

**San Diego State University
Interwork Institute**

**The Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands
Office of the Governor**

**Office of Vocational Rehabilitation
and
The State Rehabilitation Council**

**Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment Report
Federal Fiscal Years 2014-2017**

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Acknowledgements

The comprehensive statewide needs assessment (CSNA) conducted on behalf of CNMI's Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) and the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) could not have been accomplished without the assistance of a number of individuals who contributed greatly to various phases of the project. The needs assessment team would like to thank these individuals for their contributions to the needs assessment effort.

The following individuals were instrumental in helping to ensure that the research activities associated with this needs assessment were completed successfully:

- Arlene Kay A. Yamagata, M.S., CRC, Director
- Magdalene P. Reyes, Data Analyst
- Josephine Tudela, Administration and Operations Manager

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Executive Summary

The Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR), the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) and the Interwork Institute at San Diego State University jointly conducted an assessment of the vocational rehabilitation needs of persons with disabilities residing in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI). The purpose of the assessment was to provide current and relevant information on the needs of individuals with disabilities so that OVR can develop programs and allocate resources that will address the identified needs. A triennial needs assessment is required by the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 as amended by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and is intended to help inform the Unified State Plan developed by the core partners in CNMI's Workforce Development System.

The data was gathered analyzed and grouped into the sections listed below. A summary of key findings in each section is contained here. The full results are found in the body of the report.

Section One: Overall Performance of OVR

Recurring themes in this area include:

- *OVR has improved community outreach and established important partnerships that contribute to increasing opportunities for individuals with disabilities in CNMI.*
- *OVR is processing casework and moving consumers through the VR process well within the established time frames, but responsiveness to consumers remains an area in need of improvement.*
- *Many individuals with disabilities in CNMI continue to perceive of OVR as a medical services provider as opposed to a vocational rehabilitation program, so community education remains an important activity for the organization.*

Section Two: The needs of individuals with the most significant disabilities, including their need for supported employment

Needs identified in this area included the following:

- *The fear of benefit loss continues to affect the return to work behavior of SSA beneficiaries*
- *There is a need for benefits planning for SSA beneficiaries*
- *There is no extended services provider for supported employment cases*
- *Transportation remains a major barrier to employment for individuals with the most significant disabilities in CNMI*

Section Three: The needs of individuals with disabilities from different ethnic groups, including needs of individuals who have been unserved or underserved by the VR program

Needs identified in this area included the following:

- *Tinian and Rota continue to be identified as underserved by OVR*
- *Individuals that are blind or deaf were identified as being potentially underserved by OVR*

- *The remote villages in Saipan were identified as being underserved*
- *Transportation continues to be a major barrier to employment for all groups and this contributes to them being underserved.*

Section Four: The needs of youth and students with disabilities in transition

Needs identified in this area included the following:

- *A lack of work skills, soft skills, work experience and knowledge regarding the expectations of the work force are all barriers to employment for youth with disabilities in CNMI.*
- *OVR should engage youth in the schools at an early age and maintain contact with them upon graduation.*
- *Disability still has a stigma attached to it for many families in CNMI, so the need for education about disability remains high.*

Section Five: The needs of individuals with disabilities served through other components of the statewide Workforce Development System

Needs identified in this area included the following:

- *The relationship between OVR and the Title I WIOA program has been much improved over the course of the last year.*
- *Cross-training of program staff among the core partners about the program requirements, processes and services is needed.*
- *Integration and alignment of the core partners in the Workforce Development System is a goal for all partners.*

Section Six: The need to establish, develop or improve Community Rehabilitation Programs in CNMI

Needs identified in this area included the following:

- *There are no CRPs available to serve Tinian and Rota*
- *Assistive technology vendors are needed to meet the AT needs of individuals with disabilities in CNMI*
- *CRPs were needed across virtually every service area*

Section Seven: The needs of businesses

This category captures the needs of businesses in CNMI as it relates to recruiting, hiring, retaining and accommodating employees with disabilities. It includes an analysis of how OVR serves business and tries to meet their needs in each of these areas.

Needs identified in this area included the following:

- *Employers in CNMI have fears about hiring individuals with disabilities due to potential liability and ability to perform the essential functions of the job.*
- *Employers need to be educated about disability law and the capabilities of individuals with disabilities.*
- *On-the-job training is a successful strategy for employer engagement and job placement.*

The project team provides recommendations associated with some of the needs identified in each of the categories. It is understood that many of the recommendations require the collaboration and partnership of multiple agencies over an extended period of time. Some of the recommendations may be much easier to adopt and implement than others. The project team offers the recommendations with this awareness and hopes that OVR, the SRC and other stakeholders will find some of the recommendations helpful.

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Impetus for Needs Assessment

Title IV of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) contains the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 as amended and requires all state vocational rehabilitation agencies to assess the rehabilitation needs of individuals with disabilities within the respective State and relate the planning of programs and services and the establishment of goals and priorities to those needs. According to Section 102 of WIOA and Section 412 of the Rehabilitation Act, each participating State shall submit a Unified or Combined State Plan every four years, with a biannual modification as needed. In addition, Title 34 of the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Section 361.29 indicates that: The State Plan must include the “results of a comprehensive, statewide assessment, jointly conducted by the designated State unit and the State Rehabilitation Council every three years describing the rehabilitation needs of individuals with disabilities residing within the State.” In response to this mandate, and to ensure that adequate efforts are being made to serve the diverse needs of persons with disabilities in CNMI, the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, in partnership with the State Rehabilitation Council, entered into a contract with the Interwork Institute at San Diego State University for the purpose of jointly developing and implementing a comprehensive statewide needs assessment of the vocational rehabilitation needs of individuals with disabilities residing in CNMI.

Purpose of Needs Assessment and Utilization of Results

The purpose of the comprehensive statewide needs assessment (CSNA) is to identify and describe the rehabilitation needs of individuals with disabilities residing within CNMI. In particular, the CSNA seeks to provide information on:

- The overall performance of OVR as it relates to meeting the rehabilitation needs of individuals with disabilities in the Commonwealth;
- The rehabilitation needs of individuals with the most significant disabilities, including their need for supported employment services;
- The rehabilitation needs of individuals with disabilities who are minorities, and those who have been unserved or underserved by the vocational rehabilitation program;
- The rehabilitation needs of youth and students with disabilities in transition, including their need for pre-employment transition services;
- The rehabilitation needs of individuals served through other components of the statewide workforce development system;
- The need to establish, develop and/or improve community rehabilitation programs within the Commonwealth; and
- The needs of businesses in recruiting, hiring, accommodating and retaining employees with disabilities.

It is expected that data from the needs assessment effort will provide OVR and the SRC with direction when creating the VR portion of the Unified State Plan and when planning for future program development, outreach and resource allocation. This CSNA covers Federal Fiscal Years (FFY) 2014 through 2017. The data only covers 2014-2016, but the other findings include 2017.

METHODOLOGY

The comprehensive statewide needs assessment was conducted using qualitative and quantitative methods of inquiry. The specific methods for gathering the data used in this assessment are detailed below.

Surveys

Survey of Individuals with Disabilities

Instrument. The instrument used for the electronic survey of individuals with disabilities (Appendix A) was developed by the project team and reviewed and revised by OVR. The same survey was printed and hard copies were mailed to a random sample of 100 consumers in Saipan, Tinian and Rota.

Survey population. Individuals identified for participation in this survey effort can be described as individuals with disabilities who are potential, former or current clients of OVR. The project team in coordination with OVR broadly dispersed the electronic survey via an e-mail invitation, public service announcements, newspapers, Facebook, and by traditional mail.

Data collection. OVR identified individuals with disabilities and invited them to participate in the electronic survey effort via e-mail. Once the survey was active, OVR sent an invitation and link to the survey by e-mail. Approximately two weeks after the distribution of the initial invitation, another electronic notice was sent as both a “thank you” to those who had completed the survey and a reminder to those who had not. A third and final invitation was sent two weeks after the second invitation. The project team using the Qualtrics software program analyzed survey responses. Hard copy surveys were mailed in a self-addressed stamped envelope and the results were entered into Qualtrics by the project team.

Efforts to ensure respondent confidentiality. Respondents to the individual survey were not asked to identify themselves when completing the survey. In addition, responses to the electronic surveys were aggregated by the project team at SDSU prior to reporting results, which served to further obscure the identities of individual survey respondents.

Accessibility. The electronic survey was designed using an accessible, internet-based survey application. Respondents were provided with the name and contact information of the Research Director at SDSU in order to place requests for other alternate survey formats.

Data analysis. Data analysis consisted of computing frequencies and descriptive statistics for the survey items with fixed response options. Open-ended survey questions, which yielded narrative responses from individuals, were analyzed by the researchers for themes or concepts that were expressed consistently by respondents.

Number of completed surveys. A total of 76 electronic surveys and 21 hard copy surveys were completed by individuals with disabilities. It is difficult to gauge the return rate as many of the e-mail

notices and invitations to take the survey could have come from forwarded email invitations. However, it appears that the return rate for the hard copy surveys was 21%.

Key Informant Interviews

Instrument. The instruments used for the key informant interviews (Appendix B) was developed by the research team at SDSU.

Population. The key informant population consisted of OVR staff and key representatives of community partners. Individual interviews were conducted with a total of 8 persons from CNMI. There were five OVR staff interviewed in Saipan, two community partners individually interviewed in Saipan, and one individual representing business interviewed in Rota. All of the other individuals were interviewed as part of focus groups in Saipan, Tinian and Rota.

Data collection. Key informant interviews were conducted during the week of October 23-27, 2017. All of the interviews were conducted face-to-face. The general format of the interviews was consistent between the different job classifications. First, participants were asked questions to ascertain their personal and professional expertise and their experience with OVR. Participants were then asked open-ended questions about their perceptions of the needs of individuals with disabilities in CNMI. Finally, participants were asked to share their perceptions of how OVR could improve their ability to help meet those needs, with a primary focus upon helping consumers prepare for, secure, retain or regain employment.

Efforts to ensure respondent confidentiality. Names and other identifying characteristics were not recorded by the interviewer. Participants were informed that their responses would be treated as confidential information, would not be reported with information that could be used to identify them, and would be consolidated with information from other respondents before results were reported.

Data analysis. The interviewer took notes on the discussion as it occurred. Themes or concerns that surfaced with consistency across interviews were identified and are reported as findings in the report narrative.

Focus Groups:

A series of 12 focus groups were conducted in CNMI during the needs assessment effort. The focus group protocols are contained in Appendix B. Focus groups were held in Saipan, Tinian and Rota. Three distinct stakeholder groups participated in the focus groups: individuals with disabilities; representatives of organizations that provide services to persons with disabilities; and employers. A total of 79 individuals participated in the focus group research.

Focus group participants included individuals recruited by OVR staff and those that responded to the various forms of advertising for the CSNA. The format of the focus groups was consistent; a few minutes were devoted to introductions and building rapport in order to establish a productive focus group environment. The focus group moderator explained the purpose of the focus group and provided a brief description of the comprehensive statewide needs assessment. The moderator explained the role

of the Interwork Institute in the needs assessment effort and reminded participants of the confidentiality of their statements.

The agenda for the focus groups conducted with individuals with disabilities was based upon the subject areas that form the different sections of this report. Participants were given the opportunity to introduce and discuss needs that did not appear on the agenda. Groups were allowed to deviate from the suggested order of topics, and the moderator allowed the discussion to shift to relevant issues of need as participants introduced subjects.

The moderator took notes on the discussions as they occurred. The notes were analyzed by the project team. Themes or issues that emerged at least three times were identified and reported as consensual themes in the report narrative.

Efforts to ensure respondent confidentiality. Names and other identifying characteristics were not recorded by the moderator. Focus group participants were informed that their responses would be treated as confidential information, would not be reported with information that could be used to identify them, and that information from multiple focus groups would be consolidated before results were reported. In addition, OVR staff did not attend the focus groups consisting of individuals with disabilities and partner agencies in order to ensure an open dialogue amongst participants.

Accessibility. OVR included a request for reasonable accommodation in their electronic invitations to all of the research groups. There were no requests for accommodations received by the project team.

The total number of individuals that participated in the focus groups by type and island is contained in Table 1 below:

Table 1
Total Focus Group Participants by Type and Island

Focus Group Type	Focus Groups			
	Saipan	Tinian	Rota	Total
Individuals with Disabilities	18	7	4	29
Community Partners	18	6	2	26
Businesses	21	3		24
Total	57	16	6	79

Analysis of OVR Data

The project team at SDSU reviewed OVR performance data drawn from Federal Fiscal Years 2014 through 2016. The data was provided to the research team by OVR Staff in an aggregate format that did not contain names or other personally-identifying information that might identify individuals served by OVR.

