and school personnel; providing group pre-employment transition services both after-school and during school vacations.
* Assist the other components of the statewide workforce development system in assisting individuals who are legally blind by: offering to provide all One-Stop Career Centers with an evaluation of their accessibility to visually-impaired consumers; providing on-site VR services to legally blind consumers who have scheduled appointments at One-Stop Career Centers; providing training about blindness and visual impairment to the of workforce development agencies; providing consultation to workforce development staff; working with workforce development agencies to develop apprenticeship and on-the-job training opportunities for legally blind consumers; identify job-driven training opportunities for legally blind consumers; and developing an improved referral process among the partner agencies.
* Strengthen agency use of labor market information. MCB vocational rehabilitation counselors use the Occupational Outlook Handbook website of the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the Massachusetts Labor Market Information website, and the American Foundation for the Blind Explore Careers website in counseling consumers about vocational choice. Agency data show that computer science, education, human services, and customer service occupations predominate among jobs obtained by consumers who are legally blind. Data shows that these fields are all growing in the state of Massachusetts. The agency intends to offer updated training on the use of these and other resources to counselors and employment specialists.

Measurement Methodology:

* The Rehabilitation Council’s annual evaluation of the agency’s progress toward the goal.
* The number of consumers who complete the agency’s internship program.
* The number of students who participate in pre-employment transition services.

Goal III: To help legally blind persons, including students and potentially eligible students, to develop and increase the independence needed to be successful in competitive employment, as measured by the Rehabilitation Council’s annual evaluation of the agency’s progress toward the goal.

Priorities:

* Advocate and educate consumers and public officials on pedestrian safety issues which impact travel by pedestrians who use a white cane or service dog to seek and maintain employment.
* Advocate for better access to and improvement of public transportation and paratransit systems in order to increase the employment outcomes of persons who are legally blind.
* Increase consumers’ access to adaptive equipment as measured by the number served by the agency’s Technology for the Blind Unit.
* Increase pre-employment transition, transition, and college students’ access to educational materials, resources and websites.
* Advocate for improved accessibility of federal and state government and private internet sites and documents.

Measurement Methodology:

* The Rehabilitation Council’s annual evaluation of the agency’s progress toward the goal.
* The number of consumers who are served by the agency’s Technology for the Blind Unit and the Carroll Center’s training program.

Goal IV: Increase the effectiveness and efficiency of vocational rehabilitation services delivery, as measured by the Rehabilitation Council’s annual evaluation of the agency’s progress toward the goal.

Priorities:

* Annually review the agency performance on RSA performance accountability measures under section 116 of WIOA, and on other statistical measures of effectiveness and recommend actions to improve performance when appropriate.
* Improve communication and collaboration between VR counselors in MCB’s regional offices and VR counselors in MCB’s Deaf-Blind Extended Support Unit to enhance services to consumers.
* Improve communication and collaboration among MCB staff (VR counselors, children’s service workers and social workers) in order to facilitate services to pre-employment transition consumers who have reached their fourteenth birthday and to identify on a case by case basis the most appropriate departments within MCB to meet these individuals’ needs.
* Improve communication and collaboration between MCB VR counselors and all other state, federal, contracted and private agencies providing technology, vocational training and employment services to MCB consumers, including eligible and potentially eligible pre-employment transition consumers.
* Provide appropriate after-school assistive technology and orientation and mobility services as pre-employment transition services to eligible and potentially eligible middle and high school students.
* Provide appropriate job exploration and counseling pre-employment transition services such as mentorships and exposure to real life career information.
* Provide appropriate work readiness pre-employment transition services in areas such as financial management, budgeting, and social skills.

Measurement Methodology:

* The Rehabilitation Council’s annual evaluation of the agency’s progress toward the goal.
* The number of students who participate in pre-employment transition services.

###### C. overcome identified barriers relating to equitable access to and participation of individuals with disabilities in the State VR Services Program and the State Supported Employment Services Program.

