

AGENCY NAME:	Vocational Rehabilitation Department		
AGENCY CODE:	H730	SECTION:	32

AGENCY'S DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

The Vocational Rehabilitation Department's (SCVRD, VR, or the Agency) mission to prepare and assist eligible South Carolinians with disabilities to achieve and maintain competitive, integrated employment is being accomplished through an emphasis on timely, efficient service delivery and continuous improvement. Service planning focuses on long-term success for individuals served by the Agency. The state-federal partnership funds the program, contributing 21.3 percent from state sources and 78.7 percent from federal sources.

Significant Projects:

- The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) requires State VR agencies to reserve at least 15 percent of their Federal VR grant for the provision of Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS). In South Carolina, any student with a disability, ages 13-21, can receive Pre-ETS. Over the past 11 years, since the implementation of WIOA, VR has actively worked to provide these required services and to build a focused program for service provision. This program provides services consistently across the state. SCVRD employs over 80 staff members, including counselors and job coaches, who deliver direct services to students and ensure they receive reliable support. Students as young as 13, including those in middle school, can access these services upon request. However, this program remains less structured compared to the services offered to high school students. Currently, SCVRD is working on a pilot program to roll out more intentional and structured services to middle school students. SCVRD is partnering with the State Department of Education to identify better ways to connect with local administrators and teachers to assist with improving service provision for these students.

- SCVRD has decided to pilot the Customized Employment Program for one year to evaluate whether contracting this service effectively benefits the consumers participating in the program. To prepare for the pilot, SCVRD is participating in the Association of Community Rehabilitation Education (ACRE) certification course with VRTAC-QE. ACRE is a nationally recognized certification of achievement for providers of employment services to individuals with disabilities. This certification has an emphasis on Customized Employment, which will be a required qualification for the provider organization that participates in our pilot demonstration. SCVRD has identified 16 agency staff (Counselors and Job Coaches) to participate in the 12-week ACRE certification course from May 2025 through July 2025. SCVRD's next steps includes completing a Request for Preproposal to pilot Customized Employment.

- The Agency has launched a new program to track customized training that meets the needs of both employers and consumers. The program was rolled out on August 1st. beginning at the Agency's Comprehensive Evaluation Center in Lyman, SC. The new program will allow the Agency to monitor consumers' progress as they achieve training milestones more effectively. Area office staff will collaborate with a business partner to establish the appropriate milestones for completion. Once a consumer completes a milestone, the area staff will update it in the tracking program, enabling the Agency to automatically document when a consumer achieves Measurable Skill Gains (MSGs) during customized training.

- Based on our most recent Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment, SCVRD has identified the need to focus on targeted populations in our state, referred to as The Big Five. These targeted populations are individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders, Mental Illness, Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) and Spinal Cord Injuries, Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DHH), and individuals receiving Social Security Insurance (SSI) and/or Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI). SCVRD has specialty caseloads dedicated to providing services to individuals with TBI/Spinal Cord Injuries and those who are DHH. Additionally, to improve service

AGENCY NAME:	Vocational Rehabilitation Department		
AGENCY CODE:	H730	SECTION:	32

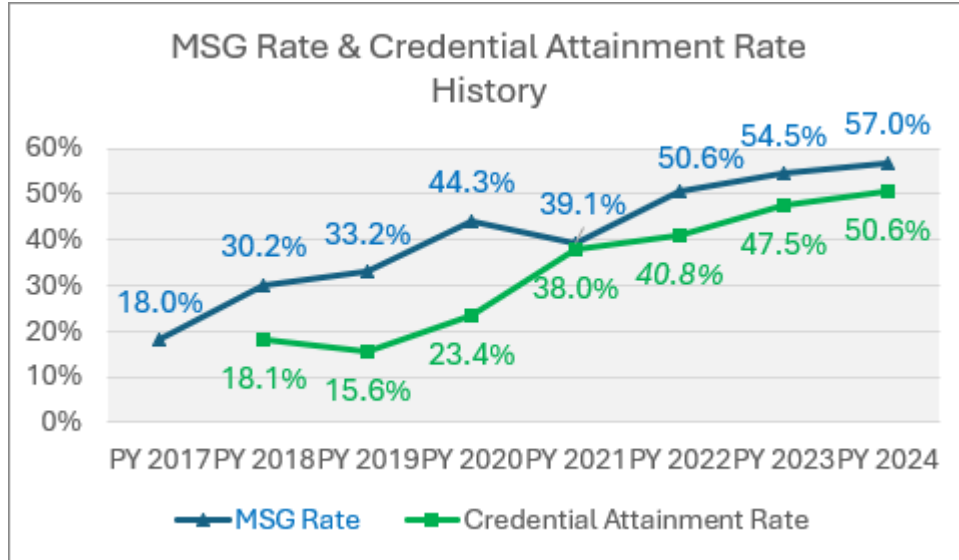
provision for DHH consumers, SCVRD has hired an additional regional counselor for the Deaf and added two in-house American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters. SCVRD also provides Individualized Placement and Support (IPS) services in coordination with the Department of Mental Health for individuals with significant Mental Health concerns. To address SSI/SSDI, SCVRD is focused on connecting all students receiving these benefits with a Benefits Specialist and is increasing training for Transition Counselors.