The data from OVR was used in conjunction with 911 data from the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA). The data was separated and is reported according to the content areas that most closely aligned with the topic areas under investigation.

The total number of individuals that participated in this CSNA in any form is 176. The project team is very pleased with this level of involvement for a program the size of OVR.

Analysis and Triangulation of Data

The data gathered from the national and agency-specific data sets, key informant interviews, surveys and focus groups were analyzed by the researchers on the project team. The common themes that emerged regarding needs of persons with disabilities from each data source were identified and compared to each other to validate the existence of needs, especially as they pertained to the target populations of this assessment. These common themes are identified and discussed in the Findings section.

Dissemination Plans

The CSNA report is delivered to OVR and the SRC. The project team received several requests by consumers and partner agencies to share the results of the CSNA. We recommend that OVR publish the report on their website for public access and that they notify the public of the availability of the report by e-mail.

Study Limitations

Inherent in any type of research effort are limitations that may constrain the utility of the data that is generated. Therefore, it is important to highlight some of the most significant issues that may limit the ability to generalize the needs assessment findings to larger populations. Inherent in the methods used to collect data is the potential for bias in the selection of participants. The findings that are reported reflect only the responses of those who could be reached and who were willing to participate. Individuals who were disenfranchised, dissatisfied, or who did not wish to be involved with OVR may have declined to participate in the focus group and key informant interview research. A second significant concern is that the information gathered from respondents may not accurately represent the broader concerns of all potential constituents and stakeholders. Data gathered from service providers, for example, may reflect only the needs of individuals who are already recipients of services, to the exclusion of those who are not presently served. Although efforts were made to gather information from a variety of stakeholders in the vocational rehabilitation process, it would be imprudent to conclude with certainty that those who contributed to the focus groups and the key informant interviews constitute a fully representative sample of all of the potential stakeholders in the vocational rehabilitation process in CNMI.

FINDINGS

- Section 1: Overall agency performance**
- Section 2: Needs of individuals with the most significant disabilities, including their need for supported employment**
- Section 3: Needs of individuals with disabilities that are minorities, including needs of individuals who have been unserved or underserved by the VR program**
- Section 4: Needs of youth and students with disabilities in transition**
- Section 5: Needs of individuals with disabilities served through other components of the statewide workforce development system**
- Section 6: Need to establish, develop or improve community rehabilitation programs in CNMI**
- Section 7: Needs of businesses and effectiveness in serving employers**

SECTION 1: OVERALL AGENCY PERFORMANCE

The first section of the CSNA reports on areas of general performance by OVR. General performance refers to how well OVR is fulfilling its mission of assisting people with disabilities to increase their independence and employment. The area of general performance also refers to how effectively OVR performs the processes that facilitate case movement through the stages of the rehabilitation process, how well OVR adheres to the timelines for this case movement identified in the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 as amended by WIOA, and OVR's policies and procedures. Finally, overall performance also refers to how effectively OVR provides placement services to individuals with disabilities in CNMI as this process significantly impacts OVR's ability to fulfill their mission.

The structure of this section, as well as the following sections, will include the following:

1. Data that pertains to the section in question, including observations based on the data;
2. Electronic and hard copy survey results pertaining to the section;
3. Recurring/consensual themes that emerged during the individual interviews and focus groups; and
4. Recommendations to address the findings in each area of the assessment.

The time-period covered by this comprehensive statewide needs assessment is the three-year period from October 1, 2013 – September 30, 2016. Federal RSA data and OVR data is based on the Federal Fiscal Year. The time frame was determined by the requirement found in the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 as amended in WIOA that VR programs perform a CSNA every three years at a minimum. The data on agency performance included in this section comes from the case management system used by OVR and is compared to the available RSA 911 data submitted by OVR where available.

Recurring Themes Across all Data Collection Methods

The following recurring themes emerged in the area of Overall Agency Performance:

- *OVR has improved community outreach and established important partnerships that contribute to increasing opportunities for individuals with disabilities in CNMI.*
- *OVR is processing casework and moving consumers through the VR process well within the established time frames, but responsiveness to consumers remains an area in need of improvement.*
- *Many individuals with disabilities in CNMI continue to perceive of OVR as a medical services provider as opposed to a vocational rehabilitation program, so community education remains an important activity for the organization.*

**AGENCY SPECIFIC DATA RELATED TO OVERALL AGENCY
PERFORMANCE**

Table 2 below identifies various data elements that illustrate OVR's overall program performance for the three-year period of this assessment.

Table 2
General Performance Data for OVR 2014-2016

Item	ALL CONSUMERS		
	2014	2015	2016
Applications	137	144	133
% of apps found eligible	53.28%	66.67%	56.39%
# of apps found eligible	73	96	75
Ave. time for elig. determination (days)	58	44	47
Significance of Disability			
Disabled	14	13	2
% of total	19.18%	13.54%	2.67%
Significant	42	58	47
% of total	57.53%	60.42%	62.67%
Most significant	17	25	26
% of total	23.29%	26.04%	34.67%
% closed prior to IPE development	6.90%	9.09%	19.15%
# closed prior to IPE development	4	4	9
Plans developed	68	83	81
Ave. time from eligibility to plan (days)	36	30	46
Number of consumers in training by type			
Vocational	1	4	4
Undergraduate	16	21	21
Graduate	0	0	0
Ave. length of open case (days) for cases closed other than rehabilitated	814	911	1100
Cases closed other than rehabilitated	26	17	28
Ave. length of open case (days) for cases closed rehabilitated	669	517	681
Number of cases closed rehabilitated	37	22	48
Rehabilitation rate	58.73%	56.41%	63.16%
Median earnings of those closed as successfully rehabilitated	\$17,992.00	\$17,628.00	\$19,396.00

Total number of cases served	310	309	341
Ave. cost of all cases	\$715.86	\$852.98	\$784.19
Ave. cost of cases closed rehabilitated	\$1,098.08	\$1,663.11	\$1,872.70
Ave. cost per case closed unsuccessful	\$256.36	\$3.53	\$23.21
Ave. cost per case closed prior to plan	\$76.56	\$69.56	\$46.01

Observations based upon the data. Table 2 indicates that the number of applicants for services rose by seven individuals from 2014 to 2015, but then decreased by 11 from 2015 to 2016. Approximately 56% of individuals that applied for services were found eligible, indicating that almost half of the people that apply are not eligible. This indicates that OVR may need to communicate its eligibility requirements more effectively to potential applicants. There is a considerable amount of work and expense that goes into the eligibility determination process, so significant resources are being expended to find such a large percentage of applicants ineligible. It is possible that the high level of ineligibility determinations is indicative of OVR's drive to educate the community about the purpose and role of the VR program and to move away from the public perspective that they are a medical service provider. It may take a few years for this education and information to take root and be reflected in the eligibility determination percentage.

The average length of time for eligibility to be determined was below 50 days in 2015 and 2016, which is well below the 60 days required by law. The significance of disability of those individuals found eligible has been steadily increasing towards the most significantly disabled over the three years of the study. Less than three percent of the total cases found eligible fell in the disabled category. The others were either significant or most significantly disabled.

OVR wrote more than 80 individualized plans for employment (IPEs) in 2015 and 2016, yet they closed almost 20% of cases after eligibility was determined and prior to the IPE being completed. The average time to develop the IPE was 46 days from the date of eligibility determination in 2016, which is half of the maximum time frame of 90 days allowable by the Rehabilitation Act as amended. This indicates that of the two time frames identified in the law (eligibility determination and IPE development), OVR is well below the maximum time allowed.

Two of the new common performance measures in WIOA are related to the number of consumers in either secondary or postsecondary education. Table 2 indicates that OVR has had 25 people in some level of postsecondary education since 2015. It will be important for OVR to monitor the progress of these individuals and report on any skills gains as they progress in training from year to year.

The number of cases closed as rehabilitated more than doubled from 2015 to 2016, and the rehabilitation rate increased to above 63%. OVR served more cases in 2016 than in any other year of the study and the cost per case closed successfully increased to nearly \$1,900. This number is well below the national average for VR programs, which is well above \$5,000 per case in many VR programs. The median earnings increased to almost \$20,000 annually for OVR consumers in 2016. Median earnings is another common performance measure in WIOA.

OVR Consumers by Gender:

Table 3 identifies the general performance outcomes by gender for OVR consumers.

Table 3
General Data for OVR Consumers by Gender

Item	GENDER					
	Male			Female		
	2014	2015	2016	2014	2015	2016
Applications	66	92	79	71	52	54
% of apps found eligible	54.55%	66.30%	51.90%	52.11%	67.31%	62.96%
# of apps found eligible	36	61	41	37	35	34
Ave. time for eligibility determination (days)	71	46	52	45	40	41
Significance of Disability						
Disabled	6	9	2	8	4	0
% of total	16.67%	14.75%	4.88%	21.62%	11.43%	0.00%
Significant	17	37	21	25	21	26
% of total	47.22%	60.66%	51.22%	67.57%	60.00%	76.47%
Most significant	13	15	18	4	10	8
% of total	36.11%	24.59%	43.90%	10.81%	28.57%	23.53%
% closed prior to IPE development	2.82%	8.70%	11.54%	4.44%	0.00%	7.32%
# closed prior to IPE development	2	4	6	2	0	3
Plans developed	38	48	47	30	35	34
Ave. time from eligibility to plan (days)	45	29	37	25	31	58
Number of consumers in training by type						
Vocational	1	2	2	0	2	2
Undergraduate	11	11	10	5	10	11
Graduate	0	0	0	0	0	0
Ave. length of open case (days) for cases closed other than rehabilitated	790	758	957	839	1131	1224
Cases closed other than rehabilitated	13	10	13	13	7	15
Ave. length of open case (days) for cases closed rehabilitated	675	452	860	662	610	452

Number of cases closed rehabilitated	20	13	27	17	9	21
Rehabilitation rate	60.61%	56.52%	67.50%	56.67%	56.25%	58.33%
Median earnings of those closed as successfully rehabilitated	\$16,952.00	\$19,500.00	\$15,756.00	\$21,216.00	\$15,652.00	\$24,076.00
Total number of cases served	170	188	202	140	121	139
Ave. cost of all cases	\$768.95	\$829.00	\$689.09	\$651.39	\$890.24	\$922.39
Ave. cost of cases closed rehabilitated	\$977.11	\$2,317.69	\$1,378.43	\$1,240.39	\$717.59	\$2,508.20
Ave. cost per case closed unsuccessful	\$438.42	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$74.30	\$8.57	\$43.33
Ave. cost per case closed prior to plan	\$108.11	\$80.24	\$33.20	\$49.51	\$52.64	\$67.37

Observations based on the data:

The rate of female applicants exceeded males in 2015 and 2016, though the number of plans completed were less for women than men. The rehabilitation rate for men exceeded the rate for women in 2016, but the average cost per case was greater for women in the same time period. The median earnings of females closed successfully were much greater than men in 2016.

Table 4 below identifies the general data elements by age group served by OVR during the three years of this study. The number of individuals by age range remained steady during the period from 2014 to 2016. It is likely that the number of youth applicants will increase significantly in the coming years due to the implementation of pre-employment transition services.

Ave. length of case (days) other than rehabilitated	834	549	903	790	1002	1133	896	642	0
Cases closed other than rehabilitated	7	1	4	16	13	24	3	3	0
Ave. length of open case rehabilitated	1284	980	752	615	432	635	348	325	848
Number of cases closed rehabilitated	5	4	8	27	15	34	5	3	6
Rehab. rate	41.67%	80.00%	66.67%	62.79%	53.57%	58.62%	62.50%	50.00%	100.00%
Median earnings successfully rehabilitated	\$11,544.00	\$15,288.00	\$13,000.00	\$19,292.00	\$17,264.00	\$22,568.00	\$22,984.00	\$49,296.00	\$31,382.00
Total number of cases served	92	92	104	195	196	216	23	21	21
Ave. cost of all cases	\$832.66	\$667.73	\$649.86	\$687.25	\$882.83	\$803.58	\$491.26	\$1,385.91	\$1,249.96
Ave. cost - rehabilitated	\$1,377.66	\$667.60	\$1,588.35	\$876.72	\$1,402.88	\$2,017.97	\$2,013.80	\$4,278.27	\$1,428.67
Ave. cost - unsuccessful	\$903.72	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$21.21	\$4.62	\$27.08	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Ave. cost per case closed prior to plan	\$400.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$41.70	\$76.92	\$59.77	\$89.11	\$67.67	\$9.51

Common Performance Accountability Measures for the VR Program

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act established new common performance accountability measures for all of the core partners in WIOA. These common performance measures (CPMs) replaced the RSA Standards and Indicators for the VR program and include the following six measures:

- I. The percentage of program participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the second quarter after exit from the program;
- II. The percentage of program participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the fourth quarter after exit from the program;
- III. The median earnings of program participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the second quarter after exit from the program;
- IV. The percentage of program participants who obtain a recognized postsecondary credential, or a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent, during participation in or within 1 year after exit from the program;
- V. The percentage of program participants who, during a program year, are in an education or training program that leads to a recognized postsecondary credential or employment and who are achieving measurable skill gains toward such a credential or employment; and
- VI. The indicators of effectiveness in serving employers.