As stated in a previous section:

The agency has long placed a high priority on outreach to minority and underserved persons. The agency has for some years had a Diversity Committee within the agency. The committee consists of the Commissioner, the Director of Communications, vocational rehabilitation counselors, representatives of the agency Staff Development Unit, and support staff. The goal of the committee is to increase access to services for multi-cultural and minority consumers. The Diversity Committee has participated in the development of the curriculum for agency diversity training and has promoted staff attendance at community conferences which address issues relevant to provision of services to specific groups such as immigrants from Sub-Saharan Africa and Cambodia. One strategy which the Diversity Committee uses is to invite the staffs of community groups with which the agency would like to develop closer relationships to attend luncheons at MCB and share information and recommendations about outreach to minority group members who are legally blind.

The agency has two Rehabilitation Teachers who are fluent in Spanish, and another Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor who is fluent in both Albanian and Greek languages. One VR supervisor speaks French and the language of the Congo; one speaks Italian. MCB also has one staff member is fluent in Polish and another staff member is fluent in Kiswahili. MCB VR counselors who work with deaf-blind individuals are proficient in American Sign Language.

The agency has access to the Language Line interpreter service in all of its offices to assist counselors in working with consumers who speak all languages, especially uncommon ones. Language Line offers interpretation of more than 140 languages. For home visits, MCB contracts with Catholic Charities for language interpreters in the community who can interpret languages such as Khymer (a language of Cambodia), Chinese, French, Russian, Polish, Croatian, Vietnamese, and Spanish.

In 2017, MCB developed an electronic brochure of services. The list of services organized by topic was recorded and has been made available on a thumb drive as well as on a cartridge. In addition, the information is being recorded and will be made available on YouTube through a link on the MCB website. The goal is for prospective consumers to receive information on MCB services before they leave an eye professional’s office after a diagnosis of legal blindness or visual impairment. MCB will distribute the thumb drives and cartridges statewide with special emphasis on targeted underserved regions of the state as well as on collaboration with minority organizations to distribute them to their members. By using different avenues to get the information out, MCB anticipates attracting prospective consumers and getting them engaged in VR services and closing the information access gap.

#### p. Evaluation and Reports of Progress: VR and Supported Employment Goals

##### 1. An evaluation of the extent to which the VR program goals described in the approved VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan for the most recently completed program year were achieved. The evaluation must:

###### A. Identify the strategies that contributed to the achievement of the goals.

The following is an evaluation of the extent to which the MCB VR program goals described in the previously approved VR services portion of the Combined State Plan for the most recently completed program year, 2016-2017, were achieved.

The Massachusetts Commission for the Blind worked with the Rehabilitation Council on the mutually-agreed upon goals and the use of Title I funds for innovation and expansion activities. The narrative interwoven with the goals below provides a report of progress in achieving the VR program goals; it describes factors that impeded the achievement of the goals and priorities, to the extent they were not achieved, and provides a report on how the funds reserved for innovation and expansion activities were utilized in the preceding year. One baseline for evaluation is a survey of MCB RC members’ annual evaluation of progress towards the goals.

Goal I: To have sufficient resources to serve all eligible individuals, as measured by the Rehabilitation Council’s annual evaluation of the agency’s progress toward the goal.

Priorities

• Monitor annually the budget and regularly advocate full funding of the VR program to ensure that in the years ahead the MCB can carry out its obligations to its many consumers. A measure for evaluation is the amount of state vocational rehabilitation funds appropriated by the Massachusetts Legislature.

• Monitor annually the allocation of funds for the Deaf-Blind Extended Supports Program and the Supported Employment Program. A measure for evaluation is the amount of state funds appropriated by the Massachusetts Legislature for the agency state-funded Deaf-Blind Extended Supports Program. Some of these funds are used for on-going supported employment services after VR services are completed.

