# Strategies for Managing the Pre-Employment Transition Services 15 Percent Minimum Reserve Requirement

**If your agency is struggling with the 15% minimum reserve requirement, you are not alone!**

State VR agencies vary across the country in meeting the pre-employment transition services 15 percent minimum reserve requirement. Some states continue to struggle to spend the minimum reserve while others are spending more than 15 percent each year. Although this reserve requirement is a minimum threshold and not a maximum requirement, it is essential State VR agencies continuously evaluate and make appropriate adjustments to the fiscal forecast.

Continuous financial forecasting plays a key role for State VR agencies when conducting strategic planning and developing, implementing, and or re-evaluating a sustainable model for the delivery of pre-employment transition services statewide to all students with disabilities who need them. Reference Pre-employment Transition Services Strategic Planning Checklist.

Each State agency is unique in organizational structure and customer makeup. Listed below are ten strategies for managing the 15% requirement. These strategies will provoke thought and offer potential ways of looking at resource management around pre-employment transition services.

## 10 Strategies:

1. **Review your current model or method of service delivery.**
    - Is it working, and is it sustainable?
    - Are these programs/services reasonable, allocable, allowable, and necessary, and provided by the most efficient use of State agency funds?
2. **Know the amount of your minimum reserve requirement and how this amount may be affected if you have carryover, relinquish funds, or get additional funds through reallotment.**
    - For instance, if you consider relinquishing funds to reduce your pre-employment transition services 15% reserve requirement, you want to fully



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understand the impact of that decision by reading question two in the FAQ RSA Pre-employment Transition Services FAQs.

> ➢ *Can a State relinquish funds during reallotment and have the returned funds reduce the pre-employment transition service requirement dollar for dollar? No. The impact of relinquished funds is proportional (see FAQ 1 above). In accordance with section 110(d)(1), a State must reserve at least 15 percent of its State allotment, under the VR grant, for the provision of pre-employment transition services under section 113 of the Rehabilitation Act. Funds relinquished in the year of appropriation only reduce the amount of the State's allotment upon which the reserved amount is based.*

- Refer to the RSA Pre-employment Transition Services FAQs for examples that can help you understand how these factors impact your minimum reserve.

3. **Remember, in states with both blind and general agencies: the 15% minimum reserve is a state requirement (not per agency).**

   Consider the following to ensure effective and timely communication between two VR agencies in the same state:

   - Review the agreement (or develop if you don't have one) between your two agencies defining how VR services are carried out in the state and ensure it includes how VR will provide pre-employment transition services to all students who need them.

     > ➢ *See 34 C.F.R. 361.24 (e) that describes how States should cooperate and coordinate services with other entities.*

   - Develop a communication plan. The plan could include assigning a staff member from each agency to have regular communication (i.e., monthly) to review each agency's expenditures to date and projections for spending through the end of the Federal fiscal year.

     - This type of communication can benefit both agencies, as one may be spending over the 15% minimum, which helps the other agency meet this state reservation requirement together.
     - You will also want to discuss what expenditures each agency charges to the reserve to ensure all costs are allowable and allocable toward the 15% minimum reserve.



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4. **Ensure you are assigning all allowable expenditures to meet your minimum 15% reserve requirement, including staff time expenditures.**
    - Be sure that time is tracked accurately and recorded for providing the required pre-employment transition service, including auxiliary aids and services, additional VR services per the NOI (when applicable), and coordination activities.
        - Review Q #6 in the RSA Pre-Employment Transition Services FAQs to ensure you count direct service costs versus administrative costs when tracking time to the reserve.
        - Reference the Pre-Employment Transition Services Time Allocation Guide for examples to help track staff time correctly.
    - Review your agency's staffing configuration and dedicate staff to provide pre-employment transition services directly. Some ideas include:
        - Having dedicated pre-employment transition service counselors.
        - Having every counselor with a portion of their caseload dedicated to pre-employment transition services.
        - Using business specialists to organize and coordinate work-based learning experiences.
        - Leveraging BEP staff to develop information about entrepreneurship and work experiences in the BEP.
    - Agencies may charge the staff time spent carrying out one or more of the nine authorized activities to the reserve once they have determined sufficient funds are available to provide the required pre-employment transition services and pre-employment transition coordination activities.

5. **Ensure you have a process to establish reasonable and allowable rates for services, including pre-employment transition services, and deliver quality services.**

    Questions to consider:
    - Have you established minimum standards or qualifications for vendors of pre-employment transition services?



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- Are vendors operating under a contract or agreement that identifies service expectations, deliverables, and payment rates?
    - Is VR identifying services needed and authorizing those services? Are vendors delivering what was agreed to and expected by the VR agency? Are you evaluating services provided, and are they making a difference for students with disabilities?
- Are your payment rates based on the rate methodology you have developed in policy and subject to review?
    - Justify the establishment of payment rates, consistency across vendors, and reasonableness.
- Do you have a process in place to ensure that VR is determining what pre-employment transition services a student may need and receives versus vendors directing that work?
    - ***Cautionary note: at no time may you delegate your authority to determine who gets the services and the services they receive to your vendors. These responsibilities remain as non-delegable functions of the VR program.***
- Are you having issues finding vendors with whom you can contract to provide pre-employment transition services?
    - Given the move to virtual service delivery, some vendors provide services nationwide. Consult with your colleagues in other state agencies by placing a question through the CSAVR/NCSAB listservs to get more information about those potential options.

