**Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind**

**2020 Vocational Rehabilitation Needs Assessment**

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**BUREAU OF EDUCATION AND SERVICES FOR THE BLIND**

**VR NEEDS ASSESSMENT**

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# **I. Assessment Overview**

**In accord with the *Rehabilitation Act of 1973,* the Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind (BESB) is required to conduct a needs assessment of individuals with disabilities living within the state. This needs assessment complies with the evaluative objectives outlined in the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA) Guide dated November 30, 2009. As noted in the Guide, this analysis is valid for three years. In conducting this preliminary analysis, Central Connecticut State University's (CCSU) Center for Public Policy and Social Research (CPPSR) gathered information from consumers, the Internet, Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) staff, and State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) members.**

# **II. Methodology**

**In conducting this assessment, the Center for Public Policy and Social Research examined and/or conducted:**

* **An analysis of population statistics for Connecticut that describe disability and minority status;**
* **A description of VR participation rates of minority individuals in comparison to individuals in the overall population in Connecticut, as well as to national VR statistics;**
* **An analysis of VR services to individuals with the most significant disabilities,**
* **An analysis of Bureau improvements since the previous VR assessment;**
* **The results of the Consumer Satisfaction Survey for individuals served during Fiscal Year (FY) 2020;**
* **Comparative longitudinal data analysis based off of the consumer satisfaction survey from FY 2017-2020;**
* **The results of in-depth interviews with select BESB VR counselors (conducted October through December 2020).**

# **III. Clientele Summary**

## **A. Overview**

**After a steady increase from FY 2012 to FY 2015, BESB’s registry has shown some evidence of a decline. The registry in FY 2014 comprised of 11,367 individuals with visual impairment, an increase of 2.9% from FY 2013. In FY 2015, 11,854 individuals were listed in the registry, the highest number observed for this assessment and a client increase of 4.3%. The registry in FY 2019 has 9,338 individuals with significant visual impairment, a 16.2% decrease since FY 2015. In 2012, an estimated 1.5% of Connecticut’s overall population, or 54,800 individuals, reported having a visual disability. As of 2018, this percentage increased by 0.5% to 2.0% of Connecticut’s overall population, or 69,600 individuals. Therefore, the decrease in BESB’s registry is likely not a result of a decreasing blind population in Connecticut and may instead be attributed to other factors. One such factor could be the lack of referrals from doctors, a point expanded upon later in this assessment.**

## **B. *Minorities***

**According to the U.S. Census Bureau’s 2019 estimate data, predictions based on 2010 Census findings, Connecticut’s minority population is slightly less representative than that of the national population. Nationally, approximately two-fifths of all Americans (39.9%) self-identified their ethnicity in a minority group. Of those individuals who associated with one ethnicity, 18.5% were Hispanic or Latino, 13.4% were African American, 5.9% were Asian, 1.3% were Native American, and 0.2% were Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander. Deviating slightly from national statistics, approximately one-third (34.1%) of Connecticut residents self-identified as a minority. In order of frequency, minority ethnic groups within Connecticut are accounted for as follows: 16.9% Hispanic/Latino, 12.2% African American, 5.0% Asian, 0.6% Native American, and 0.1% Hawaiian/Pacific Islander.**

**Comparing BESB, state, and national statistics, we find that the Bureau’s Vocational Rehabilitation program appears to be successful at engaging Connecticut’s visually impaired minority community. Overall, Bureau clientele enrolled in the VR program who self-identify their ethnicity reasonably reflect both the state and national minority population at approximately 33.5%. Sub-groups are similarly represented. For FY 2019, BESB reported the following VR program enrollment: 26% African American, 20% Hispanic/Latino, 3% Asian, and less than 1% Native American/Pacific Islander. There is currently no reliable data that measures the incidence of blindness in minority communities within Connecticut. For this reason, the needs assessment approximates information based on general minority population statistics.**