Report of Progress: The agency has had sufficient resources to serve all eligible individuals during FFY 2016 and 17 as well as projected for FFY 2018. The Massachusetts Legislature has continued to fund the agency’s VR program sufficient to match federal funds. The Rehabilitation Council expresses interest in advocating for increased vocational rehabilitation funding at the state level. For the SFY 2019, there is a proposed 1% increase in the state match. The SFY 2018 state appropriation for the state-funded Deaf-Blind Extended Supports Program is enough to cover the need for more residential services for those consumers who are turning age 22. This program provides residential and day services, including on-going supported employment services to individuals with the most significant disabilities.

MCB RC Evaluation: In FY 2018, members rated the agency’s progress as Very Good (4 out of 5).

Goal II: To develop more employment options for VR consumers, including supported employment, as measured by the Rehabilitation Council’s annual evaluation of the agency’s progress toward the goal.

Priorities: • Develop and implement plans to increase training opportunities for transition-age consumers who are not going to college. • Continue and refine the agency’s internship program for legally blind students who are attending college; explore ways to expand the program to include recent high school graduates who are not going to college with the result that the number of students participating increases each year.

Report of Progress: • The development of increased training opportunities for transition-age consumers who are not going to college continues to be a major focus area.

* In 2015, MCB partnered with Massachusetts Eye and Ear and Cambridge Health Alliance to become the first agency for the blind to launch Project SEARCH, a successful national 9-month program for individuals with disabilities that provides internship experiences. Since then, there have been 30 participants with 21 of them achieving employment, resulting in an 70% employment outcome rate.
* The Deaf-Blind Extended Supports Unit has one counselor who provides specialized, intensive VR services to a group of multi-disabled consumers who are thought to be currently underserved; these are consumers who are not deaf or intellectually disabled, but have very significant disabilities such as mental illness or brain injury in addition to blindness.
* During the past three years, MCB has participated in several hiring events with the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission that were sponsored by the Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs (OFCCP). Federal contractors are required to set a hiring goal of having 7% of their employees drawn from qualified workers with disabilities. It is called a hiring event instead of a job fair because the consumers are matched with job openings and apply online for those jobs prior to the event and real job interviews are conducted with specific employers during the event itself.
* The agency has begun to incorporate a hiring event, with scheduled job interviews for consumers who have applied online for specific jobs, into its annual job fair for individuals with visual impairments that is held each October. In 2017, with a technical assistance grant from RSA, the Job Driven Vocational Rehabilitation Technical assistance (JDVRTAC), MCB operationalized VisionWorks Consortium which consists of MCB, the Carroll Center for the Blind, and the Perkins School for the Blind. The three organizations that are a part of the consortium have pooled their employer contacts into a centralized database to track the business partner engagement to increase employment opportunities for job seekers who are visually impaired. At the job fair, employers were recruiting for a variety of positions in hospitals, hotels, colleges and universities, financial institutions, museums, and more. Many on-site interviews took place and several job seekers and employers expressed their anticipation of follow-up interviews.
* For the past several years, agency staff has regularly conducted a two-session course of soft skills training for prospective student interns and job-ready consumers. Soft skills are those interpersonal skills such as cooperativeness, politeness, and friendliness that enhance an individual ‘s on-the-job interactions, job performance and career prospects. MCB has reconfigured the event so that the training takes place in regional offices, making attendance more convenient for consumers. In addition, for those job-ready consumers who do not need soft skills training, different courses are held for them such as networking and how to get onto LinkedIn.
* MCB also provides a one-day Essential Skills Training for transition-age youth. This training covers soft skills and other career development skills for younger consumers. Based on feedback from consumers and counselors, this training has been expanded to offer consumers more opportunities to interact with employers and to include other pre-employment transition components such as occupational information and career exploration.
* MCB’s summer internship program is a long-established job preparation model that supports college-age and nontraditional students, all of whom are legally blind, to acquire work experience. In 2017, the program reached its 14th year and involved 84 participants. During the program’s 14-year span, there have been approximately 800 internship opportunities with 400 private and public business partners.
* MCB continues to be part of the statewide Massachusetts STEM Summit held in October 2016 and 2017 at the DCU Center in Worcester. Local region office staff attend the summit whose purpose is to promote education and employment of youth in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. It has been held for the past eleven years and, typically, has more than 800 educators and employers in attendance.
* MCB is a founding member of the Perkins Business Partnership (PBP) which is an alliance between Perkins and some of the region’s best-known businesses and nonprofits that is working to break down barriers to employment and expand opportunities for individuals who are blind or visually impaired. Through conversations with employers across the Commonwealth, the PBP is striving to raise awareness and motivate businesses to create work environments that are inclusive and accessible to all.