Public VR agencies have not historically gathered data on consumers that exit the program. Consequently, they have not gathered information that would apply to measures one, two, three and four for those that have exited the program. OVR is in the process of receiving technical assistance from the Workforce Innovation Technical Assistance Center (WINTAC) on implementing the common performance measures, and has begun to work with all of the core partners to gather and report data necessary for the CPMs. It will take some time to develop and implement the necessary systems to comprehensively respond to the new WIOA requirements, but there is some data available that can illuminate some of these outcome measures.

The target rates for some of the CPMs have been established for some of the core partners in the CNMI's Workforce Development System. Table 5 below identifies the target rates for 2017 for the core partners in CNMI:

Table 5
Core Partner Target Rates

CNMI	PY 2017 Employment (2nd Q) Adjusted Lvl	PY 2017 Employment (4th Q) Adjusted Lvl	PY 2017 Median Earnings (2nd Q) Adjusted Lvl	PY 2017 Credential Attainment Rate Adjusted Level	PY 2017 Measurable Skill Gains Adjusted
Adults	33	33	\$2,900.00	66	-
Dislocated Wrkrs	33	33	\$2,900.00	66	-
Youth	38	39	baseline	75	-

Adult Ed	9	9	baseline	0	34
Wagner-Peyser	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Voc Rehab	baseline	baseline	baseline	baseline	baseline

Employment Outcomes

An analysis of RSA-911 data from FFY 2015 was conducted in order to examine the types of jobs obtained by clients of CNMI OVR at case closure. The 2015 data was selected because it is the most recent year that this data was available from the RSA 911 data set. The RSA-911 data set includes a variable that contains the Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) code describing the individual's occupation when their service record was closed. Table 3 contains a list of all the SOC codes reported for all of the individuals closed successfully rehabilitated.

Table 3: Primary Occupation at Closure (six-digit SOC code)			
		Frequency	Percent
Valid	'Farmers, Ranchers, and Other Agricultural Managers'	1	4.5
	'Education Administrators, All Other'	1	4.5
	'Managers, All Other'	1	4.5
	'Management Analysts'	1	4.5
	Environmental Science and Protection Technicians, Including Health	1	4.5
	Mental Health and Substance Abuse Social Workers	1	4.5
	Career Technical Education Teachers, Secondary School	1	4.5
	Teacher Assistants	1	4.5
	Graphic Designers	1	4.5
	Security Guards	1	4.5
	Transportation Security Screeners	1	4.5
	Waiters and Waitresses	1	4.5
	Food Preparation and Serving Related Workers, All Other	1	4.5
	Sales Representatives, Services, All Other	1	4.5
	Receptionists and Information Clerks	1	4.5
	Stock Clerks and Order Fillers	1	4.5
	Office Clerks, General	2	9.1
	Office and Administrative Support Workers, All Other	2	9.1
	Laundry and Dry Cleaning Workers	1	4.5
	Taxi Drivers and Chauffeurs	1	4.5
Total	22	100.0	

Examining SOC codes by major occupational group (denoted by the first two digits of the SOC code) suggests a notable finding: while most SOC major groups reported were affiliated with two or fewer cases (i.e., a relatively small proportion of clients were placed in a particular occupational

group), 27% of all cases (n = 6) were affiliated with the SOC major group for “Office and administrative support occupations”. The next most commonly occurring SOC major group, “Management occupations”, was associated with three cases, or 13.6% of the cases that included an SOC code (Table 4).

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Management occupations	3	13.6
	Business and financial operations occupations	1	4.5
	Life, physical, and social science occupations	1	4.5
	Community and social science occupations	1	4.5
	Education, training, and library occupations	2	9.1
	Arts, design, entertainment, sports, and media occupations	1	4.5
	Protective service occupations	2	9.1
	Food preparation and serving related occupations	2	9.1
	Sales and related occupations	1	4.5
	Office and administrative support occupations	6	27.3
	Production occupations	1	4.5
	Transportation and material moving occupations	1	4.5
	Total	22	100.0

The project team cautions against drawing any conclusions based on such a small sample size for each category, but the data gives the reader a snapshot of the types of jobs obtained or maintained by OVR consumers.

Case Service Expenditures

An examination of the case service expenditures by category can illustrate where and how OVR is expending its resources for vocational rehabilitation. Expenditure data can provide important information about changes that need to occur in order to maximize service to individuals with disabilities in the future. Table 6 contains the case service expenditure data for the three years of this study.

Table 6
Case Service Expenditures

Service Category	Amount spent per year		
	2014	2015	2016
Assessment Services	\$8,518.00	\$6,958.00	\$11,135.00
Percent of Total	3.7%	2.7%	3.7%
Diagnosis and Treatment of Impairments	\$38,441.00	\$93,688.00	\$87,168.00
Percent of Total	16.8%	36.1%	28.8%
Junior or Community College Training	\$14,598.00	\$6,604.00	\$11,670.00
Percent of Total	6.4%	2.5%	3.9%

Graduate College & University Training			\$6,268.00
Percent of Total	0.0%	0.0%	2.1%
Occupational & Vocational Training	\$2,100.00	\$3,824.00	\$8,597.00
Percent of Total	0.9%	1.5%	2.8%
On-the-Job Training	\$42,220.00	\$15,154.00	\$12,538.00
Percent of Total	18.5%	5.8%	4.1%
On-the-Job - Time-limited		\$4,038.00	
Percent of Total	0.0%	1.6%	0.0%
On-the-job - Supported Employment		\$12,400.00	\$13,924.00
Percent of Total	0.0%	4.8%	4.6%
Job Readiness Training	\$20,318.00	\$14,900.00	\$18,286.00
Percent of Total	8.9%	5.7%	6.0%
Miscellaneous Training	\$78.00	\$3,354.00	
Percent of Total	0.0%	1.3%	0.0%
Transportation	\$4,192.00	\$13,836.00	\$20,875.00
Percent of Total	1.8%	5.3%	6.9%
Maintenance	\$7,861.00	\$20,881.00	\$4,803.00
Percent of Total	3.4%	8.0%	1.6%
Rehabilitation Technology	\$80,017.00	\$61,203.00	\$103,532.00
Percent of Total	35.1%	23.6%	34.2%
Interpreter		\$120.00	\$2,642.00
Percent of Total	0.0%	0.0%	0.9%
Personal Attendant	\$270.00	\$1,550.00	\$668.00
Percent of Total	0.1%	0.6%	0.2%
Others	\$9,572.00	\$1,315.00	\$453.00
Percent of Total	4.2%	0.5%	0.1%

The diagnosis and treatment of impairments and rehabilitation technology account for more than 60% of all expenditures for OVR in 2015 and 2016. On the other hand, the total training costs for all types of training accounts for less than 20% of the total expenditures. The data suggests that the perception of OVR as a medical services treatment provider is supported by their expenditures.

INDIVIDUAL SURVEY RESULTS

The individual survey was distributed electronically and in hard copy format by mail. OVR also advertised in the local newspapers as well as posted the article with link to the survey on their Facebook page. There were 97 valid surveys returned between both methods, with varying degrees of completion. Table 7 below identifies the gender of respondents.

Table 7
Gender of Respondents

Individual Respondent Gender	%
Male	54%
Female	46%

A larger percentage of males responded to the survey than females. This is the reverse of the general consumer population for OVR.

Individuals were asked to report their primary race or ethnic group. Responses to this question are detailed in Table 8.

Table 8
Ethnicity of Respondents

Individual Respondent Race or Ethnic Group	N	%
Caucasian/White	7	10.6%
American Indian or Alaska Native	1	1.5%
Chamorro	34	51.5%
Carolinian	10	15.2%
Chuukese	1	1.5%
Filipino	7	10.6%
Chinese	1	1.5%
Korean	1	1.5%
Other	4	6.1%

The majority of respondents were Chamorro, with Carolinian the next most common and White and Filipino tied for the next most common.

Respondents were presented with a checklist and asked to identify their primary disabling condition. Table 9 summarizes the primary disabling conditions reported by the individual survey respondents.

Table 9
Primary Disability of Respondents

Primary Disability	N	%
Cognitive	12	18.2%
Physical	11	16.7%
Mental Health	9	13.6%
Deaf or Hard of Hearing	9	13.6%
Mobility	9	13.6%
Blindness or visually impaired	6	9.1%

No impairment	6	9.1%
Other (please describe)	5	7.6%
Communication	2	3.0%

Cognitive disabilities were the most frequent primary disability type mentioned by respondents, with physical, mental health, deaf or hard of hearing and mobility also common. The project team assigned some of the write-in disability types to categories when they were clearly associated.

Association with OVR:

Individuals who responded to the survey were presented with a question that asked them to identify the statement that best described their association with OVR. Their responses to this question appear in Table 10.

Table 10

Respondent Association with OVR

Association with OVR	N	%
I am a current client of OVR	36	37.1%
I am a previous client of OVR, my case has been closed	30	30.9%
I have never used the services of OVR	28	28.9%
Other (please describe)	3	3.1%
Total	97	100.0%

The respondents were fairly equally distributed across those individuals that were former or current consumers of OVR. Nearly a third of respondents had never used the services of OVR.

Employment-Related Needs

Respondents were presented with a series of yes/no questions about potential barriers to achieving their employment goals and were asked to indicate whether each was a barrier to achieving their employment goals. Table 11 summarizes the percentage of individuals who identified each barrier as an obstacle to achieving their employment goals.

Table 11

Individual survey barriers to achieving employment goals.

Individual Survey Barriers to Achieving Employment Goals	Identified as barrier (%)
Not having education or training	47.9%
Employers' perceptions about employing persons with disabilities	43.8%
Mental health issues	41.1%
Not having job search skills	35.6%

Other transportation issues	35.6%
Lack of Accommodations/Assistive Technology	32.9%
Other health issues	32.9%
Not enough jobs available	27.4%
Not having job skills	26.0%
Perceptions regarding impact of income on benefits	26.0%
Housing issues	26.0%
Language barriers	23.3%
Not having disability-related personal care	20.5%
Disability-related transportation issues	15.1%
Childcare issues	11.0%
Substance abuse issues	8.2%

Not having the education or training needed for the job and employers' perceptions about hiring individuals with disabilities were the two most common barriers to employment noted by respondents. Not having the job search skills needed and general transportation issues were also cited as barriers by more than 35% of the respondents.

Barriers to Accessing OVR Services

Respondents were presented with several questions describing potential barriers to accessing OVR services and asked to indicate whether the barriers had made it difficult for the respondents to access OVR services. Table 12 summarizes the responses of the ninety-seven individuals to the questions about barriers to accessing OVR services.

Table 12
Individual survey barriers to accessing OVR services.

Individual Survey, Barriers to Accessing OVR	Percent
Limited accessibility to OVR via public transportation	33.3
Lack of disability-related accommodations	30.3
Other challenges not already mentioned	24.2
Other challenges related to the physical location of the OVR office	22.7
Difficulties completing the OVR application	22.7
Difficulties completing the Individualized Plan for Employment	21.2
Difficulties scheduling meetings with counselor	19.7
Other difficulties working with OVR staff	19.7
Language barriers	16.7

The most commonly cited barriers to accessing OVR services were limited accessibility to OVR via public transportation and a lack of disability related accommodations. Other challenges not already mentioned were clarified by respondents to include a lack of responsiveness to calls and emails and delays in being able to meet with their counselor.