- The SCVRD has initiated a significant project to establish a comprehensive training and educational institution focused on preparing professionals and supporting people with disabilities effectively. We have completed the foundational curriculum for the autism training module, and our next phase involves developing modules for additional disabilities. The WRIGHTSchool for Disability Education is more than a training program; it is a long-term strategic investment that will elevate our entire vocational rehabilitation system by ensuring a highly skilled workforce focused on improving outcomes for individuals with disabilities.
- The SCVRD Information Technology department has developed an internal Consumer Services Text Messaging System designed to provide an additional method of communication with Agency consumers. This system provides text notifications for scheduled appointment confirmation, appointment changes and upcoming appointment reminders. In addition, the Consumer Services Text Messaging system provides an interface for ad-hoc text messaging for direct consumer interaction from within the VR Case Management System.

Agency Successes:

- *Referrals:* In SFY 2025, SCVRD services received referrals for 11,138 individuals, marking a 6.4% increase from SFY 2024. Additionally, the number of eligible individuals who developed an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) rose by 3.1% in SFY 2025.
- *Timeliness:* The median number of days for an applicant to establish eligibility, complete a vocational assessment, establish a vocational objective, and develop an Individualized Plan for Employment was 56 days, which is well below the maximum federally permitted timeframe of 150 days.
- *Training Leading to Recognized Credentials:* RSA will publish the combined Measurable Skill Gains (MSG) rate and Credential Attainment rate for the state’s two VR programs in the WIOA Annual Performance Report this Fall. However, SCVRD, as a single agency, achieved a 57% MSG rate for the year (statewide target is 52.3%). The Agency’s Credential Attainment Rate was 50.56% (statewide target is 42.7%)

AGENCY NAME:	Vocational Rehabilitation Department		
AGENCY CODE:	H730	SECTION:	32



- Successful Employment Outcomes:** The Agency exceeded its Successful Employment Outcomes (SEO) goal by assisting 3,937 consumers with overcoming barriers to employment faced due to their disabling conditions, ultimately achieving competitive integrated employment. Each of these successful outcomes demonstrates an individual who was either newly engaged in or retained from leaving the state's labor force. On the local level, 21 of the Agency's 23 Areas achieved 100% or more of their SEO goals. On average, the Agency's successfully rehabilitated consumers worked 34 hours per week.
- Median Earnings:** At case closure, consumers of the Agency who were employed achieved median quarterly earnings of \$7,280, reflecting a 1% increase compared to SFY 2024. In SFY 2024, our Agency reported median earnings of \$6,519 for program participants employed during the second quarter after exit. South Carolina ranked 15th in the nation among all state Vocational Rehabilitation Agencies for this measure.
- Participant Employment after Program Exit:** SCVRD tracks the success of participants for up to 12 months after they exit the program. In PY 2024, 63.81% of program participants maintained employment during the second quarter after exit. By the fourth quarter after exiting, 61.42% of individuals maintained employment. Only the top quartile states achieve national rankings this high.
- Return on Investment:** People with disabilities who exit the program with a Successful Employment Outcome enhance the quality of their lives and their families' lives by earning income, lessening their reliance on government assistance, and stimulating the state's economy by paying taxes, making purchases, and ultimately contributing to the state's return on its investment in their services. Based on a cost-benefit analysis of SFY 2025 successful outcomes, we conservatively estimate that rehabilitated consumers will repay a minimum of \$3.40 in taxes for every dollar spent on their services. They will cover the cost of those services in approximately 4.02 years, representing a 24.90% annual rate of return.
- Employer Services:** In keeping with the Agency's dual customer approach, SCVRD provided employer engagement services to 1,750 business establishments in SFY 2025. The engagement services included, but are not limited to, educational training and informational presentations about SCVRD services, candidate referrals and interviewing, strategic planning, training opportunities including work-based learning experience, occupational/vocational training, internships, and direct job placement services.