**Since the last VR assessment was issued, BESB has continued to take numerous steps to improve its outreach to the minority community. BESB employs two VR counselors that are bicultural, one of whom is fluent in Spanish. The Bureau also employs three African-American counselors, one of whom serves a caseload in traditionally underserved communities. These five staff members are available to provide outreach to community-based organizations that can offer linkages to traditionally underserved communities. BESB additionally pays for interpreters on an “as needed” basis, continuing outreach to specific minority groups through local meetings and events. Such outreach efforts include meetings with representatives at three churches in Waterbury that have large congregations from the African-American community. Another successful example is outreach to the Hispanic Coalition, which has brought opportunities for work evaluations and internships for BESB VR clients. Working with Latinx individuals who lack English language skills has also been an emphasis of the BESB VR Program. Outreach in this area includes coordinating English as a Second Language classes for clients to gain the language skills necessary to successfully obtain employment in a wider range of occupations. These classes are particularly helpful at engaging clients who have basic English language skills. Clients enroll in training sessions that assist with translating Spanish resumes into English, as well as participating in mock interviews. CPPSR concludes that BESB has made successful efforts in reaching out to underserved populations.[[1]](#footnote-1)**

## **C. *Youth***

 **Reporting practices vary, so it is difficult to compare BESB’s success at reaching minority and child populations with other states. For example, many agency/bureau websites do not divulge statistics for race, ethnicity, or age. Despite the lack of comparative data, it is possible to assess how BESB is doing within its own state. CPPSR concludes that BESB is actively engaging blind youth in the State of Connecticut.**

**Since BESB maintains a registry of all students who are legally blind or visually impaired within Connecticut, the process for identifying and referring clients from the BESB Children’s Services Program to the BESB VR Program is streamlined and efficient. The electronic case management system for BESB has a built-in tracking system for identifying clients by age range to further facilitate the referral of clients who desire to participate in vocational rehabilitation services. This system is unique in that it allows for BESB VR to be aware of and track every child in Connecticut who is legally blind or visually impaired and who is participating in public education.[[2]](#footnote-2)**

# **IV. Vocational Rehabilitation Program Challenges**

**The COVID-19 pandemic has presented BESB with a unique challenge in providing VR services. Additionally, BESB continues to face challenges related to the implementation of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and the uncertain future of the economy. This section outlines these three environmental challenges for the purpose of contextualizing the climate in which BESB is operating. Using this knowledge as a foundation, more practical solutions can be proposed to improve the VR program.**

## **A. The COVID-19 Pandemic**

 **Since March 2020, the entire nation has been heavily impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The highly contagious nature of this virus has required individuals and organizations to dramatically change their daily lives to avoid community spread. State agencies like BESB are particularly impacted as VR services require a substantial amount of in-person interaction. Due to guidelines from the CDC and Connecticut Governor’s Office, BESB has had to rapidly create new virtual alternatives to VR services that have historically been offered in person.**

 **Ramifications: The VR services that BESB provides were modified in ways that maintain social distancing guidelines. Transportation services and in-home technology assistance services, as examples, were heavily impacted. Outreach efforts related to the VR program had to be provided in a virtual format. Part of the challenge facing BESB was in making these adjustments on a very quick timetable.**

 **Throughout 2020, it became evident that there are positives associated with the transition to an increasingly virtual world. Pre-pandemic, BESB put a significant amount of effort into preparing VR clients with equipment and technology training, which allowed them to work remotely when required for work and education. Other clients were less prepared, however, as shown by a decreased utilization of adaptive equipment services observed in a survey of VR clients. It is clear that additional equipment and technology training is needed in the VR Program to ensure that all clients are equipped and prepared to engage with critical technology in an increasingly virtual workplace.**

 **The growing prevalence of remote working has opened new pathways for VR clients to seek job and internship opportunities in other parts of the country. Eliminating the need for transportation, as well as the need for physical proximity to the employer, has already proven to be beneficial to some of BESB’s VR clients. The shift towards remote work will likely prove to be a long-term trend due to cost-savings for companies— a trend that we see as a positive development for many of BESB’s VR clients.**

## **B. The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)**

**The following is an overview of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, as described by the United States Department of Labor:**

**President Barack Obama signed the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) into law on July 22, 2014. WIOA is designed to help job seekers access employment, education, training, and support services to succeed in the labor market and to match employers with the skilled workers they need to compete in the global economy. Congress passed the Act by a wide bipartisan majority; it is the first legislative reform in 15 years of the public workforce system.**

**The highlights of WIOA, as identified by the United States Department of Labor, include:**

1. **Requiring states to strategically align workforce development programs.**
2. **Promoting accountability and transparency.**
3. **Fostering regional collaboration.**
4. **Improving the American Job Center System.**
5. **Improving services to employers and promoting work-based training.**
6. **Providing access to high quality training.**
7. **Enhancing workforce services for the unemployed and other job seekers.**
8. **Enhancing the Job Corps Program**
9. **Streamlining and strengthening the strategic roles of workforce development boards.**