6. **If you have a process to determine what IDEA transition-related services students with disabilities are already receiving through the local educational agency, be sure the process is effective.**
    - How do you determine what pre-employment transition services a student with a disability may need?
        - The formal interagency agreement between a VR agency and State educational agency (SEA) should include how students and their need for pre-employment transition services are identified; how referrals are made to the VR program; and how services are coordinated or provided by VR agencies and LEAs.



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- Some agencies develop yearly plans between the state and local education agencies and VR that outline the number of students with disabilities in the district, the services available under IDEA, and the services VR may provide through pre-employment transition services and VR transition services. (See Collaboration Guide appendix for examples of action plans and more information).
- Other agencies have worked with education to embed codes into the IEP that align with pre-employment transition services to determine what is already being provided and what the student may need. It is important to note that a VR agency can only fund those pre-employment transition services it authorized to provide to students known to the VR program.
- What is important to consider is that you develop a process to help identify the needs of students. Additionally, it is essential to recognize that each student may have different needs based on their interests and unique circumstances.

7. **Identify a process to guide staff on how students with disabilities progress through the continuum of VR services (pre-employment transition services, VR transition services, employment-related VR services).**

- Define the process in agency policies and procedures so staff can guide students with disabilities and their families through this progression to ensure a seamless transition without duplication.
  - A defined process (based on individual needs) that will help staff efficiently and effectively move students through the activities and better utilize time and resources. ***Remember not to set any arbitrary limits on the nature and scope of VR services, including pre-employment transition services.**
  - **Example**: A student may be interested in a work experience, but needs to first explore his or her interests through workplace tours or job shadowing activities. Next, they might participate in mock interviews, which may lead to paid work experiences or internships. Once a student completes these exploratory activities, they move on to VR transition services.

- Define a staff process in agency policies and procedures to determine when a potentially eligible student with a disability should be encouraged to apply for VR services.



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- Layout the purpose for each set of services and identify outcome expectations. Pre-employment transition services can be provided to potentially eligible students with disabilities prior to and after they apply for VR services. At any time, potentially eligible students with disabilities may decide to apply for VR services, and continue to receive pre-employment transition services and individualized VR services as VR eligible students under an IPE; or may no longer need VR services.

- Have a process for determining necessary services based on student need to explore his or her interests, strengths, abilities and capabilities. A student may or may not need all five required activities, and may need to participate in multiple activities.

8. **Identify work-based learning experiences (WBLEs) that align with a student's needs and interests, and where the student is along the continuum of VR services.**

    - Consider the purpose of the WBLE. Is this an early start at career exploration, or is this a job opportunity?
    - While VR may not establish arbitrary limits on the scope of VR services, which include pre-employment transition services; consider the length of time of a WBLE to differentiate it from permanent part-time employment (as with any other VR service, allow exceptions based on individual needs), and be sure to document in your policies and procedures.

9. **For those states that can get to the provision of authorized services as documented in your forecast, you may consider additional strategies for the expenditure of reserve funds in that category.**

    - Authorized pre-employment transition services may improve the transition of students with disabilities from school to postsecondary education or an employment outcome, and must support the implementation of pre-employment transition services. These strategies tend to be broader and can include some exciting and collaborative work. Q #6 in the RSA Pre-employment Transition Services FAQs outlines the nine authorized activities. Some ideas to consider are as follows.
        - Developing a loaner library of technology equipment that can be used by students as they participate in the five required activities.
        - Contracting with an organization such as the Helen Keller National Center to provide pre-employment transition services to DeafBlind students with disabilities.



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- Contracting with your Parent Training and Information Center to provide training to your staff on IDEA, working with schools and families, and effectively working with an IEP team. They can also help facilitate communications between VR and students with families where English is not their primary language. You could also have them conduct independent surveys of families and students about their satisfaction with your services. Here is a link to find a center near you- Parent Center Hub-How to Find Your Center
- Utilize various social media platforms to provide podcasts with stories about customers who have achieved success in many occupations. You will want to make sure you separate administrative costs from service costs. Developing the podcast can be counted, but expenses for the hosting platform (if there is a fee) would be considered administrative costs and cannot be charged to the funds reserved for the provision of pre-employment transition services.
- Collaborate with other state agencies for the direct virtual provision of services.

**10. Last but not least, be sure you document everything.**

- Do staff understand the written guidelines for the delivery of pre-employment transition services?
- How are you monitoring whether the staff is following what you wrote?
- How often do you assess what is working and what is not?

## Additional Resources:

- RSA mentioned continuous evaluation and financial forecasting in a Q & A document released by OSERS on 10.16.20: RSA COVID-19 Questions & Answers: Administration of the VR Services, AIVRS, and Business Enterprise Programs (PDF).
  - In this document, RSA provided clarification, including:

    *…There is no requirement that a VR agency wait until all students with disabilities have received direct services before it can spend funds on other authorized activities; the VR agency just has to ensure sufficient funds are available to provide the required direct services and coordination activities before engaging in the other "authorized" activities...*



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- NOI - Pre-Employment Transition Services Flexibilities Regarding the Use of VR Funds effective 2/28/20.
    - The NOI is vital to review and discuss with your leadership team to fully understand the real impact of providing pre-employment transition services on your program and developing an accurate forecast.
    - Additional expenditures may count toward the reserve for students who have been determined eligible with an approved IPE and need additional VR services to benefit from pre-employment transition services. The other VR services include transportation, coaching, maintenance, family services, and more.



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