AGENCY NAME:	Vocational Rehabilitation Department		
AGENCY CODE:	H730	SECTION:	32

- Starting with State Fiscal Year 2021-2022, SCVRD adopted a formal agency departmental budget process. The departmental budgets are presented and voted on by the Board at each June meeting for the upcoming state fiscal year. Since SFY2021-2022, the Agency has remained under budget in all categories (Salaries & Fringes, Operating, Case Services, and Capital Projects) at the close of each state fiscal year. The budget process enables the Agency to ensure expenditures do not exceed revenues, aligns fiscal resources with strategic plans, and enhances program efficiency and effectiveness while serving as a tool for financial planning. We are also excited to announce that our SFY2025 Agreed Upon Procedures Audit resulted in no audit findings. Administrative costs as a percentage of the Agency's total operating expenditure remained low at only 6.72%.
- Data security remained a top priority as the Agency's Information Technology department conducted mock phishing campaigns. These exercises train employees to identify and report suspicious emails safely, without exposing them to real threats. Throughout the fiscal year, employees clicked on simulated phishing emails at a rate of 5.9%, which is significantly lower than the industry average of 30%. This achievement came despite a higher volume of phishing tests and the introduction of more realistic AI-generated phishing simulations compared to the previous fiscal year.
- Disability Determination Services continued to excel in performance. This unit adjudicated 63,998 Social Security disability claims and reduced initial staged claims by over 19,000 since the beginning of the federal fiscal year. This unit also achieved a 95.8% rate for documentation accuracy on quality reviews in the most recent quarter, which was above the national and regional rates. Processing time once assigned to a Disability Examiner remains consistent at less than 60 days. The SC DDS Consultative Exam rate has continued to be one of the lowest in the nation at approximately 25%.
- The SCVRD Human Resources department successfully launched an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) in partnership with FirstSun. On May 7, 2025, the agency hosted a kickoff event for the Wellness Program Expansion, which included a statewide Teams Town Hall led by the Commissioner. The new EAP provides employees with resources to support work-life balance and enhance overall well-being.

Factors Impacting Performance:

- As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and the emphasis put on Pre-ETS by WIOA, participation in the full breadth of SCVRD services beyond the five Pre-ETS categories saw a slight decrease. This year, the proportion of youth participating in the full range of SCVRD services decreased by 0.4 percentage points from SFY 2024-25. However, the total number of youth participants increased during this same period by 363 as demand for SCVRD services for all age groups increased. Demand for SCVRD services from adults increased by 781.

AGENCY NAME:

Vocational Rehabilitation Department

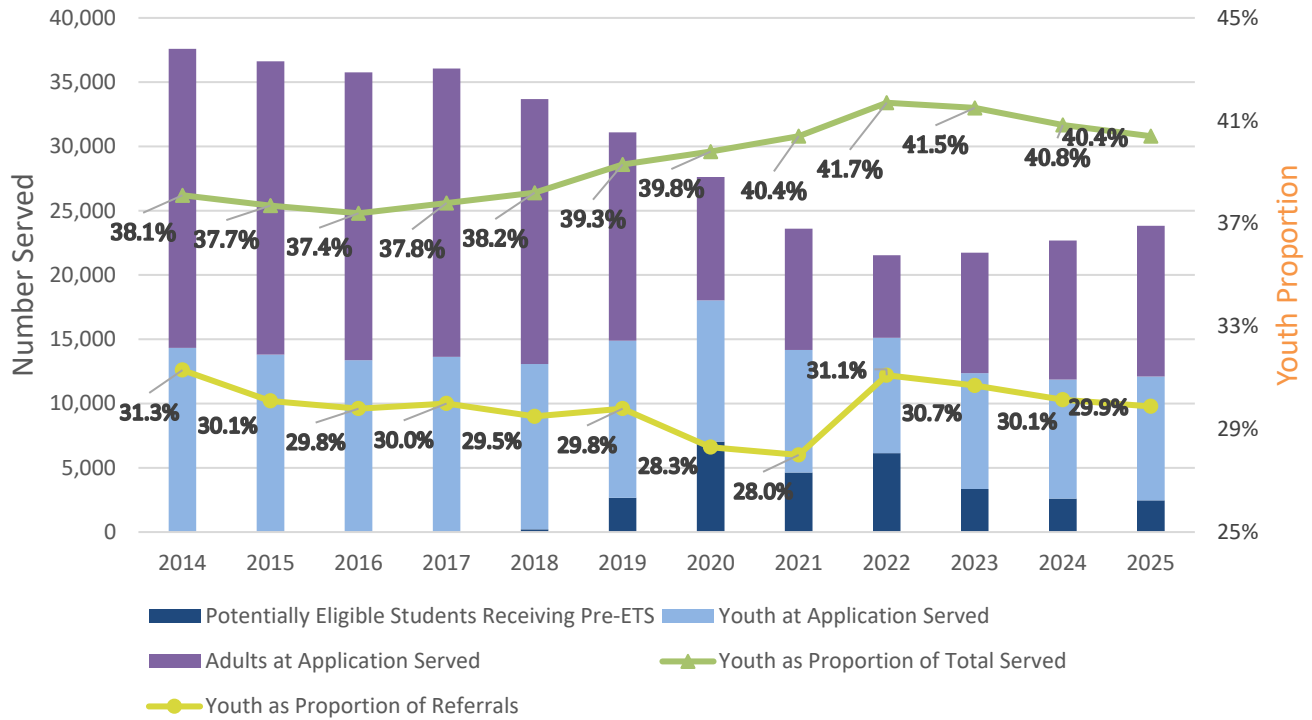
AGENCY CODE:

H730

SECTION:

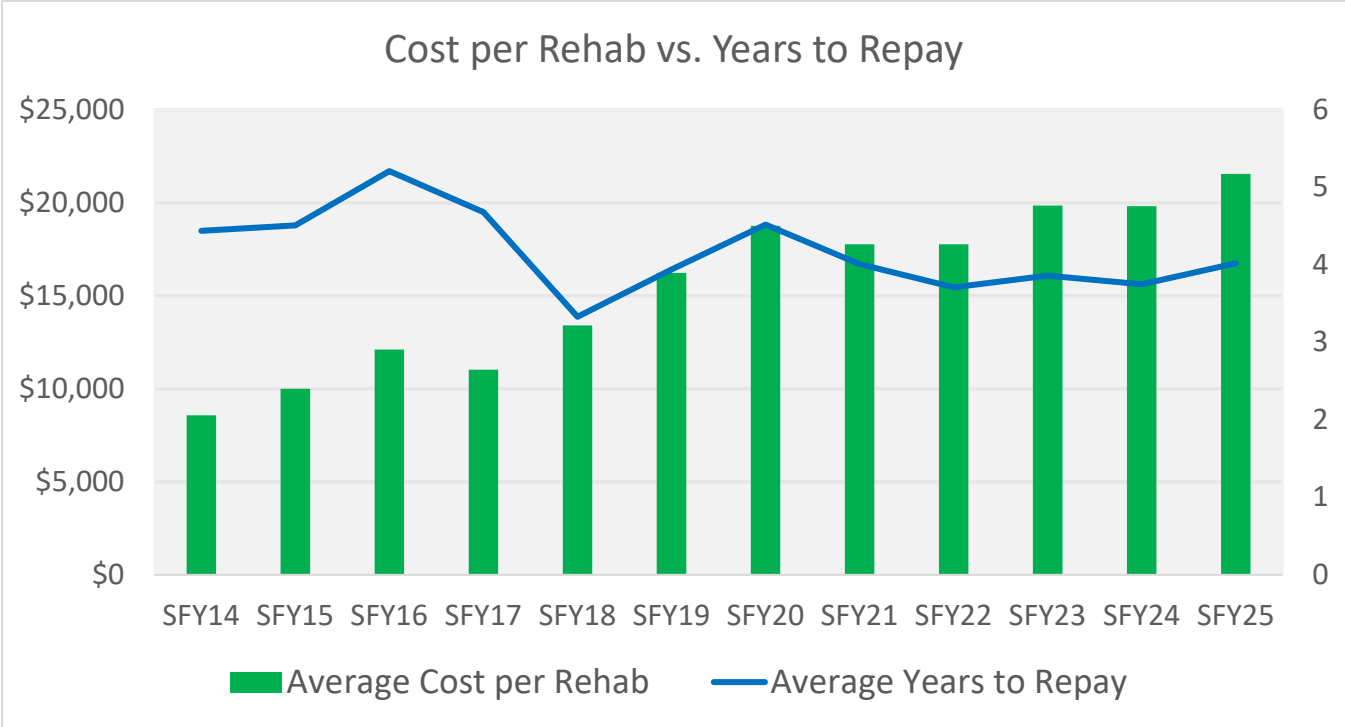
32

Youth vs. Adult at Referral Numbers Served & Potentially Eligible Pre-ETS



- The average cost of rehabilitation increases each year, but as average consumer wages rise, consumers can repay the cost within a similar timeline. Conservative cost-benefit estimates indicate that, on average, consumers need \$21,558.33 for rehabilitation and typically repay this amount within 4.02 years.

AGENCY NAME:	Vocational Rehabilitation Department		
AGENCY CODE:	H730	SECTION:	32



Finally, the staff turnover rate at SCVRD increased from 11.7% in SFY 2024 to 12.4% in SFY 2025. In response, the Administration, Human Resources, and Field Operations departments are implementing various strategies to address the issue. These strategies include reviewing common reasons for employee departures, prompting flexible scheduling and wellness programs, enhancing training opportunities for career development, evaluating salary benchmarks and benefits packages, and strengthening employee recognition efforts to acknowledge contributions and foster a culture of appreciation.

Current Efforts:

The Agency and its national vocational rehabilitation colleagues remain focused on implementation of the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). For several years, SCVRD piloted the Effectiveness in Serving Employers Performance Measures as Employer Penetration Rate and Repeat Business Customer Rate. The Agency will begin reporting the Effectiveness in Serving Employers measure, along with the five other core programs as Retention with the Same Employer 2nd and 4th quarters after exit. State fiscal year 2026 will be the first year that the Agency reports on all six WIOA Performance Indicators; they include:

- Program participants achieve employment during the second quarter after exiting.
- Program participants find employment during the fourth quarter after exit.
- Median earnings of program participants who are employed during the second quarter after exit.
- Percentage of program participants enrolled in education or training during participation who obtain a recognized credential during participation or within one year of exit.
- Percentage of program participants enrolled in education or training during a program year who achieve Measurable Skill Gains (MSGs).
- Effectiveness in Serving Employers (retention with the same employer).

AGENCY NAME:	Vocational Rehabilitation Department		
AGENCY CODE:	H730	SECTION:	32

The U.S. Department of Education's Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) negotiated performance targets for each measure (except for Effectiveness in Serving Employers), which apply in aggregate to SCVRD and the SC Commission for the Blind for SFYs 2025 and 2026.

The Communications department continued a multi-pronged effort to increase awareness of and referrals to the Agency. The Agency used digital billboards and instituted a series of postcard mailers within a geographic radius of area offices. We have focused on developing our social media accounts as a primary tool for outreach, recognition, and awareness. We have been happy to share success stories from consumers, businesses, and partnerships, and we have used social media as a tool to advertise events throughout the state. We have seen a general increase in followers and feedback overall, and we feel it has been a valuable tool in increasing referrals and SCVRD's overall visibility. The Agency's social media audience showed an overall increase in engagements, including an 86% increase in post link clicks and 25% growth of followers on LinkedIn.

We have refocused our outreach efforts to concentrate on a more grassroots, in-person approach. We redesigned our event displays to be more welcoming and informative, and we developed a range of promotional tools to draw interest in our table or booth. We encourage our field staff to attend more local events with these tools and engage with the public. We know that once someone has the opportunity to speak with our staff, they can find the help or guidance they need.

As part of SCVRD's ongoing efforts to expand consumer reach, the purchase of a mobile unit has been requested to serve rural communities. This unit will allow staff to bring resources directly to individuals who may otherwise face barriers to accessing them. While finalizing the purchasing process, a mobile outreach plan is being developed to guide implementation. This plan will:

- Identify priority regions and communities most in need of outreach.
- Establish partnerships with local organizations, schools, and employers to maximize impact.
- Outline staffing, scheduling, and service delivery strategies to ensure consistent engagement.
- Incorporate communication and promotional efforts to raise awareness of the mobile unit's availability.