**Notable to BESB, WIOA:**

***Improves Services to Individuals with Disabilities:* WIOA increases individuals with disabilities' access to high quality workforce services and prepares them for competitive integrated employment.**

* **AJCs will provide physical and programmatic accessibility to employment and training services for individuals with disabilities.**
* **Youth with disabilities will receive extensive pre-employment transition services so they can successfully obtain competitive integrated employment.**
* **State vocational rehabilitation agencies will set aside at least 15 percent of their funding to provide transition services to youth with disabilities.**
* **A committee will advise the Secretary of Labor on strategies to increase competitive integrated employment for individuals with disabilities.**
* **VR state grant programs will engage employers to improve participant employment outcomes.**

**Ramifications: Since the implementation of WIOA, BESB has had to reallocate valuable resources from other parts of the overall budget to provide the pre-employment transition services required by the legislation. BESB has been successful in this effort thus far and has stayed out of order of selection. Still, devoting the required 15% of funding to pre-employment transition services remains a continual challenge to the Bureau.[[3]](#footnote-3)**

**BESB has also faced pressure to close cases due to the WIOA requirement to document client engagement on a quarterly basis. VR counselors have sizable client loads, and when a client is shown in quarterly reports to be seemingly inactive in achieving their VR goals, some counselors may be inclined to close the case. However, BESB leadership believes it is advantageous to leave such cases open because clients could be pursuing their VR goals in non-apparent ways. Additionally, job fit is exceptionally important. Keeping cases open allows for ideal fits to materialize. The challenge BESB faces is overcoming this pressure and keeping cases open while not overwhelming VR counselors with heavy caseloads.**

## **C. The Uncertain Economic Climate**

 **The economy, on both the federal and state levels, was already in decline before the COVID-19 pandemic started. The pandemic has exacerbated this decline. In previous years, BESB faced fiscal challenges due to the high demands for VR services and the significantly reduced budget. BESB received far fewer reallotment dollars from the federal government than in the past, which forced the Bureau to make difficult financial decisions.**

**However, in 2019 and 2020, BESB’s financial situation improved. In both years, BESB received significant supplemental awards through the federal reallotment process. Additionally, money has been saved during the pandemic because many services BESB offers were/are limited due to social distancing guidelines. This has given BESB more financial security in an uncertain economic climate. For the more immediate term, BESB projects remaining out of an order of selection through Fiscal Year 2023. This is a positive development from the financial concerns that loomed over the 2017 VR assessment. With that said, the state and federal economy will likely face a new recession in the years to come. As the virus continues to spread uncontained throughout the country, the true economic impact of COVID-19 has yet to be fully understood.**

**Ramifications: Although BESB has seen notable fiscal improvements since the last assessment, the uncertain future of the economy presents a major long-term challenge for state agencies. BESB must continue to remain forward-thinking in its fiscal planning. Of particular importance to Connecticut is the projected growth in retirement over the next few years—a trend that will impact the state’s budget moving forward. For example, hiring freezes are already evident within the state.**

# **V. Vocational Rehabilitation Program Satisfaction Measurements**

**The State of Connecticut Department of Aging and Disability Services, Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind (BESB) commissioned the Center for Public Policy and Social Research (CPPSR) at Central Connecticut State University (CCSU) to conduct a customer satisfaction survey of their service recipients for Fiscal Year 2020. This work represents a continuation of research conducted by the Center for Survey Research and Analysis (CSRA) at the University of Connecticut (UConn) from fiscal years 2003 through 2008. The purpose of this survey is to evaluate the services that clients received from the Vocational Rehabilitation Program at BESB.**

**BESB continues to receive high marks for their Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) services and counselors. Slightly less than nine in ten clients surveyed (87.5%, down 5.5 percentage points from last fiscal year) reported that they would recommend BESB VR services to a friend. Reported satisfaction regarding overall experiences with BESB services, as rated on a scale from 1 to 10 points, remains strong.**

**Of the eight areas surveyed in 2020, reported overall satisfaction with BESB services decreased slightly across seven areas, while the final area remained unchanged. This contrasts with the pattern reported in 2019 in which satisfaction increased across all services. The largest decrease in mean satisfaction occurred in Small Business Venture Services (6.20, down 2.30 points), followed by Skills Training Services (7.75, down 1.50 points) and Reader Services (9.00, down 1.00 point). All other declines in mean ratings were less than one point. Satisfaction levels with Higher Education Training (8.00, zero percentage point change) remained unchanged from last fiscal year.**