MCB RC Evaluation: In FY 2018, members rated the agency’s progress as Very Good (4 out of 5).

Goal III: To help legally blind persons to increase their independence, as measured by the Rehabilitation Council’s annual evaluation of the agency’s progress toward the goal.

Priorities: • Advocate and educate consumers and public officials on pedestrian safety issues which impact pedestrians who are legally blind and issues regarding laws pertaining to the white cane and the use of service dogs; • Advocate for better access to, and improvement of, public transportation and paratransit systems throughout the Commonwealth. • Increase consumers’ access to adaptive equipment as measured by the number served each year by the agency’s Technology for the Blind Unit. • Increase students’ access to accessible textbooks. • Advocate for improved accessibility of federal and state government documents and internet sites.

Report of Progress:

* In 2017, MCB collaborated with the Registry of Motor Vehicles (RMV) around White Cane Safety Law, and as a result, the RMV included white cane and use of service dog flyers in two separate mailings. They also ran public service announcements (PSAs) on electronic billboards on four major highways across the state. Building on the momentum, MCB worked with a local Cable Access network to produce a television PSA that promotes white cane safety and the Massachusetts White Cane Law.
* The agency has been able to increase consumers’ access to both adaptive equipment and accessible textbooks during FY 2016, 2017 and 2018. The agency ‘s Technology for the Blind Unit will serve approximately 1,200 VR consumers during FFY 2018. The staff of the unit includes a technology specialist who is able to provide extended training in Word, Outlook, and basic navigation and eight rehabilitation engineers.
* The agency continues to enhance the independence and educational and vocational potential of blind children by providing adaptive equipment and software on a limited basis to elementary and middle-school aged children under its state-funded social services program. These services enable these young consumers to transition to pre-transition employment and vocational rehabilitation services at age 14 with the same level of technical skill as their sighted peers. In addition, MCB has revised its policies under the vocational rehabilitation program (in line with RSA regulations and guidance) to provide more adaptive equipment and training to pre-employment transition consumers to allow them to access and improve their work readiness, vocational, and independent living skills when they are not in school.
* MCB has been working with providers to develop new options for pre-employment transition services. The Carroll Center for the Blind, Polus Center, Lowell Association for the Blind, Perkins, and Our Space, Our Place have developed work readiness programs to address several needs. Example: Pre-ETS participants had a chance to participate in a hands-on culinary arts program where they explored careers in the culinary field.
* MCB consumers and staff attended the Annual Consumer Conference that was held in June 2016 and 2017. The Massachusetts Commission for the Blind sponsors this annual conference in conjunction with the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission, and the Massachusetts Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, and the Massachusetts Statewide Independent Living Council. About 400 consumers who are blind or who have other disabilities attend. The conference offered a unique opportunity for consumers, employers, advocates and all people with disabilities to network with one another and with agency staff in an educational environment and to have a direct impact on the agencies’ policies and practices. In 2017, with the help of the RC, MCB crafted a consumer VR services satisfaction survey. The survey’s goal was to solicit information from current consumers regarding their VR needs as well as their feedback on the current array of services provided. MCB consumers who attended the conference participated in a focus group. The feedback from the focus group continues to have a direct impact on agency policies, practices and service delivery.

MCB RC Evaluation: In FY 2018, members rated the agency’s progress as Very Good (4 out of 5).