Information about SCVRD that may be helpful when reviewing the Annual Accountability Report for SFY 2024-25:

Main Products, Services, and Delivery Methods:

- Eligible applicants with disabilities have a program of services coordinated by their Counselors or Vocational Case Managers (VCM) at one of 31 offices located throughout the state. Together, the consumer and VR Counselor or VCM develop an Individualized Plan for Employment. We actively explore career options through vocational assessments and provide comprehensive counseling and guidance to consumers. Additional services may include physical restoration services, rehabilitation technology, and job preparedness classes to enhance employability. Job Readiness Training focuses on foundational skills, while occupational and vocational training leads to industry-recognized credentials. The ultimate goal is to secure employment that aligns with the consumer's interests and is both successful and suitable.
- The Agency's 27 Training Centers serve as a vital link between businesses, industries, and a pool of skilled talent. They ensure consumers gain valuable hands-on experience while providing critical training services to consumers. For employers, these centers offer a cost-effective outsourcing solution and a reliable pipeline of qualified workers. In addition, they deliver occupational and vocational training programs specifically designed to meet employer needs and align with in-demand jobs in the local labor markets. This approach not only supports workforce development but also leads to measurable skill gains and

AGENCY NAME:	Vocational Rehabilitation Department		
AGENCY CODE:	H730	SECTION:	32

recognized credential attainments for consumers. During SFY 2025, our training centers served 2,040 consumers and worked with 226 business partners, of which 41 hired our consumers.

- In SFY 2025, SCVRD had 226 business partners outsourcing work on several hundred product lines to VR Training Centers. These agreements enabled businesses to optimize their facility utilization while providing valuable job readiness training to thousands of SCVRD consumers annually, including skills for in-demand local occupations and soft skills to enhance employability. Additionally, SCVRD Business Development Specialists (BDS) engage in sector strategies and partnerships to develop a system that supports strong regional economies. Aligning the resources of all partners, public and private, toward developing a workforce supply chain that enhances the development of consensus-based, targeted industry sectors, creates meaningful career pathways for a range of workers with various skill levels. They collaborate and integrate their efforts to address skill gaps and fully develop talent pipelines. The BDSs also participate in Integrated Business Services teams in all 12 of the State’s Workforce Development Areas, along with staff from SC Works and other workforce development partners, to provide a coordinated approach to business development activities.
- As a core partner in the public workforce system under WIOA, the SCVRD has staff co-located at SC Works centers in all 12 Workforce Development Areas of the state and shares in the infrastructure costs of operating those centers.
- Many consumers from all areas of the State, who have significant physical disabilities, benefit from services at the Comprehensive Evaluation Center in West Columbia. Services include: a comprehensive evaluation to determine vocational potential; pain management; brain injury sessions to learn coping skills; physical therapy, aquatic therapy, muscular development; and a rehabilitation technology program, which uses an engineering approach to overcoming employment and independent living barriers. The Agency’s Bryant Center in Lyman provides many of these same services to Upstate consumers.
- The Agency offers Job Retention Services (JRS) for employees across the State whose jobs are at risk due to disabling conditions. JRS provides supported employment, rehabilitation technology services, and deliver on-site instruction to help individuals achieve proficiency in their job duties. Additionally, substance abuse recovery services are offered at the Palmetto Center, SCVRD’s residential recovery center located in Florence, SC.
- The Agency continues to maintain its focus on school-to-work transition services and has devoted significant resources to maintaining a strong presence in schools over the years. WIOA supports this focus and has strengthened it by identifying a specific set of Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS). In addition to the other transition services provided by SCVRD, these Pre-ETS enhance career opportunities for students with disabilities as they finish high school and transition to employment, post-secondary education, or other career training.
- Benefits Specialists employed by the Agency provide Benefits Counseling services to Agency consumers at various points throughout their case. These services enable consumers to make informed employment decisions, understanding the effects on any Federal and/or State public benefits they receive, including but not limited to SSI, SSDI, Early Retirement, Spousal Benefits, Medicaid, SNAP, and Medicare. Just as important, this counseling educates consumers about their responsibility to report earnings to the Social Security Administration (SSA) and how to do so. SCVRD Benefits Specialists also assist with reporting wages and maintaining records of reported earnings. As a result, if SSA sends consumers letters informing

AGENCY NAME:	Vocational Rehabilitation Department		
AGENCY CODE:	H730	SECTION:	32

them of an overpayment due to failure to submit wages, our Benefits Specialists can assist in disputing the overpayment by providing documentation of timely reporting.