**Mean satisfaction with BESB counselors increased in five areas in 2020, while the remaining four areas surveyed decreased in rating. This represents another shift from the pattern observed in 2019, a year in which satisfaction ratings for counselors increased across all areas. Notably, many of these increases came from record-lows found in 2018. The most substantial increase in satisfaction seen in 2020 pertained to counselors’ ability to help clients understand the complaint resolution process (7.61, up 0.61 points). The greatest decrease was seen in counselors’ ability to help clients identify their career goals (8.06, down 0.72 points). Overall, BESB clients remain very satisfied with the services their counselors provide.**

**Clients were asked to identify the types of services that they received from BESB. Of the eight services offered, half showed an increase in participant use in 2020, while the remaining half experienced declines. This varies slightly from the pattern found in 2019, a year in which six areas of service experienced an uptick in use. In 2020, Low Vision Services (90% use) and Rehabilitation and Adaptive Equipment Services (65% use) continue to be the most widely used services among BESB clients. Use of Low Vision Services experienced an increase of one percentage point, reaching an all-time high. While remaining one of the most widely used services, Rehabilitation and Adaptive Equipment hit an all-time low in utilization rate this year (down 16.5 percentage points from 2019). This sizable decline may be attributed to guidelines regarding home visitations due to COVID-19, a pandemic which heavily impacted how services could be delivered this fiscal year.**

**Of all service categories, Small Business Venture Services experienced the greatest increase in utilization from last year (12.5%, up 5.5 percentage points). This service continues to climb from the all-time low found in 2018 (3%). Reader Services (5%, up 1 percentage point) and Personal Care Attendant Services (7.5%, up 0.5 percentage point) also experienced increases in utilization. Historically, these three services have shown low usage rates compared with other categories. Excluding Rehabilitation and Adaptive Equipment Services, Higher Education Training services (7.5%, down 14.5 percentage points) experienced the greatest decrease in utilization rate in 2020, followed by Transportation Services (12.5%, down 13.5 percentage points) and Skills Training Services (20%, down 10 percentage points). Despite these decreases in use, none are at an all-time low utilization rate.**

**This fiscal year, the BESB Vocational Rehabilitation Program had 77 clients who achieved employment outcomes, a decline of 25 individuals from 2019. This decline is likely due, in part, to the decrease in employment opportunities due to COVID-19. It should be noted that it is difficult to draw definitive conclusions with a population of this size.**

**It is important to recognize the extraordinary circumstances that were at play during the time that data was collected for this report. COVID-19 spread rapidly throughout the United States starting in March 2020. In an effort to slow the spread of the virus, Governor Ned Lamont ordered all nonessential businesses in Connecticut to close on March 23, 2020. As part of a four-phase plan to reopen the state, Governor Lamont started lifting certain restrictions on May 20, 2020. At the time of authorship, Connecticut is in Phase 2.1 of its reopening, meaning that the pandemic impacted three of the four fiscal quarters discussed in this report.**

**The pandemic has had a profound impact on BESB’s VR Program—as well as the clients it serves. Without warning, life changed dramatically for VR clients. Readers are encouraged to interpret the findings discussed in this report within the context of the global pandemic.**

# **VI. Focus Group Summary**

 **As a part of the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment, the Center for Public Policy and Social Research conducted a focus group with the members of the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC). This focus group was conducted virtually via WebEx in December 2020. The purpose of the focus group was to understand how SRC members felt about BESB services, how BESB services have changed due to COVID-19 guidelines, and needs that BESB should address in the near future. It should be noted that these qualitative findings cannot be generalized beyond the views of the individuals present at the December 2020 focus group. These findings still provide valuable insight into how a group of Bureau advisors view BESB’s operations.**

 **As in previous needs assessments, access to technology and technology training emerged as a key discussion point in the focus group. The group noted that access to technology and technology training was often not made clear to clients. There was a consensus that BESB should reach out to community partners to help provide devices and training to clients and that clients should be made more aware of what technology services are available to them.**

 **On the topic of BESB’s strengths, the group agreed that the personal touch and knowledge of counselors was a strong feature of the VR program. However, participants also concluded that BESB should do more to ensure clients are fully aware of the services available to them. One suggestion is for BESB to develop a package for new clients that includes a guide to the services available to them and a list of contacts to learn more about the VR program.**