Respondents were presented with an open-ended question asking them to describe desired changes to OVR services that would improve their experience with OVR and help them to achieve their employment goals. There were a total of 43 individuals that provided narrative responses to this question. Content analysis of the responses indicated a desire for:

- *Increased response time (n=7)*
- *Increased vendors (n=7)*
- *Nothing – they are doing a great job (n=6)*

KEY INFORMANT AND FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS

The following themes emerged on a recurring basis from the individual interviews and focus groups conducted for this assessment as it relates to overall program performance for OVR:

- OVR has made significant strides in the last three years in establishing and nurturing relationships with community partners, including core Workforce Development Partners and education agencies.
- A recurring concern expressed is the responsiveness of the agency to consumers. The time it takes to get a call or email back is frustrating for consumers. Consumers also expressed a desire to meet more frequently on a face-to-face basis with their OVR counselor.
- Procurement delays continue to be a significant source of frustration for consumers. The purchase of products of all kinds can be very time consuming and affect consumers in their preparation for, and acquisition of employment.
- The lack of jobs and training providers adversely affects the employment potential of many individuals with disabilities in CNMI. This is especially true in the neighbor islands of Tinian and Rota.
- Many individuals in CNMI continue to view OVR as a medical services and treatment provider as opposed to a vocational rehabilitation agency. OVR continues to share information about the role and purpose of the program, but they also expend a significant portion of their case service dollars on medical services.

- It was reported that many OVR consumers need to go to work right away due to financial need, so many do not consider postsecondary education as a viable option.
- The IPE process needs to be one that is a partnership between the consumer and OVR. Several individuals in the focus groups indicated that the IPE is developed by the OVR counselor and sent to them for review as opposed to being a jointly developed document.
- The typhoon exposed some significant accessibility issues in transportation and architecture throughout CNMI. Residents with disabilities were often isolated and could not access some of the most basic services. It will be important for CNMI to ensure that any new construction is built to ADA standards for accessibility.
- The location of the OVR office was again identified as a barrier to individuals accessing services.
- Tinian and Rota are not accessible to individuals with disabilities that have mobility issues.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are offered to OVR based on the results of the research in the Overall Agency Performance area:

- OVR should establish and enforce a minimum time frame for response to consumers by their staff, even if the response is to let the consumer know that they are researching the answer to a question. There needs to be a focus on at least partially defining excellent customer service by responsiveness.
- OVR needs to continue to educate the community about the purpose of the VR program and that they are not a medical service provider. The message needs to be reinforced that all services are tied to an employment goal and that OVR only provides services necessary to achieve the goal identified in the IPE. In addition, OVR needs to ensure that Medicare and Medicaid is the first payer for any medical device or treatment where applicable.
- OVR should encourage self-employment as an outcome for more consumers, especially those in Tinian and Rota. It was stated by several individuals that OVR does not frequently engage in self-employment with consumers, so this is an area of potential growth for the organization in the future.
- OVR counselors need to ensure that they are developing IPEs in partnership with their consumers. This process creates buy-in from the consumer and contributes to accountability.

- OVR should work closely with the CNMI government to advocate that any new construction occurring on island is built to ADA standards. When accessibility is not considered, OVR should be an advocate for retrofitting of the facility.

SECTION 2

NEEDS OF INDIVIDUALS WITH THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES, INCLUDING THEIR NEED FOR SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT

Section 2 includes an assessment of the needs of individuals with the most significant disabilities, including their need for supported employment (SE). This section includes the rehabilitation needs of OVR consumers as expressed by the different groups interviewed and surveyed. All of the general needs of OVR consumers were included here, with specific needs identified relating to supported employment.

Recurring Themes Across all Data Collection Methods

The following themes emerged in the area of the needs of individuals with the most significant disabilities including their need for supported employment:

- *.The fear of benefit loss continues to affect the return to work behavior of SSA beneficiaries*
- *There is a need for benefits planning for SSA beneficiaries*
- *There is no extended services provider for supported employment cases*
- *Transportation remain a major barrier to employment for individuals with the most significant disabilities in CNMI*

NATIONAL AND/OR AGENCY SPECIFIC DATA RELATED TO THE NEEDS OF INDIVIDUALS WITH THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES, INCLUDING THEIR NEED FOR SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT:

An analysis of the needs of individuals with the most significant disabilities, including their need for SE begins with an analysis of the primary disability types served by OVR, the significance of disability categories and the rate of SSA beneficiaries served by the organization.

Table 13 identifies the significance of disability rating for cases for 2014, 2015, and 2016.

Table 13

Significance of Disability for OVR Consumers

Significance of Disability	2014	2015	2016
Disabled	14	13	2
Percent of Total	19%	14%	3%
Significant	42	58	47
Percent of Total	58%	60%	63%
Most Significant	17	25	26
Percent of Total	23%	25%	35%

As indicated in the previous section, the significance of disability for OVR consumers has increased steadily in the three-year period of this study. More than 97% of the consumers served by OVR in 2016 had at least a significant disability. This information is consistent with the mandate in the Rehabilitation Act that VR programs serve individuals with the most significant disabilities as a priority of service delivery.

Table 14 below identifies OVR consumers by general disability type for their reported primary disability. The rehabilitation rate for each disability type is included.

Table 14

OVR Consumers by Disability Type

Primary Disability	Total Number by Year			Rehab Rate by Year		
	2014	2015	2016	2014	2015	2016
Visual impairment or blindness	27	31	24	33.3%	42.9%	80.0%
Physical	55	53	44	59.3%	80.0%	67.9%
Communication	14	17	22	73.3%	58.3%	81.3%
ID or other cognitive	18	19	20	58.3%	50.0%	30.8%
Mental health	23	24	23	33.3%	33.3%	44.4%

The number of individuals with physical disabilities, though declining as a percentage of the overall population of applicants, is still the most common disability type served by OVR. Individuals with cognitive impairments are slowly increasing in number while those with mental health impairments have remained steady. The rehabilitation rate of individuals with intellectual disabilities or other cognitive impairments and those with mental health impairments is below the rate of other disability types served by OVR.

Table 15 below identifies the Social Security Beneficiaries served by OVR and their outcomes. Individuals that receive either SSI or SSDI are presumptively eligible for VR services and at least significantly disabled according to the Rehabilitation Act as amended.

Table 15

SSA Beneficiaries

Item	SSA BENEFICIARIES		
	2014	2015	2016
Applications	21	18	23
% of apps found eligible	85.71%	77.78%	60.87%
# of apps found eligible	18	14	14
Ave. time for elig. determination (days)	49	49	53
Significance of Disability			
Disabled	0	0	0
% of total	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Significant	10	10	5

% of total	55.56%	71.43%	35.71%
Most significant	8	4	9
% of total	44.44%	28.57%	64.29%
% closed prior to IPE development	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
# closed prior to IPE development	0	0	0
Plans developed	19	12	16
Ave. time from eligibility to plan (days)	38	30	47
Number of consumers in training by type			
Vocational	0	1	0
Undergraduate	7	9	10
Graduate	0	0	0
Ave. length of open case (days) for cases closed other than rehabilitated	649	1186	1563
Cases closed other than rehabilitated	8	7	9
Ave. length of open case (days) for cases closed rehabilitated	1089	342	1160
Number of cases closed rehabilitated	8	1	3
Median earnings of those closed as successfully rehabilitated	\$12,766.00	\$15,652.00	\$6,292.00
Rehabilitation Rate	50.00%	12.50%	25.00%
Total number of cases served	79	75	83
Ave. cost of all cases	\$798.95	\$1,090.77	\$840.02
Ave. cost of cases closed rehabilitated	\$1,596.38	\$795.54	\$3,142.26
Ave. cost per case closed unsuccessful	\$805.05	\$8.57	\$0.00
Ave. cost per case closed prior to plan	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00

The number of SSA beneficiaries served by OVR increased by five from 2015 to 2016, after dropping by three from 2014 to 2015. The eligibility determination rate of these applicants was at nearly 61%, which may mean that OVR staff should review the presumptive eligibility requirement for SSA recipients. In addition, the eligibility determination average was at 53 days in 2016, which, although below the maximum time of 60 days, seems high for individuals considered presumptively eligible. The number of cases rehabilitated is low across years, but especially low in 2015 and 2016. The fear of benefit loss, which was a recurring theme in this study, may play a part in the return-to-work behavior of this population.

Supported employment is a service available to VR consumers that have the most significant disabilities and that need extended services in order to maintain employment. Table 16 below identifies the supported employment outcomes for OVR consumers for the three years of the study.

Table 16
Supported Employment Consumers

Item	SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT		
	2014	2015	2016
Applications	0	0	0
% of apps found eligible			
# of apps found eligible	3	8	4
Ave. time for eligibility determination (days)	42	69	28
Significance of Disability			
Disabled	0	0	0
% of total	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Significant	0	0	0
% of total	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Most significant	3	8	4
% of total	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%
% closed prior to IPE development	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
# closed prior to IPE development	0	0	0
Plans developed	6	7	4
Ave. time from eligibility to plan (days)	108	25	120
Number of consumers in training by type			
Vocational	0	0	1
Undergraduate	8	9	6
Graduate	0	0	0
Ave. length of open case (days) for cases closed other than rehabilitated	972	1201	1520
Cases closed other than rehabilitated	7	4	6
Ave. length of open case (days) for cases closed rehabilitated	1120	1052	1197
Number of cases closed rehabilitated	4	2	3
Median earnings of those closed as successfully rehabilitated	\$14,482.00	\$16,822.00	\$16,536.00
Rehabilitation Rate	36.36%	33.33%	33.33%

Total number of cases served	61	57	54
Ave. cost of all cases	\$1,030.07	\$1,056.48	\$1,100.12
Ave. cost of cases closed rehabilitated	\$0.00	\$397.77	\$3,142.26
Ave. cost per case closed unsuccessful	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Ave. cost per case closed prior to plan	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00

There were a total of 17 new SE plans developed from 2014-2016, but more than 50 total plans coded as SE in each of the three years. The average length of time from eligibility to plan for SE cases exceeded the required 90 days maximum in 2016, which is an area that OVR should investigate in future years. The rehabilitation rate for SE cases was at 33% for 2015 and 2016, which is also below the average for all OVR clients. SE cases require the identification of an extended services provider that will provide services once the VR case is closed. The extended service provider is generally the Medicaid waiver program in a State, but this is not available in CNMI, so extended services must be identified in some other way, including the development of natural supports. The lack of extended services makes providing SE services a challenge for OVR, but there remain numerous consumers that can benefit from the model. OVR has received SE training for counselors and in natural supports, which may be helpful in the future.

KEY INFORMANT AND FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS

The following themes emerged on a recurring basis from the individual interviews and focus groups conducted for this assessment regarding the needs of individuals with the most significant disabilities, including their need for supported employment:

- The need for public transportation remains a major barrier to employment for many individuals with disabilities in CNMI. Although there is some hope that public transportation may expand somewhat in Saipan, it is nonexistent in Tinian and Rota.
- The transportation that is available for individuals with the most significant disabilities is not consistent and is frequently late or early in pick-up and drop-off. This makes it very difficult for individuals to manage any kind of work schedule.
- Individuals with the most significant disabilities need assistive technology in order to be competitive in the work place. The lack of AT providers and trainers on the use of the technology was a frequently cited barrier to employment.
- The supported employment model remains a beneficial model for many individuals with disabilities in CNMI. The job coaching and long-term supports assist individuals with the most significant disabilities to retain employment.

- Many individuals with disabilities need assistance understanding the requirements for work and to engage in career exploration. This is true of young people and adults.
- Many individuals with disabilities, especially those with the most significant disabilities, need training in basic computer skills in order to be employable.
- The need for self-advocacy training was mentioned by several individuals. Although this is a core service of the independent living center through peer mentoring, the service does not reach the neighbor islands of Tinian and Rota.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are offered to OVR based on the results of the research in the Needs of Individuals with the Most Significant Disabilities, including their need for Supported Employment area:

- The need for work incentives counseling and benefits planning remains a major need in CNMI. OVR should ensure that all SSA beneficiaries, especially young people, have access to benefits planning so that they can help counter the fear of benefits loss through work. OVR consumers are referred to the SSA office for benefits planning currently, but it would be helpful for at least one individual at OVR to become an expert on SSA work incentives so that OVR can provide benefits counseling directly.
- The lack of an extended service provider continues to support the need for the development of natural supports for OVR consumers that need SE to be successful at work. OVR should continue to communicate with the Medicaid program in CNMI to see if they are willing to submit a Home and Community-Based Waiver to use for extended services.
- Several individuals indicated that individuals with disabilities in CNMI should do volunteer work more often as a strategy to show employers that they can perform the essential functions of the job.
- Although the program does not have specific job opening information for CNMI, the Labor Market Information System called The Career Index Plus, can provide individuals with disabilities in CNMI some very valuable information on career exploration and qualifications for specific occupations. This program is free of charge for all individuals and can be accessed at www.thecareerindex.com.
- OVR should provide training on supported employment to their counselors on a regular basis, especially with the passage of WIOA and the changes to the SE program.