Goal IV: Increase the effectiveness and efficiency of vocational rehabilitation services delivery, as measured by the Rehabilitation Council’s annual evaluation of the agency’s progress toward the goal. Priorities: • Review annually the agency performance on RSA standards and indicators, WIOA performance measurements, and on other statistical measures of effectiveness and to recommend actions to improve performance when appropriate. • Improve communication among all MCB VR staff between VR counselors in MCB regional offices and VR counselors in the MCB Deaf-Blind Extended Supports Unit to enhance services to consumers who would otherwise not receive necessary services. • Improve communication among MCB staff (VR counselors, children’s service workers and social workers) in order to facilitate services to consumers who have reached their fourteenth birthday and to identify on a case-by-case basis the most appropriate department within MCB to meet these individuals’ needs. • Improve and maintain ongoing communication between MCB VR counselors and all other state, federal, contracted and private agencies providing technology, vocational training and employment services to MCB consumers, including those individuals with other disabilities in addition to blindness.

Report of Progress:

* In 2017, MCB migrated to a new case management system, AWARE which is currently used by over 38 VR state agencies and 24 tribal nations. This system has the capacity to generate statistical reports to help counselors, management, and Rehabilitation Council members to evaluate the agency’s effectiveness. MCB continues to work with the vendor to develop specific statistical reports for both the MCB management and the Rehabilitation Council, including those required for the new WIOA performance measurements.
* The MCB RC members currently annually review the agency’s performance on RSA standards and indicators, and on other statistical measures of effectiveness as well as the agency’s consumer satisfaction studies. The agency ‘s performance on RSA standards and indicators has at all times met the minimum level of overall performance established by RSA.
* MCB has addressed the priority to facilitate services to consumers who have reached their fourteenth birthday and to identify on a case by case basis the most appropriate unit within MCB by developing a comprehensive assessment form for children’s workers to complete. In addition, MCB and DESE have jointly developed a technical advisory to educate TVIs, O&M instructors and other special education representatives on eligibility requirements for Pre-ETS including for those who are potentially eligible, making these services accessible to all youth with disabilities.
* The agency holds several College Nights each year throughout the state for students who are considering attending college. Their families are also invited. The purpose is to orient the students to MCB services, college disability services, etc. and to answer their questions. MCB also holds a half-day orientation session each spring in Greater Boston for those consumers who intend to begin college in the fall.
* MCB has developed a transition form to improve services to adolescents and their transition to adult services and to improve communication among the involved staff when the child turns 14. MCB Children’s Workers and the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors often make joint visits to the adolescent and parents to help the family to develop a roadmap for the child’s services going forward. Consultations with agency rehabilitation teachers, mobility specialists, and technology specialists are also offered to the consumer and family.
* MCB has committed in the statewide Memorandum of Understanding in Appendix C to participate in teams to be established comprised of individuals who are empowered to represent the core partner agency for the purpose of developing and executing local MOUs, modeled on the state MOU.

MCB RC Evaluation: In FY 2018, members rated the agency’s progress as Very Good (4 out of 5).

As noted and described in the assurance on Goals and Plans for Distribution of Title VI, Part B Funds, supported employment goals for FY 2016 and FY 17 have been met.

MCB has reviewed its performance on the national Standards and Indicators each year since the implementation of these standards and indicators. Analysis of the indicators has identified areas for improvement in the agency’s performance. The agency is pleased to note that its rehabilitants earn one of the highest average wage levels of all the state vocational rehabilitation programs. The agency has attained one of the highest average wage levels since the current Standards and Indicators were implemented some years ago.