 **Finally, regarding challenges BESB has faced due to the COVID-19 pandemic, SRC members were pleased with BESB’s response to social distancing guidelines. Participants noted that many BESB services are successfully being offered virtually, but also acknowledged that many services, such as mobility training, cannot be adequately provided until guidelines are relaxed. There is a concern that some clients may not have anyone to rely on for support during this time. BESB should aim to contact these individuals frequently to ensure they are receiving the support they need.**

# **VII. Targeted Actions Suggested by CPPSR**

**Informed by the preliminary quantitative and qualitative data collected for this needs assessment, CPPSR makes the following recommendations:**

**1. Improve Bureau outreach and visibility by sharing client success stories online, as well as continuing to promote BESB VR services to eye doctors.**

**Qualitative feedback received from in-depth interviews stresses the importance of enhancing the visibility of BESB—both internal and external to the Bureau. Showcasing client success stories can cover both domains. Internally, sharing success stories may inspire current VR clients to become active in their job-seeking efforts. BESB has hosted virtual programs where clients who have had successful VR outcomes speak to current clients about their experiences. The goal of these meetings is to encourage current clients to become more engaged with the services BESB provides, hopefully leading to more successful VR outcomes. This programming is extremely beneficial and should be expanded upon, where possible.**

**CPPSR suggests that BESB pursue this goal further by using social media platforms to broadcast success stories to a wider audience. BESB has already mentioned that they would like to post success stories on the Department of Aging and Disability Services (ADS) website, which is an excellent start. Another way to share these stories is to create a YouTube channel or Facebook page to host recorded video interviews with VR clients who achieve positive employment outcomes. To produce these videos, BESB could seek out community colleges or other community partners that offer video production services. Internally, counselors could encourage current clients to view these interviews. These interviews could be watched by clients at any time, which would lead to a greater outreach than scheduled events. Additionally, these interviews could be shared with other stakeholders such as Connecticut businesses and community partners.**

**BESB has planned to improve outreach to eye doctors—efforts that are critical to the Bureau’s mission. When diagnosing a visually-impaired patient, Connecticut eye doctors are required by law to refer that patient to BESB. However, some eye doctors do not make this referral. To minimize the incidence of this, BESB has improved their eye doctor–reporting form to add clarity and definitions of legal blindness and visual impairment. This form was posted on the ADS website and mailed to more than 1,100 eye doctors across the state. CPPSR commends these efforts and recommends that BESB continue to reach out to eye doctors to increase outreach to visually impaired individuals in Connecticut. Sharing success stories is another way to engage eye doctors within the state.**

**2. Offer new virtual services to encourage clients to utilize VR services.**

 **Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, BESB has had to quickly adapt to follow guidelines from the CDC and Connecticut Governor’s Office. Many traditionally face-to-face services have had to be converted to be provided virtually. For example, BESB now offers virtual summer camps for students and has hosted virtual panels for outreach. One downside of this is that many clients, especially students, are not as easy to engage online as they are in person. Additionally, it should be acknowledged that due to the pandemic, many VR clients have had to focus on more pressing issues and have had less time and energy to focus on engaging with BESB services and achieving their VR goals. This has also resulted in less client engagement.**

**A solution to this lack of engagement may be to provide frequent updates to clients via email or social media to let them know about events or programs BESB offers. Additionally, BESB should continue to increase its online offerings and develop new virtual events to engage clients. One example of a virtual offering could be recorded interviews or scheduled events with VR clients who had successful outcomes, as mentioned in the previous section. Another example is hosting virtual meetings over Zoom, WebEx, or a similar application for VR clients to meet with each other and discuss their challenges in seeking employment or navigating through the pandemic. These meetings could provide a community space for clients who may feel isolated to meet with others and seek advice. A BESB staff member could moderate and provide advice or record questions to be answered by a VR counselor.**

**3. Work with community organizations to improve outreach and client engagement.**

 **Through interviews with BESB counselors, it became apparent that there is some pressure from the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) to close VR client cases when clients do not regularly engage. However, this is not efficient because many clients who are less engaged are still open to job offers found by BESB when the right opportunity arrives. Therefore, it is better to try to engage inactive clients than to close their cases due to inactivity.**