SECTION 3
NEEDS OF INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES FROM DIFFERENT ETHNIC GROUPS, INCLUDING NEEDS OF INDIVIDUALS WHO HAVE BEEN UNSERVED OR UNDERSERVED BY THE VR PROGRAM

Section 3 includes an identification of the needs of individuals with disabilities from different ethnic groups, including needs of individuals who have been potentially unserved or underserved by OVR.

Recurring Themes Across all Data Collection Methods

The following themes emerged in the area of the needs of individuals with disabilities from different ethnic groups, including individuals who have been potentially unserved or underserved by the VR program:

- *Tinian and Rota continue to be identified as underserved by OVR*
- *Individuals that are blind or deaf were identified as being potentially underserved by OVR*
- *The remote villages in Saipan were identified as being underserved*
- *Transportation continues to be a major barrier to employment for all groups and this contributes to them being underserved.*

AGENCY SPECIFIC DATA RELATED TO THE NEEDS OF INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES FROM DIFFERENT ETHNIC GROUPS, INCLUDING NEEDS OF INDIVIDUALS THAT HAVE BEEN UNSERVED OR UNDERSERVED BY OVR

Table 17 below contains the outcomes for OVR consumers by ethnicity. This data excludes on person coded as Hispanic and one coded as African-American. American Indians were excluded because there were no clients identified with this ethnicity.

Table 17
Ethnicity of OVR Consumers

Item	Ethnicity								
	White			Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander			Asian		
	2014	2015	2016	2014	2015	2016	2014	2015	2016
Applications	4	11	10	107	97	94	25	35	28
% of apps found eligible	50.00%	54.55%	60.00%	55.14%	67.01%	57.45%	48.00%	68.57%	53.57%
# of apps found eligible	2	6	6	59	65	54	12	24	15
Ave. time for eligibility determination (days)	187	31	87	52	47	45	64	36	40
Significance of Disability									
Disabled	0	0	0	12	10	0	2	3	2
% of total	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	20.34%	15.38%	0.00%	16.67%	12.50%	13.33%
Significant	2	4	3	35	34	32	5	19	12
% of total	100.00%	66.67%	50.00%	59.32%	52.31%	59.26%	41.67%	79.17%	80.00%
Most significant	0	2	3	12	21	22	5	2	1
% of total	0.00%	33.33%	50.00%	20.34%	32.31%	40.74%	41.67%	8.33%	6.67%
% closed prior to IPE development	0.00%	16.67%	0.00%	6.78%	4.62%	14.81%	0.00%	0.00%	6.67%
# closed prior to IPE development	0	1	0	4	3	8	0	0	1
Plans developed	2	5	6	53	54	59	13	23	15
Ave. time from eligibility to plan (days)	32	17	61	36	29	48	38	33	33
Number of consumers in training by type									
Vocational	0	0	2	1	3	1	0	1	1
Undergraduate	0	1	1	14	13	13	2	7	7

Graduate	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Ave. length of open case (days) for cases closed other than rehabilitated	640	716	0	799	896	1081	1163	1184	1188
Cases closed other than rehabilitated	2	1	0	22	14	23	2	1	5
Ave. length of open case (days) for cases closed rehabilitated	0	653	327	667	619	839	685	265	430
Number of cases closed rehabilitated	0	1	2	33	13	30	4	7	16
Median earnings of those closed as successfully rehabilitated	\$0.00	\$47,008.00	\$30,030.00	\$19,292.00	\$17,992.00	\$24,544.00	\$12,584.00	\$14,196.00	\$14,040.00
Rehab Rate	0.00%	50.00%	100.00%	60.00%	48.15%	56.60%	66.67%	87.50%	76.19%
Total number of cases served	7	14	15	256	233	257	44	59	67
Ave. cost of all cases	\$9.29	\$1,238.40	\$769.50	\$711.16	\$618.11	\$528.74	\$904.41	\$1,727.36	\$1,705.86
Ave. cost of cases closed rehabilitated	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$3,644.50	\$972.01	\$1,530.79	\$776.10	\$2,138.09	\$2,384.00	\$3,707.36
Ave. cost per case closed unsuccessful	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$302.97	\$4.29	\$28.26	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Ave. cost per case closed prior to plan	\$0.00	\$66.37	\$0.00	\$65.11	\$47.60	\$23.66	\$122.77	\$136.81	\$89.21

The respondents were overwhelmingly Pacific Islander, including both Chamorro and Carolinian, with Chamorro being the most common ethnicity. The number of Asian applicants was between 25 – 35 for the three years of the study, and Whites were the third most common ethnicity of applicants for OVR services. The eligibility time frame for Whites was considerably higher than the other ethnicities, but the small sample size means that the average could have been skewed by a particularly long determination process for one case.

The rate of Asians in postsecondary education exceeds the other two ethnicities, as does the average length of time the cases are open prior to an unsuccessful closure. The rehabilitation rate for Pacific Islanders is consistent with the general population of consumers. The average cost of cases for Asians exceeds the other two ethnicities, which is consistent if they are attending postsecondary education at a higher rate. OVR should investigate why Asians tend to engage in postsecondary education at a higher rate than Whites and Pacific Islanders. It would be helpful for OVR to encourage participation in postsecondary education to contribute to the achievement of the common performance measures in the future.

INDIVIDUAL SURVEY RESULTS

Table 18 identifies the number of respondents by island that identified where they lived.

Table 18
Island of Residence

Island	Number	Percent of Total
Saipan	55	85.9%
Tinian	2	3.1%
Rota	7	10.9%

The project team analyzed the responses by ethnicity to determine if there were any significant differences in the identified barriers or access to OVR services depending on island of residence. The answers were consistent among respondents on each island, except when around the questions on accessing OVR services. All of the respondents in Tinian and Rota indicated that the geographic location of the OVR office made accessing OVR services difficult. Transportation was also noted by 8 of the 9 residents of Tinian and Rota to be an access issue.

KEY INFORMANT AND FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS

The following themes emerged on a recurring basis from the individual interviews conducted for this assessment in the area of the needs of individuals with disabilities from different ethnic groups, including needs of individuals who have been potentially unserved or underserved by the VR program:

- Tinian and Rota continue to be identified as being underserved by the VR program. However, it is not clear that the demand for VR services is greater in the two islands than the ability of OVR to meet. OVR does have a counselor assigned to each island and they visit the islands at least once a month. Although a more frequent presence would be helpful at times, the demand for services may well be met through maximizing the use of distance technology such as Skype or more frequent emails and phone activity.
- The distant villages in Saipan were noted by more than one person as possibly being underserved. It is difficult to estimate the need based on current outreach and response to inquiries by OVR to these areas. Travel to these remote villages is time-consuming and infrequent, so the assumption seems to be that they could be underserved. It was repeatedly stated that many families still consider disability to have a stigma attached to it, and this was especially noted in the distant villages. This may be one of the reasons that families in these villages do not seek out services from OVR.
- Blind and deaf individuals were cited as being potentially underserved. A few participants indicated that the demand for services from these populations was not great, so there was a question as to whether they are actually underserved. OVR needs to investigate this issue.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are offered to OVR based on the results of the research in the Needs of Individuals with Disabilities from Different Ethnic Groups, including needs of Individuals who have been Unserved or Underserved by the VR Program area:

- OVR should investigate whether the use of software programs like Skype can increase communication with Tinian and Rota residents so that there is a mechanism in place for these residents to interact with OVR staff on more frequent basis than once a month. If there is a lack of Internet access on the islands, OVR should consider working with a consumer who is interested in self-employment to establish an Internet Café on island which could serve multiple purposes including a more frequent access point to OVR.
- Because of the stigma attached to disability in some of the distant villages, it would be helpful for OVR to develop an education campaign in partnership with the schools that could reach families in the distant areas.
- The use of telemedicine was recommended as a way to meet the medical needs of residents in Tinian and Rota. It was suggested that OVR, either by themselves, or in partnership with another agency, write a grant proposal for telemedicine for the neighbor islands.

- In order to increase the level of direct service to Tinian and Rota, the core partners should consider cost-sharing for an employee that can be paid by the Mayor's office and each agency could share a percentage of the individual's salary and allocate that percentage of work time for the program accordingly.

SECTION 4 NEEDS OF YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES IN TRANSITION

The reauthorization of the Rehabilitation Act under WIOA places a greater emphasis on the provision of transition services to youth and students with disabilities, especially their need for pre-employment transition services (Pre-ETS). The Final Rule for 34 CFR 361 and 363 indicates that the comprehensive statewide needs assessment must include an assessment of the needs of youth and students with disabilities in the State, including their need for Pre-ETS. This section contains information about the needs of transition-age youth with disabilities (14-24) and the needs of students with disabilities (16-21) for pre-employment transition services.

Recurring Themes Across all Data Collection Methods

The following themes emerged across all data gathering methods regarding the needs of youth with disabilities in transition in CNMI:

- *A lack of work skills, soft skills, work experience and knowledge regarding the expectations of the work force are all barriers to employment for youth with disabilities in CNMI.*
- *OVR should engage youth in the schools at an early age and maintain contact with them upon graduation.*
- *Disability still has a stigma attached to it for many families in CNMI, so the need for education about disability remains high.*

AGENCY SPECIFIC DATA RELATED TO THE NEEDS OF INDIVIDUALS IN TRANSITION

Table 19 below identifies the case service data on youth in transition.

Table 19
Youth in Transition

Item	TRANSITION		
	2014	2015	2016
Applications	11	9	17
% of apps found eligible	90.91%	100.00%	76.47%
# of apps found eligible	10	9	13
Ave. time for eligibility determination (days)	36	60	50
Significance of Disability			

Disabled	0	1	0
% of total	0.00%	11.11%	0.00%
Significant	3	3	7
% of total	30.00%	33.33%	53.85%
Most significant	7	5	6
% of total	70.00%	55.56%	46.15%
% closed prior to IPE development	0.00%	0.00%	23.08%
# closed prior to IPE development	0	0	3
Plans developed	10	7	11
Ave. time from eligibility to plan (days)	33	54	126
Number of consumers in training by type			
Vocational	0	0	0
Undergraduate	8	11	11
Graduate	0	0	0
Ave. length of open case (days) for cases closed other than rehabilitated	805	549	1469
Cases closed other than rehabilitated	6	1	1
Ave. length of open case (days) for cases closed rehabilitated	1386	0	750
Number of cases closed rehabilitated	1	0	1
Median earnings of those closed as successfully rehabilitated	\$18,876.00	\$0.00	\$6,292.00
Rehabilitation Rate	14.29%	0.00%	50.00%
Total number of cases served	48	47	59
Ave. cost of all cases	\$842.08	\$439.34	\$680.87
Ave. cost of cases closed rehabilitated	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Ave. cost per case closed unsuccessful	\$1,054.34	\$0.00	\$0.00
Ave. cost per case closed prior to plan	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00

The number of consumers coded as transition-age youth increased from 2015 to 2016, and is likely to continue to increase based on the number of applications in 2016 and the increased focus on youth services in WIOA. All of the youth found eligible for services in 2016 were coded as at least significantly disabled, but the average time for plan development exceeded the 90-day requirements by more than one month. The data indicates that of all the open transition age cases in 2016, almost 20% of them were in postsecondary education. There were not enough employment outcomes for this group to draw any conclusions based on the data.

PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION SERVICES

The Rehabilitation Act as amended and reauthorized in WIOA requires VR programs to expend at least 15% of their Federal allotment annually on pre-employment transition services. These services must be made available to all eligible and potentially eligible students with disabilities in CNMI that have need of such services. It is clear from the interviews and the survey results that youth with disabilities in CNMI have a need to receive pre-employment transition services. These services include:

1. Job exploration counseling;
2. Work-based learning experiences;
3. Counseling on opportunities for enrollment in comprehensive transition or postsecondary educational programs at institutions of higher education;
4. Workplace readiness training to develop social skills and independent living (often referred to as soft skills); and
5. Instruction in self-advocacy, which may include peer mentoring

Each of these pre-ETS services was noted as a need on a recurring basis when discussing the needs of transition-age youth in CNMI.