###### B. Describe the factors that impeded the achievement of the goals and priorities.

Long-standing problems and factors that impede the achievement of the goals and priorities include: • public transportation systems and pedestrian safety issues which limit access to employment and some vocational rehabilitation services • students’ access to accessible textbooks • accessibility of documents and internet sites needed to obtain and retain employment • employer attitudes toward blindness

Report of Progress:

* In 2016, the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority’s piloted a program between the Ride (the Ride service provides paratransit, or supplemental transportation, to disabled customers), Uber and Lyft. Those eligible for the Ride became eligible to take part in the program where they could use a ride-hailing service any time at a lower cost. In 2017, a review showed that more than 10,000 rides covering 45,000 miles in 133 zip codes had been provided. In addition, the partnership had resulted in a 20% cost reduction for the transportation agency. The service, concentrated in the eastern part of the state, is benefiting many of MCB consumers.
* In 2017, a statewide mobility management initiative was started between EOHHS and MassDOT to develop an on-line One-Stop searchable directory of public, private and accessible transportation options in the state. This initiative should be of particular interest for consumers in the rural parts of the state that still experience a lack of reliable transportation. The MCB RC continues to support MCB’s efforts on this issue.
* In 2015, The Braille Literacy Advisory Council (BrLAC) was charged with developing a plan for implementing Unified English Braille (UEB) in Massachusetts to present to the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). In 2017, The Braille Literacy Advisory Council proposed a plan for transitioning to a full implementation of UEB to ensure a free appropriate public education (FAPE) for students with vision impairments in Massachusetts. Some of the items on the implementation plan include:
	+ Teachers of Students with Visual Impairments (TVIs) to receive professional development training in UEB.
	+ TVIs began to expose and instruct braille learners in non-technical UEB on an individual basis.
	+ Instructional Materials available in UEB, EBAE, UEB with Nemeth and/or EBAE/Nemeth.
	+ AIM Library accepted requests for instructional materials in the above-mentioned formats.
	+ School districts prepared to support requests for instructional materials in the above-mentioned formats.
	+ Statewide Assessments will be provided in EBAE/Nemeth for all statewide assessments
	+ Teachers-in-Training at UMass Vision Studies received braille instruction in UEB (technical and non-technical) and Nemeth.
	+ The implementation was planned for school year 2016 through 2020. More information can be found at: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/news/news.aspx?id=23936>

##### 2. An evaluation of the extent to which the Supported Employment program goals described in the Supported Employment Supplement for the most recent program year were achieved. The evaluation must:

###### A. Identify the strategies that contributed to the achievement of the goals.

As stated in a previous section:

• Monitor annually the allocation of funds for the Deaf-Blind Extended Supports Program and the Supported Employment Program. A measure for evaluation is the amount of state funds appropriated by the Massachusetts Legislature for the agency ‘s state-funded Deaf-Blind Extended Supports Program. Some of these funds are used for on-going supported employment services after VR services are completed.

Report of Progress:

The agency has had sufficient resources to serve all eligible individuals during FY 2016 and 2017. The Massachusetts Legislature has continued to fund the agency’s VR program sufficient to match federal funds. The Rehabilitation Council has been very active in advocating for increased vocational rehabilitation funding at the state level. The SFY 2018 state appropriation for the state-funded Deaf-Blind Extended Supports Program is enough to cover the need for more residential and supported services for those consumers who are turning age 22. This program provides residential and day services, including on-going supported employment services to individuals with the most significant disabilities.

In addition, as also stated in previous sections: The Massachusetts Department of Developmental Services (DDS) and the Massachusetts Department of Mental Health (DMH) have over the years worked cooperatively with MCB and provided extended services to a number of legally blind persons that have been provided supported employment services by MCB. MCB continues to collaborate with the DDS on plans to expand services to mutual consumers that includes an initiative to better identify consumers who could benefit from supported employment services and are not receiving them at this time. A new Memorandum of Agreement that includes provisions for use of joint agency resources to ensure quality service delivery and long term supports for supported employment was executed in November 2015. This includes a formal commitment of funding from MCB for appropriate supported employment services and a commitment from DDS for funding of the long-term, ongoing employment support services when needed. The agreement also provides for cross-training of staff.