 **BESB has already taken steps to lighten the caseloads of their counselors and engage clients by establishing the position of Rehabilitation Teacher, whose role is to teach clients to utilize Career Index Plus, an online career exploration tool. This tool includes a vocational interest inventory, economic outlook information, and links to immediate job openings. At present, the Rehabilitation Teacher position is vacant, but the Bureau is actively seeking to refill the position, acknowledging the importance of teaching clients to use the career exploration tool. VR Counselors are also actively encouraging their clients to use this tool and report their activities back to their counselor.**

**CPPSR suggests continuing these efforts along with collaborating with local organizations, such as community colleges and workforce boards, to seek out new job opportunities for clients. This will increase outreach and encourage clients to identify and pursue career opportunities. Additionally, BESB could develop a pamphlet describing the Career Index Plus system to be distributed by eye doctors and other medical professionals. Learning about this product could encourage individuals with visual impairments to seek out BESB VR services when they might not otherwise.**

**4. Further emphasize online career opportunities for VR clients to broaden employment and internship possibilities.**

 **Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many workplaces have started to exclusively hire for remote positions. These positions can often be more convenient for VR clients, as well as the general population, because they do not require transportation or proximity to the workplace location. It is likely that remote work will continue to be popular after social distancing guidelines are relaxed because of this convenience and cost-savings. BESB should continue to seek out these online career opportunities for VR clients, helping them adapt to a changing workplace and to broaden their potential reach on the job market.**

**5. Continually refine plans for providing necessary services to vulnerable clients in the event of a pandemic-related lockdown.**

 **It is currently uncertain how much longer the COVID-19 pandemic will continue. The state and federal governments have and may continue to enforce lockdowns in the future that require citizens to remain in their homes and physically distance themselves from others. These lockdown measures are especially challenging for the visually impaired, as some members of this population may rely on close contact with others to complete daily tasks. This could be especially true for those with overlapping disabilities. In the case of a lockdown, BESB should further refine plans to provide necessary services to their particularly vulnerable clients while following social distancing guidelines.**

**BESB leadership is very forward-thinking in planning VR services, which has proven to be a strong asset to the Bureau. Even though a vaccine is on the horizon, widespread distribution will take considerable time. It is important that BESB continually re-evaluate and refine pandemic-related Bureau plans.**

**6. Make additional efforts to equip and train VR clients with technology to prepare them for virtual work and education.**

 **BESB has put extensive resources into equipping and training clients with technology needed to work and learn remotely. However, the decrease in utilization of adaptive technology shows that some clients still need this equipment and training. In interviews with VR counselors, it became apparent that some clients do not have computers at all and rely on family members or community centers to access technology. Due to social distancing guidelines during the COVID-19 pandemic, technology access was made even more difficult for these individuals. Other clients rely exclusively on smart phones, which should not be seen as a substitute for a computer. Some websites can be difficult to navigate on a smart phone, particularly those containing fillable forms such as employment applications.**

**One solution to this challenge is to supplement BESB resources by contracting a company to provide adaptive technology as well as providing training to use the devices. An example of a community partner is Computers for the Blind, a nonprofit that provides computers to individuals who are blind or visually impaired. Computers for the Blind offers cost-effective desktop and laptop computers that include a one-year subscription to accessibility software like JAWS screen reader or ZoomText Magnifier. The specifications of these computers are adjustable to meet the needs of clients who may need a certain type of computer for employment needs.**

**In addition to providing adaptive technology, BESB should aim to provide training in its use. Oak Hill in Connecticut is a nonprofit organization that provides, among other services, assistive technology training to members. Membership is free for individuals with disabilities, including those with impaired vision. At the Oak Hill Assistive Technology Center, assistive technology specialists provide consultations, training, and technology recommendations for its members. BESB could advise its clients of the availability of these services as a supplement to the technology training it offers currently.**

**7. Look into arranging housing placement for VR clients who struggle with finding secure housing.**

 **In qualitative interviews, some VR counselors noted that it is difficult for their clients to focus on seeking employment when they are struggling with basic needs such as finding secure housing. BESB could arrange to have units in apartment complexes that are accessible to visually impaired individuals dedicated for VR clients who are struggling with housing. This would give clients the security to focus more on finding employment instead of struggling with basic needs that make accomplishing their VR goals difficult.**

1. Portions of this paragraph are credited to the VR Section of the WIOA State Plan for Program Years 2020-2023. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Ibid*. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. This situation is fluid; it is possible that Congress could issue a waiver for this requirement given the pandemic. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)