The Rehabilitation Act, as reauthorized in WIOA, also indicates that the following authorized services can be provided if funds remain after the provision of the five required services noted above:

1. Implementing effective strategies to increase the likelihood of independent living and inclusion in communities and competitive integrated workplaces;
2. Developing and improving strategies for individuals with intellectual disabilities and individuals with significant disabilities to live independently, participate in postsecondary education experiences, and obtain and retain competitive integrated employment;
3. Providing instruction to vocational rehabilitation counselors, school transition personnel, and other persons supporting students with disabilities;
4. Disseminating information about innovative, effective, and efficient approaches to achieve the goals of this section;
5. Coordinating activities with transition services provided by local educational agencies under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (20 U.S.C. 1400 et seq.);
6. Applying evidence-based findings to improve policy, procedure, practice, and the preparation of personnel, in order to better achieve the goals of this section;
7. Developing model transition demonstration projects;
8. Establishing or supporting multistate or regional partnerships involving States, local educational agencies, designated State units, developmental disability agencies, private businesses, or other participants to achieve the goals of this section; and

9. Disseminating information and strategies to improve the transition to postsecondary activities of individuals who are members of traditionally unserved populations.

In order to determine if a VR agency can move from the five required services to the nine authorized services, a fiscal forecasting model must be utilized which identifies the expenditures on the required services and on coordination services and then forecasts how much of the remaining funds, if any, can be utilized to pay for authorized services. The project team includes a completed model of movement from the required to authorized services for CNMI below. This model has been reviewed and approved by the Rehabilitation Services Administration. This model was completed by Josephine Tudela of OVR.

Fiscal Forecasting for OVR for Pre-employment Transition Services

CNMI-Wide Special Education Student Estimates:

I. 2017-2018 Totals:

Potentially Eligible (16-21): 255

Potentially Eligible 504 Students: Unknown

(data collected from the annual PSS-Special Education Student Data Report)

II. Method used to determine the need for pre-employment transition services:

OVR utilized the results of the 2013/14 and 2017/18 comprehensive statewide needs assessment to identify that pre-employment transition services were a need of students with disabilities in CNMI. All of the five required activities were cited by individuals with disabilities, their families, partner agencies and OVR staff as needed.

In addition, VR continues to identify the needs of students with disabilities via the following methods:

(1) One Vocational Rehabilitation Transition Counselor (VRTC) was hired specifically to provide Transition as well as Pre-Employment Transition Services to students with disabilities who either qualify for the VR program or are potentially eligible for the VR program in the CNMI. Part of the VRTC's duties and responsibilities is to conduct monthly co-location for a few hours each month at the three public high schools in Saipan. In addition, there are two Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors who also assist in meeting the Transition and Pre-ETS needs of students with disabilities residing on the islands of Tinian and Rota, ensuring a statewideness approach to service delivery. During the school outreaches, the VRTC and VRCs maintain regular communication with SPED teachers, other school personnel as appropriate, and the students who continue to identify their needs to us as we help to prepare them for employment and/or post-secondary education.

(2) In addition, in September of 2017, the CNMI Disability Network Partners, of which OVR is a proud member, sponsored the Pre-Employment Transition Services Conference that benefited 68 students with disabilities from Saipan, Tinian, and Rota. Students were required after each general and breakout sessions to complete an evaluation form. After reviewing and analyzing the evaluations, it was very clear that the students felt they needed more training to prepare for

employment and/or post-secondary education. Some of the requested training were in the areas of self-advocacy (learning about the rights of people with disabilities including how to request for accommodations), work-readiness training (what employers expect, right attitude for the job, how to prepare for job interview, how to fill out a job application, etc.), college options, independent living, and a number of students inquired about opportunities to apply skills learned in an actual work setting (e.g. work-based learning experiences).

(3) Furthermore, OVR is actively involved in discussions with the Disability Network Partners (comprised of the Council on Developmental Disabilities, University Centers for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities, Northern Marianas Protection & Advocacy Systems, Inc., Special Education Program, Center for Living Independently, Transition Coalition, State Rehabilitation Council, and Statewide Independent Living Council, to name a few), Transition Coalition, and the SRC through its Transition and Assistive Technology Committee on the current needs of students with disabilities. Identifying the needs of students comes from these various programs' perspectives, which give OVR a better understanding of the types of services that must be arranged and made available so that our students are able to successfully transition from high school to the adult world of work and/or postsecondary education.

III. Pre-ETS delivery method:

A.

- Statewide conferences that include all three islands in the CNMI. Currently conducted annually but with the increase in student participation, data is currently being reviewed for the possibility of a Pre-ETS bi-annual conference. The proposed additional conference is anticipated to be offered during the summer break to include Work Based Learning Experiences. Trainings are currently provided in the following areas:
 - Instruction in Self-Advocacy
 - Workplace Readiness Training
 - Job Exploration Counseling
 - Counseling on Opportunities for Enrollment in Comprehensive Transition or Post-Secondary Education Program

Trainers for the conferences are comprised of VR staff, Disability Network Partners (DNP) and Private Providers.

- School based trainings on Leadership and Self-Advocacy have been provided in group settings by the DNP, with plans to provide the additional four required services at the school sites.
- Partnership with the PSS Cooperative Education Program is currently being finalized to ensure Work Based Learning Experiences are provided.

B.

- The VR Transition Counselor (VRTC)/VR Counselors (VRC) works with their designated high schools by assisting in planning transition activities, providing technical assistance and consults with school personnel about students with IEPs or 504 plans as well as vocational planning. The CNMI Public School System (LEA) identifies students with disabilities who may be eligible for pre-employment transition services with OVR

and consults with the VRTC/VRC and facilitates a formal referral to OVR with parental approval.

- Upon completion of the required Pre-ETS forms the VRTC/VRC will forward the referral to Pre-ETS providers for scheduling.
- Outreach to ensure student awareness of Pre-ETS services are completed through teacher notices (Transition Coalition meetings), school/college/trade school flyers, web-based informational posts (OVR, PSS and Partner Websites) as well as local print media.

IV. FY 2017 Pre-Employment Target Funds (based on current continuing resolution funding):

Total Grant Award: \$867,301.00

Reserved 15%: \$130,095.00

YTD Expenses: Required Activities \$19,295.30

- A. In FY 2017, CNMI OVR provided PreETS to 68 students in the most recent year and there are an estimated 255 students with disabilities between 16-21 yrs. old in the Commonwealth.
- B. In order to provide PreETS to the 68 students, CNMI OVR spent \$19,295.30, for a total per student cost of \$283.75 ($\$19295.30/68=\283.75).
- C. Although the number of students for School Year 2018 has decreased, based on PSS-Special Education Data, the OVR anticipates an increase in the number of student for PreETS services. As noted in Section III, the increased outreach, collaborations and the continuous refinement in its referral process will allow the program to see a significant growth in its number of students served. The Program is also currently in the process of placing a Request for Proposal (RFP) for providing Work Readiness Training (WRT) for students in the Spring of 2018. The Work Readiness Program would be a seventeen (17) week program utilizing the “Skills To Pay The Bills” curriculum published by ODEP. This would allow for a minimum of 50 to a maximum of 75 students to be served. The estimated costs for providing the WRT based on initial proposals is \$750.00 per students. (17 weeks x 3 hrs. per wk. = 51 hours)
- D. Based on the information provided above, the Program can anticipate a minimum of 10% growth in its total number of students served.

Last year the Program served a total of 68 students in Pre-ETS for a total of \$283.75-per student cost. The anticipated growth 10% will have the program serving 75 students statewide.

$$\diamond 68 = 10\% \text{ growth } 75 \text{ students at } \$283.75 = \$21,281.25$$

The anticipated cost estimates are adjusted based on the anticipated additional costs of the RFP for Work Readiness Training.

$$\diamond 50 \text{ students at } \$750.00 = \$37,500$$

Total anticipated PreETS expenditure of \$21,281.25 + \$37,500 = \$58,781.25 for required services.

E. Coordination Activities Cost:

Currently, according to the personnel activity log that counselors are utilizing to track PreETS activities, the coordination activity costs for FY 2017 stands at \$2,330. Upon numerous reviews and technical assistance provided by WINTAC regarding the type of activities covered under coordination activities, the Program anticipates an increase in coordination activities. A majority of the increase will be in the airfare and car rental costs for our counselors to attend IEP and trainings in the other two islands (Rota & Tinian) directly relating to PreETS.

Estimated coordination costs:	\$4,970.00
Estimated Required Activities costs:	+58,781.25
Total Estimated costs Required and Coordination	= \$63,751.25

F. Authorized Activities Cost:

Estimated funds remaining from the minimum reserve available for authorized activities based on the Program's projected expenditures in required and coordination activities:

\$130,095 (min reserve)
 - \$63,751.25 (projected required and coordination costs)
 = **\$66,343.75** remaining for authorized activities.

KEY INFORMANT AND FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS

The following recurring themes emerged related to the needs of youth with disabilities in transition:

- OVR is in the process of developing methods for expending their 15% pre-employment transition services reserve requirement. The primary method so far has been through the pre-employment transition services conferences that occur on all three islands. The agency is developing methods to reach all of the potentially eligible students in CNMI.
- Work-based learning occurs in the private sector through the Coop program in CNMI. These experiences do not include public sector employment opportunities, but OVR can fund for stipends for youth separate from the Coop program if the student wants to work in the public sector.
- Several individuals indicated that youth do not stay connected with OVR upon graduation from high school. There needs to be a better way to ensure that youth are successfully transitioning

to OVR services when they leave school. Many individuals indicated that they think parents are concerned about their children losing SSA benefits, so they do not encourage further pursuit of employment upon graduation.

- Several individuals requested that youth be provided with an assessment of interest early on in their school life so that they could embark on a career path in their chosen field. Many were concerned that the discussion about work occurs so late in the secondary school that the student cannot take any classes that prepare them for work or postsecondary education when they graduate.
- Several individuals indicated that the drop-out rate for youth has increased in recent years and the reason is not clear.
- A need to ensure that educational plans are individualized for each student was mentioned by several individuals.
- Most students do not know about OVR and the services they offer according to focus group participants.
- Work experience is a major need for students with disabilities in CNMI.
- Soft skills were frequently noted as a need for youth in CNMI.
- Mental health services were cited as a need in all areas of CNMI. Mental health services were frequently characterized as underfunded and not available. There are currently no Psychiatrists on island. Mental Health medications are prescribed by a General Practitioner.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are provided to OVR related to the needs of youth with disabilities in transition:

- The pre-employment transition services program needs to be marketed to students and parents so that they are familiar with the possible activities and the purpose of the program.
- OVR should develop a way to track graduating students and those that receive pre-employment transition services in order to help reduce the number that lose contact after graduation.

- OVR needs to ensure that they are taking advantage of the summer youth program through the Title I youth program. Youth with disabilities should be engaging in these opportunities along with all other youth in CNMI.
- OVR has been working with the WINTAC in the area of implementing pre-employment transition services. It would be helpful for OVR to ensure that they work with WINTAC to develop internal control policies and procedures on pre-employment transition services expenditures and service delivery.
- The need to establish high expectations for youth continues to be a recommendation. Youth with disabilities need to be encouraged to reach high and not to settle for a life of dependence on public support. Family education and peer mentoring can help set high expectations.
- OVR should encourage the pursuit of postsecondary education by assisting individuals to obtain part-time employment while they go to school and utilizing OVR resources for this purpose. This will help address the financial need of individuals and will help OVR achieve their common performance measures associated with credential attainment and skills gains.
- The Department of Education should ensure that IEPs are developed using person-centered planning. It would be helpful to ensure that all Special Education teachers have regular training on person-centered planning.
- The OVR counselor needs to be invited to every IEP as long as the student is agreeable to this.
- OVR should utilize social media to communicate with young consumers and help keep them engaged in the VR process.

SECTION 5

NEEDS OF INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES SERVED THROUGH OTHER COMPONENTS OF THE STATEWIDE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM

The following information was gathered during this assessment in the area of the needs of individuals with disabilities served through other components of the statewide workforce development system. Throughout this section, the term WIOA program is used to refer to the sites where Title I services are provided.

Recurring Themes Across all Data Collection Methods

The following themes emerged in the area of the needs of individuals with disabilities served through other components of the statewide workforce development system:

- *The relationship between OVR and the Title I WIOA program has been much improved over the course of the last year.*
- *Cross-training of program staff among the core partners about the program requirements, processes and services is needed.*
- *Integration and alignment of the core partners in the Workforce Development System is a goal for all partners.*

AGENCY SPECIFIC DATA RELATED TO THE NEEDS OF INDIVIDUALS SERVED THROUGH THE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM IN CNMI

Note: For the three-year period of this report, OVR did not collect and track data on their consumers that were referred to or co-enrolled in the WIOA program. The focus in WIOA on integration of the core Workforce Development partners means that OVR will need to implement a tracking and reporting system to capture this data for future use. This is a recommendation found at the end of this section.