In accordance with the requirements of the Rehabilitation Act, MCB executed a WIOA Cooperative Agreement with MassHealth in January 2016. In addition, discussions with the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC) have clarified that MCB consumers who have been rehabilitated into competitive integrated supported employment will be eligible to receive funding for on-going supports under its state-funded Extended Ongoing Supports Program. MCB is very appreciative of the help and advice that the MRC Extended Ongoing Supports Program provided and expects that the availability of this resource will increase the opportunities for supported employment for legally blind consumers who have significant secondary disabilities but do not qualify for on-going supports from another state or private agency.

Over the years, the Massachusetts Department of Mental Health (DMH) has worked cooperatively with MCB by providing extended services and other services to some legally blind persons that have received supported employment services and other services from MCB. In 2017, DMH provided MCB with a list of identified shared consumers which MCB is working collaboratively with DMH to provide services needed.

B. Describe the factors that impeded the achievement of the goals and priorities.

Long-standing problems and factors that impede the achievement of the supported employment goals and priorities include:

* public transportation systems and pedestrian safety issues which limit access to employment and some vocational rehabilitation services
* lack of funding for extended supports for consumers who are not eligible for funding from the Department of Developmental Services or the Department of Mental Health.

##### 3. The VR program's performance on the performance accountability indicators under section 116 of WIOA.

The agency and the Rehabilitation Council look forward to using the performance accountability measures of section 116 of WIOA once the baseline measurements are developed in conjunction with RSA. WIOA and its state plan requirements have been discussed at each quarterly meeting of the Rehabilitation Council since its enactment.

##### 4. How the funds reserved for innovation and expansion (I&E) activities were utilized.

During FFY 2016 and 2017, the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind worked with the Rehabilitation Council on the mutually-agreed upon goals and the use of Title I funds for innovation and expansion activities.

Specific innovation and expansion (I&E) activities and initiatives include: •

* In 2015, MCB partnered with Massachusetts Eye and Ear and Cambridge Health Alliance to become the first agency for the blind to launch Project SEARCH, a successful national 9-month program for individuals with disabilities that provides internship experiences. Since then, there have been 30 participants with 21 of them achieving employment, resulting in an 70% employment outcome rate.
* MCB’s summer internship program is a long-established job preparation model that supports college-age and nontraditional students, all of whom are legally blind, to acquire work experience. In 2017, the program reached its 14th year and involved 84 participants. During the program’s 14-year span, there have been approximately 800 internship opportunities with 400 private and public business partners. An agency study conducted in FY 2012 showed that 93% of the interns have had successful outcomes from the internship experience; that is, the intern has either finished school and obtained a job or is on track with his or her individual plan for employment.
* The agency has been able to increase consumers’ access to both adaptive equipment and accessible textbooks during FY 2016 and 2017. The agency’s Technology for the Blind Unit will serve approximately 1,500 VR consumers during FFY 2018. The staff of the unit includes a technology specialist who is able to provide extended training in Word, Outlook, and basic navigation and eight rehabilitation engineers.
* The agency has been able to continue to enhance the independence and educational and vocational potential of blind children by providing adaptive equipment and software on a limited basis to elementary and middle-school aged children under its state-funded social services program. These services enable these young consumers to transition to pre-transition employment and vocational rehabilitation services at age 14 with the same level of technical skill as their sighted peers. In addition, MCB has revised its policies under the vocational rehabilitation program (in line with RSA regulations and guidance) to provide more adaptive equipment and training to pre-employment transition consumers to allow them to access and improve their work readiness, vocational, and independent living skills when they are not in school.
* MCB has been working with providers to develop new options for pre-employment transition services. The Carroll Center for the Blind has developed a work readiness program to address several needs. One that is frequently mentioned by counselors and other professionals is for students, who may be expert in the use of smart phones and tablets, to become proficient in the use of Microsoft Office products and educational and job-search applications. Another need is for students to use technology to enhance independent living skills needed for employment by using GPS applications, etc. The work readiness program is held one Saturday each month during the school year and addresses a variety of work readiness, independent living, computer, and social skills.