- The Social Security Disability Determination Services (DDS) program, located in the Columbia, Greenville, and Charleston metro areas, processes Supplemental Security Income and Social Security Disability Insurance claims for the Social Security Administration, and Medicaid disability claims for the SC Department of Health and Human Services.
- As of June 2025, the Agency had 927 employees in full-time equivalent positions.

Key customer segments and stakeholders:

- **Primary customers (consumers):** The Agency’s mission centers on preparing people with disabilities to secure, retain, or regain employment. It does not provide lifelong services. To be eligible, applicants must have a physical or mental impairment that substantially interferes with their ability to work. They must also require and be able to benefit from vocational rehabilitation services that would lead to permanent, competitive employment or advancement in their career. The Agency is unique in that its primary customers are people with more than 135 different physically and mentally disabling conditions. Consumers expect to receive services that lead to successful employment, aligning with their strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities, interests, and informed choices.
- **Business and industry partners:** Employers expect the Agency to provide well-qualified, reliable employees. Companies offer training opportunities for in-demand careers and outsource work for consumers in the Job Readiness Training Centers, which require high-quality, timely, and cost-effective production. Businesses utilize job retention services to assist individuals whose jobs may be at risk due to disabling conditions. Additionally, companies participate in SCVRD work assessment, training, mentoring, and job shadowing services. Business partners also include vendors who assist the Agency in providing needed goods and services that contribute to successful employment outcomes for consumers.
- **State and local agencies and private, non-profit organizations:** SCVRD has hundreds of cooperative agreements with organizations throughout the state and nation. These agency partners expect SCVRD to provide the competitive employment component that their consumers need to round out the scope of services that bring newfound independence for people with disabilities.
- **Taxpayers/Legislators:** The Agency must be accountable in its service delivery and its practices, and provide results that show efficiency and effectiveness, as well as a return on the investment of taxpayer dollars in VR programs.

Risk Assessment and Mitigation Strategies

The South Carolina Vocational Rehabilitation Department strives to assist consumers with disabilities to achieve and maintain competitive employment opportunities. To support improved employment outcomes, SCVRD offers a range of training, effective job search strategies, and job placement opportunities, enabling people with disabilities to grow, develop, and thrive in society. SCVRD also promotes successful transition into the workforce for students with disabilities by offering work-based learning and work-based training programs, which include post-secondary training as an option in agreement with the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act.

To continue to have a successful outcome of competitive employment opportunities for consumers with disabilities. SCVRD is constantly recruiting qualified employees to the team to assist with developing and

AGENCY NAME:	Vocational Rehabilitation Department		
AGENCY CODE:	H730	SECTION:	32

implementing various techniques to achieve Successful Employment Outcomes for our consumers. SCVRD continues to build excellent working relationships with the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA), US Department of Education, SC Legislative Committee, state and local organizations, charities, clubs, etc., to continuously promote and improve competitive employment opportunities for consumers with disabilities.

SCVRD develops strategic plans each year to achieve the Agency's goals of successful employment throughout the state. Each year, various trainings are offered to employees to ensure they are competent in supporting consumers by providing the services, training, and resources required to be competitive in the workplace. SCVRD is constantly exploring new technology to enhance and encourage the advancement of people with disabilities in the workplace. SCVRD also works closely with the Vocational Rehabilitation Technical Assistance Center for Quality Management (VRTAC-QM), which provides technical assistance and training for the Agency to enhance service delivery and maximize Successful Employment Outcomes for consumers with disabilities.

In serving South Carolina's citizens with disabilities and working with business partners throughout the state, it is critical that SCVRD's data is protected. SCVRD has servers on the premises of the State Office campus, as well as a backup server in Lyman, SC. In addition, the Agency has disaster recovery servers in a different state. In the event of a disaster resulting in damage to the central server, SCVRD would be able to maintain access to data and continue agency operations with the use of the backup server.