INDIVIDUAL SURVEY RESULTS

In order to determine how the WIOA effectively the program in CNMI serves individuals with disabilities, we asked a series of questions to the individual survey respondents that are detailed in the tables below.

Table 20
WIOA Program Survey Question Responses

Question	Yes	No
Have you used the services of the WIOA - funded program?	13	56
Was the WIOA-funded program physically accessible to you?	9	3
Was the WIOA program programatically accessible to you (Did they have assistive technology that worked)?	4	3
Did the WIOA-funded program help you find a job?	2	6

Only 19% of the total respondents had used the services of the WIOA program, and three of those users indicated that the program was not physically or programmatically accessible. There were two individuals that indicated that the WIOA program helped the find a job. Table 21 below identifies the services that were used by the respondents.

Table 21
WIOA Services Used

WIOA Program Services Used	Count
Assessment	3
Training	6
Employment Preparation	3
Work experience	1
Computer classes	1

The largest number of individuals went to the WIOA program to get training services, followed by assessment and employment preparation services. Table 22 below identifies how the respondents assessed the helpfulness of the staff at the WIOA program.

Table 22
Helpfulness of the WIOA Program Staff

Helpfulness Rating	Count
Very Helpful	2
Somewhat helpful	5

Neither helpful nor unhelpful	4
Somewhat unhelpful	1
Very unhelpful	1

Slightly over 50% of the respondents found the staff at the WIOA program to either be somewhat or very helpful.

KEY INFORMANT AND FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS

The following information was gathered from the individuals interviewed for this assessment in the area of the needs of individuals with disabilities served through other components of the Statewide Workforce Development System:

- The relationship between OVR and the WIOA program is much improved since the last report. They are engaged in joint planning and their communication has been much more frequent and positive. OVR counselors refer their clients to the WIOA program as a matter of course, but the outcomes associated with the WIOA program as it relates to individuals with disabilities remains a question.
- The use of on-the-job (OJT) training was cited as a useful strategy and tool in placing individuals in employment, including individuals with disabilities.
- The relationship between OVR and Adult Education and Family Literacy was characterized as a positive one, but one that could be developed further as it relates to common or co-enrolled clients.
- There are very few examples of braided or shared funding between OVR and WIOA currently.
- The core partners in CNMI indicated that they need training on how to deal with individuals with hidden disabilities such as learning disabilities and mental health impairments.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The following recommendations are offered to OVR based on the results of the research in the Needs of Individuals with Disabilities served through other Components of the Statewide Workforce Development System area:

- OVR needs to implement a tracking and reporting system for consumers that have been referred to, or are co-enrolled in the WIOA program.
- OVR and the WIOA program should continue to use OJTs as a strategy to provide employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities in CNMI. The use of OJTs was mentioned as potentially very beneficial for individuals living in Tinian and Rota due to the lack of any training providers.
- OVR should work closely with the WIOA program to set aside a set number of work-based learning opportunities for students with disabilities annually.
- OVR and the WIOA program should target a set number of co-enrolled individuals with disabilities to share funding for training and employment services. The concept of shared or braided funding is viewed positively by both organizations, but it was difficult to identify any concrete examples of this in CNMI.
- OVR and WIOA should provide regular and frequent cross-training for their staff on program flow and processes.
- OVR should encourage individuals with disabilities that they refer to the WIOA program to self-disclose that they have a disability so that both programs can get a better idea of how many clients they have in common. This will help with reporting for the common performance measures as well.
- The WIOA program should make their written material about programs and services available in multiple formats.
- OVR, the WIOA program and Adult Education should pilot a universal intake process to make co-enrollment a seamless transition for clients with disabilities and to ease the paperwork burden on clients for all programs.
- OVR should provide training to the core partners in CNMI on how to recognize, accommodate and effectively work with individuals with hidden disabilities.

SECTION 6

NEED TO ESTABLISH, DEVELOP OR IMPROVE COMMUNITY REHABILITATION PROGRAMS IN CNMI

Section 6 identifies the need to establish, develop or improve community rehabilitation programs in CNMI that serve individuals with disabilities. This assessment area presents unique challenges for CNMI. The size of the islands and the population served by OVR makes the establishment and ongoing support of a community rehabilitation program very difficult. There is one job coaching provider on island in Marianas Health, and the Northern Marianas Trade Institute is the only vocational training provider. The lack of CRPs is likely to remain a major challenge in the future, so all information in this section should be read with knowledge.

Recurring Themes Across all Data Collection Methods

The following themes emerged in the area of the need to establish, develop or improve community rehabilitation programs serving individuals with disabilities in CNMI:

- *There are no CRPs available to serve Tinian and Rota*
- *Assistive technology vendors are needed to meet the AT needs of individuals with disabilities in CNMI*
- *CRPs were needed across virtually every service area*

KEY INFORMANT AND FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS

The following themes were recurring from the individuals interviewed for this assessment in the area of the need to establish, develop or improve community rehabilitation programs serving individuals with disabilities in CNMI:

- There is one vendor in Saipan that does job coaching, but no vendor that does job development and placement. OVR must conduct all of this activity with their own staff.
- The Northern Marianas Trades Institute is the only vocational training provider in CNMI. They are able to connect with some employers for internships and apprenticeships that can result in permanent employment if the training goes well.
- The need for more providers of assistive technology was a recurring theme.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendation is offered to CNMI based on the results of the research in the Need to Establish, Develop or Improve Community Rehabilitation Programs in CNMI:

- Because the number of CRPs is very low in CNMI, OVR should continue to try and develop individual service providers to provide common service needs like job placement and job coaching. In addition, OVR should consider investigation whether the secondary school system staff or Northern Marianas Community College staff can be funded to provide services for OVR consumers.

SECTION 7

NEEDS OF BUSINESSES AND EFFECTIVENESS IN SERVING EMPLOYERS

The need for the VR program to engage with the business community and provide services to employers has been included as a common performance measure for the core partners in WIOA. WIOA has moved the discussion from whether or not VR programs should serve the business community to how well VR programs are serving this community. Consequently, it will be important for every VR program to do a self-assessment of how well they are serving employers. The project team is hopeful that this section of the report will be useful to OVR as they engage in the evaluation of how effectively they are providing services to employers.

Recurring Themes Across all Data Collection Methods

The following themes emerged in the area of the needs of business and effectiveness in serving employers:

- *Employers in CNMI have fears about hiring individuals with disabilities due to potential liability and ability to perform the essential functions of the job.*
- *Employers need to be educated about disability law and the capabilities of individuals with disabilities.*
- *On-the-job training is a successful strategy for employer engagement and job placement.*

KEY INFORMANT AND FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS

The following information was gathered from the individuals interviewed for this assessment in the area of Needs of Business and Effectiveness in Serving Employers:

- OVR has hired a full time Employment Specialist that has a background in business and who is responsible for engaging employers and doing job development and placement for OVR consumers. This demonstrates a commitment to addressing the new common performance measure under WIOA for serving employers. The large turnout in the number of employers that participated in this CSNA was a direct result of the intervention of the Employment Specialist.
- Employers in CNMI were frequently characterized as fearful of hiring individuals with disabilities and fearful of the potential cost of accommodations.
- The paperwork and reporting requirements asked of employers that either hire or provide work experience opportunities for OVR clients was described as burdensome and time consuming.

This burden caused employers to hesitate to offer future employment or work opportunities to OVR clients.

- Employers indicated that they would appreciate being educated by OVR about individuals with disabilities and how to be sensitive to their needs.
- Employers indicated that they appreciate on-the-job training funds as it helps defray the training costs of employees with disabilities and acts as a good job tryout.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are offered based on the information gathered in the Needs of Business and Effectiveness in Serving Employers section:

- The need for employer education remains a strong recommendation. OVR has started addressing this through their Employment Specialist and is encouraged to continue to help businesses focus on the ability of OVR consumers and the potential for all individuals with disabilities in CNMI.
- OVR should work to ensure that there is no paperwork or reporting burden on employers that provide job training or work experience opportunities for consumers. It is essential that businesses do not feel overwhelmed with the reporting or documentation requirements for hiring individuals with disabilities.
- Serving employers is an area of great potential partnership for OVR with the other core partners. Joint planning and implementation of efforts to meet the needs of business should be occurring regularly.
- OVR should partner with the WIOA program and target a set number of joint OJTs to implement as a way to help meet the employment needs of local businesses. This will provide both programs with positive outcomes and contribute to the common performance measure of effectiveness in serving employers.

CONCLUSION

The comprehensive statewide needs assessment for the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation involved quantitative and qualitative methods of inquiry to identify the needs of individuals with disabilities currently, formerly, or potentially served by OVR. The results of the CSNA indicate that individuals with disabilities in CNMI have multiple vocational rehabilitation needs that are met with varying degrees of success by the Workforce Development System. The core partners in CNMI have

an opportunity to work together with a shared vision under WIOA to serve individuals with disabilities and the businesses that employ them. It is the project team's hope that the information in this assessment will prove helpful and beneficial to OVR, the Workforce Development System at large in CNMI, and most of all, individuals with disabilities throughout CNMI.

Appendices

Appendix A: Individual Survey

Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands
Office of Vocational Rehabilitation
Individual Survey

The CNMI Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) is working collaboratively with the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) and staff at the Interwork Institute at San Diego State University (SDSU) in order to conduct an assessment of the needs of individuals with disabilities who live in CNMI. The results of this needs assessment will inform the development of the OVR State Plan for providing rehabilitation services and will help planners make decisions about programs and services for persons with disabilities. The following survey includes questions that ask you about the unmet, employment-related needs of persons with disabilities. We anticipate that it will take about 25 minutes of your time to complete the survey. If you prefer, you may ask a family member, a personal attendant, or a caregiver to complete the survey for you. If you are a family member, personal attendant or caregiver for a person with a disability and are responding on behalf of an individual with a disability, please answer the survey questions based upon your knowledge of the needs of the person with the disability.

Your participation in this needs assessment is voluntary. If you decide to participate, your responses will be anonymous, that is, recorded without any identifying information that is linked to you. You will not be asked for your name anywhere in this survey. If you have any questions regarding this survey or if you would prefer to complete this survey in an alternate format, please contact Chaz Compton at San Diego State University at the following e-mail address:

ccompton@interwork.sdsu.edu

Q1. Which statement best describes your association with the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation?
(select one response)

- I have never used the services of the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation
- I am a current client of the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation
- I am a previous client of the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, my case has been closed
- Other (please describe) _____

Employment-Related Needs

The next several questions ask you about employment-related needs that you may have.

Q2. Do you have the education or training to achieve your employment goals?

Yes

No

Q3. Do you have the job skills to achieve your employment goals?

Yes

No

Q4. Do you have the job search skills to achieve your employment goals?

Yes

No

Q5. Do you have the language skills to achieve your employment goals?

Yes

No

Q6. Have you been prevented from achieving your employment goals because there were not enough jobs available?

Yes

No

Q7. Have employers' perceptions of, or attitudes towards, people with disabilities prevented you from achieving your employment goals?

Yes

No

Q8. Has a lack of accommodations prevented you from achieving your employment goals?

Yes

No

Q9. Has a lack of disability-related personal care (such as a personal attendant) prevented you from achieving your employment goals?

Yes

No

Q10. Has a lack of disability-related transportation prevented you from achieving your employment goals (e.g, transportation that is accessible that includes a wheelchair or scooter lift, hand controls, etc.)?

Yes

No

Q11. Have other transportation issues, such as not having a reliable means to go to and from work, prevented you from achieving your employment goals?

Yes

No

Q12. Have mental health issues prevented you from achieving your employment goals?

Yes

No

Q13. Have substance abuse issues prevented you from achieving your employment goals?

Yes

No

Q14. Besides mental health and substance abuse issues, have any other health issues prevented you from achieving your employment goals?

Yes (please describe) _____

No

Q15. Have issues with childcare prevented you from achieving your employment goals?

Yes

No

Q16. Have issues with housing prevented you from achieving your employment goals?

Yes

No

Q17. Have concerns regarding the possible impact of employment on your benefits (such as SSI or SSDI) prevented you from achieving your employment goals?

Yes

No

Q18. Is there anything else that has prevented you from achieving your employment goals?

Yes (please describe) _____

No

Q19. What is the most significant barrier to achieving your employment goals?

Page Break _____

Barriers to Accessing OVR Services

The next several questions ask you about barriers to accessing OVR services.

Q20. Has limited accessibility to OVR via public transportation made it difficult for you to access OVR services?

Yes

No

Q21. Have other challenges related to the physical location of the the OVR office made it difficult for you to access OVR services?

Yes

No

Q22. Has a lack of disability-related accommodations made it difficult for you to access OVR services?

Yes

No

Q23. Have language barriers made it difficult for you to access OVR services?

Yes

No

Q24. Have difficulties scheduling meetings with your counselor made it difficult for you to access OVR services?

Yes

No

Q25. Have other difficulties working with OVR staff made it difficult for you to access OVR services?

Yes (please describe) _____

No

Q26. Have difficulties completing the OVR application made it difficult for you to access OVR services?

Yes

No

Q27. Have difficulties completing the Individualized Plan for Employment made it difficult for you to access OVR services?

Yes

No

Q28. Have you had any other challenges or barriers not already mentioned that have made it difficult for you to access OVR services?

Yes (please describe) _____

No

Q29. What changes to OVR services might improve your experience with OVR and help you to achieve your employment goals?

Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)-Funded Services

The next questions ask you about your experiences with WIOA-funded programs (You may have referred to this program as the WIA program in the past).

Q30. Have you used the services of the WIOA-funded programs?

- Yes
- No

Skip To: Q37 If Have you used the services of the WIOA-funded programs ? = No

Q31. Was the WIOA-funded program physically accessible to you?

- Yes
 - No
-

Q32. Was the WIOA program programmatically accessible to you (Did they have assistive technology that worked)?

- Yes
 - No
 - Not applicable
-

Q33. What services did you receive from the WIOA-funded programs?

- Assessment
 - Training
 - Employment preparation (resume development, job search assistance)
 - Job placement assistance
 - Other (please describe) _____
-

Q34. Did the WIOA-funded program help you find a job?

- Yes
 - No
 - Not applicable
-

Q35. How helpful were the services that you received from the WIOA-funded programs?

- Very helpful
 - Somewhat helpful
 - Neither helpful nor unhelpful
 - Somewhat unhelpful
 - Very unhelpful
-

Q36. Please write any comments you have about the WIOA-funded program below

Demographic Information

Q37. Are you male or female?

- Male
 - Female
-

Q38. What island do you live on?

- Saipan
- Tinian
- Rota

Q39. What is your race or ethnic group?

- White
 - Black
 - American Indian/Alaska Native
 - Chamorro
 - Carolinian
 - Chuukese
 - Palauan
 - Yapese
 - Kosraean
 - Pohnpeian
 - Filipino
 - Vietnamese
 - Chinese
 - Japanese
 - Korean
 - Hispanic/Latino
 - Other (please describe) _____
-

Q40. Which of the following would you use to describe your primary disabling condition? (select one)

- Blindness
 - Cognitive impairment
 - Communication impairment
 - Deaf-blindness
 - Deafness, I prefer to use auditory communication
 - Deafness, I prefer to use visual communication
 - Hearing loss, I prefer to use auditory communication
 - Hearing loss, I prefer to use visual communication
 - Mobility impairment
 - Psychosocial impairment
 - Respiratory impairment
 - Mental Health impairment
 - Other orthopedic impairments
 - Other physical impairments
 - Other visual impairments
 - Other (please describe) _____
 - No impairment
-

Q41. If you have a secondary disabling condition, which of the following would you use to describe it? (select one) If you do not have a secondary disabling condition, please select "No impairment" below.

- Blindness
 - Cognitive impairment
 - Communication impairment
 - Deaf-blindness
 - Deafness, I prefer to use auditory communication
 - Deafness, I prefer to use visual communication
 - Hearing loss, I prefer to use auditory communication
 - Hearing loss, I prefer to use visual communication
 - Mobility impairment
 - Psychosocial impairment
 - Respiratory impairment
 - Mental Health impairment
 - Other orthopedic impairments
 - Other physical impairments
 - Other visual impairments
 - Other (please describe) _____
 - No impairment
-

Q42. If you have a third disabling condition, which of the following would you use to describe it? (select one) If you do not have a third disabling condition, please select "No impairment" below.

- Blindness
 - Cognitive impairment
 - Communication impairment
 - Deaf-blindness
 - Deafness, I prefer to use auditory communication
 - Deafness, I prefer to use visual communication
 - Hearing loss, I prefer to use auditory communication
 - Hearing loss, I prefer to use visual communication
 - Mobility impairment
 - Psychosocial impairment
 - Respiratory impairment
 - Mental Health impairment
 - Other orthopedic impairments
 - Other physical impairments
 - Other visual impairments
 - Other (please describe) _____
 - No impairment
-

Q43. Is there anything else you would like to add about OVR or its services?

This is the end of the survey! Your information and feedback is valuable to OVR, thank you for completing the survey!

Appendix B: Individual and Focus Group Interview Protocols

**CNMI CSNA 2017/18
Individual and Focus Group Interview Protocols**

[Introductions/confidentiality/purpose statements]

Focus Group Protocol - Individuals with Disabilities:

Employment goals

- What barriers do people with disabilities in CNMI face in getting or keeping a job?
Follow up: Transportation, education, not enough jobs, discrimination, attitudes, lack of communications, fear of loss of benefits, lack of knowledge of options, etc.

OVR Overall Performance

- What has your experience with OVR been like? What have been the positives and negatives?
- What services were helpful to you in preparing for, obtaining and retaining employment?
- What services did you need that were not available or provided and why weren't you able to get these services?
- What can OVR do differently to help consumers get and keep good jobs?

Barriers to accessing services

- What barriers do people with disabilities encounter when trying to access rehabilitation services from OVR? (prompts if necessary -- mobility, communication, structural)

CNMI Workforce Partners

- Has anyone had used or tried to use the services of The CNMI WIOA program? Follow-up: What was that experience like for you? What can they do differently to better serve individuals with disabilities?

Transition

- What needs do young people with disabilities in transition from high school have as far as preparing for, obtaining or retaining employment?
- How well are the high schools in CNMI preparing young people for the world of postsecondary education or employment? What can the schools do differently to prepare young people to be successful in postsecondary education or employment?
- What can OVR do to improve services to youth in transition?

Needs of underserved groups with disabilities

- What groups of individuals would you consider un-served or underserved by the vocational rehabilitation system?
(Prompt if needed for different disability groups, minority status, geographic area and any other characteristics)
(For each identified group): What unmet needs do they have?

Need for establishment of CRPs

- Have you received services from a CRP? If so, how was your service? How effective was it? What can be done to improve the future service delivery by CRPs?
- What programs or services should be created that focus on enhancing the quality of life for people with disabilities and their families, meeting basic needs and ensuring inclusion and participation? Of these services now in existence, which need to be improved?
- What services need to be offered in new locations in order to meet people's needs?

Need for improvement of services or outcomes

- What needs to be done to improve the vocational rehabilitation services that people receive in CNMI?

Focus Group Protocol - Partner Agencies:**Employment Goals**

- What barriers do people with disabilities in CNMI face in getting or keeping a job?
Follow up: Education, not enough jobs, discrimination, attitudes, lack of communications, fear of loss of benefits, lack of knowledge of options, etc.

Barriers to accessing services

- What barriers do people with disabilities encounter when trying to access rehabilitation services from OVR?

Impressions of needs of individuals with significant and most significant disabilities

- What are the unmet rehabilitation needs of individuals with significant or most significant disabilities?
- What needs of individuals with significant and most significant disabilities are being met the best/most extensively?

Needs of underserved groups with disabilities

- What groups of individuals would you consider un-served or underserved by the vocational rehabilitation system?
(Prompt for different disability groups, minority status, geographic area or other characteristics)
(For each identified group): What unmet needs do they have?

Need for supported employment

- Please describe how effective the SE is in CNMI. What populations are receiving SE services?
- What SE needs are not being met?
- What do you recommend to meet the needs for SE?

Transition

- What needs do young people with disabilities in transition from high school have as far as preparing for, obtaining or retaining employment?
- How well are the high schools in CNMI preparing young people for the world of postsecondary education or employment? What can the schools do differently to prepare young people to be successful in postsecondary education or employment?
- How would you characterize OVR's relationship/partnership with the secondary school system in CNMI?
- How well is OVR serving youth in transition in terms of preparing them for postsecondary education or employment?
- What can OVR do to improve services to youth in transition?

Needs of individuals served through the CNMI WIOA program or WIOA system

- How effectively does the Workforce Center system in CNMI serve individuals with disabilities?
- Are there any barriers to individuals with disabilities accessing services through the WIOA program? If so, what are they and what can be done to change this?

- How effectively is OVR working in partnership with the WIOA program? Do you have any recommendations about how to improve this partnership if needed?
- What would you recommend to improve the Workforce Center's ability to serve individuals with disabilities in CNMI?

Need for establishment, development or improvement of CRPs

- What community-based rehabilitation programs or services need to be created, expanded or improved?
- What services need to be offered in new locations in order to meet people's needs?
- What community-based rehabilitation services are most successful? How are they most successful or what makes them so?

Need for improvement of services or outcomes

- What needs to be done to improve the vocational rehabilitation services that people receive?

Focus Group Protocol – CNMI OVR staff:**Employment Goals**

- What barriers do people with disabilities in CNMI face in getting or keeping a job?
Follow up: Education, not enough jobs, discrimination, attitudes, lack of communications, fear of loss of benefits, lack of knowledge of options, etc.

Barriers to accessing services

- What barriers do people with disabilities encounter when trying to access rehabilitation services from OVR?

Impressions of needs of individuals with significant and most significant disabilities

- What are the unmet rehabilitation needs of individuals with significant or most significant disabilities?
- What needs of individuals with significant and most significant disabilities are being met the best/most extensively?

Needs of underserved groups with disabilities

- What groups of individuals would you consider un-served or underserved by the vocational rehabilitation system?
(Prompt for different disability groups, minority status, geographic area or any other characteristics).
(For each identified group): What unmet needs do they have?

Need for supported employment

- Please describe how effective the SE is in CNMI. What populations are receiving SE and CE services?
- What SE or CE needs are not being met?
- What do you recommend to meet the needs for SE or CE?

Transition

- What needs do young people with disabilities in transition from high school have as far as preparing for, obtaining or retaining employment?
- How well are the high schools in CNMI preparing young people for the world of postsecondary education or employment? What can the schools do differently to prepare young people to be successful in postsecondary education or employment?
- How would you characterize OVR's relationship/partnership with the secondary school system in CNMI?
- How well is OVR serving youth in transition in terms of preparing them for postsecondary education or employment?
- What can OVR do to improve services to youth in transition?

Needs of individuals served through the WIOA program

- How effectively does the WIOA program in CNMI serve individuals with disabilities?
- Are there any barriers to individuals with disabilities accessing services through the WIOA program? If so, what are they and what can be done to change this?

- How effectively is OVR working in partnership with the WIOA program? Do you have any recommendations about how to improve this partnership if needed?
- What would you recommend to improve the WIOA program's ability to serve individuals with disabilities in CNMI?

Need for establishment, development or improvement of CRPs

- What community-based rehabilitation programs or services need to be created, expanded or improved?
- What services need to be offered in new locations in order to meet people's needs?
- What community-based rehabilitation services are most successful? How are they most successful or what makes them so?

Need for improvement of services or outcomes

- What needs to be done to improve the vocational rehabilitation services that people receive?

Focus Group Protocol – Businesses

- 1. Please discuss your familiarity with OVR and the services they provide to people with disabilities and to businesses**
- 2. What needs do you have regarding recruiting people with disabilities for employment?**
 - Do you do anything specific to attract candidates with disabilities? Please describe
- 3. Please discuss how qualified and prepared individuals with disabilities are when they apply for employment with your business**
- 4. What needs do you have regarding applicants with disabilities?**
 - Are you aware of the incentives for hiring people with disabilities?
 - Would these incentives influence your decision to hire?
- 5. What are the qualities you are looking for in an applicant for a given job and an employee?**
- 6. What needs do you have regarding employees with disabilities?**
 - Sensitivity training?
 - Understanding and compliance with applicable laws?
 - Reasonable accommodations?
- 7. What challenges do your employees with disabilities face with job retention if any?**
- 8. On a scale of 1-5 (with 5 being the highest) how would you rate OVR's reputation within the business community?**
- 9. What services can OVR provide to you and to other businesses to increase employment opportunities for people with disabilities in CNMI?**

